

Translation of Cartoonyms as a Vocabulary Teaching Technique through Associations and Context in an Inclusive Educational Setting

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Introduction

With reference to studies related to words and the way their meaning is acquired, many standpoints may be presented. One of them explains that “learning word meanings can be viewed as an association task whereby an unknown word’s meaning can become known by being presented in connection with a word of a similar meaning” (Brown 1958; Rumelhart – Lindsay – Norman 1972; Simon – Feigenbaum 1964; Wickelgren 1972; Gripe – Arnold 1979, 281). Also, it has been demonstrated that a familiar context facilitates vocabulary development and retention (Wittrock, Marks, and Doctorow 1975).

Translation of familiar animated cartoon character names – **cartoonyms** (Balteiro 2013, 883) - can be used in helping young learners with **Special Educational Needs (SEN)** develop foreign language (FL) vocabulary through associations and context. Since the creation of cartoonyms is usually semantically motivated, they are particularly descriptive in nature and suitable to the genre in which they are used. Cartoonyms are very often charactonyms, or or charactoons, namely names suggesting a distinctive trait of a given character (Balteiro 2013). Also, cartoons are generally liked by children, being a part of their daily lives.

1 Semantic Load of Cartoonyms

“My name is Alice, but –”

“It’s a stupid name enough!” Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently: “What does it mean?”

*“**Must a name mean something?**” Alice asked doubtfully.*

*“Of course it must,” Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: **my name means the shape I am** –and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost”*

*“**When I use a word,**” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, **“it is just what I choose it to mean – neither more or less.”***

(Carroll 1871, emphasis added)

Humpty Dumpty is a character in popular English nursery rhymes. This anthropomorphic egg also appears in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), where he discusses semantics and pragmatics with Alice. Referring to the above cited quotation, in fiction, and also films/cartoons, “**the characters’ names** might appear to the audience or readers as secondary because people tend to concentrate on the action, on what is happening, or on what is being narrated. However, most of those proper names **convey a message** to the audience and **have a function** that makes them unconsciously work in the audience’s mind. In many cases, there is great effort on the creators’ part to provide characters with a **name which fits the characters’ features and roles within the narrative** (be this a novel, a cartoon, a TV series, etc.)” (Balteiro 2013, 887-888, emphasis added).



Figure 1 Characters’ proper names understood as umbrella terms (own elaboration)

From what can be seen on the graph, characters’ proper names may be considered umbrella terms. As Barthes (1975, 105) encapsulates, they constitute a **unity** of characteristic traits. Bertills (2003, 54) is in line with this view describes them in terms of **networks of character-traits**, which stand for all the character’s traits, descriptions and characteristics.

Overall, characters’ proper names in children’s fiction may be qualified as **semantically loaded**. Being **dense signifiers**, they strongly contribute to the children’s understanding of the message as well as to their identification with the characters (Balteiro 2013, 889).

Typically, characters in children’s fiction are personalised animals, animated toys or fantasy creatures. Human nature is attributed to them – they often behave and speak like youngsters. As Stephens (1992 in Balteiro 2013, 889) explains, “names operate in conjunction with visual messages transmitted by illustrations.” Based on this observation, Balteiro (2013, 889) accurately concludes that “the characters’ proper names should be generally more transparent and, in animated

cartoons, fit the illustration or image identifying the character as exhaustively as possible, that is, they should be, and in fact are, less arbitrary than other proper names.”

2 Study

The main focus of the vocabulary teaching technique (translation) presented in this paper is placed on **semantic and contextual associations**, since very often there are semantic motivations behind the coining of names for fictional characters' proper names, just like in fairy tales. As Balteiro observes, (2013, 890) “creators make great efforts to produce well-formed, easy to pronounce, semantically expressive and ‘catchy’ proper names which also fit other requirements, such as matching the plot and the images.” Charactonyms tend to be of a particularly descriptive, expressive, and meaningful nature. Charactonyms in popular cartoons addressed to children for the purposes of this study will be called cartoonyms or charactoons. The examples are Disney or Hanna-Barbera characters.

Subjects for the study included 33 third-grade pupils attending an inclusive primary school in Kraków, Poland. 23 pupils (70%) represented a wide range of Special Educational Needs and thus the classes were considered heterogeneous groups. The results of 6 pupils (with coded names) having a Statement of Need for Special Education will be presented. Two children attended grade 3 a: Monika (with mild intellectual disability), Olek (with physical disability) and four from grade 3 b: Jacek (with behavioural disorders), Ela (with behavioural disorders), Anita (with mild intellectual disability), Dominika (with physical disability).

When it comes to **the choice of lexical items** for the purposes of the study, the content to be taught consisted of nine cartoonyms - one adjective (adj.) and eight nouns (N):

- Goofy (adj., ‘zwariowany’ in Polish),
- Daisy (N, Pol. ‘stokrotka’),
- Tom (N, Pol. ‘kocur’),
- Chip (N, Pol. ‘frytka’),
- Dale (N, Pol. ‘dolina’),
- Pixie (N, Pol. ‘skrzat’),
- Dixie (N, Pol. ‘dolina’),
- Tamp (N, Pol. ‘włóczęga’),
- Lady (N, Pol. ‘dama’).

These names would very often fit and complement the characters' traits or images as well as the storyline in the selected fragments of animated cartoons. Referring to Balteiro (2013, 889-890), the cartoonyms in the study agree with these peculiarities and illustrations. At the same time they are: expressive, descriptive, readable, pronounceable, understandable and easy to remember for children.

During the English lesson when the vocabulary teaching technique involving translation was tested, the following **procedure** of five steps was adopted:

1 Short talk, even in the mother tongue, about the popular cartoons. Asking whether children know the characters, whether they remember their names.

2 Watching short clips with each character, paying attention to how they behave, to their appearance.

It was expected that watching short clips from the well-known TV cartoons would help children to easily interpret and fully understand the semantically loaded message compressed in the characters' names.

3 Using flashcards to revise the names of the characters and giving Polish translation (mother tongue, L1), trying to explain the reasons why a given character has such a name. Creating semantic and contextual associations.

The association technique pairs the unknown word with a familiar word in the mother tongue. The task requires the subjects to memorize the pairings and to be able to translate the words from FL to L1 and vice versa. This process is expected to be facilitated due to associations (name = e.g. personality traits or other) and context (presentation of the video cartoon).

4 Repetitions.

5 Translation tests.

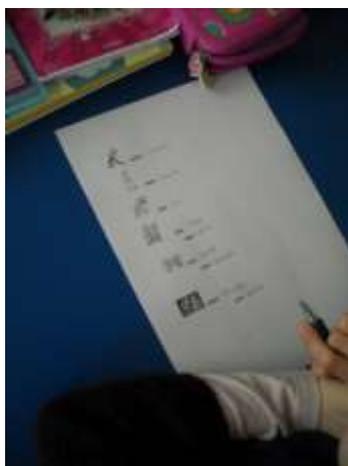


Figure 2 A pupil taking the written translation test from English to Polish

Two translation tests were administered, one written (translation from English into Polish) and one oral (from Polish into English, prompted by the flashcards). Subjects could score 1 point per each correct translation (max. 9 = 100 %) or 0,5 point in the case of mispronunciation. Polish spelling was not evaluated, thus no points were subtracted.

Results of the study are presented below in a tabular form. During the tests different behaviours of the selected cases of children with Special Educational Needs were observed.

In the oral translation test from Polish into English Monika (with mild intellectual disability) would point to appropriate flashcards but did not remember all the characters' names. She also confused Daisy with Lady. Her result in this part was 44 %. On the other hand, in the written translation test from English into Polish she scored 9 points (100 %). Her handwriting was unclear, but decipherable.

Olek (with physical disability) scored 100 % in the oral test, but behavioural problems were observed in the written part. He gave back a rucked up uncompleted test. As a consequence, his score was 0 %, but actually it was not evident whether he knew the Polish equivalents of the English names or not.

In the oral translation test Ela (with behavioural disorders) called Lady as Tamp and confused Pixie with Mixel (an invented name). Similarly to Monika, the girl manifested some difficulties with the Polish spelling, but since these problems were not taken into account by the researcher, her final score equalled 100 %.

Anita's results are put into brackets, since she was not autonomous enough. In the oral test she would just repeat the names after the researcher, which in her case should also be considered an achievement. On account of her mild intellectual disability, one modification was introduced in the written test. She got the word cards with the Polish translation of the characters' names. She was able to match 7 of them correctly (78 %).

Dominika (with physical disability) scored 33 % in the oral and 100 % in the written translation tests, although she had some problems with L1 spelling.

Jacek (with behavioural disorders) scored 89 % in the oral test. The boy confused Dixie with Pixie. He remembered all the Polish equivalents in the written test (100 %).

3 a	WRITTEN TRANSLATION TEST (English into Polish)	ORAL TRANSLATION TEST (Polish into English)
Mean scores of children without SEN (descriptive statistics)	98 % H = 100 % L = 89 % M = 100 %	98 % H = 100 % L = 89 % M = 100 %
Monika	100 %	44 %
Olek	0 %	100 %

Figure 3 Results of grade 3 a

3 a	WRITTEN TRANSLATION TEST (English into Polish)	ORAL TRANSLATION TEST (Polish into English)
Mean scores of children without SEN (descriptive statistics)	100 % H = 100 % L = 100 % M = 100 %	100 % H = 100 % L = 100 % M = 100 %
Ela	100 %	44 %
Anita	(78 %)	(0 %)
Dominika	100 %	33 %
Jacek	100 %	89 %

Figure 4 Results of grade 3 b

The examination of the means reveals the consistent effectiveness of using cartoonisms as a vocabulary teaching technique through associations and context in inclusive lower primary classrooms. It was concluded that the presented vocabulary teaching technique turned out to be very effective, both in the English – Polish and Polish – English translation, though children without special educational needs (SEN) performed significantly better in the Polish – English oral translation test than young learners with SEN.

3 Pedagogical implications

The implications for English language teachers as indicated by the present study seem to be very practical. First and foremost, word meanings should be introduced in an appropriate **contextual setting**. Moreover, educators ought to ensure that this context is **familiar**. Allowing for word connotation means that the translation process with its many components can be viewed as **cognitive-associative task** and should be further explored in order to be effectively applied in the foreign language (not only) inclusive classrooms.

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Summary

Translation of Cartoonyms as a Vocabulary Teaching Technique through Associations and Context in an Inclusive Educational Setting

The present article aims at providing an example of using popular animated cartoons in teaching foreign vocabulary to lower primary young learners, both with and without Special Educational Needs. The cartoonyms selected for the purposes of the study carry a particular meaning, which either reflect the bearer's personality traits or can be associated otherwise. The results obtained can be further discussed to draw methodological conclusions and discern practical pedagogical implications of using translation for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to children in inclusive classes.

About the Author

Werona Król-Gierat is an academic at the Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland. Her main area of research interest is teaching foreign languages, especially English, to learners with Special Educational Needs. She also graduated from Jagiellonian University where she studied Romance Languages and Cultures and specialised in audiovisual translation.