



Teaching English Through Comics

KEYWORDS

Latha S Sarma

Asst professor English, Govt Polytechnic College Ezhukone, Kollam Kerala, University of Kerala

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The world is an increasingly globalized place where individuals are communicating among and between multiple cultures each day. Today an individual has access to different situations and information from a variety of cultures at the touch of a button. For those of us who know English we take access to these information for granted. However, much of the world's information is beyond their reach locked in English. This is one reason why learning English as second language has become so popular. In fact English is now the world's most widely spoken second language, surpassing all others. More people now speak English as a second language than as their first language. English is a gateway to a world of knowledge, culture, commerce, lingua franca that gives a student access to the world in a way that other language do not. Just as Latin was the most important language for a hundred years and French for a five hundred, English is today the key to participating in global intervention. So teaching English as a second language is a hard nut to crack. Teachers are constantly searching for new and innovative materials to enhance learning in the formal classroom environment. To meet this demand publishers try to promote their material as being authentic, but teachers believe that no matter how appealing the text might be, they still ring of artificiality and are just a representation of the real thing. A text book is just that material that has been altered and simplified for the learner. That is not to say that they are not quality books, but I do believe that other should be introduced in to the class that expose students, both physically and mentally, to the outside world, particularly in English as a foreign language where authentic materials are very scarce.

Comics is one such teaching material which enables the learner to pursue the language at ease. Before this form of educational entertainment emerged to the foreground, it was often believed that "comic books were so educationally unsound that their use would lead to mental stagnation".

Comics is a medium used to express ideas via images often combined with text or other visual information. Scott Mc Loud defines comics as juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and to produce aesthetic response in the reader. Rudolphe Toffler points out that "the picture story which critics disregard and scholars scarcely notice has had great influence at all times perhaps even more than written literature. Speech balloons, captions, onomatopoeia words dialogue, narratives, sound effects or other information are the textual devices used in comics. Size and arrangement of panels contribute to narrative pacing. Cartooning and similar form of illustrations are the most common im-

age making means. In comics fumetti in a form which uses photographic images. Common form of comics includes comic strips, editorial, gag cartoons, and comic books. Since the late 20th century, bound volumes such as graphic novels, comics albums, tankobon have become proliferated in the 21st century. History of comics has followed divergent paths in different influences. Comics flourished particularly in USA, Western Europe and Japan. Towards the end of the 20th century it began to find greater acceptance with the public and within academia. The English term "comics" derives from the humorous work which predominated in early American Newspaper comic strips.

Use of comics to teach English language is not a topic widely discussed. Still the results of several studies indicate the positive effects of comics as a multidimensional teaching aid. Marsh presents the result of research conducted and describes "four major purposes for which different comics were useful:

1. Vocabulary and expression
2. Grammar
3. Conversation and composition
4. Culture, Pronunciation, intonation and listening comprehension.

Yang (2003) claims that comics can be used as a step to more difficult ideas. Carry (2004) suggests that comics can be used to help students develop their writing skills, especially of story writing. National Council of Teachers of English Website (2005) reports the research results brought by Shelly Hong Xu who claims that comics and graphic novels "Can teach about making inferences, since readers must rely on pictures and just a small amount of text". Basil and Sarigul (2013) bring an interesting comment – they conducted research comparing the use of traditional and graphic novels in EFL classes. They used Paul Auster's *City of Glass* and found that "in the traditional text format of the novel, related with postmodern style of the author it was sometimes hard to distinguish the reality and delusions in the novel; however the graphic novel format, the balloons and images that clearly represent the story line helped students a lot to connect the panels".

Comics are authentic materials which are basically fun giving and motivate the learners. These inherent characters make this medium an attractive educational tool.

- A built in desire to learn through comics (Richie 1979)
- Easy accessibility in daily newspapers and book stands
- The novel and indigenous way in which this authentic medium depicts real life language and 'every facet of people and society' (Yoshihiro 1992)

- The variety of visual and linguistic elements and codes that appeal to students with different learning styles (Bangs 1988, Davis 1990)

Moreover they have a widespread appeal to all age groups and levels of society. In fact it is one of the most widely read media throughout the world especially in Japan where comic books accounted for 22.9 % of the entire publication. Cartoons and comic strips can be used from beginner level to advanced level for a variety of language and discussion activities.

Grammar

To practice the formation of different verb tenses that is changing the present tense in the action on the strip to past or future or to write the different tense forms of the actions in the strip. Comic strips can be used to introduce modals; pronouns and usages like add better, not only but also etc...Comic strips helps to teach grammar through context.

Conversations

Blank balloons can be provided for the pictures in the comic strips. Learners can be motivated to fill it up with language students need to practice such as agreeing with opinions, asking permissions, saying you are sorry etc... We can also use sequence from a cartoon with sound off, so students describe what is happening, imagine what is being said and can then use the sequence to improvise a sketch. Let them listen to the real sketch at the end.

Vocabulary

Different comic strip heroes can be introduced. Let the learners identify their name and write about their peculiar features, character etc... Let them speak or write about their favourites. Number of new words especially adjectives can be introduced through this activity. Take one or more cartoons which comment on the issues in the news. Let the learners speak or write on it, this will help to introduce the topic and brain storm vocabulary.

Reading and Writing

Take different comic strips and ask learners to reorder it. This can be made difficult and challenging linguistically by giving separate frame to each student in a group. Let them arrange it in proper order and describe the story. Another activity is to remove the last comic strip which may be the ending of the story. Let the learners' imagine different ending to the story. Give students a comic strip with a short paragraph for each frame. Ask the learners to reduce each paragraph to a single sentence. Give students a full story and comic strip version with no dialogues. Let them fill the blank balloons.

The multidimensional nature of comic strips and comic books is a source of excellent teaching material and allows teachers and students to explore language in a creative way. Moreover we have comic forms of great literary fiction including Shakespeare, Paulo Coelho, and Charles Dickens etc... which provide interest in students to read great books of literature in a simpler way. No doubt comics is essentially the best and innovative way to learn English language.

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