Representations of Children's Stories through Drawings in English Classes

Juliana Reichert Assunção Tonelli
Professor of English Teacher Education
State University of Londrina
Brazil

Haraceli Oliveira Lima
English teacher
Escola Arte Manha/Magnus Domini
Brazil

Abstract

The aim of this work is to present the analysis of drawings made by two groups of students (aged between 3 and 4 years old) in a private school in Maringá-Pr, Brazil, as a form of representation of their impressions about aspects of the genre children's stories (CS) being explored in English class. The choice of the groups was due to the experiences of the first contact with the formal teaching of English language and because both have different points of view concerning storytelling, taking into consideration the maturity, creativity, motor skills and previous knowledge. Data analysis revealed traces of appropriation of English language by children who used that language to explain their drawings having as starting point the vocabulary explored in CS. Furthermore, the drawing activity has become an important tool for students to reveal their feelings, opinions, and emotions generated by the theme of CS explored.

Key words: English for children, children's stories, drawing activities.

1. Introduction

Children are placed in formal English Language learning (hereafter EL) at an increasingly early age (LINGUEVIS, 2007, p.138) and the main reasons for this are associated with globalization, the frequent communication between nations, and because we are a linguistically and culturally diverse society. Therefore, it is necessary to master a foreign language (FL) that allows global communication, to build citizenship, so that the individual may fully experience different contexts (DOMINGUES and GIBK, 2011).

In Tonelli's view (2007), the child needs something concrete and real to form concepts and meanings; children's stories (CS) offer a good support for this, since they are real within the children's fantasy world, and they also promote contact with language within a meaningful context, "the materiality of language" (TONELLI , 2007, p . 126) . Still in this regard, Tonelli (2005) explains that CS permit the repetition of vocabulary and certain linguistic structures which allow students to remember details of events and to gradually build their knowledge of FL being taught-learned.

The purpose of this article is to analyze drawings produced by two groups of students, aged three and four, from a private school in the city of Maringá – Pr/Brazil, in order to identify the representations of those children on aspects inherent to the CS, "Goldilocks and the three bears", in EL classes. The categories proposed by Antunes (1998), Brooks (2009) and Gardner (1995) were used to analyze the drawings. Besides the drawings, the oral explanation given by students on their illustrations was also used. The verbalization of the explanatory texts was used to identify how much children were able to use the EL and, thus, point their degree of mastery of the language.

2. Children stories contributions to English language teaching for children

The use of CS as a tool for the English language for children (hereafter ELC) teaching-learning has already been widely discussed (Miranda, 2001; Tonelli, 2005; Scaffaro, 2010, for example).

Based on the Vygotsky's propositions, Tonelli (2007, p.114) emphasizes that "it is *in* and *through* social practices that man becomes a human being; this new historical and social being will be built in his/her social interactions and the appropriation of the discourse of the other." For the author, when listening to a story, the child goes into a real context or can imagine situations from it, interacts with the speaker, or exchange ideas with their peers who live the same or different experiences.

It is also worth mentioning Rocha's proposition (2006) on teaching ELC from genres that children have already known, such as "genres that make them play, with which they engage in games, genres that make them sing, which relate to musical activities, and genres that make them story-tell, which, in turn, include narrative activities in verse or prose " (ROCHA, 2006, p.25) . By doing so, it is possible to work in a contextualized way, within the children's socio-cultural realm, bringing them closer to the contexts of use of the language and giving meaning to learning.

Scaffaro (2010) believes that the main focus to be explored in the ELC teaching via CS is vocabulary, as it is a single unit previously recognized by children. She also states that children are used to listening to stories in their mother tongue (MT) and, as long as they are within context in the lives of the little ones, they can be used in FL teaching. Cameron (2002) explains that stories used as a teaching tool are appropriate since they "offer opportunities for the use of EL, through repetition of a language pattern, and of a wealth of words, with the goal of keeping the listeners' interest and attention" (CAMERON, 2002, p. 163-165).

According to Tonelli (2007, p.118) "when entering the formal world of schooling, a child already brings with him/her concepts and knowledge acquired in their life context" and it is in the classroom interaction, when sharing and listening to stories that children can grasp new knowledge.

Tonelli (2005) explains the importance and the role of CS in children's lives. In her studies, the author characterizes a literary work as a "significant verbal organization" in which the individuals' internal and external experiences are enriched by their imagination, leading them to communicate. She argues that the stories must be fun, arouse curiosity, stimulate imagination, develop the intellect, and clearly show their emotions. Moreover, she states that one should not consider the child as a passive reader/listener, but "as an active individual who either accepts or not the text, as they perceive it as linked or not to their world" (TONELLI, 2007, p.130). To do so, the choice of CS is important, since the text must captivate the learners, present them with values about life, stimulate their imagination, and capture their attention, so that language learning and context apprehension can take place, as advocated by Domingues and Gibk (2011).

Domingues and Gibk (2011, p.118-119) add that the story may have some unknown words to the students. The authors describe the importance of presenting keywords that will help them understand the story as it unfolds, in order to facilitate the understanding of the plot. Previous activities, such as the use of plays, games, music and objects from real life representing the unknown words (*realia*), should be employed, so that teaching takes place in a meaningful and contextualized way, with the words closely linked to the story. Therefore, it is necessary to know how to tell a story for children audience.

Tonelli (2007) reports on the anticipation of the story facts and on its importance to build the children's linguistic knowledge. The author sees, in the predicting activities, an opportunity for the teacher to introduce or review the EL in different contexts, since students will be able to improve their knowledge. It may also be noted that these activities propose the use of language in situations of anticipation of events that will be told in the story. This allows the teacher to explore not only the children's imagination, but also the use of a new language, especially in the case of FL/EL teaching, within a context, crystallized in texts known or recognized by the students. Another aspect in this type of activity is the apprehension of EL by the students in their verbal description and the use of language and words unknown to them, which could be later explored.

3. Children and their drawings

Gardner (1995) reports that children aged two to six or seven years old, at preschool age, begin to master a few sets of symbols and symbolic systems. These symbols are used to describe the vision of their world, through drawings, building blocks, modeling clay, singing, dancing, gesturing, to mention only a few.

Tonelli (2012, p. 114) adds that, "the child transfers to their drawing their conceptions, their knowledge of the world, their emotions, their feelings and meanings of cultural production".

Linguevis (2007) reports that a representation of something in a drawing may bring certain information that, most likely, we would not find in, for example, a written text. According to her, a drawing is a form of simple language used by children to express their ideas when they have not yet mastered the written code.

Also regarding drawings as a form of expression, Brooks (2009) argues, based on Vygotsky's concept of a mediating instrument, how the act of drawing may be understood in the formulation process of thought. The author says that the creation of a drawing is a more complex experience than the appropriation of a word, since the act of drawing involves, besides the children's previous experiences, their imagination and thought, which emerges when they are carrying out the task.

For Brooks (2009), drawing involves memory, experience, imagination, and observation. The creation of a drawing requires the integration of all these elements and, therefore, in the author's opinion, such activity may involve the children, giving them the opportunity to express their feelings, opinions, and worldviews, which they would seldom be able to express through words.

Applying this assumption to ELC teaching, a drawing activity seems to be highly significant if we consider that, since they have not fully mastered language yet, the student may express through a drawing, for example, what he/she has come to understand of a particular subject, in a particular class. Or yet, in this case, anticipate possible events for the next part of the story to be told by the teacher.

Antunes (1998), based on Gardner's studies (1995), explains that, from two years old on, children go through a series of development stages, which he called *waves*. Gardner (1995) classified these processes in four stages: 1) *structuring of roles or events*, children between 18 months and two years of age; 2) *topological mapping*, children around three years of age; 3) *digital mapping*, children aged four years old; and 4) *notational or secondary symbolization*, children around five or seven years old.

As this work deals only with children in pre-school age, between three and four years old, we will only use the two stages comprising this age group: the "*topological mapping*" and the "*digital mapping*".

The stage (or *wave*) called "*topological mapping*" can be observed in children approximately at three years of age. This phase corresponds to the relationship between size and shape that children use as a visual reference to make their drawing. They can see a house and represent it by using two blocks, naming one as the wall and the other roof; or they can draw two circles and say that one is the head and the other, the body. According to Gardner (1995, p. 69), children tend to be more objective at this stage. For example, when "asked to create an ending to a story that has a number of characters, they will most likely divide them into two contrasting roles (such as a good mother and a naughty daughter), thus, preserving a general topological relation, but not the explicit details and nuances". An adult, when faced with a drawing of a child at this stage, would hardly be able to distinguish what it is or what it means without the explanation of the producer, in this case, the child.

The *wave* called "digital mapping" can be observed in children aged about four years old. It is the stage in which children are able to understand quantities and numerical relationships, and when they begin to enumerate small groups of objects. "Often, and with an amazing speed and avidity, the world is now seen as a place of counting" (GARDNER, 1995, p. 69). It is at this stage that children start looking for details, and want to count everything. Although counting is one of the most striking features of this stage, children try to convey a general impression; for example, it is more important to present a head full of hair than enumerating each one. Or perceive the mood of a song instead of clinging to the number of notes or beats. At this stage, their drawings become more elaborate and easily understood by their target audience. It is possible to understand or, at least, have a clearer idea about the message they want to convey through it.

4.Data collection

Two G4 classes (children between 3-4 years old) of a private school in a middle-class neighborhood of Maringa, in Brazil, were selected for data collection. Classes were classified as "Group 1", consisting of six boys and eight girls, and "Group 2", with five girls and eight boys. The children had two 45-minute EL classes a week.

The groups were chosen based on two criteria: 1) the experience of the first contact with formal EL teaching, and 2) the different views of the story told showed by both groups. The following issues were also considered: maturity, creativity, prior knowledge, and motor skills.

Although students were attending the same "grade", they were distributed in groups according to their date of birth: students of "group 1" had their fourth birthday in the first semester of the year in which the data were collected; children in "group 2" became four in the second half of the year[1].

The teaching material used by students during the school year consisted of a book with pictures illustrating the theme-story, an activity book, a CD-ROM with games related to the story, and an audio CD, with songs that were developed according the proposed theme[2]. Students were asked to make drawings that illustrated the anticipation of facts in a particular scene of the story. Based on the CS they had previously heard, they were asked to illustrate what they thought would happen next. From these drawings, the students' explanations about their designs were recorded in audio. The recordings were later transcribed and, along with the drawings, provided the data to achieve the objective of this work.

The children received a sheet of white paper, regular pencils, colored pencils and pens to make their drawings.

After the children submitted their drawings, together with their descriptions of it, we carried out an analysis on the impressions regarding some aspects related to CS told in their English classes. We also observed how much they employed the words they were already taught to explain their drawings, since they were having their first contact with the formal teaching of EL.

Three drawings from each group were chosen for data analysis of this survey.

5. Data analysis

The drawings were analyzed according to the classification proposed by Antunes (1998) and Gardner (1995), and to the assumptions of Brooks (2009) on the role played by drawing activities. Based on these authors, we looked for the students' representations about the possible developments of the CS to be told by the teacher. Their verbal explanation was used to verify the students' intention represented in the drawings and to identify the extent to which EL – object of their classes – was being appropriated by the children.

6.1 Group 1

6.1.1 Drawing 1

MJ : "É, é, *Baby bear, Mom bear, ball, Goldilocks* e mingau . "
MJ: "It's, it's, 'Baby bear, Mom bear, ball, Goldilocks' and porridge."

Student MJ uses the words in EL "Baby bear", "Mom bear", "ball" and "Goldilocks", when explaining her drawing. The vocabulary was taught in previous lessons, within the class about family members, toys and the name of the main character.

Making use of her MT, she explains that *Goldilocks* will also find "mingau" (porridge); this means that the student has a prior knowledge about the story, considering she did not hear that part in her EL class.

MJ's drawing can be classified within the characteristics of "digital mapping" because she clearly presents "Baby bear", "Mom bear", "Ball", "Goldilocks" and four bowls of "porridge" with something that seems to be a spoon next to each one. There is also a character on the left side of her drawing, in yellow, which she does not mention. It is also possible to see that she had drawn, above the characters, a cover resembling a roof of a hut, which she does not mention in her explanation either.

Comparing the student's drawing to her verbal explanation we understand that, although she has a firm, clear tracing and showed a clear representation of what she imagines will happen in the next phase of the CS, the EL used was restricted to some components of it. "Porridge" for example, is represented in the illustration, but not used in her oral explanation in EL.

6.1.2 Drawing 2

AC: "Ela entrou e já era a casa dos monstros, os *three bears* foram embora e daí ela nunca mais entrou. E daí a *Goldilocks* bateu na porta e não era ninguém, era os monstros do *Baby bear* que ele tinha medo. Isso é fumaça, fumaceira para onde a *Goldilocks* levou os monstros."

[1] Data collection took place in the first half of the year.
[2] The CD and CD - ROM are delivered to students at the beginning of the year. Parents are instructed on how to help with their use at home, the - storybook and activity book are kept at school.

AC: "She came in and it was the home of the monsters, the "three bears" went away and, then, she never came back. And hence the "Goldilocks" knocked at the door and there was nobody, it was the monsters of "Baby bear" that he was afraid of. This is smoke, a cloud of smoke to where "Goldilocks" took the monsters."

Student AC presented an explanation that has no relation to what really happened in the story. She uses the words "three bears", "Goldilocks" and "Baby bear" in EL. The first two are related to the title of the story; the third is inserted in the lesson on family members. The student retells a scene she imagined in which "Goldilocks" is a heroin, by taking the monsters away, monsters that "Baby bear" is afraid of, and where there is smoke.

When analyzing her drawing, we observed characteristics of "digital mapping", as we can recognize the elements depicted by the student.

Three figures representing the monsters can be observed on the left side. On the right, a girl representing "Goldilocks" is seen; above the characters, a line is drawn representing the smoke. Although the elements monsters, smoke, fear, are not part of the story, when representing them in her drawing, AC transposes aspects pointed out by Brooks (2009) related to the integration of the child's emotions, giving her the chance to express her feelings, opinions, and view of the world.

6.1.3 Drawing 3

L: "Era o mingau que estava pronto e aqui era a *tree*. E aqui era a piscina, e aqui era uma *flower*, e aqui era uma escada que a *Goldilocks* subia, aqui era a *ball*, aqui era o fogão, o telhado, aqui era a lâmpada, e aqui era o *Baby bear* e aqui era a *Mom bear*."

L: "It was the porridge that was ready and here was a "tree". And here was the pool, and here was a "flower", and here was a ladder that "Goldilocks" climbed, here was a "ball", here was the stove, the roof, the lamp was here, and here was "Baby bear" and here was "Mom bear."

Student L uses the words "tree" and "house" in her explanation, because they are related to the class previously taught on nature; "Goldilocks", which is present in the routine EL classes, is the main character of the story; "ball" from the class on toys; "Baby bear" and "Mom bear" are set in the class on family members.

Like MJ (drawing 1), L draws "the porridge was ready", but refers to it using her MT. In our point of view, this shows that L uses the drawing activity to express her knowledge of the story in her MT, bringing to her drawing her prior knowledge of it. However, since she does not know the word in EL, she does not use it.

When observing the student's drawing, together with her explanation, we can identify a tree, a pool on the left side, and a flower in the middle of it. Beside, three characters are seen, which may represent "Goldilocks", "Baby bear" and "Mom bear". The bears' cottage is in the center and it can be seen a stove and a lamp inside it. The last element, on the right side, might be the representation of the ladder the student describes, which "Goldilocks" climbs up. Because of its clear images, the drawing can also be classified as "digital mapping".

Generally speaking, the drawings of group 1 presented accurate details and lines, thus, making it easier to understand the message the student wanted to express, without the following explanation. This characteristic justifies the fact that all the children are in the digital mapping stage, in which they make more elaborate drawings and conveys a general impression.

As for the use of the EL, we believe the students described their drawings successfully, showing they have mastered the vocabulary previously taught. It is worth noticing that they were young children, in their first contact with formal teaching of EL, and that it was an activity aiming at predicting facts, and a large part of the vocabulary was going to be taught in the following classes, i.e., they had not seen yet.

6.2 Group 2

6.2.1 Drawing 4

AG : "O pé dela".

AG: "Her foot".

Student AG only said that "Goldilocks" would see "her foot". The student did not use any of the previously taught words in EL, or any element close to the original story. Her drawing has characteristics of "topological mapping", since we can only identify its elements through the child's explanation.

6.2.2 Drawing 5

P: “Não fiz pé, fiz barriga. Viu a *Goldilocks*, a *ball*, mingau e patinete”.
P: "I did not draw the foot, I drew the belly. I saw “Goldilocks”, the “ball”, porridge and a kick scooter."

Student P’s drawing is also difficult to understand without his explanation, so we classified it as “topological mapping”.

P says he drew “Goldilocks’s” belly, not her foot. He also says that the character will find “a ball”, porridge and a kick scooter inside the three bears’ house. The word “ball” is used in EL. The student had already prior knowledge of it, when he studied about toys (ball, roller skate, doll, skateboard, teddy bear, videogame, puzzle, memory game, kite, car, toy box).

It is worth noticing that, when explaining his drawing, the student mentions a “kick scooter”. In our understanding, this information reveals that, when asked to express in the form of drawing what he believed would happen next in the CS, the child brought information related to his real-life context.

Therefore, we came to the conclusion that a drawing activity can be considered significant within the ELC teaching learning.

6.2.3 Drawing 6

L: “Uma casa dentro da casa dos *three bears*. Aahh, esqueci, não é casa é a fortaleza da porta da casa”.
L: “A house inside the “three bears’” house. Aahh, I forgot, it's not a house, is the fortress door of the house."

When looking at L’s drawing, it is possible to identify something that resembles a house. In her explanation, she first describes a house inside the three bears’ house. Then, she “corrects” it, saying it is not a house, it is the “fortress door of the house”.

Following the criteria adopted, this drawing belongs to “digital mapping”, since it is possible to identify a house without necessarily needing the student’s explanation.

After reviewing the three drawings of group 2, we found that most students in this group are at “topological mapping” stage, regarding the stage classification of child development. Their drawings show less precise lines, less elaborate drawings, with fewer details, making it difficult to understand the message the children wanted to convey without a prior explanation of it.

As for the use of EL, although its use was restricted to words/expressions such as *ball*, *three bears* and *Goldilocks*, we observed that a few students used English to explain their drawings. The students’ explanations were short and simple, another characteristic of the topological mapping stage, when children cannot build more elaborate ideas.

The drawings analyzed, along with the children’s explanation, reveal that, although the students of both classes are at the same age range, the drawings and explanations from group 1 were more elaborate and detailed. In group 2, the explanations were simple, without many details. The drawings had less precise lines, making it harder to identify the elements in it without a prior explanation.

In general, it can be said that the differences in the use of EL and the representation of the drawings are due to the age difference between students of group 1 and 2. Students in “group 1” turned four years old in the first semester of the year, when data was collected; students in “group 2” only turned four in the second semester of the year, i.e., they were still three years old when the data was collected.

6. Final conclusions

The aim of this article was to discuss the contribution of drawing activities along with the use of CS genre as a tool for ELC teaching learning.

When analyzing the transcripts of students' explanations about their drawings, we observed that students used the MT, along with the words they already knew in EL, to express their ideas on the facts that might happen in the story, as well as their prior knowledge about it. This change in language code (EL x MT) reinforces, in our understanding, the importance of MT in the learning of EL.

We should take into consideration that the group of children was having their first contact with formal EL teaching, and that they were also very young (age range 3-4 years). Therefore, their use of EL in the explanations was restricted to the use of vocabulary already taught in previous classes. However, we believe that the attempt to use EL in their verbal explanations indicates an effort, on the part of students, to employ the language being taught-learned.

Students in group 1 employed more EL words in their explanations, their ideas revealed a prior knowledge on the story, and their drawings had more precise lines (digital mapping).

Students in group 2 did not use many words in EL, did not show ideas that illustrated their prior knowledge about the story, and their lines were not as accurate (topological mapping).

Generally speaking, the drawing activity combined with the use of CS genre as a tool for ELC teaching-learning provided an opportunity to reformulate concepts, to show feelings, to express opinions, and to review emotions generated by CS storytelling.

References

ANTUNES, C. (1998). Jogos para a estimulação das múltiplas inteligências. (16th ed.). Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, (Chapter 1).

BROOKS, M. (2009). What Vygotsky can teach us about young children drawing. International Art in Early Childhood Research Journal, 1 v. Number 1.

CAMERON, L. (2002). Teaching languages to young learners. (1st ed.). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, (Chapter 3).

DOMINGUES, D.; GIBK, C. K. S. (2011). Narrativas no ensino de língua inglesa na educação infantil**:** discutindo algumas práticas. In: TONELLI, J. R. A.; CHAGURI; J. P. (Eds.), Ensino de língua estrangeira para crianças: o ensino e a formação em foco (pp. 111-136). Curitiba, PR: Appris, (1st ed.).

GARDNER, H. (1995). A criança e o pré-escolar . Como pensa e como a escola pode ensiná-la. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, (Chapter 5).

LINGUEVIS, A. M. (2007). Vamos ouvir a voz das crianças sobre aprender inglês na educação infantil. In: TONELLI, J. R. A.; RAMOS, S. G. M. (Eds.). O ensino de LE para crianças: reflexões e contribuições (pp. 137-154). Londrina, PR: Moriá, (1st ed.).

MIRANDA, L. (2001). Goldilocks and the three bears. Collection: Learning English through traditional tales. (1st ed.). São Paulo, SP: Kinderbooks, (pages 4-10; 13).

ROCHA, C. H. (2006). Provisões para ensinar LE no ensino fundamental de 1ª a 4ª séries dos parâmetros oficiais e objetivos dos agentes. Master Thesis on Languages- Unicamp, Campinas, São Paulo, (140 pages).

SCAFFARO, A. P. (2010). O uso da atividade de contar histórias como recurso na retenção de vocabulário novo na língua inglesa com crianças na fase pré-escolar. In: ROCHA, C. H.; TONELLI, J. R. A.; SILVA, K. A. (Eds.). Língua estrangeira para crianças: Ensino-aprendizagem e formação docente (pp. 61-92). Campinas, SP: Pontes, (7 v.).

TONELLI, J. R. A. (2007) Histórias infantis e o ensino da língua inglesa para crianças. In: TONELLI, J. R. A.; RAMOS, S. G. M. (Eds.). O ensino de LE para crianças: reflexões e contribuições (pp. 107-136). Londrina, PR: Moriá, (1st ed.).

TONELLI, J. R. A. (2012). A "dislexia" e o ensino-aprendizagem da língua inglesa. Doctoral Dissertation on Languages - Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Paraná, (312 pages).

Drawings

Group 1

Drawing 1

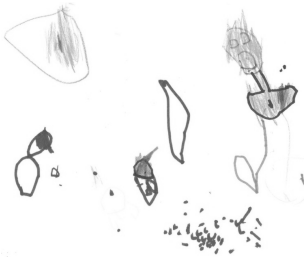
Drawing 2

Drawing 3

Group 2

Drawing 4

Drawing 5



Drawing 6