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ARTICLE

Cartoons that make a difference: A Linguistic Analysis of Peppa Pig

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the vocabulary contained in the British animated programme Peppa Pig and investigates whether this vocabulary is highly frequent but also appropriate for beginner learners of English. It also examines if there is any formulaic language in it. Comparison with the BNC wordlist, the CYLET and EVP wordlists for beginners suggests that one fifth of the English vocabulary contained in the show is highly frequent and that a small amount of it overlaps with the proposed vocabulary lists of CYLET and EVP for A1 level. Therefore, the majority of the vocabulary contained in the show is mainly infrequent but still appropriate while the in-depth analysis of selective episodes showed amplitude of formulaic language in the show and plenty repetition of it.

1. Introduction

Television is ubiquitous and young children are highly exposed to it. Rideout et al. (2003)[48] found that American toddlers are regular screen media users and spend about two hours a day in front of a screen. There has been a conflict over the last years on whether toddlers should watch television or not. In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advise parents to avoid exposing children younger than two years of age to television programs while they should be careful while selecting programmes for their children (Anderson & Pempek, 2005).[9]

The major issue of concern is whether infants watch programmes appropriate for their age. Pierroutsakos et al. (2004 cited in Anderson & Pempek, 2005)[9] found that about half of young children's exposure is to TV not designed for young children. So, it may not after all be an issue of whether children should watch television in general but of what kinds of programmes they are exposed to.

So, what are the elements of a successful TV programme designed for preschoolers? Fisch (2005)[19] and Kirkorian et al. (2008)[25] present some characteristics that all popular programmes for children share. Firstly, the content should be appropriate to their age, comprehensi-

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ble and it should also match their interests and relate to their lives. Each episode should present a limited amount of new information and repeat it throughout the episode to ensure that it will be acquired. Also, links among related concepts need to be clearly presented to ensure comprehension. It is advisable that the main characters of the show are either popular characters (or even animals etc) children admire or children so as to relate to them. Also, the programme has to be humorous, mysterious and engage their attention. Last but not least, appealing visual and sound effects should be used to attract and maintain children's attention (Kirkorian et al., 2008: 50).[25] Peppa Pig fits all these criteria and that is probably why it is so popular all over the world. Huntly (2006)[24] claims that the repetitive pattern and the consistent structural format in certain cartoons can reinforce EFL vocabulary development in young learners. What is more, exposing children to certain cognitively appropriate and linguistically rich cartoon series can contribute to children's foreign language development (Alexiou, 2015;[1] Alexiou& Vitoulis, 2014;[7] Kostopoulou 2015;[27] Prosic-Santovac 2016).[47] This last point is the impetus for this study as well.

2. The Preschoolers' TV Programme Peppa Pig

Peppa Pig is a British animated programme addressed to preschoolers native speakers of English, which is aired in 180 countries (Vaidyanathan, 2010).[54] The programme has received a series of awards and has met enormous success. Peppa has been described as a "global megastar with a following most pop stars, politicians and business leaders would kill for" (ibid) and is still very popular today.

Each episode of this programme is five-minutes long and that makes it ideal for young children who have short attention spans. It presents a 5-year-old female pig (Peppa, see Figure 1) with her family and friends in their everyday life dealing with real-life problems. In each episode the characters experience an adventure, which appeals to children's interests because they share the same interests with Peppa. Parents and young children can relate to the show because it depicts the dynamic of a real family (Wilkinson & Patterson, 2014).[56] What is rather appealing in this show is the fact that it contains real child voices and not adult voices pretending to be children.

The unique feature of this show is that it contains rich, authentic, contextualized English vocabulary that is not commonly found in a show that addresses preschoolers (e.g. 'waste of money', 'ring master', 'pruning shears', 'building inspector', 'steering wheel' etc). It "provides exposure to formulaic language and Situation-Bound Utterances, and indirectly teaches pragmatic conventions"

(Nightingale, 2014: 209).[43] According to Siyanova-Chanturia & Webb (2016)[52] authentic language is guaranteed to develop lexical competence and incidental vocabulary. This is one of the the reasons Peppa Pig is considered to be a valuable tool for EFL preschool teaching (Alexiou, 2015).[1] Although this programme has gained so much public attention it has not attracted the same research interest yet. Only a few small-scale studies have dealt with it (Nightingale, 2014;[43] Edwards, 2014;[18] Wilkinson & Patterson, 2014;[56] Scheffler, 2015;[50] Alexiou, 2015;[1] Prosic-Santovac, 2016).[47] and they have focused only on parts of the show and not the whole series. The present study aims to fill this gap and researches all the episodes of the cartoon series by examining the linguistic content of the show.

Figure 1. Peppa Pig

2.1 Young Learners' Vocabulary

Different estimates regarding early vocabulary uptake in L1 are found in literature. Schmitt and McCarthy (1997)[51] argue that 1000 words per year are acquired through childhood while Nagy and Herman (1984)[38] based on one study estimate that children acquire 3000 words per year. Nation and Waring (1997)[41] support that by the age of five, native speakers have managed to master 4,000-5,000 word families. However, more recent and systematic studies on children suggest that the lexical growth during childhood is actually smaller and reaches approximates of 600 words per year (Biemiller & Slonim 2001).[12]

When it comes to English as a foreign language (EFL), research has shown that foreign language learners after five years of EFL learning know only 1,000-2,000 word families (Nation, 1990;[39] Milton & Alexiou, 2009).[35] Consequently, young foreign language learners will lag behind native speakers and this difference is explained due to the degree of exposure and the amount of input of the foreign language. In order to catch up with the native speakers' vocabulary size (Milton & Alexiou, 2009)[35] and learn large numbers of words any kind of added exposure (like comic/cartoon series, computer games, educational URLs) will help to that direction (Alexiou, Roghani & Milton, forthcoming).[6]

Nevertheless, not all words are of equal importance in FL learning. Frequency is one important criterion to consider when choosing what vocabulary to teach to young

learners, especially if one considers the fact that frequency can affect when a word will be learnt (Milton, 2009).[33] Lately, high-frequency words that are function words and provide cohesion (ibid) have been favoured over low-frequency words, which are comprised of content words that give meaning to sentences (Nation, 2001).[40] However, teachers and coursebook writers should not be mesmerized only by frequency. Young learners' vocabulary should include thematically significant words, words that appeal to children's interests and are applicable in their everyday world (Alexiou & Konstantakis, 2009).[4] Considering that frequency lists are not organized according to themes, vocabulary teaching should include low-frequency words as well (Milton & Vassiliu, 2000).[36]

Still, frequency and age-appropriacy of the vocabulary taught to young learners are not the only parameters to be taken into consideration when choosing or developing EFL teaching materials. Latest research has shown that prefabricated language occurs in the early years of language learning not only in L1 but also in L2 (Lieven et al., 1992;[29] Wray, 2000;[59] Perera, 2001).[44] Researchers support that language occurs in patterns or strings of words, which we store as fixed phrases (Hunston et al., 1997;[23] Willis, 2003)[57] and as one item. This concept is what helps us communicate quickly and fluently (ibid). As Skehan (1992 cited in Willis, 2003)[57] emphasized, by using these prefabricated chunks we avoid organizing our thoughts and speech every now and again, a process that is really time-consuming. Most language learners use these ready-made patterns at some point and an added value is that they sound more confident and fluent. Chunking has been regarded to be basic in language acquisition (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992)[42] and it is acquired and stored without the learner analyzing the chunk into its components (Gordon, 2007).[21] Only after acquiring a chunk does a learner realize that it consists of component words (Wible, 2008).[55]

Very young L2 language learners have been found to use chunks extensively (Brown, 1973;[13] Hakuta, 1974;[22] Wong-Fillmore, 1976;[58] Peters, 1983;[45] Lieven et al., 1992;[29] Wray, 2000;[59] Perera, 2001).[44] According to Muñoz (2007),[37] meaningful chunks are used extensively in order for preschool and primary school language learners to perform speaking activities. Moreover, researchers claim that chunking aids the memory of very young learners; a rather important fact if one considers that vocabulary knowledge tends to be forgotten. After all, "the failure to remember, or forgetting, is perhaps the most salient aspect of memory for most people" (Glassman & Hadad, 2009: 178)[20] and memory training is important from an early age (Alexiou, 2009).[3] That is the reason why repe-

tition is so essential in language learning and especially in vocabulary acquisition. Nation (2001)[40] emphasizes that there are so many features of a word a learner needs to know that they are not possible to be learnt and retained after meeting a word only once. Word recycling contributes to the acquisition of all different aspects of a word and also strengthens knowledge and makes it easily accessible. Cameron (2001)[15] and Szpotowicz & Szulc-Kurpaska (2009)[53] highlight how beneficial repetition is for young learners. Frequent recycling of words, in different contexts, enhances their retention in memory and their organization in networks of meaning.

All forms of visual stimuli facilitate memory development and recall. Cartoons are ideal as visual stimuli for this age as they attract and capture children's attention. Pre-school cartoons also present great linguistic benefits for L1 but also for L2 learners. Robb et al. (2009)[49] support that cartoons like Baby Wordsworth, help lexical development. In a similar vein, small case research studies have shown that popular cartoons such as Peppa Pig (Alexiou, 2015; Prosic-Santovac, 2016; Alexiou & Kokla, 2019),[2] Charlie& Lola (Alexiou & Yfouli, 2019),[8] Ben & Holly, Cailou (Kostopoulou, 2015)[27] provide ample vocabulary input for effective and memorable early vocabulary learning (Alexiou & Milton, forthcoming) [5].

3. The Study

The aims of the present study are: (a) to determine the size of the vocabulary contained in Peppa Pig; (b) to examine whether the vocabulary included in Peppa Pig is frequent and appropriate for beginners' learners of English; and (c) to investigate if the show contains lexical chunks and if there is repetition of them.

3.1 Methodology & Procedure

For the purpose of the study, a corpus of the show's vocabulary was compiled. We watched and transcribed all the episodes that were available online. To our knowledge, there are no other corpora of cartoon TV series, except for the corpus of Dora the Explorer (Greek-English Version) that contained only the English language of the show (Kokla, 2016).[26]

The corpus was first juxtaposed with the BNC unlemmatised frequency wordlist (British National Corpus) (Leech et al., 2001)[28] to determine the frequency of the vocabulary contained in the show. Then, it was compared against the wordlist for beginner's level of the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests (CYLET 2018,[14] Starter's Level) and against the EVP (English Vocabulary Profile) wordlist for A1 Level (Capel, 2011)[16] to determine if the vocabulary in the corpus is appropriate for beginners' leaners of English. The corpus was juxtaposed against the

above wordlists using the online software Text Lex Compare (Cobb, 2017).[17]

Furthermore, eight randomly chosen episodes were examined to determine whether they contain lexical chunks and analyzed with the help of the concordance software AntConc 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018)[10] to determine the repetition of these lexical chunks.

4. Results & Discussion

The Peppa Pig Corpus & the Wordlists

The Peppa Pig Corpus is constantly being informed. Its compilation started in January 2016 and it is an ongoing process. Every time a new episode is released and is available online it is being transcribed into the corpus. The total number of the episodes included in the corpus is 243; all the episodes from the first four seasons, 32 episodes from the fifth season and 3 extra episodes that have been aired. So, the Peppa Pig corpus contains 119,033 tokens/ 4,931 types of words, which is a huge number if we consider that they are five-minutes episodes.

As far as the wordlists are concerned, the BNC list contains 2,027 tokens/1,780 types of the most frequent words in English. The CYLET's list contains 555 tokens/ 509 types of words whereas the EVP List has 744 tokens/ 610 types of words.

Regarding Frequency of Peppa's Vocabulary

Results showed that over half of the most frequent words in English are included in the Peppa Pig Corpus (Table 1), which is actually pretty good. However, these 1,027-shared types of words comprise only one fifth (20.83%) of Peppa's total vocabulary. Consequently, the majority of the words in the show are infrequent although research supports that high-frequency words are easier to learn (McCarthy, 1990)[31] and are acquired before the infrequent ones (Meara, 1992).[32] It is a fact that more frequent words are necessarily easier as they more likely to be encountered so they are available to learn; this regular occurrence aid noticing and retention.

Yet, this high amount of infrequent vocabulary in the corpus seems natural considering the fact that the show deals with everyday life and issues, so it includes more low-frequency words, content words, which give meaning to sentences (Nation, 2001).[40]

Table 1. Peppa Pig Corpus against BNC List

	BNC	Peppa Corpus	Overlap
Unique Types	753	3904	
Shared Types	1,027		57.70%
Total Types	1,780	4,931	

Regarding Content of Peppa's Vocabulary

The first finding is that almost 85% of the Starter's Vocabulary List is included in the Peppa Pig Corpus (Table 2). A similar finding was concluded about the EVP List; 88% of the EVP List is part of the Peppa Pig Corpus (Table 3). This was expected since most of the thematic areas found in starters are also found in a number of Peppa's episodes. Therefore, Peppa contains vocabulary that is cognitively and thematically appropriate for beginners' learners of English.

Table 2. Peppa Pig Corpus against Starters' List

	Starters	Peppa Corpus	Overlap
Unique Types	77	4,499	
Shared Types	432		84.87%
Total Types	509	4,931	

Table 3. Peppa Pig Corpus against EVP List

	EVP List	Peppa Corpus	Overlap
Unique Types	73	4,394	
Shared Types	537		88.03%
Total Types	610	4,931	

Nevertheless, both lists comprise only a small amount of the show's total vocabulary (Starters' List - 8.76% and EVP List - 10.89%), meaning that the majority of the show's vocabulary is for more advanced learners of English (but its thematic content would probably be inappropriate) or for very young beginners. This maybe explained by the fact that the show targets toddlers who are native speakers of English while the vocabulary is actually thematically appropriate for a very young beginner of English as well.

Regarding Lexical Chunks

A wide range of lexical chunks was discovered in the analysis of the eight episodes of the show. There were 7-12 lexical chunks per five-minute episode. The lexical chunks discovered were of two types: Simple lexical chunks, which are everyday patterns that can help in daily interaction (e.g. there you are/ look like), and situation-related lexical chunks, which are patterns used in a particular context (e.g. Ready, steady, go/ aye, aye). The two types of lexical chunks found in these episodes can be seen in Tables 4 and 5.

The type of lexical chunks in these randomly selected episodes is varied. So we get structural words like look like and multi-word lexemes like come on. We also get combinations that may or may not be collocations but which are a product of the content like muddy puddles, boat trip. These findings are informative but would be

Table 4. Simple Lexical Chunks

don't worry	best friend	there you are	looking for
thank you	watch out	having fun	boat trip
stand back	be careful	sitting room	sit down
looking after	day time	come back	fall asleep
upside down	well done	light switch	night night
hang on	come on	power cut	bed time
I'm fine	look like	bye-bye	come out

Table 5. Situation-related Lexical Chunks

muddy puddles	aye, aye
puddle jump	easy peasy
the olden days	rusty boat
world record	I suppose so
jumping up and down	Ready, steady, go
me hearties	jolly good
message in a bottle	shooting star
dress up	creep up on

Table 6. Chunk Repetition in Peppa Pig Corpus

Chunks	Repetition	Chunks	Repetition
Thank you	176	looking for	22
muddy puddles	120	home time	19
Very good	96	night time	15
Don't worry	92	dress up	15
Come on	88	There you are	14
jumping up and down	75	Stand back	12
Bye-bye	70	clever clogs	13
Well done	58	Aye, aye	15
bed time	39	come back	11
Ready, steady, go	23	looking after	10
best friend	21	look like	13
be careful	20	Jolly good	8

more enlightening if compared to a list of phrases frequently used such as the Phrasal Expressions list by Martinez and Schmitt (2012).[30] Since, interesting results regarding lexical chunks are yielded, comparing the complete corpus of lexical chunks included in Peppa Pig with a list of frequently used phrases will be our next step.

Concerning the repetition of these lexical chunks in the corpus, both simple and situation-related chunks were frequently repeated throughout an episode and across episodes (Table 6). This is very important because research has shown that word recycling contributes to the acquisition of all different aspects of a word (Nation, 2001),[40] and it strengthens knowledge and makes it easily accessible (Pimsleur, 1967;[46] Baddeley, 1990).[11] Especially in the case of young learners, repetition has been found to be beneficial (Cameron, 2001;[15] Szpotowicz & Szulc-Kurpaska, 2009)[53] since it helps them retain words and organize them in networks of meaning.

As a final note, it is worth stating that apart from rich, frequent and infrequent vocabulary as well as repetitive lexical chunks, Peppa Pig has also been considered as a pedagogic tool. In studying the episodes' content, it has been found that Peppa Pig series attempts to instill moral and cultural values, to promote multilingualism and to encourage positive pro-social behaviour to preschoolers (Alexiou& Kokla, 2019).[2]

5. Conclusion

Our findings suggest that the vocabulary size in Peppa Pig is rather large for a preschool TV programme and this is impressive. The majority of the vocabulary has been found to be infrequent, a fact that shows that there is authentic use of everyday language and that the show includes infrequent vocabulary (like fairy, dragon), which is relevant and part of preschoolers' world (Alexiou & Konstantakis, 2009).[4] Moreover, half of the most frequent words in English are contained in the show, so a combination between frequent and infrequent words is represented in the corpus and that makes it an effective linguistic tool (Milton, 2009).[33]

A wide range of lexical chunks was found in the 8 episodes' analysis. Each episode included both simple and situation-related lexical chunks that were frequently repeated throughout and across episodes. We intend to continue our investigation of the Peppa pig corpus and the lexical chunks included in all the episodes.

After a thorough linguistic analysis of the corpus, we believe that Peppa Pig is a hidden 'treasure' for language learning and that the series can be used to teach authentic everyday language, vocabulary and lexical chunks to very young EFL learners.

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