An Overview: American Television Series as Authentic Resources for English Language Development

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How can English language learners (ELLs) increase their exposure to spoken English while studying English in their home country? How can they prepare themselves to understand spoken English while traveling abroad? What should EFL teachers do to encourage their students to practice listening outside of the classroom? American television series (AMTVS) are a popular medium of studying English for ELLs worldwide due to their perceived authenticity. AMTVS are more accessible now with the advent of Hulu, Netflix, and YouTube. Instructors worldwide use AMTVS in the classroom to increase engagement and expose their students to a variety of linguistic features in English. The use of closed-captions increases ELLs' vocabulary, and improves their informal, figurative, and formulaic language acquisition as well as their listening and reading comprehension. Teachers can incorporate AMTVS into their listening instruction to expose ELLs in EFL settings to a variety of language conventions such as grammar, reduced speech, contractions, and various accents. This paper provides an overview of the variety of teaching points that instructors of ELLs can integrate into their classrooms for more context-based and enriched instruction. The linguistic challenges that educators must consider are discussed. This article concludes with the myriad of teaching and learning opportunities available that can help ELLs' English language development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Feyten (1991) asserted that listening comprises forty-five percent of our total communication time, yet it is a skill that is rarely or poorly taught. English language teachers around the world have recognized the value of encouraging English language learners (ELLs) to practice listening on their own time by watching American television series (AMTVS). However, there are many language components on which both teachers and ELLs can focus. It is essential for teachers and ELLs to identify specific learning

outcomes and linguistic features on which to focus during viewing to facilitate and guide learning. This article provides an overview of the myriad of linguistic features on which teachers and students can focus to improve their listening comprehension.

II. LISTENING CHALLENGES FOR ELLS

ELLs often experience listening and speaking anxiety which directly influences their motivation to practice either skill (Gardner, Laiande, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1987). In order to effectively communicate with other English speakers, ELLs must first be able to interpret the messages they are receiving aurally to respond verbally (Vogely, 1998). However, this ability is often overshadowed by an ELL's belief that they must have an extensive knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and perfect pronunciation before they can effectively communicate and engage in a conversation (Horwitz, 1987) although it is essential that they focus on meaning rather than striving for perfection (Vogely, 1998).

Comprehending relaxed spoken English is one of the most difficult skills for many second language learners to master. Practicing listening to English by watching American AMTVS may reduce the amount of anxiety some ELLs experience while listening and speaking as they can rewind or pause when necessary as well as support their comprehension of the dialogue by using closed-captions. Anxiety concerning engaging in either of these activities directly influences their motivation to practice either skill (Gardner et al., 1987).

ELLs recognize the importance of learning informal language, figurative language, and colloquialisms (Liontas, 2002). ELLs who travel abroad to English speaking countries quickly become aware of how much they do not know when interacting with native speakers of the language they have studied. They generally note that the speakers accent, rate of speech, and use of informal and figurative languages causes comprehension barriers. Learners often point to their lack of interaction with the foreign language in their home countries and are not accustomed to hearing the language in a contextualized situation. Similarly, many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) courses have a heavy focus on grammar rules, reading, and writing while the traditional methods of listening instruction have not changed to meet students' needs.

The traditional method of teaching listening to ELLs has been for teachers to present a listening task and assess students on their comprehension of the dialogue (Thompson & Rubin, 1996). Teachers believe that if they provide opportunities for listening input, then their students' listening comprehension will improve. However, the listening input that ELLs receive in class is not sufficient for their listening skills to improve. ELLs should be encouraged to practice listening both in and outside of the classroom "with an emphasis

on the process of listening rather than merely providing opportunities to listen or testing of listening comprehension” (Thompson & Rubin, 1996, p. 333).

Listening materials created with the intention of teaching students how to listen have been criticized as being inefficient and not being a close enough approximation to native speech (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Gilmore, 2007; Kellerman, 1992). Meskill (1996) pointed out that listening materials aimed at ELLs lack reduced speech patterns that are present in multimedia forms created for native speakers. Furthermore, she asserted that watching television shows helps second language learners “recognize patterns of stress, rhythm, and intonation and how they signal information and intent” (Meskill, 1996, p. 189) as well as “understand communicative functions of utterances according to context” (Meskill, 1996, p. 191). When ELLs have access to a multitude of tools to support their listening comprehension, vocabulary size may not play as important of a factor has been suggested by Nation (2006) and Webb and Rodgers (2009).

III. BENEFITS OF USING AMTVS AS TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOLS

AMTVS are already used for teaching both children (Goldman, 1993; Goldman & Goldman, 1988; Hsu, Hwang, Chang, & Chang, 2013; Koskinen & Neuman, 1992; Koskinen, Wilson, & Jensema, 1986; Linebarger, 2001) and adults (Bean & Wilson, 1989; Danan, 2004; Maginnis, 1987; Price, 1983; Webb, 2010; Webb & Rodgers, 2009). AMTVS are opportunities for ELLs to practice listening outside of the classroom (Price, 1983) without experiencing high levels of anxiety (Vogely, 1998). Although television, podcasts, the radio, and other listening mediums are generally easily accessible to ELLs, the language that these mediums contain often is not. Television, podcasts, and radio shows are not created with language learners in mind because they contain figurative language and varieties of English to which learners may not be accustomed. Additionally, the rate of speech may seem too fast to ELLs (Y. Wang, 2012) which is possibly a combination of unfamiliar words and the use of reduced speech (Meskill, 1996; Mitterer & McQueen, 2009).

The value of AMTVS as a listening teaching medium presents itself in a combination of image, sound, and text, which allow the learner to vicariously gain information about habits, traditions, and American culture (Talaván, 2007). Using AMTVS, ELLs can interact with informal English, colloquialisms, and figurative language in real life contexts as opposed to contrived conversations found in language learning materials created specifically for ELLs (Talaván, 2007). Nunan pointed out that studies have shown that learners who achieve high levels of proficiency often attribute their success to out-of-class

learning (as cited in D. Wang, 2012). In this way, students are exposed to a variety of accents, reduced speech, colloquialisms, figurative language, and informal English in context.

One of the principles of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia learning is the idea that people learn gain a more in-depth understanding of topics from “words and pictures than from words alone” (Mayer, 2002, p. 31). The dual-channels assumption reinforces the value of AMTVS as a learning tool for ELLs. The definition of the dual-channels assumption is that “humans possess separate information processing channels for visually represented material and auditorily represented material” (Mayer, 2002, p. 33). The information processed by the visual channel includes illustrations, on-screen text, video, and animations. The information processed by the auditory channel includes narration or nonverbal sounds. Anstey and Bull’s (2006) work on multiliteracies reinforces the need for learners to receive information through multiple channels as it bolsters their comprehension and their confidence in comprehending listening texts. Anstey and Bull (2006) stated that volume, intonation, rhythm, special effect sounds, and music are additional elements affect listening comprehension as well, which the listener must analyze and understand. Furthermore, in line with the role of the visual channel in multimedia learning, Anstey and Bull (2006) asserted that facial expressions, gestures, and body movements also play integral roles in interpreting listening texts as a whole.

Mayer and Moreno (2003) warned of the potential for cognitive overload which occurs when the narration or dialogue is not properly aligned with the visuals. Another cause of cognitive overload is when the information is presented at a fast pace and the viewer is not provided with a sufficient amount of time to organize and process the information they see. Due to these limitations, teachers should review the AMTVS that they choose to use for instruction and plan for potential cognitive overload by pre-teaching vocabulary or figurative language phrases which may overwhelm their students. However, not all vocabulary and figurative language phrases can be taught, so teachers should focus on those most essential for students to follow the plot.

1. Authentic Listening

The ability and opportunity to access AMTVS, videos on YouTube, and radio via the internet has increased the opportunity for English learners with internet access in non-English speaking countries to engage with authentic spoken English listening texts. Although not available in all countries, students can use Hulu and Netflix to watch drama series, comedy sketches, movies, documentaries, and commercials and other types of video. Because these media have been produced for native English speakers, they can be considered to be authentic listening experiences (Sherman, 2003). However, the definition

of “authentic” has been debated. Some opponents of classifying the aforementioned types of video as authentic, argue that the videos and stories in them are manipulated, the events are artificial, and do not reflect real world conversations and scenarios (Hambrook, 1992).

Morrow (1977, as cited in Gilmore 2007) defines authentic text as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort” (p. 98). Porter and Roberts (1981) definition of authentic language will be used “the language produced by native speakers for native speakers in particular language community” (p. 38). Porter and Roberts (1981) posited that native speakers and English language teachers can distinguish between English listening materials created with the intention of teaching and those that were not “with little hesitation and considerable accuracy” (p. 37). Their assertion supports Morrow’s (1977, as cited in Gilmore, 2007) definition of authentic language as native speakers can recognize that they are not the intended audience for listening materials create for ELLs possibly due to the lack of pauses, hesitations, and digressions (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997) present in the listening text.

Gilmore (2004) set out to determine whether or not listening textbook dialogues, aimed at helping adult English language learners (ELLs) improve their listening skills, contained discourse features that mimic language used in authentic dialogues. Authentic dialogues in this study were considered to be conversations that occurred in a real-life setting between two people who were not given a topic nor primed for the conversation in any way. Gilmore (2004) identified nine discourse features commonly employed in authentic dialogue: length and turn-taking patterns, lexical density, false starts, repetitions, pausing, terminal overlap, latching, hesitation devices, and back channeling. Gilmore (2004) considered how the inclusion or exclusion of each of these linguistic features shape the dialogue and influence materials writers, students, and teachers.

In his initial study, Gilmore (2004) found that authentic discourse features were nearly nonexistent in the seven service encounter dialogues that he analyzed from the following textbooks: *Inside English 1* (McDermott & Owen, 1985), *Task Listening* (Blundell & Stokes, 1981), *International Express Intermediate* (Taylor, 1997), *Making Headway: Everyday listening and speaking* (Cunningham & Moor, 1992), *Fast Forward 1* (Black, McNorton, Malderez, & Parker, 1986). Gilmore (2007) conducted another analysis of three additional service encounter dialogues from *New Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 1996), *Getting Ahead* (Jones-Macziola & White, 1999), and *Cutting Edge* (Cunningham & Moor, 2001) in which he discovered that more authentic discourse features were included than had been in the first seven listening dialogues that he investigated. The primary discourse features that had increased were latching, hesitation devices and back-channeling. The lexical density of the listening passages in the latter three service encounter dialogues were more similar to authentic dialogues. However, the

lexical density of the first seven was much higher which means that the vocabulary load was higher for the students which may have made comprehension more difficult.

Gilmore (2004) addressed the nine discourse features of authentic dialogue as they occurred across texts. The data that he collected were very unambiguous. The length of the conversations varied with the authentic conversation being longer than the textbook dialogue. Gilmore (2004) noted the absence of false starts and terminal overlap in the textbook dialogues while they showed up 6.5 times and 6.03, respectively, in the authentic interactions. However, he noted that in the beginning levels this may be advantageous to learners as the addition of these features could cause frustration while listening. Additionally, pedagogical justification for including these features is not very strong. Repetition and latching appeared only once each in the textbook dialogues and 24.14 and 8.82, respectively, in the authentic dialogues. Pauses occurred four times, hesitation devices eight times, and back-channel four times. Gilmore (2004) noted that these features were underused in comparison to the authentic interaction where 61.3 pauses, 54.3 hesitation devices, and 30.2 back-channels were used. He posited that he could not discern a rational explanation for neglecting to include hesitation devices nor back-channels. He theorized that including them in the textbook dialogue may serve as a method of separating the dialogue into digestible chunks for beginning learners. Furthermore, learners can experience how hesitation devices are used to avoid being interrupted by the other interlocutor before the speaker is finished with their utterance. However, including pauses in the textbook dialogue may not be as necessary as pausing during authentic conversation occurs organically when one of the interlocutors pauses to search for information (on a computer, cell phone, wallet, purse, etc.) that will further the conversation or answer a question.

In Rao's (2002) study, Chinese students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context lamented that they did not have access to authentic spoken English materials which they claimed hindered their ability to understand spoken English. Students in the study compared the instruction that students in an English as a second language (ESL) context received to their instruction in the EFL context (Rao, 2002). They cited their learning environment as a hindrance to improving their listening comprehension. They perceived students in an ESL context to have more opportunities to be exposed to authentic spoken English. For example, they believed that students in an ESL context had better access to native speakers and that living in an ESL environment fosters a stronger need to interact with native speakers on a daily basis whereas in an EFL context English plays a lesser role in the community and is only emphasized in the classroom. The students also believed their teacher's experience and language proficiency to be a barrier to advancing their listening and speaking skills. Furthermore, students in the study did not perceive their listening materials to be authentic sources of language.

2. Closed-Captions as a Listening Strategy

Using closed-captioning while watching AMTVS or movies represents the possibility of a free, widely accessible learning aid with a wide variety of uses by both teachers and students. In the time period following Price's (1983) study, captioning has been studied extensively as a tool to improve L2 listeners' comprehension of audiovisual input (e.g., Baltova, 1999; Winke, Gass, & Syodorenko, 2010). Closed-captions display the audio text of the language spoken in television programs or movies whereas subtitles are translations of the dialogue into the viewers' native, or primary, language. The translation aspect of subtitles may not be as effective as captions, as any biases or linguistic idiosyncrasies held by the translator add an unquantifiable element.

Since closed-captions are an accurate reflection of the words spoken by the characters in the show, all translations, and thus all inferences and interpretations are left to the viewer. The ability to infer the meaning of figurative language phrases is a skill that must be developed when learning a new language. ELLs can potentially practice inferring the meaning of figurative language phrases through watching AMTVS and movies. Furthermore, when closed-captions are used, students are more motivated to understand what they are watching (Danan, 2004).

Closed captioned television series are highly contextualized and multisensory and therefore are rich sources of input (Koskinen & Neuman, 1992). Because television series are context embedded, ELLs can more easily understand the gist of a conversation because of the context in which the conversation takes place. The constant influx of nonverbal communication performed by actors, plus the aid closed-captioning provides in aural understanding, seems a potent combination for lowering the affective filter. Kellerman (1992) called for research on the impact of nonverbal behaviors, like gestures, facial expressions and body language, on the "decoding of speech" because they seemed to be being treated as incidental to the listening comprehension process as opposed to imperative in both the listening and teaching fields. Research focused on how ELLs use closed-captioning could lead to a more interconnected understanding of the various ways in which television series lower the affective filter and aid learning.

English has a great variety of accents which include Australian, Irish, Scottish, American English, British English, and World Englishes. Additionally, within each of those varieties, regional accents exist. Mitterer and McQueen (2009) argued that listeners have to contend with understanding spoken language even within their native language. The listening difficulty occurs when an accent and/or intonation differs from the standard pronunciation, such as that which is heard on news broadcasts, or the listeners personal accent. They posit that understanding different regional accents in a foreign language amplifies the level of difficulty. For this reason, Mitterer and McQueen (2009) suggest

using captions to assist learners in reconciling the sounds with their written counterparts which cannot be done when using subtitles.

3. English Language Development Using AMTVS

As English learners have cited online viewing of AMTVS as a useful resource for learning vocabulary and idioms (Sockett, 2011), researchers have begun to investigate the impact of informal online viewing and acquiring vocabulary incidentally on language acquisition. Studies have indicated that using closed-captions leads to incidental vocabulary acquisition and development as well as improves reading comprehension (Bean & Wilson, 1989; Goldman, 1993; Koskinen et al., 1986; Maginnis, 1987). Incidental vocabulary and language acquisition are well-researched domains in the field of second language acquisition. Incidental acquisition (Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2011) occurs when readers or listeners learn vocabulary words and grammatical structures unintentionally simply because they are engaged in an activity and are not focused on the learning aspect of the task (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

Studies have shown that using closed-captions have a positive effect on ELLs' vocabulary development (d'Ydewalle & Pavakanun, 1995; Koskinen & Neuman, 1992; Linebarger, 2001; Maginnis, 1987; Melher, 1988; Montero Perez, Peters, & Desmet, 2015). However, most of these studies focus on the short-term effects of videos, movies, and television. The researchers measure how much the participants "acquired" immediately after being exposed to videos, movies or television. However, it may be erroneous to suggest that the vocabulary was acquired if long-term retention of the word was not measured.

Y. Wang (2012) used AMTVS to intentionally teach vocabulary to twenty-eight ELLs in Taiwan ranging in ages from twenty to forty-five. Three sitcoms, *How I Met Your Mother* (Bays, Fryman, & Thomas, 2005-2014), *Reba* (Hanel & Schultheis, 2001-2007), and *King of Queens* (Sussman, Davis, & James, 1998-2007), were chosen because the dialogue spoken in the series revolved around the characters' "daily lives" (Y. Wang, 2012, p. 221). She theorized that the students would be better able to understand unknown vocabulary words in context because of the actions of the characters and the locales of the action. Y. Wang (2012) surveyed students and conducted individual semi-structured interviews to understand their perspectives and thoughts on watching the American sitcoms.

Y. Wang (2012) discovered that 29 percent of participants did not find the vocabulary to be appropriate for them. The students cited characters' rate of speech and pronunciation as factors that impeded their ability to learn or write down the vocabulary. The participants' desire to write down the unfamiliar vocabulary that they encountered in the television

shows that they watched shows that they have yet to become comfortable with the vagueness of language (Porter & Roberts, 1981). Their focus on the details may have prevented them from gaining an overall understanding of the plot, which inhibited their ability to enjoy the activity.

Y. Wang (2012) further opined that perhaps the reason for their negative perceptions was that the participants had not yet reached the vocabulary size of 6,000 word families recommended by Webb and Rodgers (2009) to adequately comprehend the dialogue in the show. However, 71 percent of participants felt that the amount of unknown vocabulary was not an obstacle to understanding the episode. Additionally, they claimed that the visual support helped them to retain and understand new vocabulary words. Some participants noted that learning the vocabulary words in context was quite helpful in understanding the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. An overwhelming number of students, 93 percent, agreed that using AMTVS helped them to learn vocabulary.

Comments on Y. Wang's (2012) survey showed that students noticed that while watching AMTVS, they learned words and idioms that they stated to have never encountered in their textbooks designed to help ELLs improve their listening skills. Listening texts made for ELLs often feature figurative language out of context (Liontas, 2002). Others expressed doubt that these words were actually high-frequency words that Americans used. Y. Wang (2012) argued that AMTVS allow students to hear vocabulary in context and to gain experience with them in authentic contexts and in specific situations which enrich their experience with the words that the teacher aims to teach.

Sockett (2011) theorized that the viewing that ELLs engage in during their spare time might affect their formal learning environments. Upon surveying 230 English learners about their viewing habits, Sockett (2011) found *House*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *One Tree Hill* (Milligan, Prange, & Hartley, 2003-2012), *Lost* (Burk, Abrams, & Lindelof, 2004-2010), and *Desperate Housewives* (Cherry, 2004-2012) to be the top five television series that English learners watched online. He then searched the transcripts of these series for the most frequently used four-cluster word phrases. Sockett (2011) compared his results with the cluster word frequency word list on the British National Corpus (BNC) and determined the frequently occurring clusters to be "relevant examples of target language" (p. 12) which reflect the language of real-life conversations, such as reduced speech, intonation, stress patterns, hesitations, and pauses. He opined that teachers are less likely to incorporate television programming into their curriculum as they feel this medium is not representative of English language and culture. Furthermore, Sockett (2011) noted that the emphasis on "high culture" (p. 10), as opposed to popular culture, is perceived as superior. Television shows are considered to be a part of popular culture, consumed mainly by the uneducated and poor with little consideration of philosophy while high culture is perpetuated by the upper middle class (Gans, 1999). High culture is an

interest in, appreciation and understanding of fine art, poetry, classical literature, and operas. However, according to Sockett's (2011) findings, viewers acquired high-frequency word clusters outside of the formal learning environment with a possible relationship to specifically watching television.

While it is clear from Sockett's (2011) research that second language acquisition is occurring during viewing, Kusyk and Sockett (2012) set out to explore the general nature of listening comprehension derived from the informal viewing of television series online. To assess the degree of incidental acquisition, the researchers assessed students on their comprehension of the 50 most common word clusters, using the same four-word cluster segments from Sockett's (2011) study, found in the dialogue of AMTVS. They concluded that students who are frequent viewers have a better knowledge of the word clusters than occasional viewers. Frequent viewers also claimed to self-evaluate more than occasional viewers which prompted Kusyk and Sockett (2012) to wonder whether or not frequent viewers watch more television because they understand more or if they understand more because they have a higher language proficiency. Students with higher language proficiency are often better able to infer the meaning of unknown words based on context (Brown, 2013), are more comfortable with not knowing every word (Porter & Roberts, 1981), and focus on understanding messages rather than form (Krashen & Terrell, 1982).

4. Motivation

English language teachers have a limited amount of time to teach or expose their ELLs to the large amounts of vocabulary needed for students to reach vocabulary sizes recommended for optimal comprehension of both reading and listening texts. Research on the benefits of extensive reading on vocabulary development have affected pedagogical methods of English language programs globally (Day & Robb, 2015; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). Many programs encourage students to engage in pleasure reading extensively outside of class to promote vocabulary acquisition and increased reading comprehension. Research on the benefits of extensive listening on listening comprehension are currently emerging (Chang & Millett, 2013; Gilliland, 2015; Renadya & Farrell, 2011; Webb & Chang, 2015).

Gilliland (2015) incorporated the use of listening logs to encourage extensive listening outside of the classroom to promote improved listening skills and vocabulary acquisition. Students in Gilliland's (2015) study were encouraged to participate in a variety of listening situations outside of the classroom (lectures, public speeches, guided tours, documentaries, etc.). Upon analysis of the listening activities that the students engaged in, Gilliland (2015) noticed that her students preferred to view American television series over other activities.

They indicated that AMTVS were an authentic and accessible means of immersing

themselves in the American culture without spending the money to travel to America. Participants in D. Wang's (2012) study kept track of their viewing habits and noted the strategies that they used to increase their listening comprehension. Kusyk and Sockett (2012) used Sockett's (2011) compilation of the most frequently occurring four-word clusters in AMTVS to determine the amount of incidental vocabulary learning that occurred from students informal viewing of AMTVS online. Yang, Lin, and Chung (2009) used the popular television show *Friends* (Bright, Crane, & Kauffman, 1994-2004) to help students identify contractions

AMTVS motivate ELLs to practice listening outside of the classroom for a variety of reasons. First, AMTVS revolve around central characters and events that are integral elements of the story and plot. In this way, viewers become engaged in a story and are motivated to continue watching the story to its conclusion which may take the entire season (Mittell, 2010). Furthermore, at the end of the season, viewers are left with a cliffhanger to entice them to continue watching the next season of the series. AMTVS allows viewers to become much more invested in the characters and develop a relationship of sorts with the protagonist and the antagonist of a series, which motivates viewers to discover how the conflict is resolved.

Researchers have found that learners tend to gravitate towards more authentic listening texts in an effort to increase their listening comprehension. Chapple and Curtis (2000) noted the highly motivating nature of visual media for ELLs. Rucynski (2011) used *The Simpsons* (Brooks & Groening, 1989-2018) as a springboard to explore American culture in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. D. Wang (2012) interviewed students in China whose primary means of practicing listening skills, improving their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competence was through watching AMTVS.

The immersive experience provided by a full-length television series allows students to use semiotic symbols to aid their comprehension along with closed-captioning. Anstey and Bull (2006) posited that students need to learn how to use five specific semiotic symbols (visual, auditory, gestural, linguistic, and spatial) in order to interpret and analyze media. The visual semiotic symbol is any information that is processed through the visual channel while the auditory symbol is process through the auditory channel. Gestural symbols include body language, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures. The spatial semiotic symbol focuses on the use of space between characters and character placement and its relevance to meaning. Lastly, the linguistic semiotic symbol refers to the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary used in the dialogue. As viewers grow more familiar with and invested in the characters, they will become better accustomed to each character's personality quirks or idiosyncrasies, which can provide a lens through which to interpret and understand their actions and reactions. Helping students learn how to practice listening autonomously outside of the classroom will help students to reach their academic goals as

well as their personal language goals (Rivers, 2001).

Watching AMTVS at home allows students learn in a comfortable place at their own pace which encourages more autonomous learning (Rivers, 2001). Additionally, the stories told in AMTVS are presented in three modes: the visual language which includes proxemics and kinesics, the spoken language, and closed-captions. These modes increase the amount of comprehensible input ELLs receive, which in turn increases their listening comprehension (Almeida & Costa, 2014; Koskinen & Neuman, 1992) and motivation to learn. Teachers need only to plan a lesson around an engaging AMTVS with interesting characters and a compelling plot to motivate students to watch outside of class. It is important, however, to choose a language aspect on which to focus. The focus can be figurative language, informal language, contractions, pragmatics, reduced speech or any topic that the teacher identifies as needing more attention in their language class.

IV. LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES

While there may be numerous benefits for teachers and learners alike to use AMTVS as teaching and learning tools, they must also remain aware of the challenges they may face while using AMTVS for English development. Even if ELLs understand all of the words in a conversation, the input can still be incomprehensible due to figurative language, semantic and pragmatic conventions.

Figurative language uses words and expressions which have meanings that are different from their literal interpretation. Some of the examples of these literary devices include, but are not limited to, idioms, metaphors, irony, similes, and symbolism. Figurative language allows people to express abstract thoughts, create mental images, and reinforce group identity. It is frequently used in AMTVS which serves to create a connection between the viewer and the characters in the series. Figurative language is thought to be more challenging to teach systematically in the second language classroom because “figurative language typically arises from the role of phrases in discourse rather than from the sum of their grammatical and lexical parts” (Charteris-Black, 2002, p. 104).

Among all of the aspects of learning a language that ELLs have to master, pragmatics misunderstandings may stem from a student’s inexperience with cultural context. Washburn (2001) touted sitcoms as an effective method of allowing ELLs to observe pragmatic use. She explained that sitcoms “portray real-life violations of pragmatic norms and their consequences” (p. 22). Washburn (2001) stated that dramas can also be used to point out pragmatic violations, but sitcoms rely on these violations as a venue for humor. The researcher suggested the teacher pre-teach different types of pragmatic violations and have students note which ones they observed. As an extension activity, she asked her

students to watch their preferred sitcom at home and make note of any pragmatic violations they observed and share their observations with the class. In this way, the collaborative sharing of pragmatic violations enriches all of the students' comprehension of pragmatics.

Although figurative language and pop culture references may impede ELLs' ability to understand those aspects of the dialogue, according to the research, learners are not dissuaded from using AMTVS to increase their listening comprehension (Gilliland, 2015; Grover, Miller, Swearingen, & Wood, 2014; Sockett, 2011; D. Wang, 2012). Alm (2013) suggested that extensive listening helps ELLs to develop the ability to cope with linguistic difficulties.

V. CONCLUSION

The roles of AMTVS in language learning cannot be overstated and should not be viewed as a waste of time for students. AMTVS is one of the most popular modes of listening input for students in both ESL and EFL language learning settings. As we have seen, AMTVS is a multipurpose, multimodal English learning medium through which ELLs can increase their listening comprehension (Gilliland, 2015; Grover et al., 2014; Sockett, 2011; D. Wang, 2012), reading comprehension (Bean & Wilson, 1989; Goldman, 1993; Koskinen et al., 1986; Maginnis, 1987), pragmatic competence (Hu, 2012; Washburn, 2001), incidental vocabulary acquisition (Koskinen & Neuman, 1992; Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Sockett, 2011), and acquire informal language (Frumuselu, Maeyer, Donche, & Plana, 2015).

Teachers should capitalize on their popularity and effectiveness in developing English skills. Students want to be engaged, and teachers want to engage them. The research shows that many ELLs are already motivated to watch AMTVS during their personal time, and there are others still who do not watch because they do not know where to start. Similarly, they may consider AMTVS to be too difficult for their level of English and may need assistance choosing a television series at their level.

Teachers of ELLs in EFL settings can increase language learning in their classrooms if they identify an AMTVS to introduce to their students. Based on the AMTVS, they can create lessons that will highlight the vocabulary, figurative language, semantics, pragmatics, or pop culture within the show which will lead to authentic learning activities within the classroom. With the support of a knowledgeable instructor, new students can become motivated to listen on their personal time thereby increasing their listening comprehension in a more authentic and engaging manner.

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