

## USING TV SHOWS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

*Evelina Miščin\**

*Rochester Institute of Technology Croatia*

*Sara Miščin\**

*Klasična gimnazija u Zagrebu*

Using videos in teaching dates to times when 16mm projectors were used, then moved from VHS to DVDs. Watching videos can have a strong effect on students' mind and senses and therefore can be used as an instructional tool. There are many values of watching video clips in the classroom, to name just a few: they grab their attention, focus their concentration, create a sense of anticipation, improve attitudes toward content and learning, increase understanding, provide an opportunity for freedom of expression. The purpose of this paper is to show several ways how to use video clips of popular TV shows in the classroom in order to engage students and achieve desired results.

*Key words: TV shows, listening comprehension, language acquisition*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

TV is one of the most widespread media of our time. We have been exposed to it since the earliest childhood, and TV shows, cartoons, or YouTube videos nowadays, are one of the first contacts that a person has with a foreign language. For example, in Croatia there is a phenomenon of a *Cartoon Network generation* – those are millennials who claim to have learnt English through watching Cartoon Network and they could be correct. As children, they spent many hours watching various cartoons in English and absorbed vocabulary, accents and constructions while having fun and not realising that they were actually acquiring a new language. Why should we not use the same strategy in foreign language classrooms and make learning a new language more interesting and more fun?

### 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Berk (2009:1) mentions that video clips have been used in teaching for many years and started when instructors used 16mm projectors. The same author claims that watching video clips can have a powerful cognitive and emotional impact on students (ibid.: 2). Hobbs (2006) gives an example of

\* evelinamiscin@yahoo.co.uk

using film, television and video materials for reasons that are not directly related to knowledge acquisition or skills development. Video clips are mostly used as a time-filler. His research included teachers of all subjects and the media use was put into seven categories: 1. Content delivery approaches where video clips mostly followed the content described in the classroom and illustrated concepts and ideas; 2. Current events where national TV news was used for discussing current events; 3. Film adaptation approaches where teachers used a film or video adaptation after students have read the literary work; 4. The use of technology tools to create or analyse information where students created messages using technology; 5. Recording of student speeches, debates, experiments or plays; 6. The use of video material to start discussion or stimulate student writing and finally, 7. The use of video material in teaching foreign language skills where teachers used foreign TV commercials and popular programmes for building listening comprehension skills, particularly in French, Spanish and German (ibid., 2006). Buckingham (2003) states that by using video clips in the classroom, teachers can promote the development of critical thinking skills. Media literacy skills can be developed by asking critical questions about media messages and should not be used just to fill time.

Today, our lives have been flooded with technology and most of the students are digital natives (Prensky, 2001). They have been using computers, smart phones and other technological devices all the time. The CNN report from 2015 (<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/03/health/teens-tweens-media-screen-use-report/index.html>) mentions that teens spend 9 hours a day, while tweens 6 hours a day on average consuming media which includes watching TV, videos and movies, playing video games and so on. Therefore, the use of such media in the classroom can be used to motivate students in learning English. Hanf (2015: 138) refers to Danan and Vanderplank and states that “the linguistic benefits of watching foreign language television have been recognized in areas such as listening comprehension, cultural proficiency, and vocabulary acquisition.” Since the TV series used in the classroom are from English speaking countries, festivities and customs from those countries are often depicted in the episodes – such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, and other holidays that may not exist in the student’s country. In this way their cultural knowledge is enhanced. Students also understand the plot using the visual cues, context and actors’ body language (Curtis, 2015). The same process occurs when teachers use TV shows in a language classroom. It can be beneficial in many ways. It provides authentic listening comprehension materials which are aided by visual prompts thus helping the students comprehend the situation even if they do not have sufficient vocabulary knowledge.

TV series also extend the learning process outside of the classroom because if a student liked the episode or clip shown in class they may continue watching it at home and therefore be exposed to more language. In those cases, language learning anxiety is reduced since there is no pressure of being graded and evaluated.

### 3. THE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

There are boundless possibilities for using TV shows in the classroom. As Zakhareuski mentioned: "A TV series can help provide a balanced mix of entertainment with education" (<https://busyteacher.org/5925-what-you-can-do-with-tv-series-8-creative-ideas.html>). The first step is to find appropriate shows that are suitable both in the language they use and the purpose to be achieved in the classroom. The next step is to find an appropriate scene. Teachers who already watch some TV shows just have to jot their memory and remember some scene they think could be useful in the classroom, due to some idioms, collocations or an interesting topic. Also, YouTube or BBC groups on Facebook can be used where short clips could be found perfect for use in the classroom. Then, useful language is extracted from the clips – like colloquial expressions that cannot be found in usual textbooks or some interesting grammatical structures. Video clips have to be chosen based on the students' age and level of knowledge, the offensiveness of the video and the video structure which includes length, context and number of characters (Berk, 2009: 7).

TV shows can be used in the same way as other classroom listening exercises for checking students' comprehension by asking questions, predicting what will happen next, etc. Another way is to put students in pairs – one is facing the screen and the other is with his/her back to the screen and ask them in turns to describe what is going on in a show. In the end, students can be given homework e.g. to write a review of a TV show, to prepare a presentation about it and similar.

Berk (2009: 10) mentions eight steps for using a video clip in teaching which comprise choosing a clip, providing students with instructions for watching/listening, introducing the video, playing the clip, stopping it or replaying it, reflection, an active learning activity and a discussion. The following paragraphs will illustrate these steps on the example of seven TV shows.

#### 3.1. *Friday Night Dinner*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10-15 minutes.

**Aims** Discussing family relationships, guessing what comes next, developing listening skills, writing a summary, analysing grammar points like modal verbs, the imperative and causative have.

**Procedure** 'Friday Night Dinner' is a TV show about two brothers who do not live with their parents anymore but come to dinner every Friday night when many funny and unexpected events occur. The brothers usually play pranks on each other so it can be used for discussing family relationships. The clip that was used in the workshop is about brothers trying to put profiteroles in the freezer but are stopped by their father who is obviously hiding something. The clip can be stopped several times and students can be asked questions like 'What is father hiding in the freezer?' 'Who will they accuse of dropping the profiteroles?' Later, students can also describe the scene, how they find it, compare it to some of their experiences. Also, students can listen again and note down modal verbs ('It shouldn't be open too much'; 'Might we assume...') they hear, as well as causative have ('I'm going to have it stuffed') and explain its use. The video clip contains some strong language (e.g. 'bloody'), but it is presumed that it will be used with older students (14-18) who are probably exposed to even stronger language. The activity could also be extended if students are asked to finish the story, write their own experiences or a written task could be assigned for homework.

### 3.2. *How I Met Your Mother*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10 minutes.

**Aims** Determining names of clubs which correlate to words often used in day to day speech.

**Procedure** The show 'How I Met Your Mother' was used to practice listening for specific purposes. In this clip from season 6 episode 21 students have to determine all the clubs that the characters are considering as an option for their night out. Since the clip is full of puns it is quite difficult to distinguish all eleven names during the first listening. The names of clubs that are mentioned are 'Was', 'Wrong' and 'Oh no' and they may lead to confusion and with weaker students it may be required to watch the clip two times. This activity is very good for enhancing listening skills as students have to be concentrated to get the names of all eleven clubs. It can be made like a competitive activity where the students with the higher number of names are given some rewards (chocolates, pencils and similar).

An activity that might follow this clip could be that students either write their own roleplay in which they have to make up similar puns or they could practice tongue twisters mentioned in the clip such as 'No, Was wasn't where Where was, Was was where Wrong was, right?' as a pronunciation exercise.

### 3.3. *Blackadder*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10-15 minutes.

**Aims** Discussing vocabulary, particularly synonyms, guessing the meaning of words, inventing new words, describing the scene and the characters.

**Procedure** Watching of the 'Blackadder' clip should be preceded by a vocabulary activity where students have to guess the meaning of the words used in the clip (contrafibularity, anaspeptic, frasmotic, compunctuous, pericombobulation, interfarstically). The clip is about the visit of Samuel Johnson who claims that he has finished a dictionary which includes all the words in English. However, Blackadder wants to prove him wrong and uses unwords to make Dr Johnson miserable. There are several explanations of what these words could mean, and they are taken from <http://blackadderquotes.com/the-blackadder-dictionary>. The meanings are guessed based on the Latin or Greek origin of parts of the words. Thus, 'contrafibularity' can be taken to mean 'pulling one's leg' (deriving from 'contra' – against and 'fibula' – a bone in the leg). 'Anaspeptic' may be derived from 'ana' – back or up and the 'peptic' – stomach, thus meaning throwing up or being sick. 'Frasmotic' could be a combined form of 'frazzled' and 'spasmodic', implying a frenzied fit. 'Compunctuous' could be a combination of 'compunction' and 'contemptuous' and the meaning could be taken as 'being drawn to do someone harm'. 'Pericombobulation' is derived from 'peri' meaning 'around' and 'discombobulation' and the meaning could be something like causing someone to go around in uncertain, needless circles. Finally, 'interfrastically' is a combination of 'inter' meaning 'among' or 'in the middle of' while the 'phrastic' part is a combination of 'phase' and 'phrase' leading to the meaning in the middle of phases of talking. The follow-up activity could be asking students to invent words of their own and exchanging them with other students who have to guess the meaning. For a longer activity, students can be asked to describe the scene and its characters expressing their opinion about the Prince, Samuel Johnson (do they know who he is?) and particularly, Blackadder.

### 3.4. *Black Books*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10-15 minutes.

**Aims** Guessing what is going on by only listening to the clip, describing the scene, discussing how students feel about strangers coming to their door and specifically Jehovah's witnesses, describing what preceded the clip and what comes after it.

**Procedure** A clip from 'Black Books' could be preceded by comprehension questions connected with the name of the show. Students listen to the clip without seeing it and have to guess who the characters are, how many of them are there and what is going on. Afterwards, they are shown the clip to see whether they were right. Since the clip deals with Jehovah's witnesses, students could be asked later if they would let someone unknown into their flat. They can also try to guess what happens next by writing a story of their own.

### 3.5. *Buffy*

**Level** Pre-intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10-15 minutes.

**Aims** Identifying the situation and interpreting what the characters are saying.

**Procedure** Opposed to the previous task, in this exercise the students watched a part of the episode 'Hush' from 'Buffy' (season 4 episode 10 – from 12:48 to 15:55), in which the main characters lost their voices and could just move their lips and use gestures to talk. While watching the clips, students had to guess what the characters were saying. There are four major characters in this scene – Buffy, Willow, Spike and Xander and students can work in groups to determine what each of the characters is saying and then present their suggestions in a roleplay. There are no wrong answers, as they could not hear them, but only guess the meaning based on their body language.

### 3.6. *Modern Family*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 10-15 minutes.

**Aims** Understanding different accents.

**Procedure** The show 'Modern Family', like 'Friday Night Dinner', can also be used for discussing family relations. However, this clip was based on numerous pronunciation mistakes and misunderstandings of one of the main characters, Gloria, who is Columbian, and is still struggling with her English. Thus, she cannot understand the phrase 'dog eat dog world' and uses 'doggy dog world' saying that it is much nicer than the original one. The funniest pronunciation mistake is 'baby cheeses' which she wanted to order for her husband, but due to her poor pronunciation ends up with numerous 'baby Jesuses'. The aim of this clip is to show students the importance of good pronunciation. This exercise might serve as an introduction to a lesson on metaphorical phrases since it mentions 'dog eat dog world' and 'blessing in disguise' or could be useful when talking about various accents of English such as Chinglish, Spanglish, etc.

### 3.7. *IT Crowd*

**Level** Intermediate to advanced.

**Time** 15-20 minutes.

**Aims** Discussing technology and social media, listening for specific purposes.

**Procedure** TV shows can be great conversation and debate starters. For this purpose, we have used the 'IT Crowd' which could be used as a basis for discussing technology. As there are still quite many students who are not really competent in using technology, this clip was used to show the ignorance of middle-aged people who do not know much about the Internet. In it, the head of the IT department who is completely ignorant about computers gives a talk during a seminar and shows a device which is supposed to be the Internet to the audience who is equally oblivious about technology. Students were asked to write down true and false facts about the Internet mentioned in the clip.

The other clip from the same show was used to discuss social networks. One of the characters was displeased because his mother was his friend on one of social networks, thus controlling him all the time. This clip could be a springboard for a discussion on the use of social networks, befriending their parents and similar.

In the end, there are plenty of shows which can be used for teaching ESP. Thus, 'Gray's Anatomy', 'Young Doctor's Notebook' and 'ER' can be used for teaching medical English, 'How to Get Away with Murder' and 'Suits' for teaching legal English, 'Victoria' and 'Crown' for teaching history and 'The Office' for teaching business English. For example, the clip from 'Young Doctor's Notebook' could be shown for having students write all the medical words they could hear.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Using TV shows for teaching English has numerous possibilities. They offer authentic material which can be exploited in various ways. Some of the ways were mentioned in this paper, like answering comprehension questions, guessing what will happen next, listening for particular information (the names of the clubs), guessing the meaning of fabricated words and making your own words, listening without seeing and predicting the action and the characters, watching without hearing and guessing the dialogues, identifying pronunciation mistakes, doing true false exercises and having discussions based on the clips. In this way, students will acquire a lot of authentic language through watching amusing shows and will probably be motivated to continue watching them at home. There are many other shows and many

other methods which all depend on the taste and abilities of students as well as on the skilfulness of the teacher.

#### REFERENCES

- Blackadder Quotes. Retrieved from <http://blackadderquotes.com/the-blackadder-dictionary> (20.1.2018)
- Blackadder retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOSyIT2iG08> (2.4.2017)
- Black Books retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6TeDM-wlZ4> (2.4.2017)
- Berk, R. A. (2009) Multimedia teaching with video clips: TV, movies, YouTube, and movies in the college classroom. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*, 5(1), 1-21.
- Buckingham, D. (2003) *Media education: literacy, learning and contemporary culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Curtis, A. (2015) Learning English Through the Language of the Pokémon. In Nunan, D. and Richards, J. C. (eds) *Language Learning Beyond the Classroom*. New York: Routledge, 129-137.
- Friday Night Dinner retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeVmpcN3Y-M> (2.4.2017)
- Hanf, A. (2015). Resourcing Authentic Language in Television Series. In Nunan, D. and Richards, J. C. (eds) *Language Learning Beyond the Classroom*. New York: Routledge, 139-148.
- Hobbs, R. (2006) Non-optimal uses of video in the classroom. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 31(1), 35-50.
- How I Met Your Mother retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT-VNgbdz60> (2.4.2017)
- IT Crowd – the Internet speech retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vywf48Dhyns> (2.4.2017)
- IT Crowd – Friendspace retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8xbgdw9uvY> (2.4.2017)
- Modern Family retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyqSi6zNKKs> (2.4.2017)
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants, part II: Do they really think differently? *On the Horizon*, 9(6), 1-6.
- Zakhareuski, A. What You Can Do With a TV Series. Retrieved from <https://busyteacher.org/5925-what-you-can-do-with-tv-series-8-creative-ideas.html> (20.12.2017)

## UPORABA TELEVIZIJSKIH SERIJA U NASTAVI ENGLESKOG

Uporaba videa potječe još iz vremena dok su se koristili 16mm projektori, a potom video kasete i DVD-ovi. Gledanje videa može imati jak utjecaj na učenikov um i osjetila te bi se zbog toga trebalo koristiti kao dodatno sredstvo za poučavanje. Mnoge su pogodnosti gledanja videoklipova u razredu – privlače učenikovu pozornost, poboljšavaju koncentraciju, stvaraju osjećaj iščekivanja, poboljšavaju učenikov odnos prema sadržaju i učenju, poboljšavaju razumijevanje te omogućavaju slobodu izražavanja. Cilj je ovoga članka pokazati nekoliko različitih načina kako koristiti videoklipove popularnih TV serija u razredu kako bi profesori mogli bolje uključiti učenike u nastavu i postići željene rezultate.

Ključne riječi: *televizijske serije, vještina slušanja, usvajanje jezika*