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**Autora:** Prof. Daniela Paula Pañoni

**DNI:** 27.216.008

**Directora:** Dra. Beatriz Castiñeira

## **ABSTRACT**

Watching TV series in English is a very popular leisure activity for EFL learners. Additionally, this source of entertainment can provide EFL students with some extra language input, which may include a certain kind of vocabulary and expressions that are not generally included in the regular ESL class or formal teaching material. So, to what extent does this activity contribute to the student's natural acquisition of the language? This study aims to find out the range of effectiveness of TV shows as a source of input for the English learner, through an investigation carried out in a private English Institute, in which intermediate and upper-intermediate students' productions were analyzed in search of informal language expressions. Special attention was paid on students' use of informal expressions, such as slang terms, phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions and dirty words, as well as on certain expressions containing a dialectical or negative connotation. Information about students' habits and frequency as series watchers was also obtained for this study from a survey completed by the participants. The results of this investigation throw some light on the effectiveness of TV series as a means of language input for ESL learners.

**Keywords:** EFL natural acquisition, TV language, register, linguistic input.

## RESUMEN

Mirar series de televisión en inglés es una actividad recreativa muy popular entre las personas que están aprendiendo dicho idioma. Adicionalmente, esta fuente de entretenimiento puede contribuir en el aprendizaje de la lengua, aportando cierto contenido lingüístico que incluya elementos específicos de vocabulario informal, los cuales normalmente no forman parte de los temas dictados en las clases de inglés, ni de aquellos incluidos en los libros de texto destinados a su enseñanza. Por ende, ¿hasta qué punto contribuyen las series de televisión en la adquisición natural del lenguaje? Este estudio apunta a determinar el rango de efectividad de esta fuente de entretenimiento como medio de estímulo para el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa, a través de una investigación llevada a cabo en un instituto privado para la enseñanza del idioma. Dicha investigación analiza las producciones de los alumnos en el nivel intermedio e intermedio avanzado, en búsqueda de expresiones informales de la lengua. Se focalizó en el uso de modismos o jergas, verbos compuestos, expresiones idiomáticas y groserías, como así también en expresiones que contengan un significado dialectico o una connotación social negativa. Para este estudio, también se realizó una encuesta con el fin de obtener información sobre la frecuencia y nivel de exposición de los participantes a las series de televisión en el idioma inglés. Los resultados de esta investigación revelan la efectividad de este tipo de ficción en el idioma inglés como medio de estímulo para los aprendices de este idioma como segunda lengua.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The problem:**

Nowadays, it is common for people in non-English speaking countries to attend ESL classes, in order to start learning the language or to improve their proficiency in it. This is due to the fact that globalization has positioned English in one of the highest steps of the list of requirements to succeed in business life. “More people than ever want to learn English....Evidence confirms that English learners are increasing in number and decreasing in age...We’ve become used to the idea of English growing in popularity across the world.(Graddol, David 2006).

Consequently, in order to fulfill the needs of this growing educational industry, a wide variety of material has been made available for English teachers around the world. This undoubtedly useful tool consists mainly of textbooks, activity books, listening recordings and, in some cases, videos, CD rooms or online sites for extra practice. The main publishers in the ESL industry are Oxford and Cambridge University Press, Pearson and Macmillan. As a consequence, formal English students in non-speaking countries, who use these resources in their classes, receive input which is mainly in British English. However, it can be claimed that this material seems to select a specific range of vocabulary, which does not represent the style of language that is actually spoken by British people. On the contrary, these publications portray a more formal and correct version of the language, which might sound a bit unnatural for English Native Speakers. This variety is called Queen’s English, and tends to be associated with educated people in Britain. Therefore, by using this material, English students have access to a limited portion of English Language, one that would even sound unnatural to a native speaker, and that excludes colloquial and informal expressions, slang terms and even insults from its contents, eliminating also the variations from other English speaking countries, such as The U.S.A, Canada, or Australia, among others.

Nevertheless, thanks to the enormous growth of the internet, the communication systems and the entertainment industry of the 21st Century, international English students can still have access to real material in English, and students in Argentina are certainly not an exception. Even though we live in Argentina and we speak Spanish as a mother tongue, we are surrounded by English language, as well as by British and American culture. They are at our hands, available, waiting for us to be willing to just get a bit interested in them. Turning on the TV and accessing a Netflix English speaking show, or browsing a series site on our computer, would be enough to open the door for us to a world of a foreign culture and language.

As regards the theoretical framework, very little material has been published on this topic (Hindley Rodgers, 2013). However, some old theories by recognized linguists (Krashen 1982), can be considered in this study in order to understand the process of learning acquisition through the exposure of Input in the target language.

Input has been described as any information we receive. Hence, if that information is in a foreign language, we are unconsciously perceiving the message through it. According to Krashen's Input hypothesis (1982), the acquirer understands information that contains  $i+1$ , when the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not on the form of the message. By his theory of Input+1, ( $i+1$ ) Krashen refers to the fact that we acquire, only when we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired.

As for previous studies on the matter, some research was initially carried out in the 70's, to examine length of residence (LOR) in the Second Language environment. Some examples of these studies could be Fathman's (1975), and Ekstrand (1976).

As for recent, more updated research, some 21st century researchers have conducted some studies which focused on incidental language learning through watching television( Kusyk and Sockett 2012; Lekkai 2014) . However, although American and British TV series seem to have become the major source of English Input for students these days, there surprisingly exists a gap in the investigation field regarding this topic, as very few studies have been carried out in this area.

Nonetheless, if we take into account that Fathman's and Ekstrand studies are not updated to our present time, as they do not regard new technologies as a means of potential input for the learner, the focus should then be placed on the most recent research carried out by Kusyk and Sockett (2012) and Lekkai (2014). However, while these studies are updated to our current era and regard technology as an important means of input for English learners, they represent a small contribution to the investigation field. As a result, they leave a door open for further investigation, as technology, internet, and media are undoubtedly the maximum representatives of the 21st century lifestyle, and must be in the spotlight when it comes to analyzing the main means of input for English learners.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Krashen, language acquisition is possible when comprehension of real messages occurs, and when the acquirer is not "on the defensive". He also states that the best methods to obtain language acquisition are those which supply "comprehensible input" in low anxiety situations, and contain messages that students really want to hear.

It can be assumed that, when English learners sit down comfortably in front of a screen, willing to see a new chapter of the series they are currently binge watching, the focus of their attention is on the message, and not on the means. The series' viewer does not feel as if he was in an English class, in which he has to pay special attention to a recorded listening or to the teacher's instructions. On the contrary, he is relaxed, or, as Krashen would express it; he is not "on the defensive", and his level of anxiety is low; as he is certain that nobody would be asking him "how much he had understood" after the listening.

Krashen also maintains that two important factors for Second Language Acquisition are motivation and self-confidence. He claims that those performers with high motivation and self-confidence turn into better acquirers of the target language. Consequently, and taking Krashen's statements into consideration, it can be assumed that the series' viewer is motivated to listen to the dialogues and narratives in the foreign Language, as they represent their own choice, and had not been imposed by an educator. It can also be presumed that series' watching in the foreign language may increase the student's self-confidence the moment he/she is asked



to produce some output in the English class. The student might be feeling confident when using certain expressions, as he/ she has heard them from a native speaker (actor or actress) before.

As mentioned above, Krashen also maintains that, in order for acquisition to be successful, there must be a sufficient amount of input, which should contain structures beyond our current level of competence (Input+1). Therefore, it is a fact that the TV series the acquirer is watching has no filter in its level of English, as, unlike the educational videos, it has been thought and made for English Native Speakers. Consequently, when being exposed to it, the non-native speaker will always receive input+1.

According to Krashen, one of the methods often used by teachers in the English class is audio-lingualism. It consists of students' listening to a dialogue which contains the structures and vocabulary of the day. The student is expected to mimic the dialogue and eventually memorize it. Often, the class practises the dialogue as a group and then in smaller groups. The dialogue is followed by pattern drill on the structures introduced in the dialogue. The aim of the drill is to "strengthen habits", to make the pattern automatic. Nevertheless, this practice is not considered by Krashen as "optimal input".

There are a few requirements that Krashen lists as conditions for the input to be optimal and suitable to obtain acquisition. For Krashen, the input should be comprehensible, interesting and relevant, not grammatically sequenced, there should be a great amount of it, it should have a low rate of affective filter, and finally, it should represent a tool for conversational management.

Whereas audio-lingualism does not meet the requirements for optimal input, series watching does certainly meet all of them. Series transmit a comprehensible message for the viewer who is involved in the context and focusing on the message. They are, in fact, interesting and relevant for the viewer, otherwise he would not be watching them. Furthermore, they are not grammatically sequenced, as diverse grammatical tenses and expressions could be used and mixed in a single dialogue. They certainly represent a great amount of input, as each chapter could last from 45 minutes to 1 and a half hour. However, some students binge watch series, and could watch a whole season in just one day. As regards the affective filter, as mentioned above, it is considerably low, as the viewer feels relaxed and not monitored by the teacher's eye. Finally, whether or not series' watching represents a tool for conversational management will be one of the areas investigated by this research later on, at analyzing students' performances.

Previous studies on the matter focused on incidental learning through TV program watching and on natural acquisition of a language through exposure to it. The first studies were carried out by Fathman (1975) and Ekstrand (1976).

Fathman studied a group of children aged 6-14, who were non-native English speakers, and were enrolled in public schools in Washington D.C. Her research proved that those who had been in the USA for three years did better on the final test than those who had been in the USA for two years, and this group, in turn, outperformed those who had been in the USA for only one year.

However, the study carried out by Ekstrand (1976) found no relationship between LOR and child second language proficiency. He based his study on a group of immigrant children in Sweden. The median LOR in his study was only 10.5 months, and it may be the case that LOR effects are not seen unless the children have been in the country for a minimum length of time of at least one year.

Two more recent studies were carried out by Kusyk and Sockett (2012) and Lekkai (2014). The focus of these two studies presents a more accurate relation to the topic of investigation of this present study, as it puts technology and media in the spotlight of its investigation.

Kusyk and Sockett (2012) refer to the concept of incidental learning, claiming that when ESL learners are exposed to TV programs in English or online international chatting sites, they are experiencing an incidental acquisition of the language, as they are not actually aware that learning is taking place. They placed the focus of their study on measuring the effect of informal learning through the student's exposure to informal online contexts, as well as detecting frequently occurring chunks acquired by students who are exposed to this source of input providing tool. Nonetheless, no emphasis has been put on the acquisition of non-standard, colloquial vocabulary and expressions received from real material when watching series.

In Lekkai's study (2014) the purpose was to explore the short term effects on incidental language acquisition of Greek children aged 9-12 through watching an Italian television program, either with or without subtitles. The main focus of this study was to determine

whether subtitles facilitated the process of incidental learning of a language or not; finally reaching to the conclusion that simultaneous monitoring of the subtitles and the language of a program was a factor that favored language acquisition of a foreign language.

A study carried out by Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter (2013) investigated the influence of television on language change. The study places the focus of its investigation on a specific variation of English, the Glaswegian vernacular, and aims to find out the changes it has suffered in the pronunciation of two particular English sounds: TH-Fronting and L-Vocalization, due to the influence of the London-based TV soap opera *EastEnders*. The study hypothesizes that Glaswegian adolescents experience a psychological strong engagement with the characters of this show, which leads them to copy the Cockney dialect of London in their everyday oral productions.

In their study, Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter refer to the fact that the main reason for language change is social interaction. When people talk with each other tiny adjustments are made on the individual level, and over time, and in conjunctions with numerous other factors, but especially personal, social and ideological, these shifts can lead to community-level system changes (Trudgill 1986, Milroy 1992, Labov 1994, 2001, 2010, Eckert 2000, 2008, Milroy 2002). Therefore, they conclude that, as the participants of their study did not manifest to have had any personal social interaction with Londoners, the reason for the variation in their speech was exposure to media. They state that when the language suffers variations in areas which are geographically separated from each other, media is the reason.

The fact that the research done by Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter designates the exposure to fictional Television shows as an influential factor in language change may appear to show some similarities with the investigation carried out in the present study. However, we have only to look at the participants of both studies to notice an essential difference between them. While Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter's research analyzes how language changes due to television exposure among native speakers of English, the present study aims to find out how language learning improves among English as a second language learners. Therefore, and due to the gap in the investigation of this area, the present study aims to throw some light on this unexplored field.

A more recent study was carried out by Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat (2018) for the Department of Languages and Linguistics, in Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand. In their publication “Enhancing English Language Learners’ Conversation abilities via CA-informed Sitcom lessons”, the authors describe a research carried out in a secondary school in Thailand, where EFL learners were faced with recorded fragments of the well-known sitcom “Friends”. The purpose of that study was to enhance students’ conversational skills by introducing them to real material from this show.

Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat explain that students in Thailand have little opportunity to interact with native speakers of English. Similarly, Thai teachers of English have little exposure to natural English conversation as well, since they are confronted with government-prescribed textbooks which lack genuine spoken language features and fail to provide real world language contexts. Consequently, teachers are normally faced with the need to use home-made materials, in order to develop more natural conversation abilities in their students.

According to Washburn, (2001) among the authentic materials often used for teaching in L2 classrooms, sitcoms, situation comedies aired on TV, are found to provide a useful source of input given its abundance of natural spoken language features. Additionally, Martinez and Fernandez, (2008) stated that sitcoms allow the learners to be exposed to natural English through the verbal and nonverbal interaction of native speakers. Furthermore, Saito (2013) highlighted that sitcoms such as “Friends” provide better samples of authentic English conversation than scripted conversation in general ELT textbooks. As regards the justification for choosing the sitcom “Friends” over others, the authors refer to Quaglio (2007) stating that he argued that conversation in “Friends” is very close to naturally occurring conversation. They also quote Saito (2013) to add that “Friends” presents natural conversation closings compared with conversation closings in typical ELT textbooks.

For the sake of their investigation, Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat recorded their students’ performances twice. The first time the recording was done before the participants’ exposure to the selected excerpts of the sitcom, while the second recording section occurred after the students had watched the scenes. The focus of their study was placed on the students’ conversational skills, when facing situations such as greetings, leaving-taking, disagreements, new announcements, compliment, invitation and requests. When analyzing students’ pre- and post- test performances, the researchers noticed an important improvement in students’

fluency, vocabulary, appropriacy, comprehensibility and grammar. Consequently, they concluded that sitcoms have provided them with models of natural or near natural conversation to be observed and analyzed regarding appropriate language use.

Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat conclude their paper by suggesting that EFL teachers should incorporate sitcoms in their lessons, for various reasons: Firstly, to improve students' performances in English, considering the different aspects of the language; secondly, to introduce students' with linguistic and cultural variations that may occur in conversation in other cultural settings; thirdly, to integrate into EFL lessons, other material apart from formal scripted dialogues in textbooks ( Washburn, 2001); and finally, to help students notice not only features of natural talk-in interaction but cultural differences in the target language. (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Wong 2002).

While Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat's study addresses the benefits of introducing TV shows in ESL lessons, their focus of investigation is different from the one in the present study. Waedaoh and Sinwongsuwat's research aims to discover how sitcoms might benefit ESL students' conversational skills, and the results are measured by analyzing the participants' performances and recognizing their improvements in terms of fluency, vocabulary, appropriacy, comprehensibility and grammar skills. However, the present study focuses on identifying slang terms, idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs and catchphrases which are not included in formal EFL textbooks, students have picked up from TV series, as part of their natural acquisition of the English Language.

In "*How to study Linguistics*", (1997) Geoffrey Finch explains the variations of the language, and provides definitions for both, slang and colloquial language. The distinction between dialectical and stylistic variations are also explained, as well as the concept of polysemy.

The way in which language is naturally produced in its written or spoken form may involve all kinds of variations, which escape the linguists' concept of "idealization of the language"; that is to say; perfect grammatical constructions or correct lexical terms, usually found in dictionaries or grammar books. Consequently, when analyzing natural, everyday use of the language performed by native speakers, one may find "imperfect" utterances, such as slips of the tongue, false starts, hesitations, as well as slang and colloquial expressions.

**Colloquial language** refers to the informal use of language consisting of words, phrases and aphorisms used by common people. It is considered to be a form of everyday use of language,

more appropriate in the conversational or speech form. A very common example of colloquial language would be the contraction of the auxiliary verb “to be” and the negative adverbial “not” which results in the colloquial term “ain’t”, leading to utterances such as “ I ain’t here” “You ain’t my friend”. Another example of colloquial language might include some fixed expressions, originated in social contexts such as “No way”, which means that something would not be likely or possible.

**Slang** refers to a very informal type of language, usually spoken rather than written, and commonly used in specific social groups such as soldiers, teenagers, professions, and those who know each other well. Slang terms could be stylistic or dialectical.

**Stylistic slang** refers to words used in a special way, in a certain social context. An example of this could be the word “freak”, which is generally used among teenagers to refer to someone who is regarded as strange or different from the rest, in a pejorative way.

**Dialectical slang** is found within a specific geographic area or social class. One of the many examples of dialectical slang could be the term “bro”, used as an equivalent for “brother” or “mate”, among the members of the Bronx neighborhood in New York City.

Slang is more casual than colloquialism and consists of very informal words, which can sometimes be considered offensive. Generally, slang evolves quickly as words are created by users.

While both slang and colloquialism correspond to the informal register, colloquial language is considered to be more formal than slang, as it does not come across as offensive as the latter. Slang is consequently more informal, and predominantly used among people belonging to the same certain group.

**Polysemy** is the capacity for words to bear more than one sense, both conceptually and associatively. An example could be the word “mad”. This word could both mean “insane” and “angry”.

Geoffrey Finch (1997) also defines the **Micro functions of the language** as a number of recurring functions, which, despite the many different usages we make of language, are generally being served. Some of these are the physiological, phatic and identifying functions.

**The Physiological function** is used to release nervous, physical energy. It is sometimes manifested using bad language or swearing. It fulfills the function of finding relief and is a way

of expressing anger. Words such as fuck, bloody, bugger, shit, are meaningless. They are used here because they are socially taboo, and because at some moments we need a vocabulary of violence to express our feelings. Examples of these utterances can be found in various kinds of situations, among which one may find the following:

- Nervous and anxious sports fan watching their team play
- Heated discussion between friends, family members or colleagues (among others)
- Someone swearing at him/herself after committing a mistake or clumsy action.

The **phatic function** / **phatic communion** is the use of language to fulfill a purpose of sociability (greetings, personal questions, conversations about the weather conditions). Much of what we say is essentially meaningless and fulfills important contact uses: It helps us negotiate the start and end of exchanges, whether in spoken or written form. As members of a community and society, we are socially expected to use this kind of expressions and icebreakers in our everyday social exchanges.

Some examples might include:

- How's the family?
- It's hot today, isn't it?
- Did you have a good flight?

Words carry meaning and, thanks to the **identifying function**, language is used to help us associate that meaning with the image or thing itself. However, the terms do not mean anything outside the system to which they belong, as it is the latter the one that provides the individual word with its meaning and which relates it to the real world. Consequently, this function can be referred to as both identifying and classifying. This is due to the fact that we will always need a classificatory system in order to be able to identify things in it.

To provide an example, we can consider some of the terms which classify types of residences, such as: House, flat, caravan, castle, mansion, palace. They all belong to the linguistic system of English language, and at the same time, within this system, they belong to various subsystems:

One subsystem is, of course, types or residences. However, if we consider the word “castle” we can state that it also belongs to the subsystem of “chess” or “fairy tales”.

In conclusion, language serves our purpose to associate words and images in our minds, but those associations are also subject to the context and the subsystem to which we incidentally or accidentally connect them with.

Inevitably, our thoughts are determined by language. It could be extremely difficult to make our minds blind trying to avoid using words in our thinking. Thus, a majority of our thinking is done with words, which means that language is an essential tool for our **reasoning function**. However, words mean different things to different people, as they carry their own connotations and are subject to the influence of fashion, as well as prejudice, discrimination or acceptance, depending on the cultural context within which they are being used.

As an example, we can consider the colours “black” and “white”.

Depending on the geographical region where a community of people is located, or the generational year in which they were born, both these colours could carry different connotations. The term “black”, for example, might be associated with “evil” or “death” by some ethnical and generational groups, while others might see it as a synonym of “vitality” and “power”. Similarly, the colour “white” might represent “purity” or “goodness” as well as “frigidity”, “coldness” or “death”

An **idiomatic expression or “idiom”** is an expression whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that comprise it (American University, 2009)

Idioms are often claimed to be characteristic of informal language and popular speech, most characteristically they are very specific to particular communication systems or registers. Furthermore, they have been said to be “especially useful in terminating a topic because of their distinctive manner of characterizing abstract themes in concrete ways” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 703), which means that they have a significant role in a theory of communication and cognition (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Vega-Moreno, 2003). As such, idioms also reflect the interaction of the system of language with the emotion system, a system that deals with the assignment of values, positive and negative, including emotions, attitudes, and opinions to some entity, event, or situation (Foolen, 1997).



Idiomatic expressions are used in informal contexts and can have both a literal and figurative interpretation. A study carried out by Glass, A, 1982, proved that when an idiom is presented to native speakers, its literal and figurative interpretations are made automatically. However, that process might be different with an ESL student.

In her article *“The challenge of idioms for language learners”* (2022) freelance writer *Abbey Algiers* explains that learning and comprehending idioms can sometimes be confusing for non native speakers of English. She does this by setting an example of a 5th grade classroom in the USA, in which 25 students are native speakers of English except for Sui, a young girl who has recently arrived from Burma. The teacher starts the class by giving students a set of instructions of what they are supposed to do, but she does it by employing a lot of idiomatic expressions in her speech. Although Sui had been learning English in her home country before moving to America, she is unable to fully comprehend what she is expected to do. Algiers metaphorically explains that, while for native speakers of English the meaning of idioms is “Crystal clear”, for ESL learners it could be “as clear as mud”.

Algiers concludes by stating that there is an excessive use of idioms in everyday language, and therefore suggests varied ways in which ESL teachers can include this topic into their lessons. One of the ideas she recommends ESL teachers to implement is using fragments of TV shows where idioms are used in real conversations. *“Provide examples of idioms in popular movies and television shows, podcasts, and songs. The more idioms students are exposed to, the more they will begin to understand.”*

Algiers’ advice coincides with Krashen’s input + 1 theory. The more input students receive, the more they will learn. In this case, the idioms will represent the “+1”, the knowledge which is beyond the student’s level of acquisition so far, but which will be acquired due to the individual’s natural exposure to it.

As for the informal context in which idioms are commonly used, certain types of TV shows, such as sitcoms and teenage shows represent the ideal scenario in which one might find such expressions. It should be noted that since language is learned through cultural practices, sitcoms are full of cultural references and present a daily situation in which spoken language is uttered naturally (Ulusoy & Demirbilek, 2013). Further, as highlighted by Washburn (2001), sitcoms provide more abundant sources of appropriate conversational models compared to other genres available on television such dramas and soap operas since sitcoms mainly portray daily speech routines in which language is used by various users and settings such as at work, at

supermarket, at home, and in public places. Sitcoms basically focus on family, a workplace, and a community; consequently, the basic interactions uttered by differing characters can also represent the regular social interaction in everyday cultural context. (Morreale, 2003).

**Phrasal verbs** are defined as any two-part verbs consisting of a lexical verb followed (continuously or discontinuously) by an adverbial particle, which “behaves to some extent either lexically or syntactically as a single verb” (Quirk, Greenbaum, & Leech, 1985, p. 1150). Phrasal verbs are a prevalent feature of informal conversations. After a research study (Liu, 2011) the author concludes that the most frequent phrasal verbs are used similarly in both British and American varieties of English, and mostly occur in fiction and conversation.

One of the most popular publishers of ESL textbooks is OUP (Oxford University Press), as it represents one of the options most frequently chosen by ESL teachers, in Argentina at least. Coincidentally, a writer from this publishing company approaches this topic as well, by questioning the omission of certain words and expressions in ESL textbooks’ syllabus. Tony Grice, freelance writer and OUP author, published an article in OUP’s blog, under the heading “Dirty words in the Language classroom” (2010). In his article, he wonders why dirty words are not taught in the English classroom, claiming that they are frequently used worldwide, as they are extremely necessary to convey some feelings or opinions, in situations in which their genteel synonyms would fail to do so. Considering that, according to field research, we speak an average of 80-90 dirty words per day, Grice continues to question their omission in the ESL syllabus, and hence, he comes up with the following conclusions:

- 1) Dirty words are too terrible to see in print
- 2) They do not do well under analysis
- 3) The emotions that they transmit are not included in textbooks themes either
- 4) Students are taught to be creative letter writers, persuasive speakers and attentive listeners.

Finally, Grice concludes his article by presenting the idea that students will surely pick up from films, poetry, comedy and TV shows, those words which have intentionally been omitted from ESL syllabus.

In “*The Utility and Ubiquity of Taboo Words in Perspectives on Psychological Science*” (March 2009) Psychologist Timothy Jay has grouped dirty words under the following categories:

- Sexual
- Profane / blasphemous
- Disgusting objects
- Animal names
- Racial and gender slurs
- Deviations ( psychological, physical, or social)
- Ancestral illusions.

Additionally, in Michael Swan’s “*Practical English Usage*” (Oxford University Press 2017) there is a section (335) about discriminatory and offensive language. In this section, the author presents a list of offensive terms and provides their preferred alternative.

Words acquire considerable associative meanings from the social and cultural contexts in which they are used. The principal associative processes that affect the meanings of words are: connotation, collocations, stylistic variations and reflection.

**Connotation** is the kind of values and attitudes invoked by a word apart from its core meaning. Connotations are more culturally dependent and more likely to change over time. What a word connotes often gives a clearer insight into social and cultural attitudes than what it conceptually means. Therefore, the same word could carry various connotations and different interpretations, depending on the judgements and preconceptions of the speaker.

In the question: “Is he a real man?”, for example, it would be difficult for the receiver to determine if the speaker referred to his quality of being human, adult, male or if his personal judgment relates the word “man” with the concepts of “bravery” “strength” or “resilience” among others.

**The Reflected meaning** bedevils words to do with sexuality (gay, intercourse, queen, and fairy). It also opens up the possibility for ambiguity and puns. It is often used by tabloid newspapers who like to call the reader's attention with sensational headings. Playing with words has proved to be an effective strategy to attract curious readers.

An example of the usage of puns in tabloid newspapers could be an article about how the frequency of phone calls a person makes increases when that person is planning a wedding. The title of the article was "the wedding ring"; considering the meaning of "ring" both as "the piece of jewelry" and "the phone call".

The usage of words to do with sexuality or taboo topics is also a strategy used by tabloid press to attract more readers. Some examples of newspapers headings of this kind might be:

"Boy Scouts to accept gay boys"

Used by a tabloid newspaper to introduce the news that Boys scouts groups will start accepting homosexual people into their groups.

"My doomed son's gay plague agony"

"Gay plague", a term vulgarly used to refer to AIDS, back in the early 1980's.

During the years, English has suffered from different **stylistic variations** in its scheme, (Finch, G, 1997) including changes in its pronunciation and grammar. Nonetheless, it has been the lexical field the one that has been altered the most. However, it would seem more appropriate to use the term "contribution" rather than "alteration". The reason for this choice is that this changing process consisted mainly in English adopting new words from other languages, which led to the emergence of different registers or styles within the English language itself. This factor, together with the variety of social needs that English has had to fulfill, resulted in a richer version of the old language, characterized by the quality of hosting different levels of formality, which allows the speaker to opt for the correct register, according to the situation.

To illustrate the changes in register, we can take the term "horse" for example. This word can certainly be used to refer to the animal in any context, as it represents the normative term. However, if we were reading a literary medieval piece of work, we might find the word "steed", instead. Additionally, if we were to be informally talking to a group of friends, we might choose the term "nag". Differently, in a context involving little children in a nursery home, we might encounter the term "gee gee" to refer to the same animal. These examples

illustrate how language can vary depending on the different speakers and contexts.

As for the adoption of foreign language terms from the part of English, the following terms might serve as a clear example:

In the formal context of a law court, the term “larceny” might be heard when accusing someone of committing such crime. This term has been adopted by English from French. However, in a more informal context, we are more likely to hear the term “theft” to refer to the same crime, should we be hearing or participating in a conversation among friends or family members.

Sometimes language is used in a way which is felt, by both speakers and listeners, to be especially meaningful. **Creative competence** is the ability to use language in a uniquely valuable way such that a community will want to adopt the particular utterance for its future use in social communication. Creative competence can be found in all memorable usages of language, ranging from witticisms and jokes to the last novel. Common examples of creative competence might be the so-called “catchphrases” found in popular fictional characters from TV shows, movies, as well as famous real people, such as celebrities and politicians.

Some examples of popular catchphrases could be:

“I’ll be back” – The Terminator ( movie- 1984)

“I see dead people” – The Sixth Sense ( movie – 1999)

“How YOU doin’? Joey Tribbiani – “Friends” TV show

“What you talkin’ ‘bout, Willis? – Arnold Drummond – “Different Strokes” TV show

“I have a dream” Martin Luther King- American activist - 1963

## **RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES:**

**Research question:**

To what extent does students' watching popular American or British TV series contribute to the natural acquisition of English Language?

**Hypothesis 1:**

Students who watch popular American or British TV series use colloquial expressions, which are not formally introduced in English textbooks or in the English lessons.

**Hypothesis 2:**

Students who watch popular American and British TV series tend to pick up fixed phrases rather than single lexical items from them.

**Hypothesis 3:**

Students from Argentina who watch American and British TV series pick up slang words and colloquial expressions laden with these nationalities' social connotations and dialectical variations, which they apply later to refer to their own reality and social context.

**Hypothesis 4:**

Students who watch popular American and British TV series pick up catchphrases, used by iconic characters.

**OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this study is to throw some light on the possible effect that watching American or British TV series may have on students' learning processes and to explore to what extent such series contribute to the student's natural acquisition of colloquial expressions, slang terms and catchphrases. The data collected will also contribute to analyzing the kind of vocabulary and expressions acquired, as well as the use the students give to them. By analyzing the data, it is aimed to detect the use of terms and expressions which are not normally included in textbooks for formal English teaching, but are nonetheless used by students in their spontaneous written or oral productions.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants and context:**

Participants for this study are students attending an English course at Blue Swan Institute, in Avellaneda city, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Forty-one Argentinian students participated in this study. The age range of the participants extended from 11 to 35 or more. This included 22 teenagers (11 – 18 yrs. old), 12 young adults (19 – 35 yrs. old) and 7 students over 36 yrs. old. The study involved 27 female and 14 male participants belonging to six different courses at the Institute.

As regards the participants' prior exposure to real material in class, very little of it was used by teachers during the classes, as the main teaching resource has been each course's chosen textbook and its components. On isolated occasions, teachers would use a song or a short video to reinforce the acquisition of a certain grammar structure. However, not one class has ever been devoted to the introduction of colloquial expressions or slang vocabulary using TV programs as real material input.

The study was carried out throughout three terms of study (first and second term of the year 2019, when face to face classes were delivered, and first term of the year 2020, in which, due to the emergency situation generated by CoVid 19 pandemic, classes were exclusively delivered online. These courses generally focus on teaching the four language skills and students receive 3 hours of formal English lessons a week, which were divided into two 90-minute classes, scheduled on two different days of the week. The material used for these classes were textbooks, workbooks, extra copies from grammar books, audios, flashcards and some educational videos. Students in these courses were expected to produce both oral and written productions. However, while the speaking part was present in every class, the students' writing skills were generally assessed by teachers once every other week.

As regards the materials used for the classes, the series varied according to the student's age rate. While students over 18 years old worked with the "English File" series intermediate and upper intermediate levels, teenagers used the "Live Beat" series, from starter to intermediate

level, and the books “Gateway” and “Beyond” for the upper intermediate levels.

Regarding the students’ previous exposure to the language, most of them started studying at the institute from the beginners’ level. In the case of the teenagers, all of them also had English classes at their school; though the English level at their schools varied depending on the institution they attended to. As for the adults, only a few of them expressed they had the opportunity to use English at their work, as well as in the English class.

## **Data collection**

The aim of the present study was to detect the natural use of colloquial expressions and catchphrases, which are not normally taught in the English class, in students’ both oral and written productions.

The study was conducted in three stages:

- a) A survey
- b) Collection of data from student’s oral productions.
- c) Collection of data from student’s written productions.

**Part A: The survey.** It was used to collect information regarding students’ series watching habits, and focused on aspects such as frequency, language and nationality of preference and recognition of iconic characters and catchphrases. First of all, the survey led students to indicate whether or not they were series’ watchers, and in case of a positive answer, which audio language option they chose. This first part contributed to this study by making it possible to classify the students into two main groups: those who received input in English by watching series and those who did not. The students who were part of the first group were asked, among other things, to indicate the amount of hours a day they spent watching series in English, and if they chose to watch these series with subtitles in Spanish, in English or with no subtitles at all. They were also asked to indicate if they could identify any iconic character from all the TV series they had watched, and, being that the case, if they could relate any catchphrase to these so called iconic characters. On the contrary, the second group of students, those who indicated that they did not watch any series in English, were not normally expected to complete the rest of the survey.



**Part B: Collection of data from student's oral productions:** Special attention was paid to students' free oral productions, which generally took place at the beginning of every class, in search of a casual use of colloquial expressions and catchphrases within them. For the sake of this research, the context in which each student used a particular expression was also recorded in writing, in order to contextualize the data in view of the forthcoming analysis.

**Part C: Collection of data from students' written productions:** All students' written productions were analyzed as well, repeatedly searching for colloquial expressions and catchphrases naturally used in their writings. Throughout the course, students are normally asked to produce writings mainly in three different contexts: writings included in each unit (once or twice a month) writings included in tests (once a month) writings included in exams (twice a year). All these written productions were analyzed in search for use of colloquial vocabulary which contributed to the data collection for this research. A copy of each of these written productions was made, in the event of the need to refer back to them during the data analysis.

The data was classified and quantified, and a cross-analysis was then carried out. All the data was put together for its cross-examination and analysis in order to find connections between students' answers to the survey, and their unconscious use of colloquial expressions in their oral and written performances. A distinction was made between the expressions found in oral productions and those which came out as a product of written ones. Once the expressions were identified and classified, a thorough analysis was made in order to classify them into four main groups: colloquial expressions, idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs and catchphrases. This represented the qualitative aspect of the analysis. These distinctions and classifications were implemented with the purpose to find out if the informal register used by the students existed in the different kinds of productions, as well as to discover which kind of terms and expressions prevailed in the participants natural productions.

The quantitative analysis focused on identifying those expressions which most frequently appeared in both students' answers to the survey and spontaneous written or oral productions, as well as in determining an average amount of time spent watching American and British TV series.

The first hypothesis proposes that, by watching TV series, students acquire colloquial words and expressions that are not normally included in English textbooks. In order to gather evidence to discuss this hypothesis, a quantitative analysis was performed. A selection was made among the colloquial expressions found in students' productions, focusing on those terms which are regarded as "dirty words", according to Timothy Jay's classification in his publication "*The Utility and Ubiquity of Taboo Words in Perspectives on Psychological Science*" (March 2009).

Additionally, the information in the surveys regarding the number of daily hours each student spent watching TV series was also considered, and a percentage was calculated.

The results of these two quantitative analyses were then compared in order to reach a conclusion.

The second hypothesis in this research paper suggests that students who watch popular American and British TV series tend to pick up fixed phrases rather than single lexical items from them. Consequently, and with the purpose to either verify or dismiss the hypothesis a quantitative analysis was developed in order to recount the number of colloquial expressions used by students in their performances. Those expressions were also, classified and analyzed qualitatively in two categories: "single lexical items" and "whole phrases".

The third hypothesis in this investigation suggests that students pick up from British and American TV series, slang words and colloquial expressions laden with dialectal variations. In order to determine the accuracy of this hypothesis, the data collected was studied in search of expressions which carried such variations and consequently, the findings were classified qualitatively into "American" or "British" variations. A quantitative analysis was then performed in order to compare those results with the answers of the survey regarding the students' preferences for the nationality of the series they watch.

Geoffrey Finch's definitions on colloquial expressions and slang terms (1997, *How to study linguistics*, p. 87-93 /206 - 208 ) were regarded for this study, in order to identify and classify the data and categorize it into the proper dialectal variations.

The fourth hypothesis refers to the students' possible use of catchphrases which are typical from iconic characters in TV series. In order to find out about this topic, a quantitative analysis

was carried out including the catchphrases mentioned by the participants in the surveys, and the catchphrases found in students' spontaneous productions. Both results were later compared to reach conclusions.

In order to classify the expressions as "catchphrases", Finch (1997, p. 19) was used as reference.

## **RESULTS:**

As previously mentioned in the "Data collection" section, the data for the present study comes from three different sources: Surveys, oral performances and written productions. Consequently, and for its proper and clear analysis, such data is presented in this section respecting that criteria of selection and classification.

In order to fully analyze the data found in students' written and oral productions, this was classified into three main categories:

- General lexical terms, phrases, contractions and expressions (Table 1: oral productions, Table 2: Written productions)
- Idiomatic expressions (Table 3: Oral productions, Table 4: written productions)
- Phrasal verbs. (These will be grouped and analyzed as an independent category according to their lexical construction, disregarding their meaning) - (Table 5: oral productions, Table 6: written productions)

The classification of the collected data was made according to Finch, G. (1997, p. 21-44; 135-140)

The content in each category was divided into subcategories for a more complete analysis.

The subcategories that were taken into consideration are the following:

- Whole phrase
- Single lexical item
- Lexical Category
- Variation (colloquial language, slang terms, polysemy, creative language)

-Micro function :( physiological, phatic, identifying, reasoning)

-Register

-Associative sense (connotations, collocations, stylistic variation, reflected meaning)

The third source of data comes from the surveys completed by the participants. The main focus of investigation in the survey's answers was placed on three aspects:

- 1) Colloquial expressions and slang terms found in the catchphrases from iconic characters, which were acknowledged by the participants. (Table 7)
- 2) Phrasal verbs found in catchphrases from iconic characters, acknowledged by participants ( Table 8)
- 3) Weekly number of hours spent watching series in English, according to the participants' responses. ( Table 9)

**Table 1** shows the general lexical terms, phrases, contractions and expressions found in students' oral productions, and its classification into the subcategories previously mentioned:

**Table 1: General lexical terms, phrases, contractions and expressions found in students' oral productions.**

<b>Whole phrase</b>	<b>Single lexical item</b>	<b>Lexical Category</b>	<b>Variation</b>	<b>Micro function:</b>	<b>Register</b>	<b>Associative sense</b>
Are you nuts?	Nuts	Adj.	slang	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation
He ain't...	Ain't	Auxiliary verb ( contraction)	colloquial	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation

At my place	place	Prepositional phrase – noun	Colloquial	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation
I Crashed on the couch	crash	verb	colloquial	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation
This bloody phone	bloody	Adj.	Colloquial Dialectal variation (UK)	Physiological (Bad language or swearing)	informal	Connotation
They were smoking weed	weed	noun	Slang Polysemy (lawn / marijuana)	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation
I wanna stay	wanna	Contraction (want to)	Colloquial Dialectal variation (US)	identifying	informal	Stylistic variation

You gotta be kidding me	1) gotta  2) kidding  3) “ You gotta be kidding me”	1) Contraction ( got to)  2) verb  3)fixed phrase	1) colloquial Dialectal variation ( US)  2) colloquial Polysemy: kid = boy Kid= joke  3) creative language	1) Identifying  2) identifying  3) phatic function	1) informal  2) informal  3) informal	1) Stylistic  2) stylistic  3) collocation
No way!	-	Fixed phrase	Creative language / colloquial	Phatic function	informal	collocation
I was mad at him	mad	adjective	Colloquial / Polysemy: Mad ( crazy) Mad ( angry)	identifying	informal	stylistic

They called him a faggot	faggot	noun	slang	reasoning	informal	Reflected meaning
Full of crap	Crap  Full of crap	Noun  Fixed phrase	slang	Physiological (Bad language or swearing) /Reasoning	informal	Connotation / collocation
It's way more interesting	way	intensifier	colloquial	Reasoning	informal	Stylistic
20 bucks	bucks	noun	Slang  Dialectal (US)  Polysemy  ( male deer / dollars)	Identifying  Reasoning	informal	Stylistic  collocation
And stuff	stuff	noun	Slang	Identifying  Reasoning	informal	Stylistic

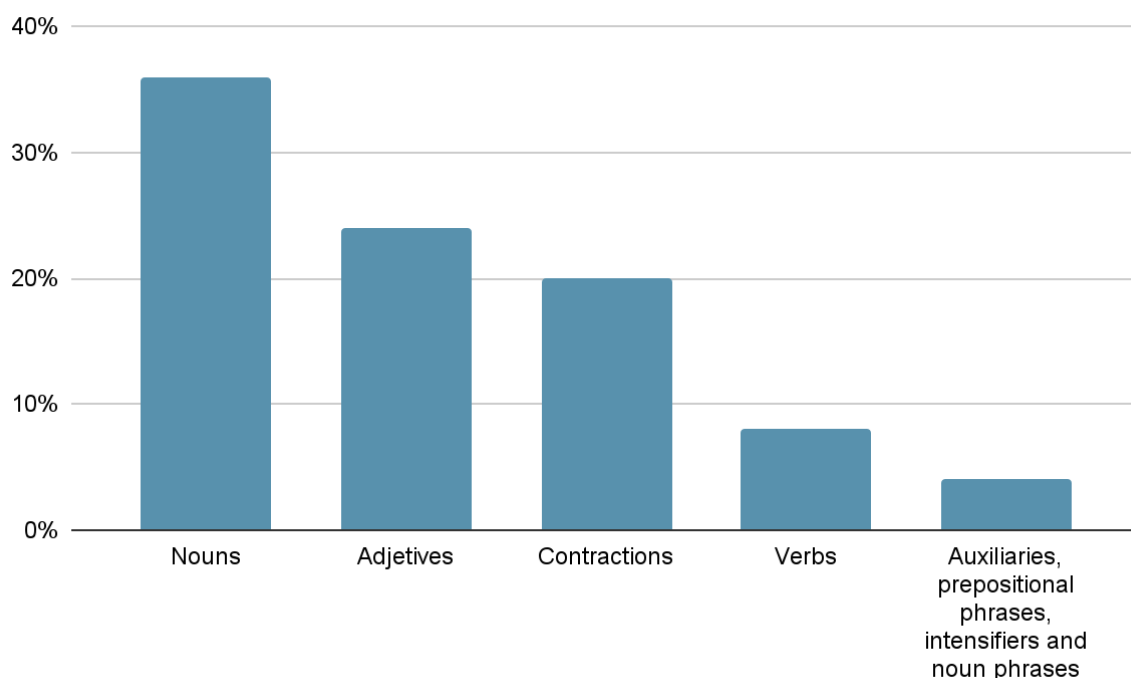
I kinda need to go to the toilet	kinda	Contraction ( kind of)	colloquial	Reasoning	informal	Connotation Collocation Stylistic
You just sound cuckoo-pants	Cuckoo -pants	adjective	Colloquial / creative	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Connotation Stylistic
There was a guy	guy	noun	Colloquial	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Stylistic
He was a newbie	newbie	noun	slang	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Connotation Stylistic
I was so pissed off	Pissed off	adjective	slang	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Stylistic
I'm not gonna...	gonna	Contraction ( going to)	Colloquial Dialectal variation (US)	Identifying	informal	Stylistic



When the cops arrived	cops	noun	Slang	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Stylistic
They gave me a lousy bag	lousy	adjective	Slang Polysemy ( Bad quality / infested with lice)	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Connotation Stylistic
The pizza guy rang the bell	Pizza guy	Noun phrase	Colloquial	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Collocation Stylistic
He's a freak	freak	noun	Colloquial	Identifying Reasoning	informal	Connotation Stylistic

**Table 1** shows the colloquial terms and expressions found in students' oral productions and its classification into the subcategories mentioned above. A total of 25 expressions were acknowledged for this part of the study. The lexical classification shows a result of 9 nouns, 6 adjectives, 1 auxiliary verb, 5 contractions, 1 prepositional phrase, 2 verbs, 3 fixed phrases, 1 intensifier and 1 noun phrase. These numbers represent the following proportions: 36% usage of nouns, 24% of adjectives, 20% of contractions, 8% of verbs, and 4% usage of auxiliaries, prepositional phrases, intensifiers and noun phrases. **(Figure 1)**

**Figure 1: Lexical classification of terms found in students' oral productions:**



As regards the variation, the subclassification derived in a total of 15 colloquial expressions (60%) and 10 slang terms (40%) 5 polysemys were found within the 25 terms and expressions (20%), as well as 3 expressions classified as creative language (12%) . A subsequent classification within this category revealed the findings of 5 terms with a dialectal variation , which included 4 terms corresponding to American English (80%) and 1 to the British variation of the language (20%).

As regards the sense and interpretation of the terms used, the micro functions and associative senses were considered as well. This revealed the findings of 19 uses of the terms for identifying meanings (76%) , 14 for reasoning ones (56%) , 2 physiological purposes (swearing) (8%) , and 2 phatic ones (8%). It is necessary to clarify here that some of the terms used fixed in more than one category of micro functions. As for the associative sense, 21 terms have been classified as stylistic variation (84%) , 7 were found carrying connotative meanings (28%) , and 6 were cataloged as collocations (24%).

Finally, in terms of register, all the 25 expressions (100%) corresponded to the informal one.

**Table 2** shows the general lexical terms, phrases, contractions and expressions found in students' written productions, and its classification into the subcategories previously mentioned:

**Table 2: General lexical terms, phrases, contractions and expressions found in students' written productions.**

<b>Whole phrase</b>	<b>Single lexical item</b>	<b>Lexical Category</b>	<b>Variation</b>	<b>Micro function:</b>	<b>Register</b>	<b>Associative sense</b>
These stuff	stuff	noun	slang	Identifying / reasoning	Informal	Stylistic variation
Pretty stuff	stuff	noun	slang	Identifying / reasoning	Informal	Stylistic variation
Gonna	gonna	Contraction (going to)	Colloquial Dialectal variation (US)	Identifying	informal	Stylistic variation
Hi Bro!	Bro	Abbreviation of noun (Brother)	Slang Dialectal variation (us)	Phatic	informal	Stylistic variation

OMG	OMG	abbreviation (standing for the interjection: “Oh my God”)	Colloquial	Phatic	informal	Stylistic variation
Trash	trash	noun	Slang Stylistic Polysemy: Trash:garbage Trash: people regarded as very low social class (pejorative)	Identifying / reasoning	informal	Stylistic / connotation
Way too cold	way	adverb	Colloquial Polysemy: Way (noun):method, road Way (adverb): far, to an extent	Identifying / reasoning	informal	Stylistic

You are dumb	dumb	adjective	Slang Polysemy  Dumb: not able to speak  Dumb: stupid	Physiological function (insulting)  Reasoning (negative connotation)	informal	Stylistic / connotation
Awesome	awesome	adjective	Slang Dialectical variation (us)	Identifying / reasoning	informal	Stylistic
Cops	cops	noun	Slang Dialectical variation (us)	Identifying / Reasoning	informal	Stylistic
Bucks	bucks	noun	Slang Dialectical Variation ( us)	Identifying / Reasoning	Informal	Stylistic
Hey	Hey	Interjection	Colloquial	Phatic	Informal	Stylistic

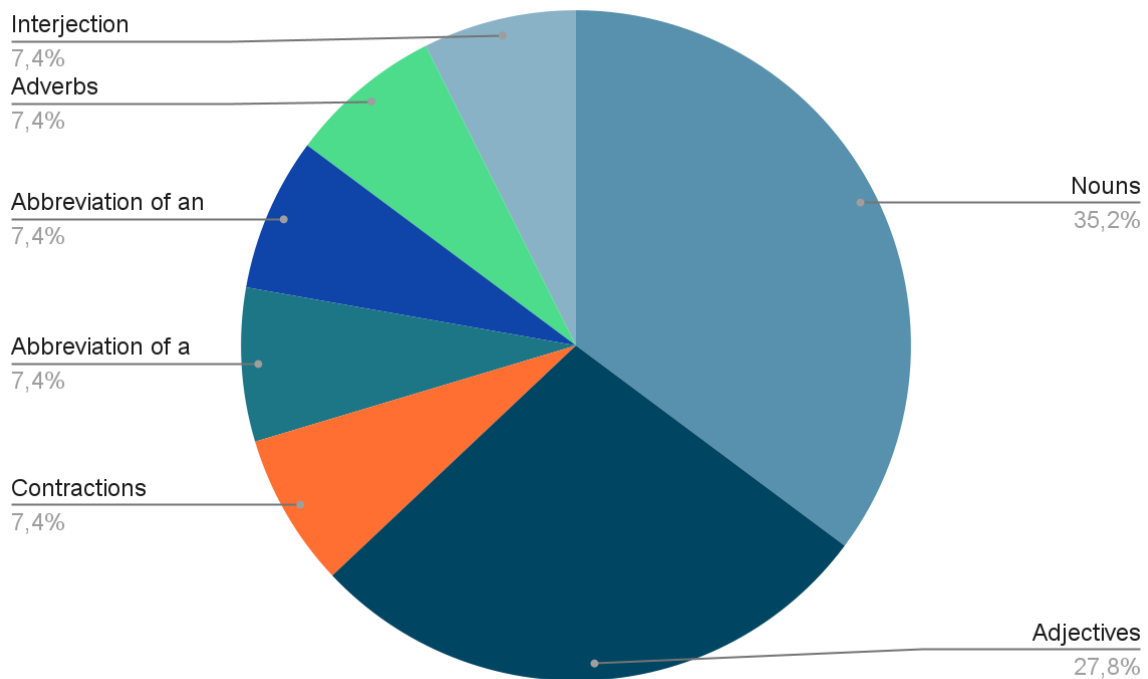
The house was weird	weird	Adjective	Colloquial Polysemy: Weird : strange Weird: freak, different from the rest (pejorative)	Identifying / Reasoning	Informal	Stylistic / connotation
I think it was “rubbish”	rubbish	adjective	Colloquial Polysemy: Rubbish: garbage / worthless, useless (pejorative)	Identifying / reasoning	informal	Stylistic / connotation
Of course I’ll go to your party “sweetie”	sweetie	noun	Colloquial	Identifying / reasoning	Informal	Stylistic / connotation

**Table 2** shows the recount and classification of the data regarded as “General vocabulary, Idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs” found in students’ written productions.

A total of 14 expressions were gathered for this part of the study. The lexical classification shows a result of 5 different nouns (the noun “stuff” was mentioned twice) , 4 adjectives, 1 contraction, 1 abbreviation of a noun, 1 abbreviation of an interjection, 1 adverb, and one

interjection. These numbers represent the following proportions: 35,2% usage of nouns, 27,8% of adjectives, and 7,4 % usage of contractions, abbreviations of nouns, abbreviations of interjections, adverbs and interjections. **(Figure 2)**

**Figure 2: Lexical classification of terms found in students' oral productions:**



As regards the variation, the subclassification derived in a total of 7 colloquial expressions ( 50% ) and 7 slang terms (50%) . 5 terms were classified as polysemies (35%). A subsequent classification within these categories revealed the findings of 4 slang terms which corresponded to the American dialectical variation , and 1 colloquial expression, also corresponding to the same variation. The analysis of the expressions found in written productions showed no findings of expressions which carried a British dialectical variation.

As regards the sense and interpretation of the terms used, the micro functions and associative senses were considered as well.

This revealed the findings of 11 uses of the terms for identifying meanings (78 % ) , 11 for reasoning ones (78%) , 3 phatic ones (21%), and 1 physiological purpose (swearing) (7%) . Just as with the classification of the oral expressions previously described, it is important to clarify that some of the terms used fixed in more than one category of

micro functions. Regarding the associative sense, all 14 terms have been classified as stylistic variation (100 %) . The search for negative connotations in the written productions resulted in the findings of 5 expressions which carried negative associative meaning ( 35%).

All the 14 expressions found in students’ written productions correspond to the informal register.

**Table 3: Idiomatic expressions found in students’ oral productions**

<b>Idiomatic expression</b>	<b>Figurative paraphrase</b>
I didn’t have the guts	I wasn’t brave enough to do something
I was out of my mind	“ I lost control of my mental faculties”
I took the rain check	“I can’t accept this invitation now. I will do it some other time”
He’s got a crush on me	“ He feels attracted by me”
He tried to flip the script	“He tried to reverse the situation”

**Table 3** shows the idiomatic expressions found in students’ natural oral productions, and an explanation of their figurative meanings. All these expressions were



appropriately used by students, providing a coherent meaning to the content of their speech.

**Table 4: Idiomatic expressions found in students' written productions:**

<b>Idiomatic expression</b>	<b>Figurative paraphrase</b>
How <b>on earth</b> ....?	How was this possible....?
<b>At my place</b>	At the place where I live

**Table 4** shows the idiomatic expressions found in students' written productions. A total of two expressions were classified into this category.

A combination of **tables 3 and 4** reveals that a total of 7 idiomatic expressions have been used by students, both written and orally, during the data selection process for this study. The quantitative analysis reflects a total of 5 idiomatic expressions coming from oral productions (71%) and 2 idiomatic expressions resulting from students' written productions (28%).

**Table 5: Phrasal verbs found in students' oral productions:**

<b>Whole expression</b>	<b>Phrasal verb</b>	<b>Meaning</b>

<p>Everything was so fucked up</p>	<p>Fuck up</p>	<p>1. Completely mismanage or handle a situation 2. Damage or confuse someone emotionally.</p> <p>In this context, the student used the phrasal verb as a participial adjective</p>
<p>He cheated on her</p>	<p>Cheat on</p>	<p>To break a promise made to a partner by having sex with someone else</p>
<p>I love hanging out with my friends</p>	<p>Hang out with</p>	<p>To spend time idly or in relaxing or socializing</p>
<p>I went to the shopping center to hang around with my friends</p>	<p>Hang around with</p>	<p>1. To spend time idly or in relaxing or socializing 2. To stay in or at a place for a period of time.</p>
<p>We heard a scream and we freaked out..</p> <p>She was bleeding so I freaked out</p>	<p>Freak out</p>	<p>To trouble the mind; to make uneasy.</p>

**Table 5** provides information about the phrasal verbs collected from students’ oral productions, during the data collection period of this study, and of their meanings. A total of 5 different phrasal verbs resulted from these spontaneous oral productions. However, 6 utterances have been transcribed, as one phrasal verb has been used twice, in two different situations and contexts (freak out). The opposite situation has occurred with the phrasal verbs “hang out” and “hang around”. In these cases, different speakers have used each of them, to refer to the same situation and context. All the students have used the phrasal verbs correctly, in terms of grammar and meaning.

**Table 6: Phrasal verbs found in students’ written productions:**

Whole expression	Phrasal verb	Meaning
Rang up my phone	Ring up	Call someone by phone

**Table 6** shows the phrasal verbs found in students’ written productions, as well as their corresponding meaning . During the data examination and collection period, 1 phrasal verb was found in the productions. The phrasal verb was correctly used by the student, in terms of grammar, meaning and coherence.

Both, section 335 “*Discriminatory and offensive language*” in Michael Swan’s “*Practical English Usage*” (2017) and the publication “*The Utility and Ubiquity of Taboo Words in Perspectives on Psychological Science*” (March 2009) by Psychologist Timothy Jay were used as reference for the identification and classification of the data in **tables 7 and 8**.

**Table 7: Dirty and offensive words found in students' productions – Timothy Jay's approach:**

<b>Offensive term</b>	<b>Jay's classification</b>
Fucked up	Sexual, profane
Bloody	Profane, blasphemous
lousy	Profane, blasphemous
Crap	Disgusting objects
Trash	Disgusting objects
rubbish	Disgusting objects
faggot	Racial and gender slurs
Nuts	Psychological deviation
mad	Psychological deviation
freak	Social deviation
Cuckoo-pants	Psychological deviation
Newbie	Social deviation
Dumb	Psychological deviation

weird	Social deviation
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**Table 7** provides detail about the dirty and offensive words found in students' both written and oral productions, and their classification according to Psychologist Timothy Jay's approach (2009) Results show that a total of 14 terms were found in students productions, among which the sub classification determined the existence of 4 psychological deviations, 3 profane terms, 3 disgusting objects, 3 social deviations, 2 blasphemous terms, and 1 racial and gender slur.

**Table 8: Dirty and offensive words found in students' productions - Michael Swan's approach:**

Offensive term	Preferred alternative
Faggot	Gay man
Nuts	Having a mental illness
mad	Having a mental illness

**Table 8** reveals that 3 of the words collected for this study coincide with Swan's random examples of dirty words in his publication. It also provides the preferred alternative term, used by the author in his publication.

**Table 9: weekly number of hours spent watching series in English:**

Amount of students	Number of hours a day spent watching series in English

1	7 hours
1	6 hours
1	5 hours
5	4 hours
9	3 hours
16	2 hours
6	1 hour

**Table 9** details the number of hours a day each student claimed to spend watching series in English. This data was obtained from analyzing the surveys completed by the participants. Results show that, out of the 37 participants who claimed to watch series in English, the average number of hours spent doing that activity a day **is 2,78**. This would mean that the average participant in this study is exposed to nearly **3 hours** of input of real English, which he receives from TV fiction.

**Table 10: Single lexical items found in students' written and oral productions:**

Single lexical item
-ain't
-bloody
- weed

- mad
- way (+ comparative adj.)
- bucks ( x 2)
- stuff (x 3)
- kinda
- guy ( x2)
- newbie
- pissed off
- gonna
- cops (x2)
- lousy
- pizza guy
- freak
- fucked up
- cheat on
- hang out with
- Hang around
- freak out (x2)
- Bro
- trash
- dumb
- awesome

- Hey
- rang up
- weird
- rubbish
- sweetie

**Total number of different words: 30**

**Total number of times the students used single colloquial terms ( considering the cases of repetition) : 41**

**Table 10** lists all the single lexical terms which were found in the students’ written and oral productions classified as colloquial language or slang. A total of 30 different terms were collected from the students’ output. However, 5 cases of repetition were noted and recorded, which results in a total of 41 uses of the terms in different 41 occasions. **Table 10** also shows that the term *stuff* was used three times, and the terms *bucks*, *guy*, *cops* and *freak out* were used twice.

**Table 11: Whole phrases (fixed phrases and idiomatic expressions) found in students’ written and oral productions:**

Whole phrase	category
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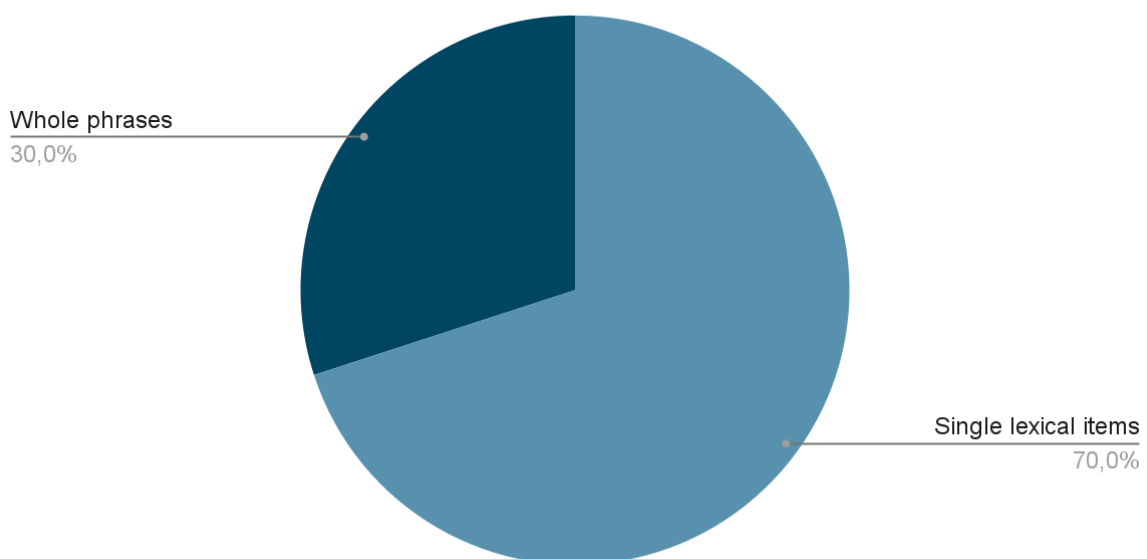
<p>Are you nuts...?</p> <p>I crashed on the couch</p> <p>You gotta be kidding me</p> <p>No way</p> <p>Full of crap</p> <p>You just sound cuckoo – pants</p>	<p>Fixed phrase</p>
<p>At my place (x2)</p> <p>I didn't have the guts</p> <p>I was out of my mind</p> <p>I took the rain check</p> <p>He's got a crush on me</p> <p>He tried to flip the script</p> <p>How on earth...?</p> <p>OMG</p>	<p>Idiomatic expression</p>
<p><b>Total:</b></p>	<p><b>fixed phrases: 6</b></p> <p><b>Idiomatic expressions: 9</b></p> <p><b>Total: 15</b></p>

**Table 11** shows the classification of the expressions found into “fixed phrases”. For the sake of this study, the idiomatic expressions found in students’ productions have been grouped together with the fixed expressions. Results show a total of 15 whole phrases, including 6 fixed phrases and 9 idiomatic expressions.

**Tables 10 and 11** show that, within the total of 50 colloquial words and slang terms found in students’ productions, the number of single words outnumbers the fixed phrases. Within the list of colloquial and slang terms used spontaneously by the participants in this study, a distinction was made between single lexical items and whole phrases. The findings revealed the use of a total of 35 single items and 15 whole phrases, which results in a percentage of 70% single words over 30% whole phrases (**Figure 3**)

**Figure 3: Percentage of whole phrases and single lexical items found in students’ productions:**

Percentage of whole phrases and single lexical items found in students' productions



**Table 12: Phrases and terms in students’ performances with social connotations:**

Word - phrase	Connotation	Whole phrase used	Kind of producti	context	Connotation given to the

		by students	on		word
freak	Negative Pejorative-  1. Used to refer to someone who's peculiar, different from the rest or "not normal"  2. sby who is extremely interested in a particular subject or activity (computer freak)	"He's a freak"	oral	The student was talking spontaneously about his brother who does not socialize much and plays video games in his room. He was criticizing his attitude and highlighting he cannot rely on him to help him with his homework.	Negative.  Used to refer to his brother as strange, different, computer lover and unsocial.
lousy	Negative / pejorative  1. Very poor or bag  2. infested with lice	"They gave me a lousy bag"	oral	The student was telling an anecdote of an embarrassing experience (as requested by the teacher) . He was coming back from the market when the plastic bag broke, and all the products he had bought ended	Negative  Used to criticize the market for the bad quality of the bag they'd given him.

				up on the pavement	
newbie	Negative Pejorative  1.An inexperienced newcomer to a particular activity.	“He was a newbie”	oral	The student was answering a question about her school and she said her mates used to misbehave in class, so she told an anecdote about a new and young history teacher who had to deal with some practical jokes made by his students. She referred to this teacher as a “newbie”	Negative- Although she claimed having felt sorry for this teacher, by referring to him as “newbie” she was actually implying he had neither the experience nor the aptitude to deal with that course.

Cuckoo-pants	Negative- Insane, or foolish person	“He sounds cuckoo pants”	oral	The student used the expression to refer to a person in a text who practiced extreme sports. She said: “He sounds cuckoo pants” and then she asked: “It means he’s crazy, doesn’t it”. The teacher provided the answer and asked her where she’d heard that expression. The student said she had heard it in the series “Riverdale”	Negative- The student’s view was that someone who risks his life in that way has to be insane. She actually disapproved of someone doing that kind of sport.
crap	Negative- 1. something of extremely poor quality 2. excrement	“It was fool of crap”	oral	A student was describing his house and complaining about his brother’s bedroom, which was untidy. He claimed that his brother’s desk was full of crap	Negative- The student’s referring to his brother’s video games as “crap” shows his disapproval of his brother’s

				(referring to the play station console and the video games which were on it)	passtime.
faggot	Negative- A gay man. This word is considered offensive when it is used by people who are not gay	“They called him a faggot”	oral	A student was retelling an episode from the series “13 reasons why”, in which a very sporty and manly boy who secretly liked men, is called a faggot by his peers, so he starts a fight.	Negative. The student’s choosing of the word “faggot” over “gay” or “homosexual” and the use of the adjectives “manly and sporty” to mark a contrast, implies a prejudice towards homosexuality.

bloody	<p>Negative – Used to express anger or to emphasize what you are saying in a very rude way</p> <p>Very / extremely</p>	<p>“This bloody phone”</p>	oral	<p>The student’s phone would not connect to the institute’s wifi. Angry as he was, he pronounced that phrase, claiming that he should buy a new one.</p>	<p>Negative – Although used wrongly, his intention was to curse his phone. He tried to use “bloody” as an equivalent of “damn or shitty”</p>
rubbish	<p>Negative- Very bad, worthless or useless.</p>	<p>“I think it was rubbish but maybe it was not my kind of film”</p>	written	<p>Phrase found in a written final exam. The task was to write a review of a film.</p>	<p>Negative - The student chose to write a negative review. Her general opinion of the film was negative. In the last section, she referred to the movie as “rubbish” and claimed she would not recommend watching it.</p>

dumb	Negative- lacking intelligence or good judgment-	“you are dumb”	written	Phrase found in a written task in which students were supposed to narrate the story of a love relationship using certain expressions previously learnt. The story read that the girl had cheated on her boyfriend and then broken up with him. When he asked for an explanation she claimed that it was because he was dumb.	Negative – the fact the boy was considered to be “dumb” seems to be enough reason for the betrayal and breakup.
trash	Negative – Waste material, refuse	“My brother’s bedroom is full of trash, like comic books, collectable little toys, and all that stuff”	written	The sentence was found in a written assignment in which teenage students were asked to describe their houses.	Negative – As the student does not like her brother’s interests, she refers to them as “trash” in a pejorative way.



weird	Negative- Stronger than “strange”. It’s often used to refer to something or someone that is very strange in a way that it’s not natural.	“She seemed to be a weird girl, that’s why no one spoke to her at school.	written	Sentence found in a fictional short story written by a student in a final exam. The story was about a new girl in town who had moved to a house which was said to be haunted.	Negative- The student seems to justify the bullying by claiming that the girl was weird.
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**Table 12** lists the words and phrases used by participants which naturally carry connotative meanings and shows a result of 11 of such expressions. In this table, the connotation given to the word is detailed and a definition of its meaning is provided. The analysis shows that all the eleven expressions found in students’ productions carry a negative connotation. **Table 12** also contains a quote of the whole phrase used by the students, together with a description of the situation in which such utterance was used and an interpretation of the negative connotation assigned to the word in the context of the oral or written production.

**Table 13: Expressions found in students’ productions with a dialectical variation**

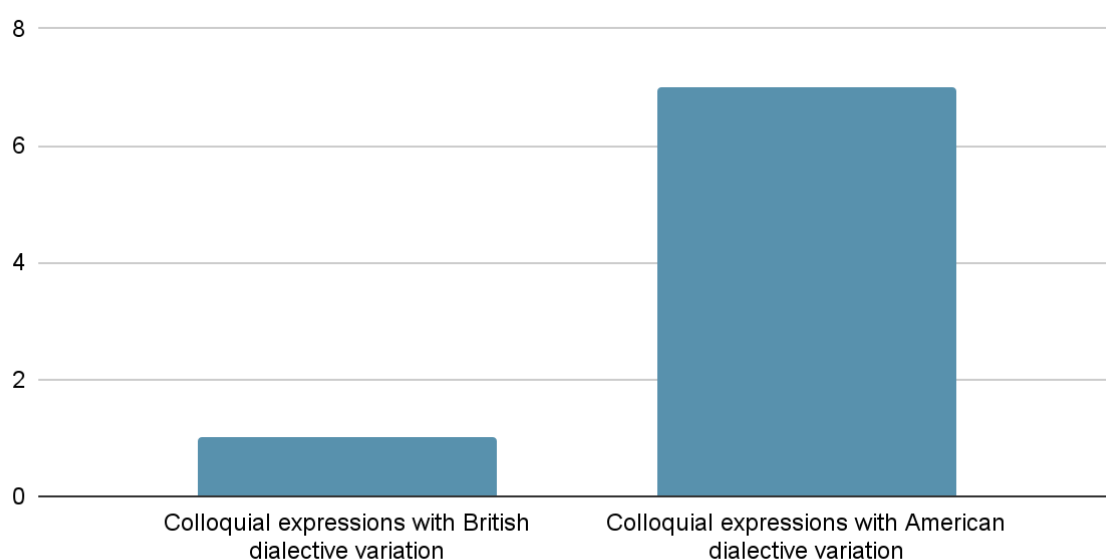
Phrase used	Dialectical variation
Hi Bro!	US
Awesome	US
wanna	US

gotta	US
gonna	US
bucks	US
faggot	US
Bloody	UK

The data was gathered and classified, and a distinction was made according to the dialectic origin of each lexical item. **Table 13** shows the findings of 7 colloquial expressions corresponding to the American dialectical variation and 1 to the British variation.

**Figure 4: Representation of the proportion of colloquial expressions with each dialectic American and British variations found in students' productions:**

Colloquial expressions with American and British variations found in students' productions



**Figure 4** compares the proportion of American and British variations in the colloquial expressions found in students' productions.

**Table 14: Catchphrases from iconic characters acknowledged by students in the surveys:**

<b>CHARACTER</b>	<b>SERIES</b>	<b>CATCHPHRASE</b>	<b>NUMBERS OF STUDENTS WHO MENTIONED IT</b>
Lucifer Morningstar	Lucifer	"What's your deepest desire?"	2
Walter White	Breaking Bad	"I'm the danger"	2
Walter White	Breaking Bad	"Say my name"	2
Joey Tribbiani	Friends	"How you doin'?"	2
Joey Tribbiani	Friends	"Joey doesn't share food"	1
Walter White	Breaking Bad	"I'm the one who knocks"	1
Walter White	Breaking Bad	"Let's cook"	1
Chandler Bing	Friends	"Hi! I'm Chandler. I make jokes when I'm uncomfortable"	1
Chandler Bing	Friends	"I wish I was dead"	1

Sheldon Cooper	The Big Bang Theory	"I'm not crazy. My mother had me tested"	1
Monica Geller	Friends	"I know!"	1
Jake Peralta	Brooklyn 99	"Cool, cool, cool, cool"	1
Sherlock Holmes	Sherlock	"It's elementary my Dear Watson"	1
Harvey Specter	Suits	"I don't get lucky, I make my own luck"	1
Harvey Specter	Suits	"You want to lose small. I want to win big"	1
Ragnar Lothbrok	Vikings	"Don't waste your time looking back. You are not going that way"	1
Ragnar Lothbrok	Vikings	Who wants to be king?"	1
Jon Snow	Game of Thrones	"You are my queen"	1
Thomas Shelby	Peaky Blinders	"Whisky's good proofing water. It tells you who's real and who isn't"	1
Janice Litman	Friends	"Oh, my God!"	1

Meredith Gray	Gray's anatomy	"So pick me, choose me, love me"	1
Rick Grimes	The walking dead	"I'm gonna kill you, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but nothing's gonna change that. Nothing!"	1
Malia Tate	Teen Wolf	"Shut up, you idiot"	1

**Table 14** provides a list of the participants' answers to a particular question in the survey. The question was: "Can you associate a characteristic phrase to any iconic character from the series you have watched?". Results show that a total of 23 catchphrases have been acknowledged by the participants in the survey. In addition, a repetition of the same catchphrase has occurred in 4 of the answers, in which the same catchphrase has been mentioned by two different students. The rest of the catchphrases appeared only once, as a single participant has mentioned each of them.

**Table 15: Vocabulary and expressions found in the catchphrases mentioned at the surveys:**

- **General vocabulary, terms, phrases, contractions and expressions:**

Whole phrase	Single lexical item	Lexical Category	Variation	Micro function:	Register	Associative sense
	-					

<b>Cool, cool, cool, cool”</b>	<b>Cool</b>	adjective	Slang Stylistic	Reasoning	Informal	Stylistic
“I’m gonna kill you, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but nothing’s gonna change that. Nothing!”	gonna	Contraction (going to)	Colloquial Dialectal variation (US)	Identifying	informal	Stylistic variation

For further investigation, all the catchphrases listed in Table 14 were analyzed in search of colloquial expressions and terms. Therefore, **Table 15** provides details of such findings, as well as a thorough classification of the terms, according to Geoffrey Finch’s (1997)

A total of 2 general expressions and terms was selected as colloquial language, which included 1 adjective and 1 contraction, both of them corresponding to the informal register. The variations included 1 stylistic slang term and 1 colloquial expression with a dialectical American variation. As for the associative sense, both expressions were classified as stylistic.

**Table 16: Phrasal verbs found in catchphrases**

**Table 16** shows the phrasal verbs found within the catchphrases, and provides its definition. Results show the finding of 1 phrasal verb in the catchphrases acknowledged by students in the surveys.

Whole expression	Phrasal verb	Meaning
“Shut up, you idiot”	Shut up	“Stop talking”

**Table 17: Number of catchphrases found in students’ oral and written productions:**

	Oral productions	Written productions
Number of catchphrases	0	0

For the sake of this study, students’ oral and written productions were once again analyzed, this time in search of the use of those catchphrases from iconic characters in TV shows, which had previously been recalled and quoted by participants in the surveys. **Table 17** shows that the results of such analysis presented no findings, as no catchphrases were found in students’ oral or written productions all throughout the data collection and analysis period.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Students’ written and oral performances were analyzed together for the classification of data. The analysis is four-dimensional. The first category focuses on the words used by students which are not normally found in formal ESL textbooks. The second one describes the type of lexical pattern chosen by the students. The third one deals with the social aspect conveyed in

the expressions analyzed, and the last one provides details about the use of catchphrases in the students' natural productions.

The aim of this research was to investigate to what extent students' watching popular American and British TV series contribute to the natural acquisition of English Language. Stephen Krashen's input + 1 theory claims that the more input the ESL learner receives in the foreign language, the higher his levels of acquisition will be, leading to a better outcome in his productions. Hence, this study aims to regard American and British TV series as the source of input + 1 students receive in English. In order to do so, the focus of the investigation has been put on colloquial expressions and terms, commonly used in TV series, with the intention to detect such expressions in students' oral and written productions. Four hypotheses were proposed for this study.

The first hypothesis in this paper suggests that students pick up from TV series, words and expressions which are not formally included in English textbooks.

As shown in **tables 1 and 2**, the expressions found in students' oral and written productions were thoroughly analyzed according to Geoffrey Finch (1997, "How to study Linguistics", p. 93, 138, 144, 145). The focus of the analysis was placed on determining the variation and micro function of each of the terms and phrases, in order to classify them accurately as either colloquial expressions or slang terms, as well as identifying the purpose and intention behind the expression used.

A quantitative analysis of the results reflects a higher use of colloquial expressions over slang terms. As for the qualitative analyses, some of the colloquial expressions found, such as "At my place", "I crashed on the couch", and "you just sound cuckoo pants" suggest a connection with input received from TV shows, since they occur frequently in TV series, mainly in sitcoms and programmes aimed for teenage audiences. As regards the slang terms, words such as "weed", "stuff", "pissed off", and "faggot", among others, carry a high degree of informality together with taboo and aggressive meanings, which leads to their exclusion from formal ESL material (Timothy Jay, 2009) and may derive in the thought of its connection to the external input students receive from TV series, in which these kind of terms are commonly used. Words like "weed" and "fagoot" prevail in TV shows which include groups of teenagers or young people who belong to the same social or community group and share a common knowledge of the local variety of the language. Additionally, findings show that many of the words used by the participants are polysemies, which apart from their slang or colloquial meaning, may carry



another one which does not fit into these categories. Some examples of polysemies found in students' productions include: weed, lousy, bucks, dumb and weird, among others. The word "weed" could both refer to "lawn" or "marijuana", being the latter a slang term. The term "lousy" could mean that someone is infested with lice, but it is also a slang word for "bad quality". The word "bucks" is usually a slang term which is equivalent to "dollars", but it is also used to refer to the male deer. Similarly, while the term "dumb" is commonly chosen to refer to someone who lacks the ability to speak, it is also a slang term used to insult someone's intelligence. Finally, the term "weird" may well mean "strange" or be used colloquially to refer to someone who is different from everyone else, in a pejorative way.

A qualitative analysis of the examples of polysemies found in the data reflect that the students used these terms for their slang or colloquial meanings. According to Jay, T (2009) , this represents the kind of content which would not be found in textbooks. Taboo words such as "weed" or insults like "dumb", "weird" or "lousy" are not the kind of vocabulary that authors would choose to include in their teaching material. Consequently, the fact that students had used these terms with their colloquial and slang meanings, may lead to the thought that they have received this input from a different source, other than the formal English class.

In **tables 1 and 2** we can find a total of 2 uses of physiological functions: "bloody" and "crap". The term "bloody" was orally produced by a student when he was referring to his own phone. Annoyed by not being able to access the Institute's wifi signal, he pronounced the phrase: "This bloody phone", in an attempt to release his anger. It was observed that the student used the term properly, as his intention of cursing his phone was actually fulfilled. However, the choice of the word "bloody" was uncommon for an English class, as it corresponds to a group of taboo and dirty words from the British variation of the English language. When asked about the term, the student replied that he had heard it in the TV show *Peaky Blinders*, which is a British series about a crime gang of the same name which operated in Birmingham from 1880 to 1910.

Another use of the physiological function was the expression: "It was full of crap". The student referred to the video games and playstation's console in his brother's room as "crap", in an attempt to express his disapproval of his brother's passtime. While in this context, the speaker is not actually using the word "crap" to swear or curse, it is a fact that this term can also be used to fulfill that purpose. It is also unlikely to encounter the term "crap" in traditional ESL course material.

Both of the examples mentioned above suggest that the participants acquired these terms in an environment other than the English class. While the words “bloody” and “crap” do not appear in an English coursebook, they certainly do so in TV shows. In the case of “bloody”, the student was actually able to identify the source of input. In the case of “crap”, however, it was not possible, but the fact that he had heard such term in a TV show should not be discarded.

As regards the **phatic function**, a total of 5 examples were found in **tables 1 and 2**. The terms and expressions are: “Hi Bro!”, “OMG”, “Hey”, “You gotta be kidding me” and “No way”.

In the case of “Hi Bro” and “Hey”, the participants have used these expressions in written productions, as a way to start their informal letters / mails to a friend. These expressions were picked from the students’ productions and selected as part of the data for this study, as none of them fits into the group of informal greetings commonly provided by ESL textbooks, which tend to include terms like: “Dear / Hi (friend’s first name). They were classified here as phatic functions, as both of them serve the purpose of sociability, as they are greetings, used in this case to start an informal letter. Additionally, neither the slang term “Bro”, which contains a dialectical American variation, nor the colloquial interjection “Hey” will frequently be found in textbooks for EFL Students. Thus, this suggests that students have learnt such terms from another source of input.

The abbreviation “OMG” was also selected from a participant’s written production. It was used to respond to a comment in a letter previously received. This abbreviation is considered here as a phatic communion, as it is meaningless, but serves the purpose of responding to shocking news, and its use might be expected in certain situations within members of the same community.

It is a fact that ESL textbooks contain various examples of phatic expressions which are used to respond to shocking news, such as “That’s amazing / great / incredible” among others. However, neither the expression “Oh, my God” nor its abbreviation “OMG” are frequently found in this source of formal ESL input. Additionally, the expression “Oh, my God” came up in one of the answers to the survey carried out among the participants of this study. More specifically, one participant expressed he/she remembered having heard the expression “Oh, my God” in the TV series “Friends”, as it was the catchphrase of one of the characters.

The expressions “You gotta be kidding me” and “No way” were selected for this study from students’ oral performances. Both of them are considered to correspond to the phatic function,

as they fulfill the purpose of sociability, and are expected to be used within members of the same English native speaking community, as a way of responding to some kind of information which is hard to believe. Both participants have used these expressions in an appropriate context, indicating they had some previous knowledge on how they operated within the English language system.

Similarly to the examples previously discussed, neither of the expressions are likely to be found in standard ESL educational material, which might lead to the idea that students might have acquired them in an environment, other than the English classroom.

A total of 18 examples of the **reasoning function** were found in the data. The following terms were found in the oral performances: “freak”, “guy”, “lousy”, “cops”, “pissed off”, “newbie”, “cuckoo pants”, “kinda”, “stuff”, “bucks”, “way more”, “crap” and “faggot”. Additionally, the list of the terms found in the written performances include: “stuff”, “bucks”, “way more”, “rubbish”, “sweatie”, “trash”, “awesome” and “weird”. All these terms were classified for this study as reasoning functions, as they carry a certain connotation, and might imply a sense of discrimination, prejudice, fashion or acceptance, depending on the cultural context. The terms “freak”, “newbie”, “faggot” and “weird” have a negative connotation and are used here to discriminate someone who is considered different from the speaker. The term “faggot” was uttered by a student who was orally retelling an episode from the series “13 reasons why”. In such episode, a group of fellow teenagers accused a very sporty and manly boy of being a “faggot”, because they suspected he had had a secret affair with another boy. The accused boy reacts furiously, and gets involved in a fight with his verbal aggressors, showing his disapproval of the comment and feeling discriminated and insulted by it. Also, as both the accusers and the accusee, were immersed in the same cultural context (American teenage students at college), both parts understood the significance and connotation of the term. However, although the Argentinian student who used such term in an oral production in his ESL class is actually immersed in a different cultural context, he succeeded in using the term appropriately, as well as understanding its meaning and connotation.

As for the terms “weird” and “freak”, both of them were uttered by students who meant to refer to people who were different from everyone else, in an unacceptably peculiar way. One student described his own brother as a “freak”, claiming that he did not socialize much with other people, but preferred playing video games instead. The term “weird” was used by a participant in a written production, in which she narrated the story of a fictional girl who was

bullied and ignored at school, because she was “weird”. Both examples show a negative connotation, discrimination and prejudice. In the first example, the student claimed that he did not approve of his own brother’s behavior of not socializing and “wasting” his time on video games, so, according to him, he deserved to be called a “freak”. Similarly, in the case of “weird” the narrator seemed to be justifying the bullying, as, since the girl was “weird” she deserved to be bullied and ignored. In both cases, the students also used the terms correctly, serving the needs for what they actually meant to express.

The term “newbie” also has a discriminative, negative connotation, as it is used to refer to someone as not experienced or apt enough for a particular task. This term was collected for this study from a student who was referring to a new History teacher she had at school. The student expressed that the teacher was a victim of some practical jokes carried out by the students, and was unable to deal with them as he was too young and inexperienced. As the girl narrated the event, she explained that the reason why the teacher was unable to handle the situation was because he was a “newbie”. Hence, even though the narrator claimed she had not participated in the practical jokes, the negative connotation of the word she chose to refer to her professor, implies that she herself also regarded such teacher as inexperienced and unsuitable for the job.

One of the characteristics of the reasoning function, is that the terms are subject to the influence of fashion depending on a shared knowledge of a cultural group. The terms in this study data which fulfill such requirements are the following: freak, guy, lousy, cops, pissed off, cuckoo pants, kinda, stuff, bucks, way more, crap, weird, rubbish, sweetie, trash and awesome. With the intention to develop this concept, some of these terms will be put into context in order to provide some examples:

The term “cop” is used colloquially to refer to police officers. It is subjected to the influence of fashion, as the members of the same English speaking community would understand its meaning. However, such a term is not likely to be found in an ESL textbook, in which the term “police officer” will be preferred. This is due to the fact that ESL material aims to teach English as a global language for all the different communities and social groups worldwide.

The term “bucks” was chosen for the second example. It is colloquially used to refer to the American currency, as it stands for a synonym of “dollars”. Such a term is commonly used by American people when referring to prices in their country. Their shared knowledge as members of the USA enables them to comprehend and employ the term “bucks” correctly. However, it is also unlikely for us, non native speakers of English, to find such a term in ESL teaching

material, where the equivalence “dollars” would be more common.

For this study, the term “cops” was collected from a student’s oral performance. Part of the sentence he pronounced in his spontaneous speech was: “When the cops arrived..”. As for the term “bucks”, it was selected from a participant’s written production, in which he had expressed that the price of something had been “20 bucks”.

Both participants are Argentinian ESL students, who have been born and raised in Buenos Aires and speak Spanish as their mother tongue. Consequently, neither of them belong to an English speaking community in which the terms “bucks” or “cops” are used colloquially, as part of a fashion shared by its genuine members. Nor is it likely that the participants had experienced an encounter with such terms in ESL teaching material, as these colloquial terms are not normally included in the syllabus. This situation might lead to the thought that the students could have acquired those terms from another source of input which does not only reflect the linguistic aspects, but cultural ones as well.

**Tables 3 and 4** show the idiomatic expressions found in students' oral and written productions respectively. The classification of the data was made according to the following theory (American University, 2009). Gibbs, 2007, Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Vega-Moreno, 2003). *Abbey Algiers* (Ulusoy & Demirbilek, 2013).

One of the idioms used by a student in a spontaneous oral production was “take the rain check”. In season 5 episode 4 of the popular TV series “Friends”, Ross and Rachel, two of the main characters, are chatting. When Rachel invites Ross to her apartment to watch a TV show, Ross declines the invitation by responding: “Mind if I take the rain check? I’m waiting for a call from Emily”

The example previously described mentions the usage of an idiom in one of the most popular series chosen by the participants of this study, and points out the repetition and appropriate usage of such idiom by an ESL student, participating in this research.

Another idiom used spontaneously by a student in an oral production was : “I didn’t have the guts”. While it is true that ESL teaching material does include some idioms in its syllabus, the expressions chosen for such purpose are rarely extremely informal. An idiom like “have the

guts” is more likely to reach a non-native speaker’s ears through a TV show than through ESL formal teaching material. Furthermore, the inclusion of idioms in ESL material seems to be scarce compared with the real number of idioms an ESL learner would need to learn in order to fully comprehend a native speaker.

Some examples are provided here with the idiom “have the guts to do something”:

Another TV show mentioned by the participants in the survey was “The walking dead”. In season 7 episode 8 of that show, an iconic character called Negan tells his victim “You have no guts” before killing him. Here again, we can notice that an idiomatic expression from a TV show was also chosen and used correctly by an ESL student participating in this study.

As regards the inclusion of idioms in ESL material, textbooks do include some idiomatic expressions in their syllabus, but this content is scarce and only provides the students’ with an idea of the concept of what idiomatic expressions are. To address this topic more in detail, teachers tend to find themselves in the need of using extra material, just as Thai teachers do to enhance students’ communicative skills by using series. An example of the inclusion of idioms in formal ESL material is provided hereunder:

The textbook “English File upper-intermediate - Fourth edition- (Latham-Koenig, Oxenden, Comacki - Oxford University Press - 2020) has a total of 12 units of vocabulary bank at the back section. Only one of those units includes a section of idiomatic expressions. They are a total of eight expressions related to business vocabulary. (page 162)

**Tables 3 and 4** show a total of seven idiomatic expressions, none of them coinciding with the ones provided by the students’ former or current classroom material. If we consider Washburn’s theory (2001) in which he claims that sitcoms, situation comedies aired on TV, are found to provide a useful source of input given its abundance of natural spoken language features, and we also refer to Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Pryce and Gunter’s study, and we consider that the main reason for language change is social interaction. We can also infer that, as the participants have not had any social interaction with native speakers of English, the idioms included in the textbooks is insufficient, and the series they mention do include idioms in their scripts, the possibility of them acquiring idioms from the series is worth considering.

**Tables 5 and 6** detail the list of phrasal verbs found in students’ both written and oral productions. (Quirk, Greenbaum, & Leech, 1985, p. 1150). The five different phrasal verbs which came up in the students’ oral performances during the experiment were: fucked up, cheat

on, hang out with, hang around and freak out. As for the written productions, only one phrasal verb was collected, which was ring up.

Quirk states that phrasal verbs are most frequent in informal conversations. However, this does not mean that they are exclusive forms of this register. In Bryan Fletcher's "Register and Phrasal verbs" (2005), the author first expresses that it is generally believed that phrasal verbs are most suitable in speaking rather than in writing, and in informal rather than formal situations and verbs. However, after describing his experience with academic writers, he concludes that phrasal verbs are found in all types of text and are essential for expressing many ideas in natural English. He maintains that there are many situations – even in quite formal texts – when a phrasal verb is the most natural-sounding way of expressing a particular idea.

It is a fact that ESL formal material includes phrasal verbs in its syllabus. Some books even provide a specific section for these expressions.. However, textbooks generally present phrasal verbs as isolated vocabulary, and not as part of a conversational situation. It is generally the teacher's initiative to come up with strategies which help students put them in context. Additionally, ESL textbooks seem to limit the variety of the phrasal verbs they include in their contents, to a carefully selected, "formally accepted" group. Within the most frequent ones, one might find: "come up with", "get down to", "set off", "take off", "take up", "give up", "give out", among many others.

Within the phrasal verbs detailed in **tables 5 and 6**, we can find expressions like "fucked up" and "freak out", which are far from belonging to the "formally accepted" group of phrasal verbs included in ESL formal material. On the contrary, they are more likely to have been heard by students in a more informal, conversational context, such as TV shows.

For example, in the American TV show "*The United States of Tara*" the adjectival phrasal verb "fucked up" is used in the title of one of its episodes (Season 2, Episode 7 "Department of Fucked up family Services").

An example of the use of the phrasal verb "freak out" in TV shows can be found in the sitcom "Friends" (Season 8, Episode 23) when the characters Phoebe and Monica are having a chat at a hospital waiting room, and Monica tells her friend: "*watch me freak out chandler*", referring to her future announcement of her desire to be a mother.

Consequently, as phrasal verbs are most common in conversational, informal situations, and ESL formal material provides students with a limited list of these expressions, it appears

appropriate to suppose that the participants in this study could have obtained the input from the series they have previously claimed to watch.

**Tables 7 and 8** both provide a list of dirty and offensive words found in students' both written and oral productions. A division of that data was later carried on, classifying it according to Timothy Jay's approach in **table 7**, and to Michael Swan's approach in **table 8**.

The first hypothesis in this paper suggests that students pick up from TV series, words and expressions which are not formally included in English textbooks.

**Table 7** shows the presence of 14 words found in students' productions, which fit into Timothy Jay's classification of dirty words. In addition, **Table 8** reveals that 3 of the words collected for this study coincide with Swan's random examples of dirty words in his publication.

Thus, the results reveal that some of the words used spontaneously by the participants in this study correspond to the category: "taboo, offensive or dirty words".

If we consider that, according to OUP author Tony Grice, dirty and taboo words are intentionally excluded from ESL textbooks, it might be accurate to conclude that students have learnt these terms from a different source of input, other than the course material. Furthermore, if we refer one more time to Tony Grice's paper, in which he claims that ESL students will learn such terms from TV shows, we could refer to TV series as the source from which participants in this study have picked up these terms.

In order to provide more evidence to either verify or dismiss hypothesis number 1, some of the students' responses to the survey were gathered in **table 9**, which details the number of daily and weekly hours the different participants in this study spend watching series in English.

**Table 9** reveals that the average number of hours a day a student spends watching series in English is **2,78**. This would mean that the average participant in this study is exposed to nearly **3 hours** of input of real English, which he receives from TV fiction.

Taking all the previous evidence into consideration, together with Jay's and Grice's approaches, and Krashen's Input + 1 theory, it can be stated that hypothesis number 1 in this paper seems to be accurate. However, more research on the matter is suggested in order to provide more information.



The second hypothesis in this paper suggests that students who watch popular American and British TV series tend to pick up fixed phrases rather than single lexical items from them. In order to investigate this topic, the information in **tables 10 and 11** is analyzed.

The quantitative analysis reflects that the participants tend to memorize single words more easily than whole phrases, and consequently reproduce the first ones with a bigger frequency.

Consequently, though it was previously hypothesized that students who watch popular American and British TV series tend to pick up fixed phrases rather than single lexical items from them, the results indicate the opposite. As shown in **tables 10 and 11**, a total number of 35 single lexical items, classified as slang or colloquial, was found in students' productions. While the recount of data resulted in the finding of 15 whole phrases and fixed expressions from the same students.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the second hypothesis in this study is inaccurate. The findings suggest that English learners tend to pick up isolated, single colloquial terms from TV series, rather than whole phrases. These single lexical items have been correctly used by different participants in different sentences and contexts, which might suggest that each of them had a clear notion of its meaning and was, therefore, able to use it correctly when producing their own sentences.

It must be remarked that the results of this study are only indicators. Further research on the matter needs to be conducted in order to obtain concluding results.

The third hypothesis in this study refers to the way in which Argentinian students copy from American and British TV series, colloquial expressions and slang terms which carry social connotations and dialectical variations from such nationalities. It is also suggested in the hypothesis that these students tend to copy such expressions to refer to their own Argentinian reality and social context. In order to verify the first part of this hypothesis, the data in **table 12** was analyzed in search for colloquial words which carried a connotative meaning. The concepts of the **associative senses, connotation and reflection** in Finch's publication were considered for this analysis.

Besides providing details about the words used by the participants and its negative connotations, **table 12** also describes the context in which the student chose to use that term, and the connotation he/she intended to give to the word. The reason for this inclusion is that, for the sake of this study, it was necessary to understand the context in which the student's

production was set, in order to detect its connotation and decide if it was in fact, a negative one.

An example is provided here in order to illustrate the way in which the connotation was detected in this study:

One of the expressions detailed in **table 12** mentions the student's choice of the word "crap" to refer to the content on his brother's desk. The student's exact words were "it was full of crap". Consequently, he was asked by the teacher to be more specific, to which he responded, "you know, video games, the play station, that kind of crap". Thus, the student's referring to such expensive and valuable technology as "crap" might reflect his disapproval of his brother's pastimes.

The qualitative analysis of this information reveals that, in the majority of the cases, the participants used the terms correctly, as they served the needs of the message they were trying to transmit. To clarify this point, two examples are provided below:

Example 1: "weird"

This term was found in a written performance, in which the students were supposed to write a fictional story using narrative tenses. This participant had chosen to write about a haunted house, which, after having been uninhabited for a long time, was sold to a man and his teenage daughter. The story went on by describing the new inhabitants as strange people who failed to socialize with the neighbors. The girl in the story did not make friends at school either, as no one would speak to her because she was "weird".

In this case, the word chosen is accurate to transmit the idea intended by the student, as she meant that the girl was different from the rest. Furthermore, a negative connotation is added to this word, as the girl was "different in a bad way" and that was the reason why nobody would talk to her at school.

Example 2: "newbie"

The term was found in an oral performance when a student was retelling something that had happened in her class at school. She referred to her new History teacher as a "newbie". She explained that the teacher was very young and she supposed he did not have enough experience dealing with secondary school students. Moreover, he had a hard time dealing with her companions who would misbehave in his classes.

The term “newbie” chosen by the student is correctly used in this context, as she wanted to portray the teacher as inexperienced. Moreover, the negative connotation is added at implying that the teacher was not apt to manage the class.

It was generally observed that, in most of the cases, not only were students able to recognize the connotative meaning in some of the words they hear in series, but they also succeeded in using them correctly when referring to their own realities or as part of a fictional narrative.

Therefore, it can be concluded that this specific little group of Argentinian students picked up something more than just single lexical items from watching series. They additionally brought to their own classroom, a collection of words laden with connotative meanings, prejudice and social context and were able to use them adequately, in terms of grammar and semantics.

The third hypothesis also suggests that students copy phrases from TV series, which carry dialectical variations, and use them later to refer to their own reality and social context. In order to develop this idea and analyze the data collected, the concept of **stylistic variation** in Finch’s publication will be used as a referential framework.

**Table 13** shows the terms used by students which carry a stylistic variation. Additionally, a distinction was made according to the dialectic origin of each lexical item. **(Figure 4)**

The results show the findings of 7 colloquial expressions corresponding to the American dialectical variation and 1 to the British variation. If we assume that, by using these expressions, students were repeating what they had heard from the characters in the foreign series they watch, we can notice that, not only were they using the terms for communication, but they were also making use of colloquial expressions and slang words which correspond to a foreign culture, and thus, carry a dialectic origin. Nevertheless, by using them, students were bringing these expressions into their current social context and were now part of their own reality and acquired vocabulary. Whether they would sound natural should they ever use these terms in a real conversation with a native speaker, is a matter for further study .

Further research might investigate, for example, how an English native speaker from New York would react towards an Argentinian person who is speaking to him in English with a Latin accent and telling him / her: “Hey Bro, Can I borrow 20 bucks? I wanna take a cab”

However, some information on the matter can also be found in Michael Swan’s *Practical English Usage – OUP, 2017*; in his chapter about Slang (334):

*“Many slang expressions are widely used. However, many other slang expressions are only used by members of particular social and professional groups, and nearly all slang is used by people who know each other well, or share the same social background. So, it is usually a mistake for outsiders (including foreigners) to try deliberately to use slang. This can give the impression that they are claiming membership of a group that they do not belong to. (...) It is best for learners to avoid slang unless they are really sure of its use”*

The third hypothesis in this research paper aims to find out whether ESL learners copy slang terms and colloquial expressions with dialect variations from American and British TV series. Consequently, it can be concluded that the analysis of the data may serve as proof of the hypothesis' accuracy. As shown in **table 13**, the participants in this research have used slang terms and colloquial expressions with a dialectical variation in their productions. Nonetheless, such participants are Argentinian and do not share the same cultural and social background as the characters in the series they watch, which, according to Michael Swan's approach, might make them sound as if they were claiming membership of a group they do not belong to.

The fourth hypothesis suggests that students who watch popular American and British TV series pick up catchphrases, used by iconic characters. As shown in **table 14**, a total of 23 catchphrases were acknowledged by the participants who completed the surveys. This might imply that students do recognise the catchphrases from iconic characters, and are able to recreate them correctly in English.

With the purpose of deepening this investigation, an analysis was performed on the data, in search of slang terms, colloquial or informal vocabulary within the catchphrases (“creative competence, Finch, 1997)

**Table 15** shows 2 findings of slang terms within the catchphrases. The terms are “cool” and “gonna”. The first one is a slang term, and the latter is a contraction subjected to a dialectical variation (US). Both of them correspond to the reasoning function, as they are subjected to the influence of fashion and cultural background.

Additionally, **table 16** details the phrasal verbs which were found within the catchphrases. The analysis resulted in the finding of the phrasal verb: “Shut up”.

In order to either verify or dismiss the fourth hypothesis which suggests that students might use the catchphrases from iconic characters in their own speech, the observation and data collection process also focused on identifying such expressions in students' performances. The results of this part of the investigation are shown in **table 17**.

**Table 17** reflects that no catchphrases were used by students' in their spontaneous oral or written productions. These results serve to prove the fourth hypothesis of this research paper to be wrong. Therefore, it can be concluded from **tables 15 and 16** that students identify and comprehend the catchphrases used by the iconic characters and are able to relate them to the name of the character and series. However, they do not feel tempted to make them part of the acquired range of vocabulary and expressions in English they use to communicate in their own reality.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

This study attempted to measure to what extent students' watching popular American or British TV series contribute to the natural acquisition of English Language. Conclusions were drawn on five key points: usage of slang vocabulary and colloquial expressions, acquisition of single lexical items or whole phrases, usage of colloquial expressions with social connotations, usage of colloquial expressions with dialectical variations, and repetition of catchphrases from iconic characters.

**Slang vocabulary and colloquial expressions:** If we go over the analysis of the data in tables 1 to 7, we will find that students use slang terms, colloquial language, idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs and even dirty words, in their natural productions. According to OUP author Tony Grice, dirty words are excluded from formal ESL material, and idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs are included, but in a reduced proportion. As Algiers suggested, introducing fragments of TV shows in English lessons is a good way to face students with the excessive use of idioms in everyday English. Additionally, the results in table 9 illustrate that the participants regularly spend an average of 3 hours watching series in English. All things considered, the results seem to suggest that students might have picked up slang terms, colloquial expressions, phrasal verbs, dirty words, and idiomatic expressions from watching TV shows.

Krashen's input + 1 theory claims that ESL students need to be exposed to a level of input which is higher to their own level of acquired knowledge, so that they can keep on with their process of learning. The results show that many of the expressions the participants have

acquired and use regularly do not correspond to the contents commonly included in ESL material. Hence, the students' exposure to real language from TV shows might represent their share of Input + 1.

**Acquisition of single lexical items and whole phrases:** The results expressed in tables 10 and 11 illustrate that the participants have responded more positively to the acquisition of the single words they hear in TV shows than to the repetition of whole phrases. Although the opposite was initially hypothesized, the fact that the participants have actually used appropriately both linguistic instruments from TV shows in their own productions, is sufficient proof that the Input + 1 acquisition process has occurred.

**Usage of colloquial expressions with social connotations:** The data in table 12 reveals that students copy from TV shows many words which carry social connotations. The analysis of the students' productions and their context also confirms their intention of giving the words such negative connotations. This throws some light on how the real material acquisition process does not only operate by transmitting knowledge of the language, but also of the negative connotation a word is given by a certain social context.

**Usage of colloquial expressions with dialectical variations:** Table 13 portrays that students do copy from TV series expressions with dialectical variations. A vast majority of American expressions over the British ones was shown in the results. However, both of them appeared in their productions, which resulted in hybrid produce of American and British English, Queen's English from ESL books, and a mixture of American, British and Argentine culture.

**Repetition of catchphrases from iconic characters:** As shown in table 14, the participants were able to acknowledge many catchphrases from iconic TV characters in their answers to the survey. However, none of them have actually used those catchphrases spontaneously in their productions, during the data collection period. This indicates that students identify and understand the catchphrases, but have not incorporated them as part of their productions.

Overall, it can be concluded that students' watching popular American and British TV series does contribute to the natural acquisition of English Language. Firstly, because it represents the Input + 1 mentioned by Krashen, as the material is intended for native speakers of English, and not learners. Secondly, because it provides students with both, single words and whole expressions which are not included in textbooks. Finally, because it does not only introduce students with a foreign language, but also with its connotations and social contexts.

**Limitations:** It was felt that the data collection period might not have been sufficiently long as regards the finding of catchphrases in students' productions. Some teachers claimed that they had actually heard their students use catchphrases in previous situations. However, this did not occur during the data collection period. It was presumed that, having the process been longer or more exhaustive, the results in this area might have been different. Consequently, further study on the matter is recommended.

Furthermore, a small number of participants were part of this study. It is believed that more interesting and conclusive results might be achieved if a larger scale study was conducted.

Finally, it would be interesting to analyse a native speaker's reaction to the participants' use of expressions with a dialectical meaning and cultural connotations. Hence, it is suggested that further studies on this matter are developed in the future.

**Implications for education:** The present study illustrates how students receive their share of input + 1 in their free time, in a different environment to the English classroom. It might be useful for teachers to take advantage of this situation for various reasons:

Firstly, considering that students watch series as a hobby, it would be beneficial if teachers implemented these resources in class, as it would increase students' level of motivation. Asking students to retell a chapter of their favorite series in class, for example, may motivate the student to speak, and the rest of the class to listen.

Secondly, teachers can take advantage of the expressions that students learn from series. A data collection process, similar to the one in this study could be carried out, and the results could be shared with the whole class, in order to make the new vocabulary reach all the participants.

Finally, if expressions with a negative connotation or cultural context came up in class, that situation might represent a good starting point for teachers to address topics such as bullying, discrimination and national identity.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Survey:**

1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Gender: Female \_\_\_\_\_ / male: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Do you watch series in English?

Yes

No

4) If so, what nationality are the series you watch?

American

British

other (mention nationality) \_\_\_\_\_

5) What audio option do you choose when you watch series in English?

Original language (English)

Spanish dubbing

6) If you choose to listen to the original English audio, do you choose to read the subtitles?

Yes

No

7) If you choose to read the subtitles, which option do you choose?

Spanish subtitles

English subtitles

8) If you choose to watch series with English subtitles, do you find it easy to understand the storyline?

Always

frequently

sometimes

Never

9) If you watch series with English subtitles, do you:

a) Find it easy to guess the meaning of new words from the context

b) Write down words or expressions you do not know and check their meaning later

c) Ignore new words and phrases

10) How often do you watch series in English?

Never

hardly ever

sometimes

very frequently

always

11) How many days a week do you watch series in English?

\_\_\_\_\_ Days a week

12) How many hours a day do you spend watching series in English?

\_\_\_\_\_ hours a day

13) How long have you been studying English formally?

\_\_\_\_\_

14) How long have you been watching series in English?

\_\_\_\_\_

15) Do you think any of the series you have watched has introduced (a) character/s which can be classified as "iconic"?

Yes

No

16) If so, can you specify which character(s) they were?

Iconic character

Series

17) Can you associate a characteristic phrase to any of these characters?

Yes

No

18) If you chose Yes in (15), can you specify which they were?

Series

character

catchphrase

19) Can you name the most relevant series in English you have ever watched?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20) Are you currently watching a series in English?

Yes

No

21) If so, which one?

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