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**TV SERIES AND AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
LEARNING**

Campina Grande

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao Departamento de Letras e Artes da Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB), em cumprimento as exigências e normas para a obtenção do título de Licenciatura Plena em Letras – Habilitação em Língua Inglesa.

Orientador: Prof. Esp. Paulo Alberto Marques.

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TV SERIES AND AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Daniely Alves de Sousa¹**ABSTRACT**

This current paper deals with the development of autonomy through Situational Comedies, Sitcoms, a specific kind of American TV Show, watched by many different people in the whole world as a way of entertainment. Thus, this research aimed to analyze how useful Sitcoms may be as a tool to promote autonomy in English as Foreign Language Learning. To achieve this purpose, we utilized as main theory support, Little (2003) related to autonomy in learning, Leah (2012) regarding linguistic and cultural aspects contained in Sitcoms, and Hložková (2013) concerning the use of Sitcoms in learning process. We selected four participants that have contact with Sitcoms for a while, and we presented to them two questionnaires; the first one related to linguistic aspects and the second concerning to cultural aspects which could be learned. As results, we noticed, the four students could arouse their interest to use Sitcoms with a view of learning because they could find the requested aspects and reflect in the moments they perceived that they were learning English as well. We believe that they develop consciousness about the use of Sitcoms in the learning process, helping them on studies in the foreign language learning.

Keywords: Sitcoms. English. Autonomy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, internet makes language learning easier, as well as helps to construct an autonomous learner because it offers some accessible tools which are very useful, such as TV series. This kind of video entertainment can provide many facilities to guide students in the learning process, since the contact with this material involves students in the culture, authentic language and daily conversations.

The development of this research was based in my personal involvement with Sitcoms. It helped me develop my English as Foreign Language. Also, I noticed that some students of English watched Sitcoms, but did not realized that they could use it to develop their autonomy in English studies.

For these reasons the objective of this term paper is to analyze how useful Sitcoms may be as a tool to promote autonomy in English as Foreign Language (EFL). In addition, as a

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specific objective verify the linguistics benefits which may be achieved by watching Sitcoms, also to identify the cultural Knowledge which may be developed through Sitcoms.

So, this work provides specific analyzes utilizing episodes of TV series, considering what students can learn through this, specifying some important points, such as linguistic and cultural ones, in order to consider while watching Sitcoms, that it will help students to understand what exactly they will learn. This way, learners can understand and see beyond the situations presented on Sitcoms, and discover that it can be more just than a hobby or just to have fun.

Some TV series, Sitcoms, provide many benefits to the learning process due to the short duration of the episodes, the presence of humor and a simple and colloquial vocabulary. So, with time, it can be helpful in order to build an autonomous learning which may lead students to become more aware of the studying process, helping teachers to guide students to the construction of knowledge. This way, Grote (1983, p.11) reinforces this comment about sitcoms:

The sit-com on television is in fact something new. It is a powerful and popular form of entertainment. It has developed much by accident, growing from small ideas and encouraged by the unique economic conditions of American broadcasting. Most of us have watched it all our lives, and for the most part we have taken it for granted as the most available and least demanding of the many forms of comedy.... In less than thirty years it [appeared], tested some variations, settled on its basic rules, and perfected its form. In the process, it has overturned more than two thousand years of comic traditions and established an entirely new and unique form of comedy.

That is why sitcoms is a good source of culture and day by day linguistic features of Americans, helping the learner to come closer, intimate of the language they want to learn. Also, this kind of material offers support in many aspects to help learners and even teachers in the process of leaning inside and outside the classroom.

First, to occur learning process with this audio-visual resource, students need to search for specific materials that are interesting and meaningful for them. Thus, the process will be more efficient because students will not wait entirely for the teacher in order to learn a foreign language, and students have to search for something that interests them because learning can happen more easily.

[...] The connection with a learner's personal development determines the meaningfulness of new knowledge. If learning is not perceived by a learner to be meaningful, it is less likely to be incorporated into his or her internal

schemes. It might be learned and remembered, but not become part of a learner's internal representation of the world. [...] (REINDERS, 2013, p.41)

As Reinders (2013) says, if learning is not related to the personal interest of the student, knowledge will not be involved on their internal link with the world. Learning is better absorbed when the material involves real and concrete events, making part with student's social world.

By the use of the TV Series, the learner can develop the listening skill, primarily, in a certain level of comprehension of the target language. Consequently, learners turn to be integrated with it, by the culture and linguistics aspects, which were chosen to the analysis in this paper, because we consider these aspects important points for the learning process.

Besides, they become autonomous learners, carrying what they are studying outside the classroom. Autonomy in a sense that “[...] includes the notion of interdependence, that is, being responsible for one's own conduct in the social context: being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways [...]” (KOHONEN 1992, p. 19; *apud*, BENSON 2001, p. 14).

By doing this, these students can develop their skills and increase their knowledge in the target language being autonomous learners. This term paper aims to show EFL learners that these video stimuli can be useful to learn at home. This research, is organized like the follow: Methodology, Literature review and the analyzes of the data, a Reflection on learning autonomy through Sitcoms, Linguistic and Cultural aspects.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to make this term paper possible we are going to describe the methodological approach of this research.

This paper is characterized as a case study that “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events-such as individual life cycles, small group behavior [...]” (YIN, 2009, p. 4). For these reasons, this term paper is classified as a qualitative research that makes [...] the researcher inevitably dives deep into the subject or phenomenon under study [...] (TAVALLAEI *et all*, 2010, p.571).

We selected four participants, Arabella, Lucius, Refia and Clarice (It is not their real names, the participants choose these pseudonyms). They are university students that studies English as a Foreign Language. This group was chosen because they have, for a while, contact with TV series, watching it as a hobby at home. They can indeed learn from it more than just

words, but complete sentences, expressions and cultural things of American day by day. In the table below we present a brief profile of the participants of this research:

Table 1: Profile of the participants

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| PARTICIPANT A– Arabella | She is a Major student of <i>Universidade Estadual da Paraíba</i> and she is twenty-two years old. She studies English and teaches in an extracurricular course of the same university. She has had contact with TV series for six years. |
| PARTICIPANT B – Lucius | He is a Major student of English at <i>Universidade Estadual da Paraíba</i> and he is twenty-four years old. He has had contact with TV series for eight years. |
| PARTICIPANT C – Refia | She is a Major student of English at <i>Universidade Estadual da Paraíba</i> and she is twenty-two years old. She has had contact with TV series for seven years. |
| PARTICIPANT D – Clarice | She is a Major student of English at <i>Universidade Estadual da Paraíba</i> and she is twenty years old. She has had contact with TV series for six years. |

Table produced by the author.

Through the research of authentic materials, video stimuli like: Modern family and How I Met your Mother, two aspects were analyzed in order to demonstrate that through this material, learners can become autonomous in the learning process. One benefit of this kind of TV show is that it is easily found on the internet.

In order to collect data, we made questionnaires (APPENDIX A to H), in which the participants had to answer about their English learning comprehension while watching episodes of the Sitcoms Modern Family and How I Met Your Mother (HIMYM). In the first three questions of each questionnaire, they answered about English Learning Comprehension. In order to obtain linguistics aspects, we selected episodes from Modern Family as the following: Season one, episodes three and ten, season two, episodes four and six and season three episode ten. In addition, to obtain cultural aspects, we choose episodes from HIMYM as the following: Season one, episodes one, six and twenty, season two, episode eleven, and season three episode nine. For a better organization to this analyzes we preferred to focus on each aspect of a specific Sitcom, both of TV series can be used to learn linguistic and cultural aspects.

The episodes selected have specific cultural and linguistic elements which are considered for us, important to participants know about them, that is why we choose the mentioned episodes.

In the next section, we present the mainly theories that helped us to write this research, exposing the following topics: Autonomy in foreign language learning, the use of TV series in English Learning and Linguistic and Cultural aspects through Sitcoms.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this current section, we expose the theory related to autonomy in English learning, the principal authors that explain and defines autonomy in the process of learning a foreign language.

3.1 *Autonomy in foreign language learning*

Developing a better way to learn is a challenge, and in some cases people do not have the necessary conditions to make this happen. Instead of waiting for some support, many people search for learning by themselves, being responsible for their own knowledge, in a situation that the “[...] learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions[.]” (DICKINSON, 1987 *apud*, MENEZES, 2005, p. 1). Therefore, teachers play an important role, because they can make important decisions, helping students become aware of the work they have to do, and promoting in learners the engagement needed for learning (WANG, 2011).

Menezes (2005, p. 1) states the importance of learners seek for autonomy, and just wait by the material that others gave to them, being free to choose the area that wants to learn:

[...] However, hardly ever will language learners be able to make and implement all the decisions concerning their learning. They will, at least, depend on material written by somebody else. It seems that such concepts can represent the highest degree of autonomy, the one which enables the learner to choose what, how and when to learn, without the constraints of formal educational. This idea is also present in Crabbe’s (1993) ideological argument: “the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices as in other areas, and not become a victim (even an unwitting one) of choices made by social institutions.

Nowadays, in order to learn a foreign language, people find many ways to achieve this purpose, and the alternatives are bigger, likewise the chances to be autonomous. TV shows, songs, games, etc., can help in this process, with all these resources available, people have the possibility to learn by themselves, and choose something related to their own personal wish. More than this, to be autonomous is important because students will grow as a more conscious learner. For example, if the methodology and the material, do not match the student's wish, he/she may find another way to improve knowledge.

All the process of building knowledge needs essentially effort of the student but as Reinders (2013, p. 47) states, "[...] this alone is not sufficient. They need to be aware of this process and need to pro-actively take responsibility for creating the opportunities that allow them to learn as they see fit". The consciousness of this process and the search for opportunities to learn is very important, however, students need to understand what they are doing: "they must know what they are reading and how they can better comprehend the text" (CAMPBELL, 1994, p.6). That is why is important for students search for a good material that fit in his/her personal wish.

The route to become autonomous in learning is varied and extensive, so, we should pay attention in many facts that involves the process of acquiring a foreign language, in order to transform each step to construct the information in the target language. To reinforce this question, Little (2003, p.1) shows two arguments in favor of developing learners' autonomy, defining possibilities that could influence or represent the main causes in this question:

There are two general arguments in favor of trying to make autonomous learners. First, if they are reflectively engaged with their learning, it is likely to be more efficient and effective, because more personal and focused, than otherwise; in particular, what is learned in educational contexts is more likely to serve learners wider agendas. Second, if learners are proactively committed to their learning, the problem of motivation is by definition solved; although they may not always feel entirely positive about all aspects of their learning, autonomous learners have developed the reflective and attitudinal resources to overcome temporary setbacks motivational (...)

Students also have to make a relation between what they learn in the classroom and out of the classroom, because they need to perform the more adequate way for their own learning, to make learning happens into their own context, following their life style, being a learner that will improve his/her knowledge by the use of his/her effort achieving their purpose in learning.

In conclusion, learners have many possibilities to progress in a foreign language, but it is not recommended to do this alone, so teachers have a part on this responsibility promoting

and encouraging students into the process, stimulating them to be autonomous. For this reason, it is also important to make students aware about the work they are developing to have a more successful learning.

The next section we explain the importance of the use of TV series in English Learning.

3.2 *The use of TV Series in English Learning*

Some resources may help our learning development and make it more motivating, for instance, we may mention the TV series. Moreover, this type of material brings to the learner a lot of elements, as Wilson (2000, p. 1) states: "Video provides visual internal and external stimuli such as the environment and this can lead to and generate prediction, speculation and a chance to activate background schemata when viewing the visual scene reenacted".

There are some benefits that are completely relevant, like the contact with the authentic language presented in a contextualized way. Students keep in contact with this for 30 minutes (depending on the TV series), and since this time is not so long, the learners can understand many aspects just in the first time that he/she sees it, like the environment and people habits. This may help students to understand a little bit how to work the culture of the target language, based on this, Hlozková (2013, p.20) states, "if we want to learn the English language we have to learn about cultures of English speaking countries."

TV series can also improve learner's background knowledge on the target language, making learners more confident in their communication because they have contact with culture, slangs and colloquial language. Another fact is that this kind of audio-visual resource deals with real conditions and speeches of people's day by day, so students can get closer to words' and sentences' right pronunciation, thus they may also comprehend better because it is presented in a contextualized way. Arthur (1999, p.1, *apud* WILSON, 2000) explains some other benefits:

Video can give students realistic models to imitate for role-play; can increase awareness of other cultures by teaching appropriate and suitability; can strengthen audio/visual linguistic perceptions simultaneously; can widen the classroom repertoire and range of activities; can help use the latest technology to facilitate language learning; can teach direct observation of the paralinguistic features found in association with the target language; can be used to help when training students in ESP related scenarios and language; can offer the visual reinforcement of the target language and can lower anxiety when practicing the skill of listening.

Therefore, linguistic aspects are also presented to learners by watching, they have a chance to study language intensively (Curriculum Corporation, n.d.a., *apud*: BRANDT,

2005), they can build a large vocabulary; can see the words presented in many different dialogs, and, as cited before, in many contexts of real life. Students may internalize words and phrases entirely and, consequently, may be able to use in a real conversation correctly, being more autonomous when speaking, because they will be able to create new language by themselves.

We believe that listening may be one of the language skills, which will probably be improved, developed through the use of TV series. This type of material is a rich resource for this skill, because it provides students "different accents, different voice qualities, different background noises" (MARKS, 2000, *apud* BRANDT, 2005 p.1), and they can analyze these aspects, internalize and practice by themselves, developing their listening in a proper way.

There are so many other contributions of this type of video source for the language learner, which has in his/her hands the large source of knowledge. But, it is important to notice that the way TV series are used is what makes the difference in terms of learning a foreign language. To summarize this idea, we present now a list of eight benefits according to Shen (2005, p.3):

Advantages of using video materials include but are not limited to the following: (1) providing both audio and visual internal and external stimuli; (2) rendering accessible the gestures, facial expressions and body language of native speakers in the TL; (3) presenting real language in use (accents, gender and dialect differences ... and so forth) and real-life social interaction in culturally authentic contexts; (4) offering the context for learning even for students with limited reading and writing ability; (5) applicable for group study or individual self-study; (6) film conventions such as characters, plot development, and story capable of stimulating and engaging language learners; (7) being able to provide valuable cultural information and to sensitize students to cultural differences; and (8) videos being able to be manipulated, like segmentation and repeated viewings, for various instructional purposes.

As we can see, there are many advantages using sitcoms in order to learn a foreign language and become autonomous in the process of learning. The similar situational language, enable students to be involved more closely with various ways of speaking in the target culture, also through the environmental characters and some repetitions of speaking provide students the development of the listening skill, this way, learners have contact with a vast knowledge to develop their skills in the foreign language.

To conclude, there are many benefits in watching some videos in English when [we](#) are learning a foreign language, but, there are implications, students have to be aware about their own learning, in order to facilitate it. Students have to pay attention to what type of video is more interesting for them, because they can understand better when something call [his/her](#)

attention, this way, we believe TV series can be a good way to develop language learning, we just need to fit it to our own style.

3.3 Cultural and Linguistic aspects through Sitcoms.

When it comes to learning linguistic and cultural aspects through Sitcoms, we cannot help mentioning technology in this process. Technology comes as an important tool to facilitate learning through sitcoms. Students, sometimes do not have access to real contact with native speakers and cultural environment in which the language is spoken, so, technology facilitates it, making students closer to the language that they want to learn.

Our translation: “Through the multimedia it has a new structure of how to present, demonstrate and structure the information seized. The computer, by text, image and sound interrupts the author / reader relationship that is clearly defined in a book, it goes to a higher level, reconfiguring the way it is treated this relationship. The interactivity provided by multimedia applications can help both on task of teaching and learning”. (SOUSA and CARVALHO, 2011. p. 27)²

This way, technology assists on the process of comprehension of images and sounds, facilitating the relation between information and student. Also, helps students to interrelates all the different forms of language, such as, visual, musical, written and spoken, making students comprehend their acquired knowledge as a group of elements that function as only one, and not just as single pieces of elements. Learning becomes easier to understand when we involve different types of languages stimulus.

Watching videos in English is an example of input of different languages stimulus. When we develop a habit to watch some videos with the audio in English, such as TV series, more directly sitcoms, it is perceived a great development in listening and lexical vocabulary. One of this increase is linguistic; students are dealing with the language spoken in almost natural sense. As Leah (2012, p. 97) affirms: “Linguistically, sitcoms not only enable but also encourage the learner to observe the language and enrich their vocabulary from an “intensely verbal form of television”.

²Através da multimídia tem-se uma nova estruturação de como apresentar, demonstrar e estruturar a informação apreendida. O computador mediante texto, imagem e som interrompe a relação autor / leitor que é claramente definida num livro, passa para um nível mais elevado, reconfigurando a maneira de como é tratada esta relação. A interatividade proporcionada pelos aplicativos multimídias pode auxiliar tanto na tarefa de ensinar quanto na de aprender. (SOUSA *et all*, 2011. p. 27)

This kind of authentic material, which brings contextualized speeches, may increase motivation to study the foreign language, due to the fact that learners feel more comfortable knowing the environment that language is used. Perceiving and distinguishing words they hear, even if they do not know how to write it, but can understand the meaning through the audio and context in which they are involved on a specific scene speech. So, this way, Leah (2012, p. 98) says that:

Thanks to watching sitcoms, learners encounter various customs, attitudes, beliefs and ways of life; furthermore, they can compare and contrast the culture of English speaking countries with the culture of their mother tongue. Due to learning more about the culture of English speaking country, learners become to understand the language's links to its culture.

So, by watching Sitcoms, the contact with culture is significant. In order to understand the target language, comprehend beliefs, attitudes, customs, helps creating links with are being spoken and which context they are to act like that and to pronounce certain types of vocabularies.

As it was mentioned on this research, students can develop their linguistic skill, and their cultural perception by watching sitcoms, also through this process may construct autonomous learning. Also, we have to consider that books and teachers have their importance in the learning process. In the next section, we present our analyzes on the implications of Sitcoms about linguistic and cultural aspects in order to develop autonomy in English.

4. REFLECTION ON LEARNING AUTONOMY THROUGH SITCOMS – LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

In this section, we first present the view of participants about learning through Sitcoms, in which part of the episodes they found difficult or easier to understand language. In a second moment, we present the aspects that the participants had to find out while watching the selected episodes. Thus, in order to do this, we choose for linguistic aspects, some episodes of Modern Family, and related to Culture, episodes of HIMYM. Because, students had to pay attention on theses aspects, they could internalize information in a more conscious way, to thereby, construct a certain level of autonomy in English Learning.

4.1 *Learning through Sitcoms – View of Participants*

The view of participants about learning through Sitcoms, are subjective, so each one has a point of view about this question. However, their speeches about it are interrelated because they have some characteristics in common.

Related to the question one of our questionnaires (see APPENDIX A to H the first questions), the participants answered about the moment they think they are learning English, so, as we can perceive on the speech of Arabella: *“Focusing on Character’s daily basis conversations as well as episodes with traditional festivals and celebrations. Also by paying attention to new vocabulary”*, and Clarice: *“During all the episodes, through daily conversations”*, we can reinforce the idea of the characteristics of the Sitcoms that brings to student’s daily conversations, this facilitates comprehension in English. As Hlozková (2013, p.14) says that Sitcoms offers this support in a “sense of achievement connected with exposure to the authentic language”.

Lucius, gives another perspective, that when we get involved with the character’s life, their routine, own vocabulary and forms to express, can also help on the process of absorbing information: *“From episode 2 you get to be familiar with the series, to understand the story and the characters”*. So, with time, understanding how each character’s act, may contribute to storing knowledge as Hlozková (2013, p.4) states “a major factor in motion picture and theatrical drama is that the events portray the most important thing to happen in the protagonist's life”.

Sometimes things related to culture can be difficult to understand, but some tips given by the characters help us to comprehend things that for us are not that common, let’s see what Arabella said about it: *“Sometimes new nouns or cultural facts spoken are new, but easily understood since therefore besides the language the images and physical expressions”*. So, by the real social life interaction of Americans played by the characters in authentic contexts offers support to help students comprehend language even if these students have limited reading and writing abilities (WILSON, 2000). This same situation also happens when occur repetition: Refia: *“When The characters make use of terms or expressions that I do not Know, in different moments of an episode or in more than one episode, it becomes easier to me to memorize and learn new vocabulary”*.

In question two, the participants answered about when they think that are having a clear comprehension of the language. It is almost the same situation in question one, but in this case,

students pay more attention to the aspects they are familiarized with such as words, culture, daily conversations and common topics. We can see on the excerpts hereafter: Arabella: *“While characters are having daily conversations is easy to comprehend because the vocabulary used during these situations is already familiar to me”*. Lucius: *“For the Known culture aspects, it facilitates understanding of the language”*; Refia: *“Mostly when the characters talk about a common topic and do not make use of slangs”*, Clarice: *“When they use words and expressions I know, but also when I understand a new word through the context”*.

We can perceive many aspects in common in the speeches of the four participants. They believe that they are having a clear comprehension when they have some familiarity with something that happens in the episode. They agree with this, maybe because when we have the habit in watching Sitcoms, with time we tend more easily, to understand and store some vocabulary, expressions and phrases spoken in daily routine. All these points reinforce Arthur’s (1999 *apud* WILSON, 2000) ideas that learner can get confidence in English learning because they are exposed to the culture, slangs and Americans daily routine, being close to real conditions of speeches. They link Americans speeches with their own colloquial language, the way they speak informally with people, this makes students gain confidence and internalize more linguistic and cultural aspects from the Sitcoms.

Furthermore, participants gave their opinion on question three related to the moments that they could perceive they have difficulties to understand. We have to clarify that there will be moments in which difficulties appear while watching some scenes of videos in English, but this makes part of the learning process. Most part of the difficulties found out by the participants was when characters talk about culture, slangs, regional people and some internal jokes. The students affirm this in the following passages, Arabella: *“Usually during references to national bands, songs, places and people”*, Lucius: *“When characters have their own slangs, it difficult a little understanding of some vocabularies”*, Refia: *“When the characters emit opinions or give examples, or even make jokes about cultural information, that are more likely to people that live in the U.S.A.”* Clarice: *“When they speak words I don’t know or slangs and expressions related to their culture”*.

These things are difficulty to understand for outsiders. The same thing happens when a foreigner comes to Brazil and takes time to comprehend regional words, slangs, because these things are related to culture, their own habits. But, *“there are times when characters talk about objects they are holding or pointing to, so the images allied to the conversations make the whole situation easier to assimilate”* (Arabella). As Arabella says, with time we assimilate better this cultural concepts by the way they present to the viewer, making easier to assimilate. This

cultural awareness is so important, because students become conscious to cultural differences, making contrast with their own culture, as Shen (2005) affirms. And knowing these cultural facts students are able to make language links with the target culture, facilitating the comprehension of some vocabularies built in a different context that sometimes students never saw before the TV Series (LEAH, 2012).

To conclude, all the participants have similar thoughts about learning through Sitcoms. They agree that day by day conversations and situational events happened on these episodes, help them to comprehend language more clearly. So, linguistic and cultural aspects, with time are assimilated by them creating a store of knowledge to develop skills, like listening in more comfortable way. In the next section, we present the linguistic and cultural aspects found by the participants.

4.2 *Autonomy through linguistic and cultural aspects – Sitcoms*

In this section, we present the aspects found by the four participants while they watched the episodes. As we explained in the methodology, the participants had to pay attention in some aspects in order to answer the questionnaires. These aspects are described on tables.

Firstly, we reflect on the linguistics aspects the participants found in the episodes. Arabella got many vocabularies such as: Garbage, plain, diaper, Christmas etc. These words she could internalize and understand by the context. The meanings of some words are sometimes related to culture, like the Colombian tradition “*Inocente*”, “*which some one plays tricks on another at Christmas*”. Phonetically, she could perceive the difference between Manny, a proper name, and the word money, both words are misunderstood by the Colombian character, Gloria, of the Sitcom *Modern Family*.

We can join this capacity of comprehension of these words with the question of autonomy that Arabella could learn from Sitcoms. In this context and moment, she could be responsible for her own learning (DIKINSON, 1987, p.1, *apud* MENEZES). We believe this because of the aspects and explanation she gave like in the following exert: “*Elephant in the room: Awkward and silent situations, happens for unresolved matters*”. Beyond the learning of separate words, the acquisition of expressions is also expressive in their answer. These expressions found on the situation in the Sitcoms are commonly used in day-by-day speeches, and this can help students to understand better the way native’s speakers use the language and if she travels abroad these expressions would help her to socialize better.

Differently from Arabella, Refia could get another vocabulary of the same episodes such as: Wrestle, dismay, lackluster, condor etc. This show us that the student can “learn as they see fit” (REINDENS, 2013). Each student focused on things that called their attention, this way learning is motivated by their personal wishes, making they internalizing knowledge more naturally. Related to cultural questions, both students could get almost the same thing, like: “*Inocente*”, Christmas’ tradition in Colombia. But she perceived another aspect: Costco, an American wholesale corporation. These aspects call their attention because sometimes it is in these points that the principal topic of the episode is centered. Phonetically she could perceive the difference between Cam, a proper name, and Cam of Camera.

Related to vocabulary contrasting Arabella, Refia and Clarice (Lucius did not answer this part), each one took different vocabularies, as we said before, each student perceives words that call their attention the most, that’s why it differs almost in all words presented by them, it goes to phonetics aspects, also. But when we talk about the semantic aspect this changes a little, because the strong themes of the episodes like, *Quicenera* and *Inocente*, Colombian traditions, were cited for the three participants, because these themes control the situation presented in the episode.

In the table below we exhibit the linguistic aspect found by the participants while watching the episodes of the Sitcom Modern Family.

Table 2: Linguistics aspects found by the four participants in episodes from the Sitcom Modern Family.

| LINGUISTIC ASPECTS | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| PARTICIPANTS | MODERN FAMILY | | |
| | Vocabulary | Semantic/Meaning | Phonetically |
| Arabella | Garbage; plain; diaper; Christmas; sweater; caroler; real state; party; bike shorts; holiday; law firm; costume; turkey; attic; tape. | <u>Snob</u> : person who dislike lower-class people/things; <u>Inocente</u> : Colombian tradition in which a person plays tricks on another at Christmas; <u>Quicenera</u> : Colombian celebration launched for fifteen year girls. <u>House of horrors</u> : thematic decoration of Dunphy’s house of Halloween. <u>Elephant in the room</u> : Ackward and silent situations, happens for | The way Gloria pronounces Manny’s sound like money; Burrito ‘Burrato’ (Jay’s line of 12 min); ‘Kay’ (English name) are Que? (Spanish word); Drop out (phrasal verb) dropout (adjective); Luke (name) Look (verb); Four to five/forty-five. |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|--|--|
| | | unresolved matters between people. | |
| Lucius | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| Refia | Wrestle; Costco; hick; dismay; caroling group; lackluster; candor; twitch; gasping; spare; gargoyle; booze; toiletry; snatch; attic; rack. | <u>Costco</u> : An American wholesale corporation; <u>Inocente</u> : Christmas' tradition in Colombia; <u>Quinceñera</u> : The Colombian 15 th birthday celebration for girls; <u>Quasimodo</u> : The protagonist of The Hunch Back of Notre-Dame; <u>Douglas – fir</u> : It is an evergreen conifer species. | Cam/Cam (era) Fool/full Phil in/ fill in Gargle/ gargoyle; carpool; car pull; Luke/look |
| Clarice | Aerodynamic; Glorifier; tackling; spin class; estoga; Teasing; drop out drop off; I am a pusher; attach. | The idea of step sister and family; Innocent's tradition and Natal's Difference; <u>Quicenera</u> ; Halloween; Express Christmas. | Phil and Feel; In Phil in; Drop out drop of and Jesus and Cheeses; Look and Luke. |

Table produced by the author

Regarding cultural aspects, Arabella, explained many important cultural aspects such as: “*The Halloween festivities, its costumes and the way people celebrate (e.g. if you are Kid you can go door-to-door asking people for candy)*”; “*The prom night is an important event for high school seniors, the way they dress, the place for the party (school), the way they behave*”. These American cultural habits became known for many people, and even influencing other people from other nationalities to adopt somehow these habits. Brazil is one example, some people adapted the idea and use, for example, the Halloween decoration to give parties. Related to the Prom night, some Brazilian schools also get the idea and makes a snippet of this American tradition, is also very known in here.

Lucius brought to us the question of: “*Find friends in bars to talk or meet new people*”. This aspect is interesting because show how some Americans like to meet people in bars and snack bars, even if they do not drink they go to eat and watch, football games, baseball etc. By knowing this, student is consciously of some vocabularies proper of the place. Like how to call the waiter if they go there, how important it is to American people to be polite in such situation.

Another important cultural aspect found by the participants was the tradition of Thanksgiving, like in the answer of Refia: “*Thanksgiving celebration*”. The atmosphere of the episode shows how this event is important to Americans. Also, Arabella observed this tradition while watching: “*Thanksgiving parades broadcasted on TV, typical food (turkey is mandatory!), spending the day with family and friends*”. We can point out how detailed is the explanation especially when she says that Turkey is mandatory, a strong cultural mark. But the participants also paid attention in a common American behavior, as we can see in Clarice words: “*Ted lives with his friends*”. An interesting fact is that most adults American (in this case the principal character of the Sitcom) before marriage, they live with their friends, when they finish college, sometimes, they do not come back home, they prefer to live with friends. That is why “Sitcoms familiarize learners with a target culture's sites, authentic discourse, native speakers' lives, and their social behaviors” (LEAH, 2012).

The cultural aspects found by the participants that was used in the analyzes is presented in the table below:

Table 3: Cultural Aspects found by the four participants in episodes from the Sitcom HIMYM.

| CULTURAL ASPECTS | |
|-------------------------|---|
| PARTICIPANTS | HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER (HIMYM) |
| Arabella | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in apartments with college friends before getting married and forming family; • The Halloween festivities, its costumes and the way people celebrate (e.g. if you are Kid you can go door-to-door asking people for candy); • The prom night is an important event for high school seniors, the way they dress, the place for the party (school), the way they behave; • Christmas decoration, spending the day with family, carolers (Christmas choirs); • Thanksgiving parades broadcasted on TV, typical food (turkey is mandatory!), spending the day with family and friends. |
| Lucius | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find friends in bars to talk or meet new people; • The Halloween tradition passed from childhood to adulthood; • The cultural aspect of this episode is the Christmas tradition in family and with friends; • Meet with friends and family for thanksgiving. |
| Refia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement; date; friend’s reunion at a bar. • Halloween, Halloween costumes, party and competition; |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school prom, the preparations for marriage; • Christmas party, the use of message machine, breakup; • Thanksgiving celebration, date, breakup. |
| Clarice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted lives with his friends; • Halloween; • Marshal and Lily Wants a specific place to marry; • Christmas importance to the characters. |

Table produced by the author.

As we perceived observing the linguistic and cultural aspects of the four participants, all the data collected until here make us believe in the relevance of this research. In the following section, we present our final remarks related to this research.

5. FINAL REMARKS

The main objective of this paper was to analyze how helpful Sitcoms can be as a tool in order to promote autonomy in English as a Foreign Language Learning. Throughout the research we presented some episodes to four participants in order to make them pay attention to linguistic and cultural aspects, this way they could perceive that they can learn, and they can use it not just as a hobby but also to study English as a foreign language. The analyzes of the answers show us how important the use of Sitcoms may be useful not only to students but also to teachers in order to use it in classroom to develop student's autonomy.

With some opened questions, the participants answered about the moment they think they are learning English when watching the episodes and the answers showed us how conscious they were about learning. As we can see in Arabella's speech about the moment she thinks that is learning, she says that the images and physical expressions helped her in comprehension of the language, this confirms that the scenes and gestures presented in the video stimuli like Sitcoms really helps. She and the others participants expressed it in a clear way, specific points in the Sitcoms that learning is actually happening. This demonstrates how the answers were reflexive, this makes us believe that the participant could develop their consciousness related to learning through Sitcoms.

This research allowed these participants not only to perceive the moments that they learned and the aspects that they found, but also the consciousness that they could learn at home and not just waiting entirely for the teacher guidance, developing this way a certain level of autonomy. It is important to notice that students can learn if they are interested and like to watch

Sitcoms. The TV series have to fulfill the personal interest of the student in order to make learning more successful.

We believe that this work is relevant for the field of autonomy in English as foreign language learning because it presents how students can absorb information contained in TV series Sitcoms in a conscious way and, by this process, construct autonomy.

SÉRIES DE TV E AUTONOMIA EM ENGLÊS COMO LINGUA ESTRANGEIRA

RESUMO

O presente trabalho discorre sobre o desenvolvimento da autonomia através de Comédias Situacionais, *Sitcoms*, um gênero específico de TV Americana, assistida por diferentes pessoas no mundo inteiro como forma de entretenimento. Por essa razão, essa pesquisa tem por objetivo, analisar quão útil as *Sitcoms* podem ser na questão do desenvolvimento da autonomia em Língua estrangeira. Como apoio teórico utilizamos, Little (2003) no que diz respeito à autonomia no aprendizado, Leah (2012) relacionado aos aspectos linguísticos e culturais contidos nas *Sitcoms*, and Hložková (2013) que discorre sobre o uso de *Sitcoms* no processo de aprendizado. Selecionamos quatro estudantes que tem contato com seriados de TV por algum tempo, e apresentamos a eles dois questionários a fim de obter aspectos linguísticos e culturais que podem ser aprendidas. Como resultado, pudemos perceber que os quatro participantes puderam aguçar seu interesse no uso de *Sitcoms* em seu aprendizado, através dos aspectos encontrados, como também refletir nos momentos em que percebiam que o aprendizado se efetivava. Acreditamos que eles puderam desenvolver de maneira consciente sobre o uso desse tipo seriado no processo de aprendizagem podendo assim ajudá-los na aprendizagem da língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: Comédias Situacionais. Inglês. Autonomia.

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APPENDIX A – Arabella’s linguistic aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (Modern Family)

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?

Focusing on characters' daily basis conversations as well as episodes with traditional festivals and celebrations. Also by paying attention to new vocabulary and idioms.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?

While well known characters are talking to each other, it's usually easy to have a clear comprehension of the language content since I am already used to their voices and accents. Besides that there are times when characters talk about objects they are holding or pointing to, so the images allied to the conversations make

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?

Usually during references to national bands, songs, places and people. the whole situation easier to assume.

- Questions 4: Try to identify Vocabulary, Meaning and Phonetic aspects while watching the episodes.

4. What linguistics aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Aspects | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | Vocabulary | Semantic/Meaning | Phonetically |
| Temp 1; Ep 3 | garbage / plain / diaper | Snob: person who dislike lower-class people / things | The way Gloria pronounces 'Manny' sounds like money |
| Temp 1; Ep 10 | Christmas / sweater / caroler | innocent: Colombian tradition in which a person play tricks on another at Christmas | 'Burrito', 'Burrato' (Jay's line at 12min) |
| Temp 2; Ep 4 | Real state / party / bike shorts | quinceañera: Colombian celebration launched for fifteen year girls. | 'Kay' and Que? (English name) (Spanish word) |
| Temp 2; Ep 6 | Holiday / law firm / costume | House of horrors: Thematic decoration of Dunphy's house at Halloween! | drop out / dropout (adjective) (phrasal verb) |
| Temp 3; Ep 10 | Turkey / attic / tape | elephant in the room: awkward and silent situations / happens for people unresolved matters between people. | luke / Look (name) / (verb) four to five / forty-five |

APPENDIX B – Arabella’s cultural aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (How I Met Your Mother)

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?

Sometimes new ~~words~~^{nouns} or cultural facts spoken are new but easily understood since there are, besides the language, the images and physical expressions.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clear~~y~~ comprehension of the language?

While characters are having daily conversations is easy to comprehend ~~because~~^{because} the vocabulary used during these situations is already familiar to me.

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?

During the series episodes swearing is avoided, therefore other expressions are used to 'replace/represent' the bad words, these words are not well known by outsiders, so they are usually difficult to understand.

- Questions 4: Try to identify cultural aspects while watching the episodes.

4. What cultural aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Cultural Aspect |
|---------------|---|
| Temp 1; EP 1 | Living in apartments with college friends before getting married and forming a family. |
| Temp 1; Ep 6 | The Halloween festivities, its costumes and the way people celebrate (if you're a kid you can go door-to-door asking for candy). |
| Temp 1; Ep 20 | The prom night is important an important event for high school seniors, the way they dress, the place for the party (school) and the way they behave. |
| Temp 2; Ep 11 | Christmas decoration, spending the day with family, and carolers (christmas choirs). |
| Temp 3; Ep 9 | Thanksgiving parades broadcasted on TV, typical food (turkey is mandatory!), Spending the day with family and friends. |

APPENDIX C – Lucius’ linguistic aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (Modern Family)

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?

From episode 2 you get to be familiar with the series, to understand the story and the characters.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?

The audio series helps a lot to understand the history and the interpretation of the characters as well.

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?

In some episodes I did not know some vocabularies, for example, football and Christmas.

4. What linguistics aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Aspects | | |
|---------------|------------|------------------|--------------|
| | Vocabulary | Semantic/Meaning | Phonetically |
| Temp 1; Ep 3 | x | | x |
| Temp 1; Ep 5 | x | x | x |
| Temp 1; Ep 9 | | x | x |
| Temp 1; Ep 10 | x | | x |
| Temp 1; EP 11 | x | | x |
| Temp 2; Ep 1 | x | x | x |
| Temp 2; Ep 4 | | x | x |
| Temp 2; Ep 6 | | | x |
| Temp 3; Ep 10 | x | | x |
| Temp 3; Ep 11 | x | | x |

APPENDIX D – Lucius’ cultural aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (How I Met Your Mother)

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?

Gradually you realize that a lot of questions of the aspects are known, facilitates learning.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?

For the Known culture aspects facilitates understanding of the language.

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?

For the characters have their own slangs difficult a little understanding of some vocabularies

- Questions 4: Try to identify cultural aspects while watching the episodes.

4. What cultural aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Cultural Aspect |
|---------------|---|
| Temp 1; EP 1 | Find friends in bars to talk or meet new people |
| Temp 1; Ep 6 | The Halloween tradition passed from childhood to adulthood |
| Temp 1; Ep 20 | The tradition of graduation a tradition from high school to college |
| Temp 2; Ep 11 | The cultural aspect of this episode is the Christmas tradition in family and with friends |
| Temp 3; Ep 9 | Meet with friends and family for thanksgiving |

APPENDIX E – Refia’s linguistic aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (Modern Family)

M/M!

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?
Generally when a character makes a joke I find very intelligent ^{or funny}. It makes me want to learn it.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?
Mostly when the characters talk about a common topic and do not make use of many slangs.

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?
When the characters emit opinions or give examples or even make jokes, about cultural information that are more likely to people that live in the U.S. understand.

- Questions 4: Try to identify Vocabulary, Meaning and Phonetic aspects while watching the episodes.

4. What linguistics aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Aspects | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | Vocabulary | Semantic/Meaning | Phonetically |
| Temp 1; Ep 3 | wrestle, Costco, hick | Costco: an American wholesale corporation | like/flock Cam/corn (wa) |
| Temp 1; Ep 10 | dismay, carding group, backlist | Innocente, Christmas tradition in Colombia | fool/full |
| Temp 2; Ep 4 | condor, twitch, gasping | Quinceañera: the Colombian 15th birthday celebration for girls | Phil in / fill in |
| Temp 2; Ep 6 | spare, garage, booze, turkey | Quiximodo: the protagonist of the Dutch book of Latin | gangle / garage; carpet/carp |
| Temp 3; Ep 10 | snatch, attic, rack | Douglas-fir: it is an evergreen conifer species | like/flock |

APPENDIX F – Refia’s cultural aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (How I Met Your Mother)

Modern Family!!!

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.

1. What moment do you think you are learning English?
When the characters make use of terms or expressions that I do not know in different moments of an episode or in more than one episode, then it becomes easier to me to memorize and learn new vocabulary.

2. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?
When the characters do not talk so fast and when they are talking about topics I am already familiarized with.

3. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?
Mostly when they talk fast and use many phrasal verbs I am not get used to.

- Questions 4: Try to identify cultural aspects while watching the episodes.

HMMYM 4. What cultural aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Cultural Aspect |
|---------------|--|
| Temp 1; EP 1 | engagement; date; friends' reunion at a bar |
| Temp 1; Ep 6 | Halloween; Halloween costumes, party and competition |
| Temp 1; Ep 20 | High School prom; the preparations for marriage |
| Temp 2; Ep 11 | Christmas party; the use of message machine; breakup |
| Temp 3; Ep 9 | Thanksgiving celebration; date, breakup |

APPENDIX G – Clarice’s linguistic aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (Modern Family)

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.
5. What moment do you think you are learning English?
During all the episodes, through daily conversations.
6. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?
When they use words and expressions I know, but also when I understand a new word through the context.
7. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?
When they speak words I don’t know or slings and expressions related to their culture.
- Questions 4: Try to identify Vocabulary, Meaning and Phonetic aspects while watching the episodes.
8. What linguistics aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Aspects | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| | Vocabulary | Semantic/Meaning | Phonetically |
| Temp 1; Ep 3 | Aerodynamic | The idea of step sister and family | Look and Luke |
| Temp 1; Ep 10 | Glorifier | Innocent’s tradition and Nata’s Difference | Phil and Feel |
| Temp 2; Ep 4 | Tackling, spin class, estoga | Quiceneara | In Phil in |
| Temp 2; Ep 6 | Teasing, drop out drop off | Halloween | Drop out drop of and Jesus and Cheeses |
| Temp 3; Ep 10 | I am a pusher, attach | Express Christmas | Look and Luke |

APPENDIX H – Clarice’s cultural aspects

QUESTIONNAIRE (How I Met Your Mother)

- Questions 1, 2 and 3 after watching the episodes. Episodes described in question 4.
5. What moment do you think you are learning English?
During all the episodes, through daily conversations.
 6. What moment do you think you are having a clearly comprehension of the language?
When they use words and expressions I know, but also when I understand a new word through the context.
 7. What moment are you having difficulties to understand?
When they speak words I don’t know or slungs and expressions related to their culture
- Questions 4: Try to identify cultural aspects while watching the episodes.
8. What cultural aspects can you observe while watching the episodes?

| Episodes | Cultural Aspect |
|---------------|--|
| Temp 1; EP 1 | Ted lives with his friends |
| Temp 1; Ep 6 | Halloween |
| Temp 1; Ep 20 | Marshal and Lily Wants a specific place to marry |
| Temp 2; Ep 11 | Christmas importance to the characters |
| Temp 3; Ep 9 | The desire that they have to have sex with two girls |