

SITCOMS, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ACQUISITION



MARIJA KRSTVA

Sitcoms, Language and Culture Acquisition

**A Mixed-Methods Study of University Students in North
Macedonia and Poland**

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Foreword

Dr. Krsteva has presented a good argument for using American situation comedies as an adjunct for learning English as a second language. In this well documented book, she gives the reader a short lesson on the sitcom, including a discussion of the production style and the cultural values of this media format. She then takes the reader into a lengthy presentation of the academic understanding of language acquisition including Kramsch's views that language expresses one's cultural reality and Sapir-Worf's idea that the language one uses influences the thoughts one thinks. The author adeptly shows that the use of language in sitcoms supports these ideas. Next Dr. Krsteva explores how sitcoms relate to linguistic communication theory, in that sitcoms allow the learner to become involved, as a silent observer, in the day-to-day experiences presented in the sitcom, which allows them to better understand the language. The author also addresses a situation that I observed teaching in English in a non-English setting, that of foreign language speaking anxiety. She makes a good argument that following the dialog of a sitcom, with its use of idioms and even slang, helps the student feel more confident in their knowledge of the language. The final section of the book presents the results of a random survey of two groups of English as a second language learners, one in North Macedonia and one in Poland, concerning their consumption of English language sitcoms outside the classroom. The results indicate that, on a practical level, in addition to the academic argument, the use of sitcoms can indeed be a valuable teaching tool for English as a second language.

This book will be a valuable tool to support the decision to include sitcoms in the curriculum for English as a second language.

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Introduction

The genre of the situation comedy, or the sitcom, is a multifaceted arena of investigation that has been, until recently, neglected lacking the attention from various scientific fields, such as film, media, narrative and cultural studies. Moreover, the genre that has been part of media production and viewers' attention for almost a century offers a broad field of investigation in different spheres of social, artistic and cultural life globally. It holds a unique place and role into shaping the world of media and culture as a result. The key feature of the sitcom lies in its effect. Therefore, a compelling and critical study of the genre is of paramount importance in order to reveal the important topics related to sitcoms as an artistic and media product of mass consumption. A wide range of perspectives can be employed in analyzing the sitcom reaching different purposes and conclusions.

In this respect, this study draws a specific connection between the sitcom as a media product and the processes of language acquisition and culture adoption. More specifically, it will explore the sitcom as a genre and its role in foreign language acquisition (the English language) for university students. The main hypothesis is that while sitcoms are genre that mainly uses humor for entertainment, they also contain real-life situations with realistic and everyday conversations, using an effective language for communication. The viewers, although not directly involved in the scenes, could easily be perceived as passive participants in those conversations, thus personally "living" in the situations and adopting the language used by the actors/characters. It is the actors' talent and ability to deliver the character that further influences how the sitcom will be adopted.

Furthermore, while these encounters with the foreign language and culture are in an informal setting, the acquisition of the content is undisputable. The research will show the trend in the use of sitcoms for language acquisition by establishing the main points and characteristics of the process and giving recommendation for their formal use in studying English. A simple proof of how much the sitcoms participate in the viewers lives is their popularity on social media. Fan pages, videos, reels and memes have all been dedicated to particular scenes, lines and moments from different sitcoms. The dedication to the sitcom and the connection it forms with the audience can be seen in a simple post, a video or a picture and the comments following it on the social media. By examining a single such post, it can be seen that the fans already quote the scene, i.e the lines of the characters shown in the footage. This leads to the conclusion of this study that the sitcoms largely influence the language and culture acquisition of the viewers in general.

The unique contribution of the research lies in the connection between culture, language and thought drawing primarily on two main theoretical claims. Firstly, the research will rely on Claire Kramsch's (1998) idea that language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. Secondly, the research relies on Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis that language affects the thought process, i.e. the principle of linguistic relativity to illustrate the way in which language influences people's thought and behavior. The main connection with the research is made in the point that the sitcoms present social reality of English speakers (people living in English speaking countries) and as Edward Sapir claims "speakers of different languages perceive the world differently because of the ways in which language influences a person's thinking and behavior". We will prove how re-living social situations in sitcoms lets viewers immerse in the social reality and pick up the language

units. This idea will further be developed along the lines of Benjamin Lee Whorf's claims who developed Edward Sapir's ideas and proposed a linguistic relativity, i.e. "since languages differ in grammatical structures, in linguistic categories, and in other ways", Sapir and Whorf concluded that the speakers of different languages have different ways of viewing the world. Language serves as a filter of its speakers' perceptions and influences the way that a cultural group categorizes experience. After his studies, B. Whorf set forth a double principle: "the principle of linguistic determinism, namely, that way one thinks is determined by the language one speaks, and the principle of linguistic relativity, that differences among languages must therefore be reflected in the differences in the worldviews of their speakers" (Salzmann et al., 2012, p. 230 cited in Chodzkiene 2014:39). According to the linguistic determinist view, language structure controls thought and cultural norms. "Each of us lives not in the midst of the whole world but only in that part of the world that our language permits us to know. Thus, our knowledge of the world to a large extent is predetermined by the language of our culture. The differences between languages represent basic differences in the worldview of diverse cultures." (Chodzkiene 2014, p.39). All this also relates to the ideas of phenomenology and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The connection maintains that individuals cannot be separated from the social context and the phenomenologists' idea that action and behavior develop from the interaction between the world and the mind. The sitcoms give real life situations that are re-lived by the viewers and as a result, they pick up the language and discourse used there. The research was conducted on two Universities, the Goce Delcev University in Stip, North Macedonia and the University of Rzeszow in Poland.

The study contains the following key segments: firstly, a literature review will be made on the sitcoms as a genre and their connection with foreign language and culture acquisition. The research will specifically explore the area of university students studying the language who have already been involved in the language and culture and the way they are influenced by the sitcoms. In this way it will contribute to already existing scholarship on general use of sitcoms for language acquisition. It will distinguish the most relevant theories in this respect. Secondly, the media space and the students' habits and media preferences will be examined. The genre of sitcoms was generally aired and popularized on TV, but in the past three decades the media set significantly changed with internet encompassing all previous media content and the development of new audiovisual materials. This change also affected the way young people perceive and access sitcoms as well as the time dedicated for watching them. As a result, the influence of sitcoms on foreign language acquisition also changed. The research will explore the trend in popularity of such series and their effect in turn. The next part is dedicated to exploring the level and amount of language and cultural content acquisition. A survey will be prepared and distributed to the students at both Universities. The sitcoms contain universal but also up-to-date topics and vocabulary. These will be examined mainly regarding American culture, for example if and how a languacultural unit is presented and if and how students adopt such information. Furthermore, the acquisition of phrases and vocabulary will be explored. The collected results serve to establish new ideas and conclusions about the connection of the sitcom narrative and culture and language acquisition corroborating on the claims of this study.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used for the purposes of this research. The qualitative methodology will involve

descriptive and comparative methods, while the quantitative methods will involve an online survey. The data from the survey will be analyzed, described and presented and corresponding conclusions will be made.

In order to illustrate the nature of subject matter and to better serve the objectives of the study, the first chapter is dedicated to presenting the sitcom as a genre and all the characteristics and conventions pertaining to it. This will show how the sitcom is intrinsically connected with the way people adopt linguistic structures, vocabulary or cultural information. A critical review of literature dedicated to the sitcom as a genre will be given in order to add this study in the array of analytic niches calling for academic attention. As noted above the sitcom is a complex form of art but also a media and cultural product and as such it is a subject of a complex interpretation. A number of viewpoints on the historical development and the characteristics are incorporated into the core idea of the study, that is the symbiosis created between the audiovisual text and the audiences, making it a unique form of art to influence language and culture acquisition contrasting with other media products or didactic means and products. Bringing the constitutive components of the sitcom to the fore, the study foregrounds the critical discussion in light of Kramsch's (1998) and Sapir-Whorf's theoretical postulates thus forming the key questions of the questionnaire. In this way the study remains within the established scope and objectives of the analysis. In Chapter 1 the sitcom is analyzed as a media product and a narrative genre. A literature review is given to cover all the major aspects relevant to the purpose of the present study. It shows that the sitcom can be seen from different angles and perspectives and opens up space for the following discussion on its role in foreign language and culture acquisition. The Second chapter looks into the above process

discussing the connection between language, culture and thought, the appeal of the sitcom in this respect and the ensuing cognitive process to adopt the content and make these connections. Since the language acquisition is a skill and requires a listening skill, this chapter looks into the sitcom as a solution to some listening skills within the cognitive process. Chapter 3 discusses the relevance between sitcoms and linguistic communication theory maintaining that the communication and language are integral to sitcoms. The next chapter, Chapter 4 points to the connection sitcoms and their role in alleviating foreign language speaking anxiety. Chapter 5 provides a comparative outlook into the connection between the sitcom and the comic strip as connected genres. In Chapter 6 the concept of languaculture is introduced as pertinent to the sitcom and the language learners as a unit. The American sitcoms *Seinfeld* and *Two and a Half Men* are presented. Examples of the languaculture are given in different categories (informal, neutral/formal language and figurative language). Chapter 7 presents the survey results conducted at the Goce Delcev University of Stip in North Macedonia and the University of Rzeszow in Poland. The results testify to the discussion of this study and the different aspects of the connection between the sitcom and the foreign language learners. Finally in the conclusion, the main points and results of the study are pointed out giving a new perspective on the role and place of the sitcom in foreign language and culture acquisition. As a result, a unique contribution is made to the theoretical and educational aspect of the above theme.

Chapter 1: The Sitcom

A sitcom or a situation/comedy is a television program of the genre of comedy with a set time-frame of usually half an hour with a set cast of characters and location, usually a household or a workplace. Following the same initial idea and purpose of the show is part of the product's nature. In this, sitcoms are different from sketch comedy where a troupe may use different character for a different sketch, or a stand-up comedy where a comedian entertains the audience telling jokes and stories. In the sitcom, although characters may strive to change they are in a sense doomed to return each time to somewhere close to their starting point. Hence, the sitcom is merely providing a simple and reassuring problem/solution formula while the audiences are reassured rather than challenged or forced to reexamine their values.

Sitcoms can further be classified according to the program's production format, they can be recorded in front of a studio audience or the live studio audience can be imitated or enhanced by the use of a laugh track. The type of camera setup and the new audiovisual advancements can also make a difference in the character of the sitcom. According to the American Film Academy, many contemporary sitcoms like the sitcoms of the past use the single-camera setup and do not feature a laugh track, thus often resembling the dramedy shows of the 1980s and the 1990s rather than the traditional sitcom. Unlike single-camera sitcoms of the past, nearly all contemporary comedies shot in this way are produced without a laugh track. The genre of the comedy drama or also known as dramedy combines elements of comedy and drama. The modern, scripted television examples tend to have more humorous bits than

simple comic relief seen in a typical hour-long legal or medical drama but exhibit far fewer jokes per minute as in a typical half-hour sitcom. Examples of these involve *Desperate Housewives*, *Sex and the City* and *Suits*.

The terms “situation comedy” or “sitcom” became commonly known in the 1950s. Prior examples involve appearances on the radio. Since this study is dedicated to sitcoms in English coming from and representing English-speaking countries, we’ll briefly review the appearance and evolution of such sitcoms. The sitcom format was born in January 1926 with the initial broadcast of *Sam n’ Henry* on WGN radio in Chicago. Sitcoms became a staple in broadcasting. US director and producer William Asher has been credited with being the “man who invented the sitcom” having directed over two dozen of the leading sitcoms, including *I Love Lucy* from the 1950s to the 1970s. British sitcoms are typically produced in one or more series of six episodes, most of which are created or produced by one or two writers. The majority of British sitcoms are 30 minutes long and are recorded on studio sets in a multiple camera set-up. The characteristics of both the British and American sitcoms fall into the general category of sitcoms charactersitics, remaining more or less within the frames of representing family and friends’ relations, work relations, work and organization and generally everyday life situations.

One major work on the sitcoms as a genre is Brett Mills’ *The Sitcom* (2009). In it, Mills gives a more concise perception of the genre. The book looks into the definitive aspects of the sitcom such as the industry that produces it, the programs where it is placed and the audience. “Mills spends considerable time explaining why sitcoms have exerted such popular appeal. He approaches the topic in terms of four theories: the Superiority Theory (outlining the relationship between the joke-teller, the audience, and the butt); the Incongruity

Theory (looking at the content and structure of jokes); the Relief Theory (suggesting that comedy fulfills a need in the individual and within society); and the Cue Theory (focusing on a program's textual elements and their relationship to the society that produces them)." (Raw 2010, p.1). One aspect of this book touches upon the cultural awareness examination of this study, namely, "Mills offers the results of a mini-survey conducted among his students in Missouri and Indiana Universities, and concludes that cultural factors shape their responses: not laughing at jokes which others [British audiences, for example] find funny resulted in a feeling of exclusion' (113). At the same time Mills concludes that sitcom, unlike other television genres, is something which audiences actively seek out in a comedy zone, desiring to be made to laugh' (122)" (Raw 2010, p.2). However, this has a different aim and focus from the examination proposed in our study namely, Mills dealt with students belonging to the same socio-linguistic and cultural context as the context of the sitcoms in question.

Simone Knox and Kai Hanno Schwind endeavor to explain the phenomenon behind the NBC series *Friends* in their *Friends, A Reading of the Sitcom* (2019) and how these entities are conceptualized here. The endless events and situations of usually middle-class everyday life present a wide arena played out by a carefully chosen set of characters, scenes and language, the language being the aim of the storyline. The action is further emphasized by the additional content of the language and the humor. Although considered superficial on the surface, sitcoms reveal real truth about life in the specific humoristic manner. They often tell things as they are behind the seemingly senseless conversations. Contrary to the claim that "the representational structure of the sitcom is more straightforward than that of its dramatic part" (Chandler 1997 cited in *Genre Analysis Does it*

challenge viewers to "read" the sitcom - "Friends"?) this study maintains that the choice of problems the characters encounter almost always carry a true component to it. Grace Cuiming Li and the group of students at the York University in California give a genre analysis looking into the genre and an example of it, namely the sitcom *Friends*. They examine the subject of the program and whether it supports the features of a sitcom and enables the participants in the audience to interpret the messages without difficulties (*Cuiming Li: Genre Analysis Does it challenge viewers to "read" the sitcom - "Friends"?*). According to her, both the connotation embodied by genre and a set of cultural, social, historical and industrial contexts can be seen as one of the forces which contributes to the genre analysis. Inevitably *Friends* follows the initially conceived context of the sitcom and particular a setting complying with the expectations of the mass audience. In-depth discussion on each context will not be given in this study, but can serve as the material for further exploration of the sitcom in the linguistic and cultural context. Furthermore, the context relates to the cultural and media studies since "Television has been a major form of entertainment in the world and a major component of North American life." (*Cuiming Li: Genre Analysis Does it challenge viewers to "read" the sitcom - "Friends"?*).

When looking into the cultural awareness intrinsic to the show, we must first see the emphasis of the show, is it verbal or physical, or emotional and development of human nature? Thus, the components of the situation comedy constitute the plots, characters, settings and thought. Time, too, is taken to fit the required frame for presentation on television, the problem is introduced early on and the plot is set into motion. The plots for every episode usually involve a disruption of the status quo by one of the characters attempting to break the middle-class mores. Next in their analysis,

Cuiming Li and the students distinguish between three types of characters in situation comedies: main, supporting and transient. The core action is carried by the main characters, the supporting are members of the regular cast who support the main characters and often act as foils (a character that contrasts with another, to better differentiate the qualities of the protagonist). Here arises the question of the most salient features of the sitcom; it is action, characterization or thought? The complications of a sitcom are flaws in the plan to solve the problem or natural outgrowths of the problem. Li further introduces the element of the crisis. It is the highest point of physical and verbal action. The protagonist goes on to make a mistake or fall into trouble/misunderstanding making attempts to resolve the problem. A result (or results) has to ensue in order to achieve a resolution. Often in the sitcom this is a restoration of the status quo. A shorter or a longer scene can achieve the restoration. The restoration enables the possibility of creating a new episode of equal taste for the audience, thus making them already engaged with the fictional cast's life situations. The sitcom's content is somehow expected by the audience. Although the characters seem to evolve in order to present their side of being just like everybody else and to show their humanity, they are often returned back to square one. The storyline keeps this attitude, rather than a fairytale act of human development towards a perfect world. The analytic model of Cuiming Li discussing *Friends* lists the motivations and emotions the characters' exhibit claiming to be but few per storyline, basically those necessary to continue and illustrate the action. The motivations involve jealousy, greed, envy, curiosity, and fear, but they are never too complex and rarely mixed. The emotions on the other hand involve grief, fear, excitement, love and usually exaggerated for a comic effect. All this helps the audience follow the content without too much challenge. Similarly,

the settings of the sitcom are also generally simple to serve the purpose of a background for the action, rather than being a part of it. (Cuiming Li). Again, despite this, the characterizations are not really shallow but stand for an everyday problem that at first glance is more real than any elaborated philosophy. The thought process is based on first impressions and quick reaction which is exactly the case of everyday communication in the family, the workplace or the place of living. In this way the sitcom appeals to a wider audience usually the mass middle-class not only in the English-speaking countries but across the world.

Cuiming Li claims the plot of the sitcom is oriented towards trivial incidents rather than the characters' thoughts. However, this so called "trivial" in the sitcom can actually stand for a real-life truth otherwise not presented or revealed in a television program or within another genre. It is here, in the seeming superficiality that a major truth is revealed and in a humorous way as the main factor attracting the audience to follow the series. As Mark Twain said, humor is mankind's best blessing. Humor and satire, as well as self-irony are the backbone of the storyline in the sitcom. In addition, exaggeration is often used to achieve the comic effect. This turns to be the key factor for the acceptance of the program by the audience. More importantly, humor is the main factor that enables the viewers' immersion in the language and culture of the sitcom. As already said, they virtually participate in the real-life situation with authentic language and communication by laughing at the situations. Even though any social or political problems are not overtly presented they can be uncovered in the humorous comments from the action of the characters in the sitcom. The whole action is subjected to humor. The humor however has one other unique aspect here, it is an aide in presenting the necessary checks and balances in life in general. This frame establishes the generic

characteristics of the sitcom. As such it encourages the dedication of the audience by successfully sending the message. At the same time, when discussing the properties of the genre, we must not forget that the sitcom is also a media product and thus subject to various external factors that shape its appearance. These involve the economic factors and practices in relation with the number of audiences and the technological advancements.

Another approach to examining and analyzing the genre of the sitcom is given by Antonio Savorelli in his *Beyond Sitcom: New Directions in American Television Comedy* (2010). Here he engages with semiotic analysis to unlock the texts of example sitcoms as a scientific approach to such narrative texts employing structural analysis. This approach can further reinforce the analysis of the sitcoms as cultural artifacts. As Savorelli claims, “texts are autonomous to a certain degree, not simply as glass-enclosed worlds but as relatively open systems necessarily in touch with the cultures that foster their production” (Savorelli 2010, p.4).

Although as in Savorelli (2010) “due to comedy’s postulated inclination to cause laughter, many critics and viewers consider it scarcely realistic genre, one whose verdictive pact would entail the adherence to worlds that almost never work in the real world” Savorelli (2010, p.6), the typical situation in a sitcom is sometimes “more real than reality”. This last idea in inverted commas is so because the events present the dynamics of life in a particular culture for a group of people belonging to that culture. The characters show immediate interaction to the best of their knowledge at the backdrop of one or more protagonists’ low point. These situations carry cultural information enhanced by the phrases the characters’ use in the conversation. In addition, sitcoms are the basis of practical cultural stereotypes and issues. The witty comments and replies of the characters abound in references to the

history of the country where the sitcom is taking place but also references to popular culture. Since culture is communication and communication is culture, the sitcom is the perfect area to examine the presentation, delivery and adoption of such content. The semiotic analysis Savorelli (2010) proposes also involves the analysis of different metatextual, external level on a level of enunciation: “the reference can be established to empiric, external texts; to fictional, embedded texts or, in self-referential act, to the main text itself” (Savorelli 2010, p.16). As a model of semiotic analysis of the sitcom, according to Savorelli (2010), involves the following components: linguistic, visual, gestural and spatial.

In another book, Jeremy G. Butler (2019) provides an extensive study on the sitcom as a genre, its characteristics and implications. According to him, “there are really only two absolutely essential attributes of sitcom storytelling as it has evolved during the broadcast-network era: (1) the series must have repeatable premise and (2) individual episodes must be segmented to allow for commercial interruptions.” (Butler 2019: Introduction). He further claims that the other aspects of the sitcom narrative can be negotiated. Each program in the TV industry has a hook, something that can describe the premise in one or two sentences. The sitcom, however should contain a “narrative recurrence”. Namely, Butler identifies the following parts as integral to the narrative of the sitcom: “1. Teaser or cold opening; 2. Act I, consisting of one or more scenes; 3. Act II, consisting of one or more scenes; 4. Tag. (Butler 2019: Introduction). Humor is the driving force of creating a relaxed, yet catchy atmosphere for the sitcom viewers. In *The Sitcom* (2019), Butler lists the three main theories of humor, the superiority (one where one thing is deemed superior and takes out a joke on something less superior/deformed), relief, or release theory of humor (when something is serious, or difficult and one finds

something funny to accompany it) and the theory of incongruity (which makes fun of how two or more things not corresponding with each other are put together to a comic effect) (Butler 2019: Introduction). In the sitcom, humor is the antidote to otherwise complex and difficult human interrelations.

Overall, this study examines the cultural and linguistic representation in the context of family, friends and workplace as conceptualized by the genre of the sitcom. The way characters interact on the one hand and the language they use on the other, invite the audience to virtually take part in the interaction, often in the position of a virtual witness, judge or someone similar to the protagonists. This participation develops a specific connection of the viewer with the cast and the storyline; it is like having guests in your own living room, or visiting friends who live in another country whose language you are trying to pick up. This claim postulates the new avenue for cultural adoption and language acquisition. One can learn the lyric of a song and identify with the feelings and emotions, or one can watch an educational or popular video online, a new item, but this content does not involve the quality of interaction between the world and the mind. In the sitcom we not only hear the words uttered by the characters but we also see how they look, the clothes they wear, their gestures and facial expressions combines with music and the laugh track. All this combined often results in a willing suspense of disbelief of the fictionality of the scene in front of the audience. This type of immersion can also be contrasted with video gaming where gamers from different countries play virtual games online and engage in conversation. While this is an active practice of the language, it will not be possible or effective if there had not been prior acquisition of the content to some extent. This makes the sitcom the most suitable

mode for cultural and linguistic immersion that media and technology can offer.

The advance of social media further revealed this phenomenon in a different way. People have assumed a virtual social life online, somewhat a hybrid space, a middle space where they equally remember somebody's comment or react to somebody's post as if in real life. They exhibit the plethora of emotions and motivations in the online interaction. However, this semiotic environment does not provide the narrative storyline the sitcom possesses. For this reason, in 2019 Netflix bought the right to broadcast the 90s sitcom *Seinfeld* again (Reuters, 2021). According to TIME, Netflix outbid Warner Media, Amazon, Viacom and NBCUniversal. (Chow, 2023). The sitcoms have turned into a cult of popular culture. Their presence in reels, memes and other references is ever increasing.

Being directly dependent on media, the sitcom as a genre also followed the changes in technology, mainly in the placement and acceptance of the content. While being the ever-present program on TV, the sitcom faced the precedence of the internet and the online placement of video content and channels. This study examines whether there are any changes in the students' habits when it comes to watching traditional TV programs and accessing the content in various ways online. It looks into which platforms are most popular for them and whether the sitcom falls into those preferences. This in turn shows the change in the popularity of the sitcom in the more traditional way and its effect. Next, the study examines what other genres are popular among the young students, have they changed their preferences and why. More entertainment options means there is little chance that a lot of people are watching the same thing at any given moment. While for most of its existence, television has split its real time audience between three or four main networks. Now there are hundreds of choices viewers can make. This study is

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also an indication of the cultural and social shift not only in America but globally.

Chapter 2: The process of language acquisition and culture adoption

2.1 Language, culture and thought

Like any other work of art, as a narrative structure and media product, pragmatically, structurally, stylistically or semiotically the sitcom can be subject of various analysis and each analyzed example can bring new and specific insights to the discussion. This analysis will not be estimating the viewer's perception role and strategy as either a ratified listener, an overhearer, a ratified speaker, a fan recipient or a meta recipient (see Wieczorek, 2016). The survey is designed to reveal and confirm students' own habits of watching sitcoms, how and when they are willingly or unwillingly exposed to such content. Furthermore, the survey will show students' own perceptions on the influence of the sitcom on their language acquisition and cultural awareness.

Thus, the analysis tries to establish two main claims: the first one is that sitcoms within their cultural and linguistic outreach make a convergence between real and fictional play and perceptions, thus confirming Claire Kramsch's idea that language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality; the second claim is the confirmation that language affects thought process i.e. the Sapir-Whorf's principle of linguistic relativity in which language influences people's thoughts, worldview and behavior. The survey shows how much being exposed to the virtual situation in the sitcom made the viewers more inclined to think in English when using the language in their further study and practice. Furthermore, the students will show whether they pick up the language culture on conscious or subconscious level. To that end, the theoretical concepts of Kramsch, and Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are presented

alongside thematic and discursive analysis of certain points in different American sitcoms in order to exemplify the world-making aspect of the sitcom.

As Kramersch (1998, p.3) points, the three aspects of the connection between culture and language come from the following: firstly, as she claims, people use words to express facts, ideas and events that they have learned and perceived while living as part of a community, at the same time, authors of texts express their attitudes, beliefs, points of view, namely, language expresses cultural reality; secondly, members of a community not only express experience, but they also create experience through language (Kramersch 1998, p.3). “The way in which people use the spoken, written or visual medium itself, creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker’s tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality. Finally, language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves with others through their use of language; they view languages as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often seen as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Thus, we can say that language embodies culture.” (Kramersch 1998 p.3).

The sitcoms are built on verbal communication: “The spoken utterance is the original type of verbal communication. The meaning conveyed in spoken language can be specified by the means of voice, volume, intonation or pauses. According to the insights expressed by A. C. Wintergerst and J. McVeigh: “Spoken language is relatively informal, repetitive and interactive. Speakers may use long pauses and talk over or interrupt each other. Written language is relatively formal, more concise and less repetitive (2011, p. 11).” (In Chodzkiene 2014 p.44).