

**EXAMINATION OF THE LINGUOCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH
BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN SITUATIONAL COMEDIES**

**EXAME DAS CARACTERÍSTICAS LINGUÍSTICO-CULTURAIS DO INGLÊS COM
BASE NA ANÁLISE DE COMÉDIAS SITUACIONAIS AMERICANAS**

**EXAMEN DE LAS CARACTERÍSTICAS LINGUOCULTURALES DEL INGLÉS A
PARTIR DEL ANÁLISIS DE COMEDIAS SITUACIONALES AMERICANAS**

Natalia Leonidovna SOKOLOVA¹
Marina Georgiyevna SERGEEVA²

ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the problem of studying the linguocultural characteristics of English based on the analysis of American situational comedies. The study highlights the role of humor and understanding of the cultural figures, necessary for the most effective English language learning. Summing up the results of the research, situational comedy (sitcom) is the most convenient material for studying the linguocultural characteristics of English, due to the abundance of various linguocultural markers and lexical units. The study aims at improving students' language proficiency by studying the linguocultural characteristics of English based on the analysis of American situational comedies. The results of the study allow concluding that studying the linguocultural characteristics of English leads to the improvement of students' language proficiency.

KEYWORDS: Language and national character. Linguistic material. Modern linguistics. Sitcom. Linguocultural characteristics.

RESUMO: O artigo se dedica ao problema de estudar as características linguístico-culturais do inglês a partir da análise das comédias situacionais americanas. O estudo destaca o papel do humor e da compreensão das figuras culturais, necessários para o aprendizado mais eficaz da língua inglesa. Resumindo os resultados da pesquisa, a comédia situacional (sitcom) é o material mais conveniente para estudar as características linguístico-culturais do inglês, devido à abundância de vários marcadores linguístico-culturais e unidades lexicais. O estudo visa melhorar a proficiência dos alunos no idioma, estudando as características linguístico-culturais do inglês com base na análise das comédias situacionais americanas. Os resultados do estudo permitem concluir que estudar as características linguístico-culturais do inglês leva à melhoria da proficiência linguística dos alunos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Idioma e caráter nacional. Material linguístico. Linguística moderna. Sitcom. Características linguístico-culturais

¹ Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0667-5098>. E-mail: n.sokolova@rudn.ru

² Research Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Moscow - Russia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8365-6088>. E-mail: sergeeva198262@mail.ru

RESUMEN: *El artículo está dedicado al problema del estudio de las características lingüísticas del inglés a partir del análisis de las comedias situacionales estadounidenses. El estudio destaca el papel del humour y la comprensión de las figuras culturales, necesarios para el aprendizaje más eficaz del idioma inglés. Resumiendo los resultados de la investigación, la comedia situacional (sitcom) es el material más conveniente para estudiar las características lingüísticas del inglés, debido a la abundancia de varios marcadores lingüísticos y unidades léxicas. El estudio tiene como objetivo mejorar el dominio del idioma de los estudiantes mediante el estudio de las características lingüísticas del inglés basadas en el análisis de las comedias situacionales estadounidenses. Los resultados del estudio permiten concluir que estudiar las características lingüísticas del conduce a la mejora del dominio del idioma de los estudiantes.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Idioma y carácter nacional. Material lingüístico. Lingüística moderna. Comedia de enredo. Características lingüísticas.*

Introduction

One of the most important problems when learning a foreign language is the achievement of such a level of proficiency, which allows understanding its national specifics, set expressions, shades of meaning, and implications. The solution to this problem is usually in the development of a linguistic personality, the involvement of students in intercultural communication, and immersion in the appropriate language environment (KOGAN, 2020).

However, in our opinion, the solution to the problem may be in students' acquaintance with linguistic material, based on which it is possible to learn the specifics and linguocultural features of the language. We consider situational comedies (a special form of discourse that reflects national specifics) to be effective for this purpose.

Literature review

Linguocultural studies currently play an important role in modern linguistics. Their importance is constantly growing (this area of research is based on the hypothesis of linguistic relativity proposed by E. Sapir and B. Whorf, as well as the linguocultural studies by E.M. Vereshchagin and V.K. Kostomarov) (HUANG; HOI; TEO, 2018). The above-mentioned research makes it possible to study the formation and development of the linguistic worldview and its manifestations in language and texts, as forms of discourse. In the process of teaching a foreign language, this causes the emergence of pedagogical technologies aimed at active and comprehensive assimilation of the language (KARASIK, 2001; KONSHINA, 2006; PANINA, 2005; BÍROVÁ *et al.*, 2018).

This area of research is important for the potential increase in the efficiency of translations (it allows achieving representativeness and capturing the essence of texts), analysis of the genre specifics of texts (it allows analyzing systematically language techniques and means, their genesis, etc.), learning a foreign language, as well as the characteristics of discourse in general (it allows identifying the interconnection between discourse and socio-cultural and socio-economic phenomena) (ATTARDO, 2001). We can say that linguocultural studies make it possible to study language and discourse in connection with the linguistic personality, linguistic worldview, and society as a whole and develop appropriate pedagogical techniques (KULINICH, 2000).

A sitcom, clipping for situational comedy, is one of the most common “petit genres” (genre art) in the modern world, it is manifested mainly in the format of series (MILLS, 2008). Speaking about geography, this genre appeared in the United States in the early 1920s. Sitcoms originated in radio but have been found mostly on television since the 70s. In most cases, a sitcom is characterized by a fixed set of characters and the same setting and each episode is a complete story. The sitcom is one of the most popular genres on American, European, and Russian television. Today, sitcoms have become very popular due to the genre art, that is, humor from everyday life. The sitcom shooting technology makes it possible to quickly respond to the events in the life of society, and the genre allows adding satirical elements.

The relevance of the study is in the fact that the examination of sitcoms from linguocultural points of view is extremely important since this genre accumulates knowledge about the life of society, it is an example of mass discourse. The analysis of linguistic techniques and means of achieving a humorous effect in a sitcom allows us to understand the deepest linguocultural figures, which are implemented through humor, thereby they significantly improve students’ knowledge of the language.

Methods

The study was carried out at the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia. The study involved 50 students; the sample was representative in terms of gender and other characteristics. The study was aimed at improving students’ language proficiency by studying the linguocultural characteristics of English based on the analysis of American situational comedies.

The research was carried out during one semester. As part of the study, students were asked to study the linguocultural and lexical features of the sitcom “Modern Family”. Before

and after the study, we analyzed such indicators of language proficiency as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as students' understanding of the nuances of the language. The analysis was carried out according to the method of expert assessment by representatives of the teaching staff (GOREV *et al.*, 2018; VOLKOVA; PANCHENKO, 2018; BLINOVA; DUGINA; ZABOLOTSKIKH, 2018).

The research was carried out according to the algorithm typical for psychological and pedagogical research, presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - The experiment algorithm

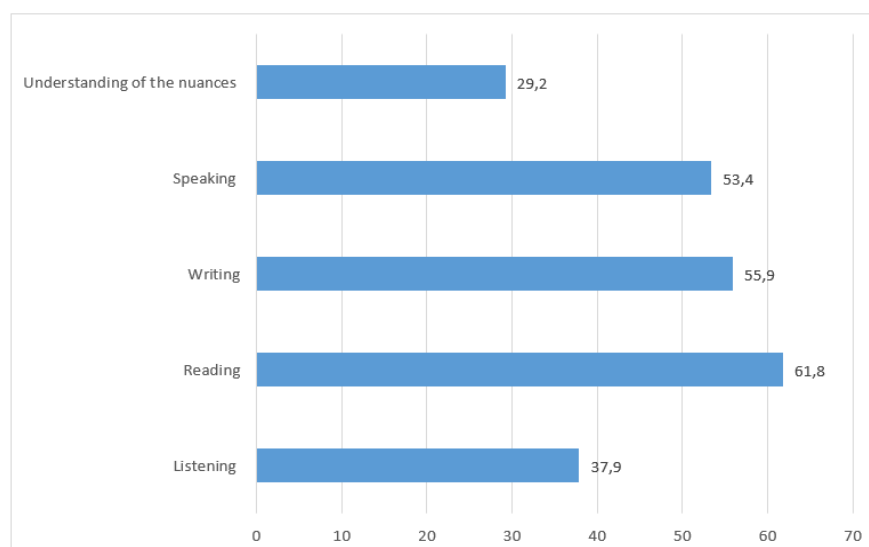
Algorithm
1. Theoretical analysis of the problem
2. Ascertaining stage
3. Formative stage
4. Control stage

Source: Devised by the authors

Results

At the ascertaining stage, the analysis of the indicators of students' language proficiency was carried out (VASBIEVA *et al.*, 2018). The data are presented on a scale from 1 to 100, where there are three ranges: 1-33 is low level, 34-68 is average level, 69-100 is high level (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 - Results of the ascertaining stage



Source: Devised by the authors

The data presented in Fig. 1 allow us to conclude that, in general, students have the average level of the above-mentioned indicators, and the average level corresponds to the average values. The indicator “Understanding of the nuances” (the interpretation of the meaning of linguistic constructions, humor, and implications) was at a low level.

To develop language proficiency, students were given a project task at the formative stage, which was implemented during the semester. The task was to analyze the linguistic, cultural, and lexical features of the sitcom “Modern Family”. In our opinion, this task contributes to the development, first of all, of understanding the nuances of the language. However, at the same time, such indicators as speaking and listening should also develop during the implementation of the task (SHARONOVA; TRUBNIKOVA; SOKOLOVA, 2018).

“Modern Family” is a series about a modern American family. This is an American mockumentary family sitcom television series, with the characters frequently speaking directly to the camera in confessional interview segments. The main idea of “Modern Family” is quite simple: in the 21st century, the family can be of any kind. The family can unite people of completely different sex, age, social status, and origin. Sometimes it is difficult to deal with family members, but everyone still loves each other. Considering the fact that “Modern Family” is a sitcom, humor is an important part of this series. For our research, it is important to consider humor as a comedy component in the film discourse, considering its linguistic manifestation, but not as an intellectual ability to notice the comical, funny sides of various phenomena (DOLZHICH; DMITRICHENKOVA, 2018).

Let us consider examples of lexical and semantic means used to create a comic effect, identified by students. In the last seasons of the series, many secondary characters appear, for example, a Russian doctor (in this case, it is a reference to the TV series “Scrubs” and the works by Bulgakov). At the hospital, the doctor was met by the Feldsher, who was very pleased to meet him and immediately began to ask questions of interest:

The Feldsher: “But Moscow Ah! Dear, dear Moscow you must tell me everything”.

Young Doctor: “Oh, yes so you know Moscow?”

The Feldsher: “No. You must tell me everything”.

Irony in the words of the Feldsher causes a humorous effect. He reacts to the doctor’s words as if he often visits Moscow and knows a lot about it. However, when the doctor asks whether he has ever been there, the Feldsher answers negatively and asks to tell him everything about the capital of Russia. When the Young Doctor examines his new office, the adult version of himself is also present. After the story about medical devices, the Older Doctor has flashbacks:

Older Doctor: “Yeah I saw a lot of horror and tragedy in here. Happy days”.

For the Older Doctor, horrifying and tragic days were the happy ones. This oxymoron and the Young Doctor's surprised reaction to these words do not leave the audience indifferent.

During a "tour" of the hospital, the nurse and Emmy constantly draw the Young Doctor's attention to the portraits. When Emmy helps to put on the Young Doctor's gown, she cannot but mention the Older Doctor's name:

Emmy: "It belonged to Leopold Leopoldovic".

Young Doctor: "Of course"

Emmy: "Of course, I'm sure he won't mind if you use it. He is dead. He was a lot taller than you".

Another comparison during the evening of the Young Doctor with the Older Doctor after the words about his nobility and death produces a comic effect. In one of the episodes, the Young Doctor calls everyone to see a patient with an amazing, in his opinion, illness:

Young Doctor: "Come on, you have to see this to believe. It is truly remarkable".

The Feldsher: "My God, doctor. She is ugly".

Young Doctor: "What? No, no! Look at her eyes".

By "truly remarkable" the Young Doctor means the eyes of a woman, which are remarkable to him. However, the Feldsher understands everything differently, and "truly remarkable" for him is the woman's ugliness. The directness and audacity of the Feldsher, as well as the ambiguity of the meanings, are humorous.

When the Older Doctor opens the curtains and looks at the window, he sees a heavy snowfall:

Older Doctor: "You've been lucky with the weather".

This particular sentence causes laughter because of irony, but together with the previous phrase "...You're in the middle of nowhere..." it enhances the already achieved comic effect.

When the Young Doctor thinks about the treatment of a young patient, he asks Pelageya about her father:

Emmy: "His only child. He's a widower. He took me once to a harvest festival. He cried"

Young Doctor: "Excellent".

The phrase "Excellent" cannot be used in its literal sense because the Young Doctor is an empathic person who wants to help everyone. However, his irony was not understood by the nurses and the Feldsher, which leads to disapproving glances. The irony and the resulting misunderstanding are two important parts of the comic effect. It can be concluded that the most effective ways of representing American humor are metaphors and irony.

Having considered the linguocultural features of the film discourse of the American sitcom “Modern Family”, students came to the following conclusions:

1) One of the important characteristics of American humor is its simplicity, therefore, sitcoms mainly use linguo-semantic tropes to create a comic effect, such as irony, metaphor, juxtaposition, exaggeration. Having analyzed the examples, we can say that the comedy in speech is interconnected with a reaction, expressed without words, which allows showing one’s attitude towards situations, evaluating and reacting to them, which at the same time is an implicit assessment of the characters’ actions.

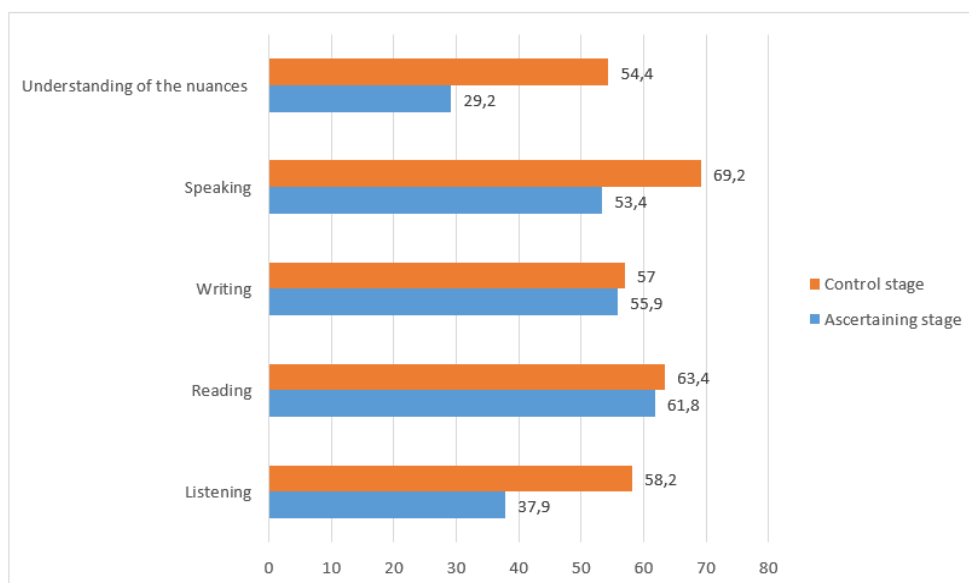
The most frequently used linguistic means, which also represent comedy, are comparisons and puns, and linguistic techniques are irony, metaphor, and references to the significant concepts of the American linguistic worldview (for example, superheroes).

2) The representation of family values in the given sitcom (loyalty, attitude towards children, compromising, etc.) mainly occurs due to the plot composition, which is a distinctive feature of sitcoms. Yet, such tropes as metaphors, irony, and comparison are used as markers that emphasize the plot composition and means of implicit assessment of the characters’ actions.

The most commonly used tropes for the representation of family values are comparison, metaphors, and irony, while this representation is often intertwined with the comedy and monologues of the characters, which is done to create contrasts for a better perception of the events.

After this stage, we carried out re-diagnostics.

Figure 2 - Results of the control stage



Source: Devised by the authors

The data presented in Fig. 2 allow us to conclude that students mainly demonstrate an average level of the analyzed indicators. However, some of them are quite high, in particular, speaking. At the same time, there is significant progress in the understanding of the nuances and listening. The results of the control stage allow us to conclude that the actions taken at the formative stage were effective.

Conclusion

In the article, we analyzed the problem of studying the linguocultural characteristics of students during the study of the linguistic material of situational comedies. A sitcom is a situational comedy characterized by a fixed set of characters and the same setting, where each episode is a complete story. Understanding and perceiving a joke in the original in another language is often difficult because national humor and its linguostylistic features are of great importance. However, based on such material, the improvement of language proficiency is effective.

The linguistic techniques and means used in the sitcom “Modern Family” have a linguocultural specificity, reflect the culturally significant topics of national humor, actualize family values, determine the social roles of characters in the real life of an American family. Thus, they create the genre originality of the American sitcom, based on which the study of the linguocultural features of the language by students is the most effective.

For further research, in our opinion, it is important to examine the linguocultural specifics of American humor and its reflection in sitcoms, as a factor in increasing the effectiveness of language learning.

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