Unveiling American values using sitcoms

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ABSTRACT: The international status of English has contributed to the development of ways to teach the language from an intercultural perspective. In this context, successful cross-cultural communication requires not only the mastery of language skills, but also the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes, as learners will have to interact appropriately with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the classroom, teachers tend to rely on textbooks for the introduction of cultural content. This generally means that the teaching of culture is based on the transmission of facts about the target language and that only external aspects of culture are covered. This paper addresses the use of television as an additional tool to reinforce and enhance cultural learning in the EFL classroom. Specifically, this work suggests that situation comedies can be used to identify the cultural values that underlie external behaviors. Thus, after reviewing the theoretical background and the defining features of American culture, we will present a teaching proposal aimed at the tertiary level in which we use the sitcom *Superstore* to raise students' cultural awareness.
Key words: *Cultural learning, intercultural competence, television, ELT, situation comedies*

Las *sitcoms* como herramienta para el acercamiento a los valores culturales americanos

RESUMEN: El estatus del inglés como lengua internacional ha contribuido a desarrollar la enseñanza de idiomas desde un enfoque intercultural. En este contexto, el éxito de la comunicación intercultural se basa no sólo en el dominio de la lengua, sino también en el desarrollo de conocimientos, habilidades y actitudes, puesto que los aprendices deben ser capaces de interactuar de manera apropiada con personas que hablan otras lenguas y provienen de otras culturas. En el aula, lo más habitual es que el aprendizaje cultural se reduzca al contenido del libro de texto. Por lo general, esto implica que la enseñanza cultural se limita a la transmisión de información factual sobre la cultura de la lengua meta y que sólo se tratan aspectos culturales externos. Este artículo aborda el uso de la televisión como herramienta adicional para reforzar y mejorar el aprendizaje cultural en el aula de lengua extranjera. En concreto, este trabajo plantea que las comedias de situación pueden servir para identificar los valores que sustentan los comportamientos externos de una cultura. Así, una vez revisados los conceptos teóricos y

las características que definen la cultura estadounidense, presentaremos una propuesta didáctica en la que usaremos la comedia de situación *Superstore* para reforzar la formación cultural del alumnado universitario.

Palabras clave: *Aprendizaje cultural, competencia intercultural, televisión, enseñanza de inglés, comedias de situación*

1. Introduction

As we were leaving behind the 20th century to advance into the 21st, our world was being reshaped by globalization, digital technology, internationalization and multimedia communication. In this context, English became an international language, a present-day *lingua franca* (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2005). As a consequence, the demands and goals of teaching and learning English as a foreign language have been redefined. As our students are going to communicate and interact with native and non-native speakers (Piątkowska, 2015), they need to develop Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997). This transcends language and includes non-linguistic competences and cultural awareness, allowing them "to engage in interaction with representatives of cultures other than the target language culture" (Marczak, 2010, p. 19).

However, addressing cultural issues in the classroom poses some challenges. Foreign language textbooks are still the main source of cultural topics and content (Maijala, 2018; Sercu et al., 2005; Tomlinson, 2012). Nevertheless, numerous studies show that textbooks usually display external elements of culture, offering a "tourist" representation. This means that invisible aspects underlying culture, such as values and beliefs, tend to be overlooked (Hatoss, 2004; Lee 2009; Raigón-Rodríguez & Larrea-Espinar, 2015; Tang, 2006; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Varón, 2009). This being the case, instructors need supplemental resources to help them culturally train their students (Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020). In recent years, the use of media has gained strength as an alternative approach to teaching/learning culture (Yang, 2016). Not only films, but also television shows can be a limitless source of cultural content, since they allow us to see the world of different cultural communities while depicting interactions, relationships and issues of different socio-cultural-economic-political nature (Kaiser & Shibahara, 2014; Yang & Fleming, 2013).

The literature review will conclude with an overview of North American defining features, which will be pivotal for the second part of this paper, where we build on these ideas to present a teaching proposal. In this way, we will use situation comedies (sitcoms) as a tool for cultural learning, paving the way for the improvement of intercultural skills. Although this development aims at teaching individuals to communicate effectively in multicultural backgrounds, competence training and cultural learning must be carried out using specific cultures. Thus, our teaching proposal focuses on an episode from the sitcom *Superstore*, which will be used to identify some of the values and beliefs from North American culture.

The proposal will follow the methodological structure of pre, while and post-viewing activities. In this way, we will focus first on six basic values (individual freedom, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, competition, material wealth and hard work) and explain how they are interrelated and organized in pairs of rights or responsibilities. Then, we will point at

specific situations and problems depicted in the episode to finally discuss how those issues are connected to cultural values. As for assessment, we will also refer to a questionnaire to measure students' perceptions.

2. Culture and approaches to culture teaching

Culture has been and still is a very complex notion because it can be related to different disciplines (Williams, 1983). The first definitions of the term came from the field of Anthropology. The following quotation from Kroeber and Kluckhon (1952) is one of the most widely accepted:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; cultural systems may on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of further action (p. 181).

In the area of language instruction, culture is usually depicted as a set of knowledge, behaviors and attitudes shared by a group of people (Shih, 2015). Spencer-Oatey's definition adds the idea that our behavior is influenced, but not determined, by culture:

> Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3).

Despite the diversity of interpretations, there is general agreement that culture is made up of different aspects or segments. The main categorizations include: Hammerly's threefold model of achievement, informational and behavioral culture (1982); the "Three Ps" model of perspectives, products, and practices (National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, 1999); Kramsch's conception of material productions and ground of meaning (1993); and, finally, the conceptualization of "big C" and "little c" cultures (Seelye, 1984). This twofold categorization, based on Hall's (1976) paradigm of external and internal culture, has been very prolific, being replicated as visible and invisible culture (Hinkel, 2014) or renamed as "upper case culture" and "lower case culture" (Bennett, 1998, p. 3) or even as "Big C" and "small c" (Lee, 2009, p. 78; Paige et al., 1999, p. 70).

Although the categorization of culture is helpful from a pedagogical perspective, Tang (2006) advises us against a rigid separation of its components, since they are woven together and complement each other.

In language teaching, culture and language have always been bound together: "What

most scholars agree on is that language and culture cannot be separated from one another" (Weninger & Kiss, 2015, p.50). In this manner, language "expresses cultural reality" (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018, p. 403) and is invariably cultural (Risager, 2005). This close association can be seen in terms like Agar's "languaculture" (1994), Risager's "linguaculture" (2007) and Kramsch's "language-culture nexus" (2011). According to Byram (2017), these terms reinforce the idea that the cultural dimension should be integrated into the linguistic one, that "teaching language, by nature, involves teaching culture" (Nguyen et al., p. 166). Nonetheless, the teaching of culture has been shaped by diverse approaches that reflect two different views of the language-culture connection.

3. Teaching culture and Foreign Language Learning

In foreign language teaching, there have been three approaches to teaching culture which reflect two different perceptions of the relationship between language and culture (Piątkowska, 2015).

In the first view, culture is seen as a static concept, that is to say, "a body of static, classifiable, teachable, and learnable knowledge, information, rules or facts" (Shih, 2015, p. 409) that has to be transmitted. As such, culture and language are not bound together. This conceptualization gave way to the Knowledge-based Approach, where cultural competence consisted mainly in the transmission of factual information, and to the contrastive approach, where the comparison and contrast of elements prevented deep cultural analysis, since culture was seen "as a set of declarative propositions understood as facts" (Piątkowska, 2015, p. 4).

The second view is built on a dynamic approach to culture in which language and culture are interrelated (Ho, 2009). This is the Intercultural Communicative Competence Approach, which aims to remedy the shortcomings of Communicative Language Teaching:

> However, despite its roots in Hymes' work (...) communicative competence has come to be interpreted somewhat narrowly and prescriptively, as appropriate language use rather than competence in the social and cultural practices of a community of which language is a large part (Roberts et al., 2001, p. 26).

In the Communicative Approach, the standard of proficiency entails a monolithic view of language since it is based on the premise of a "normed target variety" (Hall, 2013, p. 225).

Thus, building on the concept of English as a *lingua franca*, the Intercultural Approach rejects the ideal of the native speaker and prepares students for cross-cultural communication, which "requires the ability to look at the target language culture from various cultural perspectives respecting different values, beliefs and assumptions" (Piątkowska, 2015, p. 6). At the core of this approach is the ability to decentre, to distance ourselves from our own culture and look at cultural aspects from our interlocutor's perspective (Byram, 1997). As learners will have to communicate successfully and interact with people from other cultures, cultural meaning is negotiated, which allows for a dynamic view of culture.

4. INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

As we have just seen, culture is not a fixed set of values, beliefs or practices connected to a specific language or nationality. Thus, we should go beyond the promotion of cultural competence to enhance intercultural competence, because the former "is related to the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with the target language countries, whereas intercultural competence requires a broader definition that embraces the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to participate in successful cross-cultural situations" (Czura, 2016, p. 85). Therefore, most researchers agree on a three-dimensional conceptualization of intercultural competence: affective, cognitive and behavioral (Chao, 2013; Hessel, 2019). Byram's model of intercultural competence (1997) identifies five components encompassing the three dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education. The development of these elements is essential for successful intercultural communication, where students are able "to think and act critically, and to negotiate the complexities of today's world" (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 141). The development of intercultural competence needs to be specifically addressed in class, as culture is not automatically acquired with the foreign language (Byram & Wagner, 2018; Piatwoska, 2015). Educators, then, are responsible for developing interculturally competent learners. Nevertheless, studies show that many teachers still approach culture as a static concept, equating culture with the transmission of knowledge of the target culture (Bandura & Sercu, 2005; Czura, 2016; Gu, 2016; Maijala, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2016). This emphasis on knowledge undervalues attitudes and skills (Castro & Sercu, 2005), revealing an inconsistency between theory and practice. Maijala (2018) suggests that textbooks are also to blame in this regard. Textbooks are still the most common instructional tool and the main source of cultural content. However, they widely interpret culture teaching as passing on cultural information about the target country with a focus on external aspects (Byram & Wagner, 2018; Canale, 2016; Larrea-Espinar & Raigón-Rodríguez, 2020; Vinall & Shin, 2019). For this reason, we suggest the use of an additional resource to culture teaching conducive to intercultural understanding. As communication today is mostly multimodal (Bonsignori, 2018; Ruck, 2020), we can take advantage of TV shows to enhance culture learning.

5. TV AND FILMS IN EFL

In the teaching of foreign languages, it is very common to use films and television series in the target language (Stempleski & Tomalin, 2001). The viewing of foreign media was adopted as early as the 1970s to improve students' linguistic skills (Yang, 2016). There is extensive research on the pedagogical advantages of media for the development of language proficiency: grammar (Ruhl, 1978), vocabulary (Bonsignori, 2018; D'Ydewalle & Van de Poel, 1999; Webb, 2010), listening (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005), oral skills (Dikilitas & Duvency, 2009), writing (Kasper, 2000), and pragmatics (Bruti, 2015). Moreover, some studies concentrate on the role of media in motivating students (Bada & Okan, 2000; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). Audiovisual material provides authentic context and input for students:

"[…] with its contextualised images, language and action, has been regarded as an engaging 'authentic' source of learning" (Truong & Tran, 2013, p. 208). The language input is real because it has not been created for language learners (Kaiser, 2011). In this manner, the language is not simplified and retains its original pace and accents (Yang, 2016). However, some doubts have been cast on the authenticity of this material, pointing to the fact that this language is not natural or spontaneous. Al-Surmi (2012) distinguishes between natural and authentic conversation; the latter refers to dialogue that is being reproduced or replicated in a specific context. In this way, audiovisual material is authentic and, most importantly, provides a broader picture of the linguistic and paralinguistic elements of language.

The use of subtitles and captions has also been examined in relation to the development of language proficiency through media content. As subtitles reinforce the connection between oral and written language (Webb & Nation, 2017), most evidence points to the benefits of using same-language text to boost language learning. Thus, subtitles or captions can lead to improvements in grammar, listening, comprehension, pragmatics and vocabulary (Abrams, 2014; D'Ydewalle & Van de Poel, 1999; Ghia, 2012; Kuppens, 2010; Vanderplank, 2016; Yang, 2014). In particular, Pujadas and Muñoz (2019, p. 479) comment on "the potential of television programmes and movies for learning vocabulary due to its lexical richness, repeated encounters with low-frequency words, and visual image support".

Due to the renewed interest in culture, audiovisual material has also started to be used not only for language but also for culture learning. TV shows and films can help to integrate language and culture since they are carriers of cultural information, a window open to different cultural realities that provide "an authentic look at culture" (Yang, 2016, p. 3). Audiovisual material can give access to relevant sociocultural information about a culture as it shows its values, worldviews, behaviors and beliefs (Truong & Tran, 2014). Ruck insists on this idea: "Specifically, audiovisual texts are a valuable resource to model interpersonal communication and provide semiotically and socioculturally rich contexts for interpretive viewing to interpret the communication and cultural practices in the texts and relate them to cultural perspectives" (2020, p. 2). Moreover, audiovisual material promotes reflection on our own culture, which fosters the shift from ethnocentric to ethnorelative attitudes. In the academic context, many studies have addressed the use of films for (inter)cultural training and critical reflection (Chao, 2013; Guzzi Harrison, 2009; Hauptle-Barcelo, 2008; Kaiser & Shibahara, 2014; Oxford & Gkonou, 2018; Tognozzi, 2010; Truong & Tran, 2014; Tuna & Razi, 2016; Vieluf & Göbel, 2019; Yang, 2016; Zhang, 2011). As TV series and sitcoms have gained social and cultural relevance in recent years, they have also started to be used in pedagogical contexts for culture learning. This type of media promotes "contextualized engagement" (Truong & Tran, 2014), which favors the interpretation of cultural products in their appropriate context (Yang & Fleming, 2013). Thus, the number of publications addressing TV shows and sitcoms from a cultural perspective is growing, albeit slightly. Focusing on sitcoms, which is the genre chosen for this study, the academic research has examined cultural messages in *The Simpsons* (Rucynski, 2011), *Modern Family* (González-Alafita et al., 2012), *Friends* (Larrea-Espinar & Raigón-Rodríguez, 2012), *The Big Bang Theory* (Lee, 2016) and *Master of None* (Raigón-Rodríguez & Larrea-Espinar, 2019). In the foreign language classroom, situation comedies have been generally favored for their short running time and the closed nature of their episodes.

The genre, whose origins can be traced back to the radio, became popular in the 1950s

with the success of *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-1957). The conventions of the traditional sitcom in terms of production, narrative structure, content and humor were revisited at the turn of the century, bringing about a renewal of the genre. The new sitcom is longer, closer to a documentary or cinema production, more advanced and inclusive in terms of content, and more subtle in terms of humor (Bonaut-Iriarte & Grandío-Pérez, 2009).

Yang (2016) indicates that audiovisual material can be a tool furthering the development of intercultural skills, among others, since watching films or shows has an effect on students' knowledge and attitudes. Sitcoms "can be an effective platform for the language learners to be immersed in the culture or way of life of the target community" (Chang, 2015, p. 26).

The next section will introduce the main defining features of American culture providing academic support for the activities developed in the teaching proposal.

6. AMERICAN VALUES

There are three factors that have helped shape the values and beliefs that underlie American behaviors. The first of them is the country's geographical context, a proverbial land of unlimited natural wealth and resources. The obsession with the frontier has, thus, played an important role; this is a recurring myth, one of endless possibilities, which shapes the country's character and history. The frontier provided the space and conditions to strengthen the American ideals of individual freedom, self-reliance, and equality of opportunity (Datesman et al., 2014, p. 86). It also provides an explanation for Americans' obsession with guns and taking the law into their own hands.

The second factor is how immigration built the country as we know it. America has always been a nation of immigrants, but it was over the course of the twentieth century when its population quadrupled and reached 300 million people. This immigration flow was not entirely diverse, but rather controlled by quotas imposed to protect white, Protestant "Americanness". These restrictions prevented most Asians from entering the country legally in the first half of the twentieth century (Daniels, 2006, p. 76). The creation of unity from diversity proved to be essential: "One means by which America has unified itself is through an imagined communal mythology that all could share and that provided a cluster of beliefs through which the nation could be articulated, both to itself and to the world" (Campbell & Kean, 2016, p. 30). A part of that mythology is the American Dream, a Shangri-La rooted in the psyche of the immigrants, who came to this land looking for individual freedom, opportunity and wealth. Despite the fact that many Americans still believe that it is possible to go from rags to riches, many authors claim that this dream is dead, as equality of opportunity does not exist anymore. According to David Simon, creator of *The Wire*, "in Baltimore, as in so many cities, it is no longer possible to describe this as a myth. It is no longer possible even to remain polite on the subject. It is, in a word, a lie" (Alvarez, 2009, p. 6). According to Daniels, other myths that are associated with immigration are Plymouth Rock, the Statue of Liberty and the Melting Pot: "The first, much beloved by politicians, holds that most immigrants came for religious and/or political liberty; the second that most immigrants came desperately poor; while the third puts forth the assimilationist notion that ethnic differences quickly disappeared" (Daniels, 2006, p. 74). Like most preconceived ideas, there is some truth to these conceptions: some did find freedom and wealth as they

assimilated in their new country. It is this set of shared beliefs and founding myths that provide Americans with a coherent sense of belonging. Naturally, this mythical past reflects mainly the values of a powerful group, seeking to present a profoundly heteroglossic reality as uniform and exemplifying the nature of cultural privilege (Valdiviezo & Nieto, 2015, p. 94). In our case, "whiteness became the privileged grounding and metaphor for the empty abstraction of US citizenship" (Singh, 2009, p. 10).

The last defining feature is religion, especially Protestantism. America is, at its core, a religious country. Even though Article 6 and the First Amendment of the Constitution were meant to create separation between church and state, references to God, God's will and the Bible are common in American politics and presidents' speeches. Although the number of Protestants has waned in the last fifty years, their values are at the very center of American culture and their leaders still hold most of the economic and political power. Only a hundred years ago, Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the subsequent Volstead Act to enforce it federally. Prohibition was a clear statement by Old Protestant America, whose beliefs remained intact despite having become an increasingly secular movement. It was only too natural that other Protestant values, like success and financial gain, would give way to bootlegging and criminal organizations, which made the most of this newly created demand. The Eighteenth Amendment was repealed 14 years later, having achieved nothing and remaining as the only addition to the Constitution to be rescinded to date. According to Roof and Caron (2006, p. 113), religion in the United States "takes on a very visible – and in ways puzzling and disturbing – role in public life". Still today, the rhetoric based on (white, and mainly Protestant) God and country is very powerful, fueling constant alliances between political neoconservatives and Christian leaders. Even if church and state are separated in the constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance ("one nation under God") is a constant reminder that America is still undecided on whether religion should be a private or public matter.

7. TEACHING PROPOSAL

"*Superstore*: social issues and the downside of the American Dream"
This teaching proposal addresses the proven shortcomings of textbooks regarding cultural learning in the EFL classroom. Thus, it has been designed to provide an insight into American cultural values using television. The proposal has been devised for university students, who are expected:
- To identify North American values and beliefs and learn how they underlie visible behaviors.
- To become aware of their own values and how these influence the way they interpret the world.
- To develop positive attitudes and curiosity towards other cultures and, in particular, towards North American culture.
We have chosen to work with the sitcom *Superstore*. This show has consistently dealt with the economic and social problems of middle- and low-income workers, who are unable to provide food and appropriate healthcare for themselves and their families. Many have argued that Cloud 9 (a fictional superstore chain) has striking similarities with Walmart, the

largest private employer in the US with one and half million workers nationwide. According to the *Washington Post*, many of them are paid below the poverty line ("working poor"), receive no health care benefits, and are bombarded with anti-union propaganda[1].

The workshop's structure follows the methodological sequence of pre, while and post-viewing activities:

A) Pre-watching activities: Before watching the episode, students will be asked to discuss which values and beliefs they think that are relevant in American culture, and if/how television plays a role in portraying those values. After the discussion, we will put forward the idea of culture as an iceberg: behaviors are just the tip, while values and beliefs are underwater and underlie those behaviors. Only by understanding the hidden part can we make sense of external cultural aspects.

Next, the students will read the text "Traditional American Values and Beliefs" from the book *American Ways: An Introduction to American Culture* (Datesman et al., 2014, pp. 31-37).

This chapter explains how American culture consists of six basic values organized in pairs representing rights and responsibilities:

Table 1. American values

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM	SELF-RELIANCE
EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY	COMPETITION
MATERIAL WEALTH	HARD WORK

The information provided will make the students aware of the how the pairs are interrelated. The benefit of individual freedom is associated with self-reliance. The earliest settlers escaped the controls that existed in Europe (government, religion, aristocratic hierarchy, etc.) and, as such, were in charge of their own destinies. In order to keep this freedom, the cost that they have had to pay (responsibility) is self-reliance. Individuals have to rely on themselves and solve their own problems. In relation to equality of opportunity, it reflects the belief that everyone has a chance to succeed. Immigrants could rise to a higher social position since their place in life was not determined in this new country. As life is seen as a race, competition is the price to be paid for this equality of opportunity. In this manner, an individual has the responsibility, the duty to enter the race for the purpose of succeeding, despite knowing that not everyone will be successful. Finally, the abundant natural resources of this land drew in many immigrants who went there in the hope of raising their standard of living, their material wealth. This attempt at a better life is the foundation of the American Dream, but to acquire material wealth, one needs to work hard, hence the importance of holding a job and not living off government welfare. Being the latter pair of values still relevant in American society, it is generally acknowledged that it is very difficult for the average worker these days to get rich, no matter how hard they work. Therefore, the American Dream is dead (we will delve into this idea in the episode). We will continue with a comprehension activity to review the ideas presented in the reading. The chapter offers

[1] See https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/05/09/average-walmart-store-manager-makes-year-many-employees-still-earn-below-poverty-line/

different activities that can be used to check the students' understanding. For this workshop, we have selected the multiple-choice exercise "Understand Details" (p. 39). Finally, we will conclude this section with a speaking activity in which the students are asked to discuss historical differences between the creation of the USA and their own country and how these differences can help understand cultural traits.

B) While-watching activities: The students will watch the last episode from the first season, episode 11 "Labor", in which one of the employees gives birth and we are made aware that Cloud 9 does not offer their employees paid maternity leave. A couple of coworkers try to contact corporate to ask for a solution only to have a "union buster" sent to the store. The store manager is fired for "suspending" the new mother for six weeks with pay. Then, most of the workers walk out of the store in protest as a reaction to their manager being laid off. The first season ends with the jobs of all the employees in jeopardy. The episode will be played with English subtitles. Same language captions are proven to be effective in improving grammar, listening comprehension, pragmatics and vocabulary (as discussed in the theoretical framework).

While watching the episode, the students will have to complete a worksheet with some comprehension questions, such as:

Why can't Cheyenne take the day off to give birth?

Why do Amy and Jonah call the corporate headquarters?

What are the two words that make the executives panic?

What is the training session about?

Why are the workers hired for less than 40 hours?

Why is Glenn fired?

C) After-watching activities: After checking the answers to the comprehension questions, we will focus on making the students aware of how the working conditions (and some situations) depicted in the episode are connected to the cultural values presented earlier. The activity below is presented as a suggestion:

In pairs/groups, discuss how the six values described in the text from "American Ways" can be related to the following issues in the episode: - Lack of healthcare for workers - Lack of paid maternity leave - Anti-union policies - "Working poor": low wages and no benefits

For example, the issue of "anti-union policies" is embodied in the "union-buster", who states: "I don't need to pay someone to speak for me". This idea points directly to "self-reliance". Finally, the students can discuss how the principles of freedom and social justice are understood in their own society and their implications. To this end, we will present this famous Ronald Reagan quote: "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help".

If we are interested in measuring students' self-perception of their development of intercultural competence and, more specifically, attitudes and interpreting skills when using

this type of workshop, Raigón-Rodríguez & Larrea-Espinar (2019) provide a Likert questionnaire with items based on descriptors extracted from the FREPA project (Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches).

8. Conclusion

The concept of English as a *lingua franca* means that English is the language of choice that speakers use to communicate globally. It is widely acknowledged that language is embedded in culture and, in this context, culture plays an even more prominent role, since we are expected to interact with representatives of different cultural backgrounds. The goal of foreign language teaching, then, is the development of intercultural communicative competence, leaving behind the previous focus on language competence and the transmission of culture-specific knowledge. As intercultural competence is not naturally acquired or developed with the foreign language (Piątkowska, 2015), "the intercultural elements need to be dealt with in a systematic manner in education" (Baker & Fang, 2021, p. 14). Within intercultural competence, skills and attitudes tend to be neglected in the classroom (Nguyen et al., 2016), perhaps because culture teaching is usually dependent on the content of the materials and, as we have seen, textbooks are generally limited to the introduction of cultural facts. In this article, we have supported the use of TV in the classroom as an additional resource to focus on skills, attitudes and cultural awareness, which will finally promote intercultural competence. Thus, we have argued that media can reveal the practices, beliefs and values underlying a culture and, as such, is a powerful tool to help students understand the cultural values and social norms that influence intercultural communication. After describing the most relevant features from American culture, we have designed a teaching proposal for the EFL classroom at the university level using an episode from the sitcom *Superstore*. The suggested activities work on the development of skills (interpreting/relating and discovery) and attitudes, as the students are asked to identify the American values and beliefs depicted in the episode and to reflect on their own culture. In this regard, the field of intercultural language teaching would benefit from a more regular use of audiovisual material, since it helps "raise the students' awareness of how their cultural biases can shape the lenses through which they view and interpret behaviours and beliefs of people from a different culture" (Truong & Tran, 2014, p. 219). Therefore, television becomes an invaluable tool for training future global citizens.

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