

Barbara De Cock, Andrea Pizarro & Ferran Suner Munoz - The role of TV series on the comprehension of taboo language in foreign language students

Streaming platforms have facilitated the distribution and access to series in languages other than English. In recent years, several series in Spanish have known an extraordinary success. Such is the case of *La casa de papel* (“Money heist”), a global phenomenon that has accumulated more than 6700 million total viewing hours, according to Netflix [1]. The series tells the story of the planning and development of the robbery to the National Bank of Spain by a varied group of people. This heterogeneity is also depicted linguistically: The characters present variation at different sociolinguistic levels (level of education, ethnicity, etc.), which brings about a variety of vernaculars in every interaction. The linguistic variation is interestingly depicted in the use of taboo language, which is used as a resource to index social features of the characters. For instance, the so-called “Professor” construes his uptight persona among others by never swearing, whereas the rest of the characters use taboo language abundantly and with a variety of functions.

The series has become particularly popular among students of Spanish of a foreign language (L2). The success of this and other series leads to the hypothesis that the increased exposure to Spanish through streamed content possibly facilitates the comprehension of taboo language. In previous studies it was proved that linguistic immersion (e.g. through a stay abroad) has a significant impact on the knowledge of that kind of language [2]. The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether the same effect applies to the amount of exposure to L2 Spanish through TV series and assess the implications for language acquisition.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To this end, a group of students at B2-C1 level will complete a test, where they are asked to translate or propose alternatives in their first language for 20 taboo expressions used in *La casa de papel*. In addition, participants will be presented with a linguistic biography questionnaire, asking them about their contact with Spanish both during prolonged stays and through watching Spanish TV series. The analysis of the factors modulating the comprehension of taboo expressions will include variables related to the speaker (social variables and information related to their linguistic biography) and to the linguistic context (types of taboo expressions and proximity with the students’ first language) as independent variables.

EXPECTED RESULTS

We wish to show whether and to which extent prolonged contact with various registers of Spanish through TV series can contribute to enhancing students’ comprehension of taboo expressions. This offers further perspectives to look into the role of various types of so-called internationalization at home for contact with non-standard varieties or with expressions from informal registers that are typically not present in textbooks.