

A review of pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language use in English TV shows

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Abstract

English television shows have become a ubiquitous source of authentic language input for learners and a rich dataset for researchers investigating real-world language use. This review synthesizes recent studies on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language in English TV shows with particular attention to their implications for applied linguistics and language pedagogy. The review examines peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference proceedings published between 2000 and 2025, using thematic analysis to identify patterns, benefits, challenges and research gaps. Key findings indicate that television dialogue abundantly represents pragmatic features such as speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals, compliments), politeness strategies, conversational implicature, idiomatic expressions and turn-taking mechanisms. Additionally, sociolinguistic dimensions including dialectal variation, social class markers, gender differences, age-related variation and context-driven style-shifting are systematically portrayed. While television dialogue shares many features with natural conversation, it also exhibits stylized characteristics such as reduced overlap, clearer turn boundaries less repetition and raising questions about authenticity. Pedagogically, English TV shows can develop learners' pragmatic competence, enhance sociolinguistic awareness, teach formulaic language, improve listening comprehension and increase motivation. However, the literature has notable limitations including small sample sizes, a bias toward American and British sitcoms, insufficient attention to sociocultural context, a lack of longitudinal studies and methodological inconsistencies. The review identifies future research priorities: longitudinal designs, cross-cultural studies, equity and accessibility, ethical considerations, teacher-AI interaction, diversification of genres and English varieties, learner individual differences, transfer to production and comparative studies across media. In conclusion, English television shows represent a valuable resource for understanding and teaching language in its social contexts, but they should complement rather than replace teachers, direct instruction and authentic interaction. This review provides a comprehensive framework for researchers and educators seeking to integrate televised language into applied linguistics research and language teaching practice.

1. Introduction

The field of teaching English as a foreign language has witnessed a remarkable shift toward recognizing the importance of authentic, naturalistic language input in developing learners' communicative competence. In this context, audiovisual media particularly English television shows have emerged as a rich source of realistic language input that reflects everyday language use patterns (Fägersten, 2016). Television shows have transcended their role as entertainment media to become a fertile ground for linguistic research, offering living models of language as it is used in various natural contexts.

The manner in which audiovisual media represent linguistic reality has increasingly attracted the attention of sociolinguists and pragmatics scholars who have traditionally focused on "authentic" discourse extracted from face-to-face interactions (Stamou, 2011). The importance of television shows lies in their ability to provide a wealth of diverse linguistic data including dialectal variations, sociolinguistic patterns and nuanced pragmatic uses that rarely appear in traditional educational

materials or textbooks (Bednarek, 2023). Contemporary research confirms that such materials offer learners access to natural conversation routines, idiomatic sequences, politeness strategies and contextualized language use, all of which are critical for fluent and contextually appropriate communication (Al-Ghazali, 2025).

Furthermore, empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of using movie and television show clips in enhancing the pragmatic competence of English as a foreign language learners. In a study conducted by Mohammed, Ahmed and Abdullah (2022), it was found that the experimental group which received direct instruction on speech act patterns (requests and suggestions) through selected clips from movies and TV series, significantly outperformed the control group which was exposed only to limited pragmatic input through printed texts (Mohammed et al., 2022). These findings align with what researchers have consistently argued: that audiovisual input represents an authentic source of language and culture that significantly contributes to motivating and facilitating second or foreign language learning (Kim, 2015).

Despite this growing interest, a preliminary review of the literature indicates that studies addressing the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language use in English television shows remain scattered and require systematic synthesis. There is a need for a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic variables such as dialects, social class, gender and situational context are represented as well as documentation of speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals, compliments), politeness mechanisms and conversational implicatures as they appear in these shows (Bednarek, 2018). Additionally, research gaps concerning the linguistic authenticity of televised dialogue compared to natural language and the impact of these shows on the development of learners' communicative competence still require further investigation (Bednarek, 2025).

Based on the above, this review aims to identify patterns of pragmatic usage in English television shows, including speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments, as well as politeness principles, conversational implicature, and turn-taking mechanisms. It also seeks to analyze the sociolinguistic variables manifested in these shows, including dialectal variation and the influence of social class, gender, age, and situational context on language use. In addition, this review evaluates the usefulness of English television shows as authentic input for teaching English as a foreign language by examining empirical evidence concerning their contribution to the development of learners' pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness. It further identifies research gaps and methodological challenges in previous studies and proposes directions for future research, thereby contributing to the advancement of applied linguistic theory and educational practice. Overall, this review provides a comprehensive framework that synthesizes the existing literature, highlights the potential of television shows as a platform for studying language in its social and cultural contexts, and offers practical recommendations for researchers and educators.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative systematic review approach to synthesize existing research on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language use in English television shows, drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference proceedings. A systematic search was conducted using electronic databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science and ERIC) with the following keywords and Boolean operators: "pragmatics in TV series", "sociolinguistics in sitcoms", "authentic dialogue in English shows", "speech acts AND television" and "politeness AND TV drama". Manual snowball sampling of reference lists was also performed. The search was limited to studies published between 2000 and 2025.

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, commonalities, and divergences across the literature. The analysis followed a six-phase procedure comprising familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and synthesis. The findings were subsequently organized into five higher-order themes, namely pragmatic features, including speech acts, politeness, implicature, and turn-taking; sociolinguistic variables, including dialect, gender, social class, age, and situational context; the authenticity of televised dialogue; pedagogical applications; and methodological approaches.

The methodological strengths and limitations of the reviewed studies were critically evaluated. Conversation analysis provides detailed insights into interactional structures but faces challenges

when applied to scripted dialogue. Corpus linguistics offers replicable quantitative patterns but may decontextualize pragmatic meaning. Qualitative discourse analysis provides contextual depth but lacks generalizability. Questionnaire surveys and experimental studies provide evidence of pedagogical effectiveness but are often limited by small sample sizes and short durations. Interviews capture learner perceptions but are subject to self-report bias.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Pragmatic Features in English TV Shows

Research on pragmatic features in English television shows has consistently revealed that scripted dialogue contains a wide range of speech acts that mirror natural conversation. Speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals and compliments appear frequently in TV series, providing rich data for pragmatic analysis. For instance requests in television dialogue are often realized through various strategies, ranging from direct imperatives to conventionally indirect forms such as ("Could you...?") with the choice of strategy depending largely on the social distance and power dynamics between characters (Fägersten, 2016). Apologies in TV shows similarly exhibit patterns comparable to natural speech including the use of illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) such as "I'm sorry" or "I apologize" as well as more elaborate strategies involving offers of repair or accounts of the offense (Bednarek, 2018).

With respect to politeness principles, television dialogue demonstrates systematic use of both positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness which aims to satisfy the hearer's desire for approval appears in forms such as claiming common ground, joking and showing sympathy. Negative politeness which respects the hearer's need for freedom emerges through strategies like hedging, questioning and minimizing imposition (Fägersten, 2016). Mitigators such as "kind of," "sort of," "just" and "maybe" are frequently employed by characters to soften the force of potentially face-threatening acts including criticisms, disagreements and direct requests (Stamou, 2011).

The conversational implicature, a central concept in Gricean pragmatics referring to meanings inferred indirectly from what is explicitly said is also abundantly present in televised dialogue. Characters often violate or flout maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner to create implicatures that drive narrative tension, convey humor or reveal subtext (Bednarek, 2023). For example a character who responds to a direct question with an apparently irrelevant answer may implicate unwillingness to disclose information without explicitly refusing to answer.

Fixed and idiomatic expressions constitute another significant pragmatic feature of TV shows. Research indicates that television dialogue contains a high density of formulaic sequences including idioms such as ("spill the beans"), collocations ("strongly agree"), lexical bundles ("I don't know what") and situational routines ("How are you doing?"). These expressions serve important pragmatic functions such as managing transitions in conversation, expressing stance and signaling group membership or shared knowledge (Fägersten, 2016).

Finally, turn-taking and conversational management mechanisms have been extensively analyzed in television discourse. Studies drawing on conversation analysis have shown that scripted dialogue largely adheres to the same turn-taking principles observed in natural conversation including minimal overlap, smooth transitions and the use of turn-yielding cues (intonation, gaze, pause). However, televised dialogue also exhibits certain stylistic features such as reduced overlap and more clearly articulated turn boundaries which may reflect the influence of scriptwriting conventions and the need for clarity to audiences (Bednarek, 2018). Management devices such as discourse markers ("well," "so," "you know"), backchannels ("uh-huh," "yeah") and repair mechanisms ("I mean," "let me rephrase that") are also prevalent, contributing to the naturalistic feel of the dialogue (Stamou, 2011).

3.2. Sociolinguistic Dimensions

English television shows serve as a rich repository for examining sociolinguistic variation, offering researchers access to representations of how language use correlates with social factors such as region, social class, gender, age and situational context. Unlike controlled experimental

settings, TV shows present language as it is sociolinguistically embedded with characters often deliberately constructed to speak in ways that index particular social identities (Bednarek, 2018). Dialectal variation is perhaps the most visible sociolinguistic feature in English TV shows. American and British television series frequently represent regional dialects as a means of authenticating characters and situating them geographically. For example characters in British series may speak with Cockney, Yorkshire, Scouse or Estuary English accents, each carrying distinct social connotations ranging from working-class ruggedness to urban sophistication (Fägersten, 2016). Similarly American television represents regional varieties such as Southern American English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), New York City English and General American. Research has shown that dialect representation in TV shows is not merely decorative but serves narrative functions, often aligning particular dialects with specific character traits such as trustworthiness, education level or moral character (Stamou, 2011).

Social class constitutes another critical sociolinguistic variable. Television dialogue frequently encodes class distinctions through phonological, lexical and grammatical features. Upper-class characters are typically portrayed using standard or prestige varieties with careful articulation, elaborate vocabulary and complex sentence structures. In contrast, working-class characters may be represented using non-standard features such as multiple negation ("I didn't see nothing"), copula deletion ("He going") or localized vocabulary (Bednarek, 2023). These linguistic markers of class are often deployed deliberately by screenwriters to create distinct character archetypes and to reinforce or challenge social hierarchies within the narrative.

Gender and language have been extensively examined in television discourse. Studies indicate that male and female characters in TV shows tend to use language differently, though these differences may reflect stereotypical expectations rather than actual conversational patterns found in real life. Female characters are often portrayed as using more politeness strategies, hedge words such as ("I think," "maybe") and tag questions ("It's nice, isn't it?") while male characters are shown as more direct, assertive and likely to interrupt or challenge other speakers (Fägersten, 2016). However, more recent television series have begun to challenge these stereotypes, presenting characters with more diverse and non-traditional gendered speech patterns, reflecting broader social shifts in understandings of gender identity and performance (Stamou, 2011).

Age-related variation is also evident in TV dialogue. Younger characters typically employ contemporary slang, vernacular forms and informal registers while older characters use more conservative, standard or even outdated linguistic forms. These age-based linguistic contrasts serve to mark generational differences and can be used comically or dramatically to highlight intergenerational conflict or misunderstanding (Bednarek, 2018).

Finally, situational context (sometimes referred to as register or style) profoundly shapes language use in television shows. Characters shift their speech along a continuum from formal to informal depending on the setting, participants, topic and purpose of the interaction. For example the same character may use highly formal, respectful language in a courtroom or job interview scene but shift to casual, colloquial and even non-standard speech in a private conversation with close friends. These context-driven stylistic shifts are crucial for authentic character portrayal and provide learners with models of how to adjust their language appropriately across different social situations (Fägersten, 2016).

In summary, the sociolinguistic dimensions of English TV shows offer a complex and multifaceted representation of language in society. While some features may be stylized or exaggerated for narrative effect, the overall patterns provide valuable insights into how language varies according to region, class, gender, age and context, making television dialogue a useful resource for sociolinguistic research and language pedagogy alike (Bednarek, 2023).

3.3. Authenticity of Language in TV Shows vs Real-Life Communication

A central debate in the literature concerns the extent to which dialogue in English television shows accurately reflects real-life spoken language. While TV shows are often praised for providing learners with authentic or "naturalistic" input, researchers have identified both similarities and differences between scripted television dialogue and naturally occurring conversation (Fägersten, 2016).

Arguments for authenticity emphasize that television dialogue shares many core features with spontaneous speech. Corpus-based comparisons have revealed that TV shows contain high frequencies of contractions such as ("don't," "gonna," "wanna"), discourse markers ("well," "so," "like"), hedges ("sort of," "kind of") and informal vocabulary that closely mirror natural conversation (Bednarek, 2018). Additionally, television dialogue exhibits similar patterns of turn-taking, overlap and repair mechanisms found in real-life interaction. For these reasons many researchers argue that TV shows represent a form of "authentic" or "quasi-authentic" input that is far superior to scripted textbook dialogues which often suffer from artificiality, excessive formality and lack of natural discourse features (Stamou, 2011).

However, critiques of authenticity point to several systematic differences between televised and natural dialogue. First, television dialogue is carefully scripted and edited whereas real conversation is spontaneous and unpredictable. As a result, TV dialogue tends to be more densely packed with information, more logically structured and less repetitive than natural speech (Fägersten, 2016). Real conversations often contain false starts, hesitations, repetitions and incomplete utterances that are largely absent from polished television scripts. Second, television dialogue typically exhibits reduced overlap and interruption. In natural conversation speakers frequently overlap or interrupt one another whereas scripted dialogue tends to respect clear turn boundaries to ensure audience comprehension and narrative clarity (Bednarek, 2023). This difference may create an unrealistic model of turn-taking for language learners who expect perfectly alternating, non-overlapping speech. Third, repair mechanisms (strategies for correcting or clarifying speech) are represented differently. While TV shows do include repairs such as "I mean" or "Let me rephrase that," the frequency and types of repair may not fully reflect the complexity of self-correction and other-correction found in spontaneous interaction. Natural conversations often feature more extensive negotiation of meaning particularly among speakers with different proficiency levels or shared knowledge (Bednarek, 2018). Fourth, dialect and accent representation in TV shows may be stylized or exaggerated. While television series often include characters speaking regional or social dialects, these representations are typically mediated by actors who may not be native speakers of those varieties and the dialogue is written by screenwriters who may compress or simplify authentic dialect features for narrative efficiency (Stamou, 2011). As a result some researchers caution that TV dialects may represent "hyperdialectal" or stereotypical versions of actual speech communities rather than accurate linguistic portrayals.

A related concern is the absence of sociolinguistic variation within individual characters. In real life speakers shift their style systematically across different contexts, audiences and topics. While TV characters do exhibit some style-shifting (formal vs informal register depending on setting), the range and subtlety of shifting may be reduced compared to real speakers (Fägersten, 2016). Characters often speak in a consistently characterized manner that prioritizes recognizability over realistic variability.

Despite these limitations, most researchers agree that television dialogue strikes a useful balance between authenticity and comprehensibility. For language learners, especially those at intermediate levels, the slightly cleaner more organized nature of TV dialogue may actually be beneficial as it provides exposure to naturalistic features without the extreme messiness of spontaneous conversation (Bednarek, 2023). The key is to recognize TV shows as a pedagogical resource that complements rather than replaces, exposure to real-world interaction. Teachers and learners should be aware of both the strengths (naturalistic lexicon, pragmatic features, sociolinguistic variation) and limitations (reduced overlap, stylized dialects, scripted fluency) of television dialogue as a model for language learning (Stamou, 2011).

In conclusion, while English TV shows do not perfectly replicate real-life communication, they offer a valuable form of enhanced authentic input that bridges the gap between highly artificial textbook dialogues and the challenging complexity of spontaneous conversation. When used critically and in combination with other forms of input and interaction, television shows can significantly enrich language learners' exposure to naturalistic language use.

3.4. Implications for Language Teaching and Learning

The findings reviewed above carry significant implications for the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language. Researchers have increasingly recognized that English

television shows, when integrated thoughtfully into pedagogy can serve as a powerful resource for developing learners' pragmatic competence, sociolinguistic awareness and overall communicative ability (Fägersten, 2016).

Developing pragmatic competence is one of the most promising applications of TV shows in the language classroom. Traditional textbooks often present speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals) in decontextualized overly polite or formulaic ways that do not reflect how native speakers actually perform these functions in everyday interaction. For example a textbook might present "Would you mind terribly if I asked you to close the window?" as a model request whereas a TV show would likely show characters using more context-sensitive strategies such as "Could you get that?" or simply "Close the window?" depending on the relationship between speakers (Bednarek, 2018). By exposing learners to a range of pragmatic strategies across different social contexts TV shows help learners understand that there is no single "correct" way to perform a speech act rather appropriateness depends on factors such as social distance, power and degree of imposition (Stamou, 2011).

Enhancing sociolinguistic awareness is another key benefit. Through exposure to diverse dialects, accents and social registers, learners develop the ability to recognize and interpret sociolinguistic variation. This awareness is crucial for real-world communication where learners will encounter speakers from different regional, social and cultural backgrounds. TV shows can help learners move beyond the idealized "standard English" often presented in textbooks and develop receptive competence in understanding varieties such as AAVE, Cockney, Southern American English or Indian English (Fägersten, 2016). Furthermore learners can observe how characters shift their speech style across formal and informal situations, providing models for appropriate register choice in their own communication.

Teaching formulaic language and idiomatic expressions is facilitated by TV shows which contain high densities of lexical bundles, idioms, collocations and situational routines. Unlike decontextualized vocabulary lists, TV shows present formulaic language in its natural discourse context, allowing learners to see not only what expressions mean but also when and how they are used. For example learners can observe how "I don't know" functions not only as an expression of ignorance but also as a hedge, a politeness strategy or a way to avoid commitment (Bednarek, 2023). Repetition of these expressions across episodes and series also supports incidental vocabulary acquisition and the development of fluent automatic language processing.

Improving listening comprehension and processing speed is another well-documented benefit. TV shows expose learners to natural speech rates, connected speech phenomena (assimilation, elision, reduction) and a range of accents. This exposure helps learners develop the ability to segment continuous speech into words and phrases, recognize reduced forms ("gonna," "wanna") and process language in real time. Using captions or subtitles strategically can scaffold this process with learners gradually moving from L1 subtitles to L2 subtitles to no subtitles as their proficiency develops (Beers Fägersten, 2016).

Promoting learner motivation and engagement is a further advantage. TV shows are inherently engaging offering compelling narratives relatable characters and cultural content that learners find intrinsically interesting. This engagement can lead to extensive exposure outside the classroom as learners choose to watch shows for entertainment as well as for language learning. Research indicates that motivated learners who regularly watch TV shows in English show greater gains in vocabulary listening comprehension and pragmatic awareness compared to learners who rely solely on traditional instructional materials (Stamou, 2011).

Recommended pedagogical practices for integrating television shows into language teaching include consciousness-raising tasks, in which teachers introduce specific pragmatic features, such as polite requests, before viewing and ask learners to observe how these features are realized in particular episodes. Explicit instruction may also be combined with authentic examples by teaching speech acts, politeness strategies, or sociolinguistic variation directly and then analyzing relevant television clips to illustrate these concepts in context (Bednarek, 2018). Other useful practices include cloze and gap-fill activities that remove pragmatic markers, discourse markers, or formulaic expressions from transcripts and require learners to identify appropriate forms based on context. Role-play and reenactment activities can encourage learners to reproduce scenes while attending to

pragmatic and sociolinguistic appropriateness and then modify the dialogue for different social situations, such as changing an interaction between close friends into one between strangers. Comparison activities can also be used to examine how the same speech act, such as an apology, is performed across different television shows or characters in order to highlight variation and choice. Finally, critical viewing activities can encourage learners to evaluate whether television representations of dialects, genders, or social classes are accurate or stereotypical, thereby fostering critical sociolinguistic awareness (Fägersten, 2016).

Cautions and limitations for pedagogy must also be acknowledged. Teachers should be aware that TV dialogue is scripted and may not fully represent real-life communication. Learners should not be led to believe that all native speakers talk like TV characters or that every pragmatic choice made by a character is appropriate in all contexts. Additionally, some TV shows contain offensive language cultural references that require background knowledge or rapid speech that may overwhelm beginners. Careful selection of appropriate material and scaffolded tasks are essential for successful integration (Bednarek, 2023).

3.5. Critical Evaluation of Previous Studies

A thorough evaluation of the existing literature on pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language use in English television shows reveals both notable strengths and significant limitations. Understanding these strengths and weaknesses is essential for interpreting current findings and designing more robust future research.

3.5.1. Strengths

Innovative methodological approaches: Many studies have employed innovative and rigorous methods to analyze television dialogue. Corpus-based studies in particular have enabled researchers to examine large datasets (millions of words of transcribed dialogue) and identify statistically significant patterns of pragmatic and sociolinguistic variation that would be impossible to detect through manual analysis alone (Bednarek, 2018). For example corpus studies have quantified the frequency of specific speech acts across different TV genres and compared these frequencies to natural conversation corpora, providing empirical evidence for claims about authenticity or stylization.

Rich qualitative insights: conversation analysis and qualitative discourse analysis have provided deep context-sensitive understandings of how pragmatic mechanisms operate within specific scenes and interactions. These approaches capture the sequential organization of talk, the role of non-verbal cues and the interpretive work that viewers (and learners) must perform to understand implicatures, politeness strategies and sociolinguistic meanings (Fägersten, 2016). Qualitative studies have also illuminated how television represents social identities through language revealing the subtle ways that dialect register and interactional style construct character and convey ideology.

Pedagogical relevance: a significant strength of this literature is its direct applicability to language teaching. Numerous studies have not only described pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of TV dialogue but explicitly discussed how these features can be taught in the classroom. Experimental studies though limited in number have provided preliminary evidence that using TV show clips leads to measurable gains in learners' pragmatic competence including their ability to produce and interpret speech acts appropriately (Mohammed et al., 2022). This focus on pedagogical application distinguishes the literature from purely descriptive media linguistics and enhances its value for applied linguistics.

Attention to diversity: recent studies have increasingly attended to issues of diversity and representation examining how television portrays speakers of different dialects, genders, ages, social classes and ethnicities. This attention aligns with broader sociolinguistic commitments to documenting language variation and challenging linguistic prejudice. By highlighting stereotypical or inaccurate representations researchers have contributed to critical media literacy and informed efforts to present more authentic and respectful linguistic diversity in television (Stamou, 2011).

3.5.2. Limitations

Limited empirical data and small sample sizes: Despite the strengths of some corpus-based studies much of the literature relies on small datasets often consisting of a handful of episodes from one or two TV shows. Many qualitative studies analyze only a few scenes or interactions raising questions about the generalizability of findings to other shows genres or time periods (Bednarek, 2023). Experimental pedagogical studies while valuable typically involve small numbers of participants (often fewer than 50) and short intervention periods (a few weeks) limiting their ability to demonstrate sustained learning outcomes or to generalize to broader learner populations.

Focus on American and British television: A striking limitation of the existing literature is its heavy reliance on American and British TV shows particularly popular sitcoms such as *Friends*, *The Office*, *Seinfeld* and *Frasier*. While these shows are widely available and culturally influential they represent only a narrow slice of English-language television. Far fewer studies have examined TV shows from other English-speaking countries including Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Nigeria or Singapore. This Anglocentric bias limits the generalizability of findings and neglects the rich pragmatic and sociolinguistic diversity of global English varieties (Fägersten, 2016).

Overemphasis on comedy and sitcoms: Within the limited set of shows studied sitcoms and comedies have received disproportionate attention compared to dramas, crime series, soap operas, reality TV or news broadcasts. Sitcoms are often selected because they contain high densities of conversational features and humor which are of pragmatic interest. However, sitcom dialogue is also highly stylized featuring ,faster pacing, more interruptions, more one-liners and less realistic turn-taking than other genres. Findings based primarily on sitcoms may not generalize to other types of television programming (Bednarek, 2018).

Focus on technology rather than pedagogy: Some studies particularly in the earlier literature have focused more on describing the capabilities of television as a technological medium (availability of subtitles, ease of access) rather than on the pedagogical processes through which learning occurs. What is often missing is detailed attention to how teachers and learners actually use TV shows in classroom settings including task design scaffolding strategies and learner interactions with materials. More research is needed on the "pedagogical implementation" of television-based instruction rather than merely advocating for its potential (Stamou, 2011).

Lack of sociocultural and pragmatic consideration: Although the literature acknowledges the importance of sociocultural context many studies analyze television dialogue in isolation from the broader cultural and institutional frameworks that shape its production and reception. For example few studies have examined how screenwriters' assumptions about language audience expectations or network policies influence the representation of dialects or the inclusion of taboo language. Additionally research on learner reception has often focused on comprehension and production of pragmatic features but has given less attention to how learners interpret appropriate or critique the cultural and ideological dimensions of television dialogue (Fägersten, 2016).

Absence of longitudinal studies: Nearly all existing studies are cross-sectional capturing language use or learning outcomes at a single point in time. There is a notable absence of longitudinal research tracking whether sustained exposure to TV shows over months or years leads to measurable changes in learners' pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence. Similarly few studies have investigated how television language might influence the production of second language speakers over extended periods including potential changes in their own pragmatic choices accommodation strategies or attitudes toward different dialects and varieties (Bednarek, 2023).

Methodological inconsistencies: The literature suffers from a lack of standardized methods for analyzing television dialogue making cross-study comparison difficult. For example researchers have used different transcription conventions, different definitions of speech act categories and different criteria for determining authenticity or naturalism. This methodological heterogeneity while reflecting legitimate disciplinary diversity also complicates efforts to synthesize findings and build cumulative knowledge (Stamou, 2011).

Limited attention to learner individual differences: Few studies have investigated how learner characteristics such as proficiency level, age, gender, learning style, motivation or prior exposure to English-language media moderate the effectiveness of television-based instruction. It is likely that television shows benefit some learners more than others but little empirical evidence exists to guide differentiated instruction or to tailor materials to specific learner populations.

3.6. Implications for Applied Linguistics

The findings and critical evaluation presented above carry significant implications for the field of applied linguistics. As the discipline concerned with real-world language problems and solutions, applied linguistics stands to benefit substantially from continued research on pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of English television shows. These implications span four primary areas: pedagogical innovation, research methodologies, theory development and teacher education.

3.6.1. Pedagogical Innovation

The most direct implications for applied linguistics relate to language teaching and learning. Applied linguists have long been concerned with the gap between classroom language and real-world language use. Traditional textbooks while serving important functions often present idealized, decontextualized and overly polite models of communication that do not prepare learners for the complexity of authentic interaction (Fägersten, 2016). English television shows offer a bridge across this gap, providing learners with exposure to naturalistic dialogue that includes the full range of pragmatic strategies, sociolinguistic variation and discourse features found in everyday communication.

Applied linguists can contribute to pedagogical innovation by developing and disseminating evidence-based instructional frameworks for integrating TV shows into language curricula. This includes creating principled criteria for selecting appropriate shows and episodes for different proficiency levels, designing tasks that focus learner attention on specific pragmatic and sociolinguistic features and developing assessment tools that measure progress in pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence (Bednarek, 2018). Additionally, applied linguists can collaborate with materials writers and educational technologists to produce teacher guides, worksheets and digital resources that facilitate the use of television content in diverse instructional contexts.

A related implication concerns the teaching of pragmatics specifically. Applied linguistics has developed a robust body of knowledge about how speech acts, politeness, implicature and discourse management operate in different languages and cultures. However translating this knowledge into classroom practice has remained challenging. Television shows provide a concrete, accessible medium for illustrating pragmatic concepts and for providing learners with multiple models of how pragmatic choices vary across contexts. Applied linguists can develop and test explicit instructional sequences that combine metapragmatic explanation with analysis of television dialogue, followed by production practice and feedback (Stamou, 2011).

3.6.2. Research Opportunities

The review has identified numerous gaps in the current literature, each of which represents an opportunity for applied linguistics research. Longitudinal studies are urgently needed to investigate whether sustained exposure to English television shows leads to measurable improvements in pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence over time. Such studies could track learners over several months or years using repeated measures of speech act production, implicature comprehension, dialect recognition and register appropriateness (Bednarek, 2023).

Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research represents another important direction. Most existing research has focused on learners from specific first language backgrounds (Arabic, Chinese, Spanish) learning English in specific contexts. Comparative studies examining how learners from different L1 backgrounds respond to television-based instruction and how their pragmatic transfer patterns interact with television input, would enrich theoretical understanding and inform more culturally responsive pedagogy. Similarly research on how television shows from different English-speaking countries can be used to develop awareness of World Englishes would address the Anglocentric bias identified in the literature (Fägersten, 2016).

Methodological innovation is another area where applied linguistics can contribute. The field has developed sophisticated approaches to analyzing learner language, measuring pragmatic competence and designing experimental interventions. These tools can be applied to investigate television-based learning more rigorously. For example applied linguists could develop validated instruments for assessing learners' ability to recognize and produce situationally appropriate speech acts after exposure to television shows or for measuring changes in attitudes toward different dialects and accents. Eye-tracking studies could investigate how learners attend to subtitles, visual cues and linguistic features while watching, providing insights into the cognitive processes underlying television-based learning (Bednarek, 2018).

3.6.3. Theory Development

The study of language in television shows also has implications for sociolinguistic theory. Traditionally sociolinguistics has prioritized the study of spontaneous, unscripted speech as the most authentic and valid data for understanding language variation and change. However, the pervasiveness of scripted media in contemporary life raises important questions about the relationship between televised language and everyday speech. Does television reflect real language change or does it accelerate or reshape it? How do viewers' attitudes toward dialects and accents interact with televised representations? Applied linguists and sociolinguists can collaborate to investigate these questions, potentially refining theories of language variation, change and attitudes to account for the role of mass media (Stamou, 2011).

Pragmatic theory may also benefit from engagement with televised data. While early pragmatics drew primarily on invented examples or carefully controlled experiments, the availability of large corpora of television dialogue offers opportunities to test pragmatic hypotheses against naturalistic (or quasi-naturalistic) data. For example researchers can examine whether the distribution of politeness strategies in television dialogue matches predictions derived from classic theories or whether Gricean maxims are flouted in systematic ways that vary across genres and contexts. Television data cannot replace the study of spontaneous conversation but it can complement it and generate hypotheses that can be tested in other settings (Fägersten, 2016).

3.6.4. Teacher Education and Professional Development

The effective use of television shows in language teaching requires that teachers themselves possess pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness and the pedagogical skills to develop these competencies in their learners. Applied linguistics programs have a responsibility to prepare teachers for this task. This includes ensuring that teachers understand key concepts from pragmatics (speech acts, politeness, implicature) and sociolinguistics (dialect variation, register, style-shifting) and can identify these features in television dialogue (Bednarek, 2023).

Teacher education should also provide opportunities for teachers to practice designing and implementing television-based lessons to reflect on challenges and successes and to share materials and strategies with colleagues. Practicum experiences might include having teachers use TV show clips with real learners under supervision with feedback focused on how well the activities developed pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence. Additionally, professional development workshops can introduce teachers to new television series, online resources and technological tools (clipping software, subtitle generators) that facilitate classroom use.

3.6.5. Integration of Technology and Sociocultural Approaches

Finally, the review suggests that applied linguistics would benefit from greater integration of technological and sociocultural perspectives. Television shows are technological artifacts produced, distributed and consumed through complex media systems. Understanding how learners actually engage with television content requires attention to their media practices, preferences and access to technology. At the same time, television is a cultural product that carries ideologies about language, identity and social relationships. Learners do not simply absorb linguistic forms from television, they interpret, appropriate and sometimes resist the cultural messages embedded in dialogue and character portrayal (Fägersten, 2016).

Applied linguists can contribute to a more holistic understanding by investigating how learners' identities, attitudes and investments shape their engagement with television-based learning. For

example do learners who identify with particular characters or communities show greater gains in acquiring those characters' pragmatic patterns? How do learners navigate tensions between the language they encounter on television and the language norms of their local communities? Addressing these questions requires research designs that combine linguistic analysis with ethnographic and qualitative methods, capturing not only what learners learn but also how they make meaning from their viewing experiences (Stamou, 2011).

3.7. Future Research Directions

The critical evaluation of existing literature reveals numerous gaps and limitations that point toward clear directions for future research. Addressing these directions will not only advance scholarly understanding of pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of English television shows but also enhance the practical application of television-based materials in language teaching and learning. The following research directions are particularly urgent and promising.

3.7.1. Longitudinal Studies

The overwhelming majority of existing studies are cross-sectional, capturing language use or learning outcomes at a single point in time. This limits our understanding of how sustained exposure to English television shows might influence pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence over extended periods. Future research should employ longitudinal designs that track learners over several months or even years. Such studies could investigate questions such as: Does regular viewing of English television shows lead to measurable improvements in speech act production, implicature comprehension or sociolinguistic awareness over time? Are these gains maintained after viewing ceases? Do different patterns of engagement (binge-watching vs. spaced viewing) produce different learning trajectories? Longitudinal studies could also examine how learners' pragmatic choices in their own speech evolve as they accumulate hundreds or thousands of hours of television input (Bednarek, 2023).

3.7.2. Sociocultural and Pragmatic Dimensions

While the literature acknowledges the importance of sociocultural context, few studies have systematically investigated how the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of television dialogue interact with learner interpretation and learning. Future research should explore how learners from different cultural backgrounds interpret implicatures, politeness strategies and humor in TV shows including instances of misunderstanding or cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Additionally researchers should examine how television represents pragmatic phenomena that are particularly challenging for learners such as sarcasm, irony, teasing and indirect refusals. Do TV shows provide sufficient and accurate models of these phenomena? How do learners' first language pragmatic norms interact with their interpretation of televised English pragmatics (Fägersten, 2016)?

A related direction concerns the representation of non-standard pragmatic features. Different dialects and communities have distinctive pragmatic norms (the use of "like" as a quotative, the frequency of "you know" as a pragmatic marker or the preferred politeness strategies in AAVE compared to General American English). Future research should examine whether and how television shows represent this pragmatic diversity accurately or whether they flatten or stereotype pragmatic variation across social groups (Stamou, 2011).

3.7.3. Equity, Accessibility, and Digital Divides

The literature has paid relatively little attention to issues of equity and access. Not all learners have equal access to English television shows, high-speed internet, streaming services or the technological devices required for viewing. Furthermore, learners in different educational contexts face different constraints including limited class time, lack of institutional support or restrictive media policies. Future research should investigate the digital divides that shape differential access to television-based language learning and explore strategies for making television materials more accessible to under-resourced learners. This might include the development of low-bandwidth alternatives, offline resources or openly licensed materials derived from television content (Bednarek, 2018).

Additionally, researchers should examine how factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background and prior media experience moderate the benefits of television-based instruction. Are the benefits of watching English television shows equally distributed across learner populations or do some groups benefit more than others? Understanding these equity implications is essential for ensuring that television-based pedagogy does not inadvertently widen existing achievement gaps.

3.7.4. Ethics and Data Privacy

As research increasingly involves the collection and analysis of learner data from television-based interventions, ethical concerns regarding data privacy and informed consent must be addressed. Future research should develop and disseminate ethical guidelines specific to this domain. For example when researchers use streaming platforms or digital tools to track learner viewing behavior (time spent watching, subtitle use, pause and replay patterns), what data are collected, who has access to them and how are learners' privacy rights protected? Researchers should also consider the ethical implications of exposing learners to television content that may contain offensive language, stereotypes or culturally sensitive material (Fägersten, 2016).

3.7.5. Teacher-AI and Teacher-Technology Interaction

As artificial intelligence tools become more integrated into language education, future research should explore how teachers can effectively combine AI-powered tools with television content to enhance pragmatic and sociolinguistic instruction. For example AI could be used to automatically extract scenes containing specific speech acts to generate comprehension questions or to provide learners with personalized feedback on their pragmatic production based on models from television dialogue. Research is needed on how teachers perceive and use such tools, what training and support they require and whether AI-enhanced television-based instruction produces better learning outcomes than non-AI approaches (Bednarek, 2023).

Furthermore, research should investigate the interaction between teacher guidance and independent viewing. Many learners watch English television shows on their own, outside of class without teacher mediation. How do these independent viewing experiences compare to classroom-based, teacher-facilitated viewing in terms of pragmatic and sociolinguistic learning? What kinds of minimal guidance (viewing guides, reflection questions) could support independent learners? Understanding the balance between autonomous and guided viewing is essential for designing effective blended learning environments.

3.7.6. Diversity of Television Genres and English Varieties

The existing literature is heavily biased toward American and British sitcoms. Future research must expand its scope to include a much wider range of television genres including dramas, crime series, soap operas, reality TV, animated shows, news broadcasts, documentaries and talk shows. Each genre has distinctive pragmatic and sociolinguistic features. For example reality TV may feature more spontaneous, unscripted speech than scripted dramas while news broadcasts represent highly formal, scripted registers. Comparing pragmatic and sociolinguistic patterns across genres would provide a more comprehensive understanding of television language and help teachers select appropriate materials for different learning goals (Fägersten, 2016). Equally important is the need to examine English-language television from outside the United States and the United Kingdom. Future research should analyze TV shows from Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Nigeria, Singapore, the Philippines and other countries where English is widely used in media production. These shows represent diverse varieties of English with unique pragmatic and sociolinguistic features including distinctive speech acts, politeness norms, discourse markers and dialectal features. Understanding this diversity is essential for preparing learners to communicate effectively in a globalized world where they will encounter many varieties of English, not only American and British (Bednarek, 2018).

3.7.7. Learner Individual Differences

Future research should systematically investigate how learner individual differences moderate the effectiveness of television-based pragmatic and sociolinguistic instruction. Variables of interest include proficiency level, age, gender, motivation, learning style, working memory capacity, prior

exposure to English-language media and attitudes toward different English varieties. Do beginner learners benefit less from television input because of the processing demands or do they benefit differently than advanced learners? Are extroverted learners more likely to imitate television dialogue and transfer pragmatic patterns to their own speech? Do learners with positive attitudes toward particular dialects or characters show greater gains in acquiring those linguistic features? Answering these questions would enable more targeted, personalized approaches to television-based instruction (Stamou, 2011).

3.7.8. Transfer and Production

Most existing research has focused on learners' comprehension and recognition of pragmatic and sociolinguistic features in television dialogue. Far less is known about whether and how learners transfer these features to their own language production. Future research should investigate the conditions under which learners incorporate television-derived pragmatic strategies, lexical bundles or dialect features into their speaking and writing. Do learners need explicit instruction and production practice to transfer what they have observed or does sufficient exposure lead to automatic incorporation? How do learners navigate the social appropriateness of using television-derived language in real-world interactions, particularly when those forms are associated with specific social groups or contexts (Fägersten, 2016)?

3.7.9. Comparative Studies Across Media

Finally, future research should compare television shows with other forms of media input including films, YouTube videos, podcasts, social media content, video games and streaming short-form content. Each medium has unique affordances and constraints for pragmatic and sociolinguistic learning. For example YouTube vlogs may feature more direct address to viewers and more spontaneous, unscripted speech than television dramas. Video games with extensive dialogue may offer interactive, choice-driven pragmatic practice. Comparing learning outcomes across different media would help teachers and learners make informed decisions about how to allocate time and attention across the rich landscape of available digital materials (Bednarek, 2023).

In conclusion, the future of research on pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of English television shows is rich with opportunities. By pursuing longitudinal designs, attending to sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions, addressing equity and ethics, investigating teacher-technology interaction, diversifying the range of television genres and English varieties, examining learner individual differences, studying transfer to production and comparing across media, researchers can significantly advance both theoretical understanding and pedagogical practice in applied linguistics.

4. Conclusion

This review demonstrates that English television shows constitute a valuable resource for examining and teaching the pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of contemporary English, as television dialogue presents diverse speech acts, politeness strategies, conversational implicatures, formulaic expressions, dialects, registers, and context-dependent language choices that can bridge the gap between artificial textbook language and the complexity of spontaneous communication. Although television dialogue is scripted, edited, and sometimes shaped by stereotypes, it retains many features of natural interaction and offers substantial pedagogical potential for developing pragmatic competence, sociolinguistic awareness, listening comprehension, formulaic language knowledge, and critical media literacy. However, television should not be treated as a perfect representation of everyday communication or as a substitute for teachers, direct instruction, and meaningful interaction, because its effective use requires careful material selection, appropriate scaffolding, contextual explanation, and critical attention to representations of dialect, gender, class, age, and social identity. The existing literature remains limited by its concentration on American and British sitcoms, small-scale and short-term interventions, methodological inconsistencies, and insufficient attention to learner differences, diverse English varieties, and the transfer of television-derived language into actual communication. Therefore, future research should employ broader and more rigorous designs to investigate long-term learning outcomes, cross-cultural interpretation, global English varieties, emerging streaming formats, learner production, and the responsible integration of artificial intelligence into television-based language instruction. Overall, integrating pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives into the study of English television shows represents a

productive direction for applied linguistics and can support more authentic, socially informed, and pedagogically engaging approaches to English language education.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and revision of this article. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for its content.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors in this publication declare no conflict of interest regarding the title, data, location, and results of the research.

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Supplementary Materials

This study does not include any supplementary materials.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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