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Multiplatform and original version? Continuity and change in the consumption of American television shows among Spanish undergraduates

¿Multiplataforma y en versión original? Continuidad y cambio en el consumo de series de televisión estadounidenses de los universitarios españoles

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ABSTRACT: The article presents the main findings of a recent survey on consumption of American television shows conducted among undergraduate students at the University of Oviedo, Spain. It addresses first whether this audience group has the technical means and the linguistic skills to watch television across platforms and languages. Next, it identifies viewing patterns of US shows among the sample students, finding that the majority still watch series on conventional television and dubbed into Spanish. Finally, the findings are discussed briefly in the contexts of the uses and gratifications theory, and foreign language education policies at national and European level.

RESUMEN: *El artículo presenta los resultados principales de una encuesta reciente sobre consumo de series de televisión estadounidenses realizada entre estudiantes de la Universidad de Oviedo. En primer lugar, el texto valora si esta audiencia posee los medios técnicos y conocimientos lingüísticos necesarios para consumir televisión en distintas plataformas e idiomas. A continuación, identifica los patrones de consumo encontrados en la muestra, destacando que una mayoría aún ve las series dobladas y en televisión convencional. Finalmente, los resultados son analizados brevemente en relación a la teoría de usos y gratificaciones, y las políticas de enseñanza de idiomas españolas y europeas.*

Keywords: Original version, show, television, English, Spanish, audience, platform.

Palabras clave: versión original, serie, televisión, inglés, español, audiencia, plataforma.

1. Introduction

ICT services and digital devices are hugely popular and still growing quickly in Spain, especially among younger people. Accordingly, TV content can flow across platforms and languages, which has deepened fears of decline in the television and dubbing industries, respectively.

Spanish TV networks regularly use social media tools to further engage audiences¹. Still, intent on maintaining their business model, they actively discourage forms of content viewing and audience measurement which do not entail exposure to the TV screen and remain extremely hesitant to make content available online². Also, they have concentrated in fewer, larger companies which operate multiple channels, narrowed the time gap between US and Spain airings of popular shows, increased the number of repetitions and reruns, and fought hard against piracy.

The dubbing industry, an integral part of the Spanish mediascape since 1932, has also felt badly threatened by advances in broadcasting technologies. Free-to-air DTV channels have DVD-like audio and subtitle options, so audiences can watch shows and films in the language they were originally recorded. Furthermore, although US networks IP-restrict access to their online content outside the US, popular shows in original version are widely available for illegal download and/or stream within minutes of US premieres, and links to subtitles in Spanish usually follow shortly afterwards.

Given that English has been compulsory at most stages of the national curriculum for at least three decades, one would think that original version TV has been warmly

¹ Cfr., e.g., GARCÍA-AVILÉS, José Alberto, "Roles of audience participation in multiplatform television: From fans and consumers, to collaborators and activists", *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, vol. 9 (2), 2012, pp. 429-447.

² Cfr. ARTERO, Juan Pablo, SÁNCHEZ-TABERNERO, Alfonso and HERRERO, Mónica, "Impacto económico de la digitalización y la convergencia en el sector audiovisual en España", *Quaderns del CAC* 34, vol. XIII (1), 2010, pp. 61-67; UNIVERSIDAD DEL PAÍS VASCO, "La nueva televisión debe escuchar a la audiencia", available at www.ehu.es/p200-content/es/contenidos/noticia/20122824_lazaro_echegaray/es_np/20122824_lazaro_echegaray.html, 2012, accessed on 05-06-2013.

embraced by Spanish audiences, even more so since fluency in English is an important asset to get a job and 82% of Spaniards consider English the most useful foreign language for their personal development³.

Significant parts of the audience, therefore, do not depend on Spanish networks for watching American shows anymore, and neither do they have to watch them dubbed into Spanish, or any of the country's regional languages, if they do not wish to. Who are these people? Are they really watching shows on laptops, desktops, smartphones, consoles and tablets? Are they taking advantage of DTV audio and subtitle options to watch shows in English, and/or downloading/streaming original versions from the internet? Are they in need of improving their English skills or quite the opposite?

Over the last few years, TV fiction has become the object of unprecedented attention from the academia and the media in Spain⁴. Still, *precise* data on viewing beyond the TV set and in foreign languages are scarce. Among the exceptions to the general trend are Navarro *et al.* (2012) and Callejo (2013), who have recently done research on the use of traditional and new media in Spain, and found that television continues to be the dominant medium regardless of age, class, gender and educational attainment. Also, regular polls on multilingualism by the European Commission show that only one Spaniard in four prefers original versions to dubbed series and films, and the one-off *First European Survey on Language Competences* (2012) (hereinafter, ESLC) has pointed out that Spanish high school students are among those who watch less content in original version. Furthermore, yearly reports such as *La Sociedad de la Información en España*, *La Sociedad en Red* and *eEspaña* provide accurate, albeit very general, data on ICT services and electronic devices in Spain.

The article presents the main results of a recent survey on viewing of US series conducted among undergraduate students at the University of Oviedo, Asturias, which aimed to assess: 1) whether young, highly-educated audiences have the technical means and language skills to adopt new forms of TV viewing, 2) whether they are adopting these forms or still largely watch dubbed content on conventional TV sets, and 3) the popularity of American shows across platforms in Spain.

The remainder is organized as follows. The first section uses data from the reports mentioned above to give a general picture of information society in Spain. Section 2 describes briefly the methodology of the survey and presents the digital technology penetration and self-assessed English competence data collected from the sample. Section 3 identifies viewing patterns of American TV shows among the sample. The final section discusses the survey results in the contexts of the uses and gratifications theory, and foreign language education policies.

2. A brief overview of information society in Spain

Spaniards are not lagging behind in embracing digital technology, despite the harshness of the current economic crisis. As of December 2012, roughly 67 percent of Spanish households had an internet connection, about 24 per cent were subscribed to a pay-TV

³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Europeans and their Languages. Special Eurobarometer 386*, available at ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf, 2012c, p. 70, accessed on 01-07-2013.

⁴ Cfr., e.g., CASCAJOSA, Concepción and REQUENA, Jesús, *Mad Men. Los reyes de la avenida Madison*, Capitán Swing, Madrid, 2010; PÉREZ-GÓMEZ, Miguel Ángel (ed.), *Previously On. Interdisciplinary Studies on TV Series in the Third Golden Age of Television*, Biblioteca de la Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 2011.

service and 94 percent were using mobile phone services⁵. 74.1% of households with internet access were subscribed to an ADSL broadband service, compared to 17% for cable. 91.3% of ADSL subscriptions were part of packages including some other service –usually a landline (73.7%)⁶.

There were 24.1 million internet users (about a million more than in 2011) in Spain at the end of 2012, of whom 72.6% accessed it every day and 25.5% were permanently connected, switching between mobile and domestic broadband throughout the day. The majority (55.2%) accessed the internet on laptops and desktops, although 39% used other devices besides personal computers⁷.

According to Fundación Telefónica, “Spaniards have the highest average number of tech devices in Europe”⁸. Mobile phones, television sets and DVD players were the most popular devices in Spain over 2012, being used by 90.9% of citizens, and in 88.5% and 60% of households, respectively. Nevertheless, it should be noted that DVD players are becoming obsolete, as the total number of players fell by 12% and just 3.2% of households acquired a new player in 2012⁹.

47.8% of households had at least one desktop, compared to 54.6% which had at least one portable electronic device, an increase of 5.8% with respect to 2011¹⁰. Spain is also the country in EU-5 which showed the highest penetration in smartphones (66% of all mobile phones) in Q4 2012¹¹. Sales of smartphones and mobile broadband subscriptions rose by about 60% over the year and, in fact, 43.5% of users had had this kind of terminal for less than a year by late 2012. Besides, 68.3% of mobile phone users aged 16-24 owned a smartphone¹².

Only 1.84 million internet users (7.65%) paid for downloading or streaming series and movies over 2012, although 7.5 million people watched them in streaming, and 8.3 million downloaded them –a decrease of about 2 million since 2010¹³. Laptops and desktops were the preferred screens for online video among internet users; however, an overwhelming 96.5% of Spaniards would use the TV set to watch films and series, compared to just 11.2% for the second most-used screen, the laptop¹⁴. Furthermore, “there is a growing trend towards simultaneous usage of media content across platforms”¹⁵. That is, rather than multiplatform consumption of a single content, different, albeit often related, contents are being consumed on different screens simultaneously.

⁵ URUEÑA, Alberto (coord.), *La sociedad en Red. Informe anual 2012*, Ministerio de Industria, Energía y Turismo, Madrid, 2013, pp. 61-89.

⁶ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *La Sociedad de la Información en España 2012*, Ariel, Madrid, 2013, pp. 40-41.

⁷ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 36, 72.

⁸ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁰ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹¹ COMSCORE, “Smartphones reach majority in all EU5 countries”, available at www.comscoredatamine.com/2013/03/smartphones-reach-majority-in-all-eu5-countries/, 2013, accessed on 30/07/2013.

¹² FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹³ GIMENO, Manuel *et al.*, *eEspaña. Informe anual 2013 sobre el desarrollo de la sociedad de la información en España*, Fundación Orange, Madrid, 2013, pp. 61, 68.

¹⁴ FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

3. *Survey and sample description*

3.1. *Methodology*

Throughout the second semester of the academic year 2011-2012, student groups from thirteen different degrees at the University of Oviedo were asked to respond to a printed questionnaire containing open and mostly closed questions about age, pursued degree, language skills, access to digital devices and ICT services, and consumption of American TV series.

The questionnaire was completed by 198 undergraduate students. Primary Education (23.2%), Business Administration (14.7%), Chemistry (12.1%), English Studies (10.6%) and Musicology (8.1%) were the most represented degrees in the sample. At the time of completing the survey, a majority of students (58.1%) were freshmen and none was enrolled in a bilingual program. The average age was 20, with 48% aged 18-19, 43.4% 20-24, and 8.1% over 25. Gender data were not collected.

187 students (94.4%) said they watched at least one American TV show. This group was presented with a table containing the titles of 93 running series of every major genre, and mutually non-exclusive response categories for closed questions about frequency (weekly, casual, marathon), language (Spanish, English, English with Spanish subtitles) and medium (generalist TV, thematic TV, PVR, streaming, download, DVD/BR) of viewing for each show. Univariate and multivariate analyses of the collected data were carried out using the software package R, version 2.15 (2012).

3.2. *Language skills*

The vast majority of respondents (97.94%) were native speakers of Spanish, and nearly as many (97.9%) said they had studied English as a second language through secondary school level. One native speaker of Czech, one of French, one of Galician and one of Polish were also found in the sample of students surveyed.

Respondents were also asked to rate their English skills on a five-point scale, with response categories being: “excellent, very good, good, average, poor”. The majority (58.72%) rated their English skills as good or better, with only 4.7% rating them as poor. Significantly for our study, 62% rated their competence in oral comprehension as good or better [good (39.6%), very good (18.2%), excellent (4.2%)]. Quite unsurprisingly, 50% of respondents who rated the competence as excellent and 25.7% of those who rated it as very good were undertaking the degree of BA in English Studies. By contrast, 50% of those who rated it as average and 30% of those who rated it as poor were pursuing the degree of BA in Primary Education.

3.3. *ICT penetration*

At the time of completing the questionnaire, just 4% of respondents had no ICT subscription services whatsoever. Over a third of respondents (36.9%) said they had subscriptions to pay-TV/domestic broadband/mobile broadband packages. Domestic

broadband only subscriptions and pay-TV/domestic broadband, domestic broadband/mobile broadband packages showed similar rates of about 18%, whereas mobile broadband only subscriptions stood at just 5.1%.

Cable was by far the preferred medium for pay-TV, as local cable provider Telecable had 69.44% of subscribers to the service. However, although Telecable also offers internet access, only 60% of its pay-TV subscribers were also subscribed to the cable broadband service. In fact, the market for home internet access was dominated by ADSL, which accounted for 65.56% of subscriptions, compared to cable's 25%. It is also worth mentioning that 180 respondents (90.9%) had broadband access at home, whereas 108 (54.54%) were subscribed to a pay-TV service.

Two thirds of respondents had regular access to 5-9 devices, 28.8% to 0-4, and 5.1% to 10 or more. The most popular devices capable of playing TV content among students include television sets (96.5%), laptops (87.37%), MP3/4/5 players (71.72%), DVD players (62.12%), desktops (60.61%) and smartphones (55.05%). On the other extreme, less than 13% regularly used portable DVD players, netbooks, Blu-Ray players and tablets.

4. Main findings

4.1. Language

96 out of 187 respondents (51.33%) said they watched at least one American show in English, with or without Spanish subtitles. Nonetheless, as shown in Table 1, when asked about viewing language, they selected Spanish a total of 1103 times, English 191, and English with subtitles 246. That is, Spanish-dubbed versions of US series are watched over 2.5 times more than original versions, and 56.3% of all content watched in English is also watched with subtitles.

Table 1. Viewing language by oral comprehension rating

Oral comprehension	ES	EN	EN (subs)	ES / [EN+EN(subs)]
Poor	94	33	36	1.36
Average	345	34	52	4.01
Good	416	43	64	3.88
Very good	176	45	53	1.79
Excellent	72	36	41	0.93
Total	1103	191	246	

Source: Own elaboration.

When oral comprehension is taken into account, we observe that although students with poor skills show surprisingly high original version rates, viewing in English tends to increase in parallel to comprehension skill levels and is the highest among excellent skilled individuals, being the only group in which viewing in English is higher, albeit slightly, than Spanish. Respondents who rate their oral comprehension as good or

average present the largest rates of consumption of dubbed content, watching about four times as many shows in Spanish as English.

Table 2 shows that consumption of TV fiction in English also increases with age. Whereas students aged 18-19 watch 3.07 times as much content in Spanish as English, those aged 21-24 watch 2.2 times as much, and those over 25, 2.07 times as much. Finally, there could not be established a correlation between choice of language and access to ICT services and electronic devices.

Table 2. Viewing language by age

Age	ES	EN	EN (subs)
18-19	519	65	104
21-24	470	97	116
>25	114	29	26
Total	1103	191	246

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. Platform

As Table 3 shows, television is still by far the preferred medium for series consumption, whereas time-shifted (PVR) and DVD/BR viewing is almost non-existent. Shows are watched about three times as much on conventional TV sets as online, even among respondents who also have domestic and mobile broadband subscriptions. Furthermore, with the exception of those in that group, who watch about as many shows on pay-TV as free-to-air, respondents watch the huge majority of series on free-to-air, as its viewing figures are roughly equivalent to pay-TV, download and streaming taken together.

That notwithstanding, the internet has become a powerful competitor to pay-TV. Although total viewing figures are quite similar (398 and 383, respectively), it should not be overlooked that online viewing is significantly lower than pay-TV only among students with access to all ICT services and ten electronic devices or more (Table 4).

Table 3. Viewing platform by subscription to ICT services

Type of subscription	Free-to-air	Pay-TV	Download	Streaming	PVR	DVD/BR
Pay-TV, domestic and mobile broadband	253	255	104	49	9	2
Pay-TV + domestic broadband / Pay-TV + mobile broadband	311	101	81	68	2	1
Domestic or mobile broadband	181	37	41	26	4	3
No subscriptions	22	5	11	3	0	0
Total	767	398	237	146	15	6

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4. Viewing platform by access to electronic devices

Electronic devices	Free-to-air	Pay-TV	Download	Streaming	PVR	DVD/BR
10 or more	29	33	18	3	1	0
5-9	542	306	169	97	10	6
0-4	196	59	50	46	4	0
Total	767	398	237	146	15	6

Source: Own elaboration.

4.3. Series

The ten most popular series among respondents are, in this order, *The Simpsons* (152), *Family Guy* (116), *American Dad* (115), *How I Met your Mother* (99) (hereinafter, *HIMYM*), *Bones* (83), *House, M.D.* (79), *CSI* (75), *CSI: Miami* (71), *Grey's Anatomy* (62) and *CSI: NY* (62). Top-ten series by age group are quite similar, although the favorite show among over 25ers is *HIMYM*.

With 60.52% of its audience watching episodes every week, *The Simpsons* also has the highest rate of viewer loyalty, followed by *HIMYM* (50.5%) and *House* (32.91%). At the other side of the spectrum, Seth McFarlane's cartoon series *Family Guy* and *American Dad* have the lowest rates of loyalty (18.10% and 12.17%, respectively). All age groups watch an average of about seven shows per season.

As shown in Table 5, the top-ten series confirm the overwhelming preference for conventional television, especially free-to-air, as viewing platform. Overall, these series are watched over five times as much on television as online, 2.38 times as much on free-to-air as pay-TV, and 1.43 times as much on free-to-air as pay-TV, download and streaming taken together. All shows except *HIMYM* present low rates of online viewing, with the three *CSI* series having the absolute low. *HIMYM* is also the only show whose viewing figures are both roughly evenly distributed across platforms and a little higher online.

Table 5. Viewing platform of top-ten series

Show	Free-to-air	Pay-TV	Download	Streaming
The Simpsons	126	40	13	8
Family Guy	77	37	10	9
American Dad	75	37	7	1
HIMYM	32	22	37	26
Bones	51	26	9	6
House, M.D.	48	21	12	5
CSI	59	14	1	2
CSI: Miami	51	16	0	1
Grey's Anatomy	34	21	15	5
CSI: NY	44	16	0	0

Source: Own elaboration.

Top-ten series by platform (Table 6) are quite similar, with *The Simpsons*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *House, M.D.*, *Bones*, *Family Guy*, as well as *HIMYM*, being amongst the most watched on television and online. Nonetheless, a closer look at the data reveals further differences between television and online viewing.

First, the most popular shows for free-to-air overlap those in the top-ten list, whereas discrepancies are slightly higher for other platforms. Second, with download and streaming figures at 7 and 1, respectively, *American Dad* is the only show amongst the three most watched on TV sets that has not made to the list of online favorites. Third, cartoons top the lists for conventional television, yet the genre is less popular online. Fourth, *Breaking Bad*, *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood* are quite popular online, though very few or no respondents watch them on television¹⁶. *True Blood* is also the only series for which streams (7) are greater than downloads (2). Fifth, although it has not made to the top series for free-to-air or pay-TV, *South Park* is actually watched four times as much on television as online¹⁷. Sixth, viewing of *The Walking Dead* is roughly evenly distributed across platforms¹⁸. Finally, the original series of the *CSI* franchise is still the most popular of the three on free-to-air TV, although it fails to be amongst the ten most popular on pay-TV and is hardly watched online.

Table 6. Top-ten series by platform

Free-to-air	Pay-TV	Download	Streaming
The Simpsons 126	The Simpsons 40	HIMYM 37	HIMYM 26
Family Guy 77	American Dad 37	The Walking Dead 20	The Walking Dead 15
American Dad 75	Family Guy 37	Grey's Anatomy 15	Family Guy 9
CSI 59	Bones 26	The Simpsons 13	Breaking Bad 9
Bones 51	HIMYM 22	Breaking Bad 13	The Simpsons 8
CSI: Miami 51	Grey's Anatomy 21	House 12	True Blood 7
House, M.D. 48	House, M.D. 21	Family Guy 10	Bones 6
CSI: NY 44	The Walking Dead 20	Bones 9	Grey's Anatomy 5
Grey's Anatomy 34	CSI: Miami 16	The Vampire Diaries 8	House 5
HIMYM 32	CSI: NY 16	South Park 8	The Vampire Diaries 5

Source: Own elaboration.

When audience loyalty is taken into consideration (Table 7), we observe that most of the series which are popular online are also amongst those with larger rates of respondents watching episodes every week, although *Family Guy* and especially *South Park* present very low rates of audience loyalty.

Table 7. Audience loyalty (in bold: popular shows online)

Show	Audience loyalty (%)
The Vampire Diaries	70.58
The Simpsons	60.52
The Walking Dead	56.14
HIMYM	50.5
True Blood	40
House, M.D.	32.91
Grey's Anatomy	29.03
Bones	25.3
CSI: NY	24.19
CSI: Miami	23.94
CSI	21.33
Family Guy	18.1
American Dad	12.17
South Park	4.44

¹⁶ Conventional TV figures for the shows are as follows (free-to-air, pay-TV): *Breaking Bad* (2, 4), *True Blood* (0, 0) and *The Vampire Diaries* (1, 2).

¹⁷ Free-to-air 24, pay-TV 14, streaming 4.

¹⁸ Free-to-air 18.

Source: Own elaboration.

We can observe in Table 8 that top-ten series are watched 4.64 times as much in Spanish as English, which also bears out the clear dominance of Spanish as viewing language. All shows except *HIMYM* have high rates of viewing in Spanish, although they are significantly high in the cases of *Family Guy* (7.42), the *CSI* franchise (*CSI* 8.12, *CSI: Miami* 8.42, *CSI: NY* 8.83) and especially *American Dad*, which has the absolute high (11.77).

Table 8. Viewing language of top-ten series

Show	Spanish	English (subs)	English	Total English
The Simpsons	137	13	9	22
Family Guy	104	9	5	14
American Dad	106	4	5	9
HIMYM	56	29	23	52
Bones	67	11	3	14
House, M.D.	65	10	5	15
CSI	65	5	3	8
CSI: Miami	59	5	2	7
Grey's Anatomy	50	8	9	17
CSI: NY	53	4	2	6

Source: Own elaboration.

Top series by language (Table 9) are also quite similar, with *The Simpsons*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *House, M.D.*, *Bones*, *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, as well as *HIMYM*, being amongst the most watched in Spanish and English. The list of the most watched shows in Spanish contains the same items as that of the most popular series across platforms and languages, although the order of items is a bit different. *HIMYM* is the most watched show in English, followed by *The Simpsons* and *The Walking Dead*. Besides, *The Walking Dead*, *South Park* and *Desperate Housewives* are amongst the ten most-viewed series in English; still, they are far more popular in Spanish (39, 37 and 33, respectively). *Breaking Bad* is viewed roughly as much in English (11 subs, 2 English) as Spanish (11), and so is *The Vampire Diaries* (11 Spanish, 3 subs, 4 English). As said above, respondents prefer watching shows in English with subtitles, although three series are slightly more viewed without them –*Grey's Anatomy* (9 English, 8 subs), *Desperate Housewives* (7 English, 5 subs) and *American Dad* (5 English, 4 subs).

Table 9. Top-ten series by language

Spanish	English (subs)	English
The Simpsons 137	HIMYM 29	HIMYM 23
American Dad 106	The Simpsons 13	Grey's Anatomy 9
Family Guy 104	The Walking Dead 13	The Simpsons 9
Bones 67	Bones 11	The Walking Dead 8
House, M.D. 65	Breaking Bad 11	Desp. Housewives 7
CSI 65	House, M.D. 10	American Dad 5
CSI: Miami 59	Family Guy 9	Family Guy 5
HIMYM 56	Grey's Anatomy 8	House, M.D. 5
CSI: NY 53	South Park 7	The Vampire Diaries 4
Grey's Anatomy 50	Desp. Housewives 5	South Park 4

Source: Own elaboration.

Comparing these data with those by platform (Table 10), we find that viewing rates for television and Spanish are quite overlapping, as are online viewing and viewing in English. The highest overlap is found amongst the top-ten shows for television, as well as *South Park* and *Desperate Housewives*, for which viewing in Spanish accounts for roughly 90% of each series' total for television. Among the top-ten shows, only *HIMYM* shows a little higher rates of viewing in Spanish than on television –an indication that some respondents watch it in Spanish across platforms, as they do in the cases of *The Walking Dead* and *Breaking Bad*. *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood*, however, show large rates of viewing in Spanish, though they are hardly watched on television.

Table 10. Series by platform and language

Show	EN	EN (subs)	ES	Download	Streaming	Free-to-air	Pay-TV	Total English	Total Online	Total TV
HIMYM	23	29	67	37	26	32	22	52	63	54
The Walking Dead	8	13	39	20	15	18	20	24	35	38
Family Guy	5	9	104	10	9	77	37	14	19	114
Breaking Bad	2	11	11	13	9	2	4	13	22	6
The Simpsons	9	13	137	13	8	126	40	22	21	166
American Dad	5	2	106	7	1	75	37	7	8	112
Bones	3	11	67	9	6	51	26	14	15	75
Grey's Anatomy	9	8	50	15	5	34	21	17	20	55
House, M.D.	5	10	65	12	5	48	21	15	17	69
The Vampire Diaries	4	3	11	8	5	1	2	7	13	3
True Blood	3	3	4	2	7	0	1	6	9	1
South Park	4	7	37	8	4	24	14	11	12	38
Desp. Housewives	7	5	33	8	5	26	10	12	13	36
CSI	3	5	65	1	2	59	14	8	3	73
CSI: Miami	2	5	59	0	0	51	16	7	0	67
CSI: NY	2	4	53	0	0	44	16	6	0	60

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

Spanish undergraduates do possess the technical means and estimate they have the language skills necessary for watching US series in original version across platforms. At the time of conducting the survey, only 4% of students rated their English skills as poor, and over 62% rated their oral comprehension as good or better. Data of access to ICT were high and generally in line with those for Spain as a whole, although the rates for domestic broadband and pay-TV were about thirty points higher. The television set was the device with the highest penetration, but laptops were closing in. Also popular were MP3/4/5 players, DVD players, desktops and smartphones.

Over 94% of students watch US shows, confirming that television consumption remains largely associated with tension release needs¹⁹. A majority of Spanish viewers do not watch TV to be educated or informed; they expect television to provide entertainment,

¹⁹ Cfr. KATZ, Elihu, GUREVITCH, Michael and HAAS, Hadassah, "On the use of the mass media for important things", *American Sociological Review*, 38, 1973, pp. 164-181.

relaxation and escapism, so genres which satisfy these needs better tend to fare better among them²⁰. In line with this view is the fact that the most popular shows with respondents fall into the genres of animation and live-action sitcom, and medical and crime drama. That is, entertaining, light episodic shows that can be watched casually and easily, as episodes needn't be focused on wholly, nor viewed every week or in order, to know exactly what is going on.

The genre preference, language choice and platform usage trends observed lead us to think that students generally invest little cognitive, physical and economic effort in watching US TV series. Accordingly, they prefer non-complicated series dubbed into Spanish over complex and original version shows, and generally choose the lean-back, largely passive and economical, experience of traditional television over newer, more active and personalized, forms of viewing provided by other devices. In other words, smart TVs may be about to radically change how we watch television, yet television is still largely talked about, rather than watched, online²¹.

New and old episodes of the most popular series, especially animated sitcoms, air at mealtimes and/or in prime time, and are widely available on different free-to-air and pay-tv channels throughout the day. Missed episodes, therefore, can be watched on repetitions / reruns or online for free, so very few students care to record them on PVR, and even fewer buy or rent DVDs or Blu-Rays of series.

Free-to-air broadcasts are generally enough to satisfy the casual viewing needs of students, mostly of whom do not seem to mind irregular schedules and being weeks or even months behind the US and pay-TV airings. Some, however, do mind, particularly when it comes to highly addictive serials (e.g., *The Walking Dead*, *Breaking Bad*, *Desperate Housewives*) and episodic shows with major serialized subplots (e.g., *HIMYM*), which are best experienced in order and not knowing what is going to happen next, and/or shows which are either unavailable or difficult to catch on free-to-air channels (e.g., *Breaking Bad*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *True Blood* and *South Park*). It is then that the most eager viewers, including many of those subscribed to pay-TV services, turn to the internet in search of their favorite shows, as the reward is perceived to be worth the effort –so worth it that they do not mind original versions, smaller screens or waiting for downloads.

Downloads are much higher than streams. At the time of conducting the survey, very few series were available for legal viewing online in Spain and those which were, were in streaming, dubbed into Spanish and only available after free-to-air airing. This suggests that illegal downloading is pervasive and, as in many other countries, largely caused by airing delays and unavailability of legal content on free-to-air television and/or online. It is also worth noting that the two most downloaded shows worldwide

²⁰ Cfr. GRANDÍO, María del Mar, "El entretenimiento televisivo. Un estudio de audiencia desde la noción de gusto", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. 22 (2), 2009, pp. 139-158; ARAN, Sue *et al.*, "Jóvenes, amor y series de televisión. Incidencia de la alfabetización audiovisual en la (re)interpretación de los relatos amorosos televisivos", *Quaderns del CAC* 36, vol. XIV (1), 2011, pp. 119-128; NAVARRO, Héctor *et al.*, "El consumo multipantalla. Estudio sobre el uso de medios tradicionales y nuevos por parte de niños, jóvenes, adultos y personas mayores en Cataluña", *Quaderns del CAC* 38, vol. XV (1), 2012, pp. 91-100.

²¹ Popular TV knowledge is important to belong in a group of friends as significant parts of daily conversation, off- and online, are made up of appropriated lines and references from shows, and discussions about plots and characters. Cfr., e.g., GRAY, Jonathan, *Watching with The Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006; CABLETV.COM, "An Interview with Will Brooker", available at cabletv.com/blog/how-hollywood-affects-culture-and-a-will-brooker-book-giveaway/, 2011, accessed on 07-05-2013; KALVIKNES BORE, Inger Lise, "Focus Group Research and TV Comedy Audiences", *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, vol. 9 (2), 2012, pp. 3-22.

over 2012, *Game of Thrones* and *Dexter*, are not popular among Spanish students, and neither are *Homeland* (#7) and *Fringe* (#9). By contrast, downloads for *The Big Bang Theory* (#3), *HIMYM* (#4) *Breaking Bad* (#5), *The Walking Dead* (#6) and *House* (#8) are pretty much in line with worldwide trends²².

As said before, most students want to invest little cognitive effort in viewing shows, so they are more than twice as likely to watch shows in Spanish as English –about five times as likely in the case of very popular shows. Obviously, for students with lower English comprehension skills, watching a series in English involves a high cognitive effort²³ that is totally at odds with escapism or relaxation, so it is no wonder that original version viewing increases in parallel to comprehension skills. Nonetheless, students with poor skills are far more willing to watch shows in English than either average or good-skilled individuals, and excellent-skilled ones still watch roughly as many shows in Spanish as English. Furthermore, consumption of series in English increases slightly with age and is also higher online.

A number of likely explanations come to mind. First, many students may overrate their English skills and watching a show in English is more difficult for them than they would admit. The standardized English tests for entry to the University of Oviedo quite bear out these views, as average mean scores have been middling over the last few years, despite the exams roughly correspond to level 2 (A2) on the six-level scale of competence laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and do not assess students' oral and aural skills²⁴. Moreover, recent studies²⁵ have pointed out that the English competence of young Spaniards in general is well below most Europeans²⁶, especially in oral comprehension.

Second, a very large portion (70.1%) of students at Spanish universities live with their parents in the university's catchment area and commute to classes every day²⁷. The most popular series air on free-to-air channels at mealtimes and in prime time, so it is likely that students watch them on conventional television with older family members who know little or no English, and are resistant to original version. Conversely, when students watch series on screens designed for individual use, they are more likely to watch them in English. Third, slightly higher consumption of shows in English among older students can be related to the fact that they are closer to entering an increasingly competitive labor market and knowledge of English is an important asset to find a job,

²² Cfr. TORRENTFREAK.COM, "Game of Thrones most pirated tv show of 2012", available at torrentfreak.com/game-of-thrones-most-pirated-tv-show-of-2012-121223/, 2012, accessed on 26-03-2013.

²³ When watching subtitled content, 84% of viewing time is actually spent reading subtitles. Cfr. JENSEMA, Carl *et al.*, "Time spent viewing captions on television programs", *American Annals of the Deaf*, vol. 145 (5), 2000, pp. 464-468.

²⁴ Average mean test scores since 2009 are as follows: 57.7% (June 09), 37% (September 09), 60.1% (June 10), 42.8% (September 10), 64.5% (June 11), 44.2% (July 11), 56.8% (June 12), 45% (July 12), 59.5% (June 13), 42.7% (July 13). Source: Own elaboration based on data from the University of Oviedo.

²⁵ Cfr., e.g., RUPÉREZ, Augusto *et al.*, "TV or not TV? Subtitling and English skills", available at *Social Science Research Network*, ssrn.com/abstract=1403964, 2009, accessed on 20/03/2013; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *First European Survey on Language Competences. Final Report*, available at ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf, 2012a, accessed on 24-07-2013; EF EDUCATION FIRST, *EF English Proficiency Index*, available at www.ef.com.es/epi, 2013, accessed on 09-11-2013.

²⁶ For instance, only about 24%-30% of Spanish students in their last year of compulsory education have English skills in accordance with the expected level for their age. Cfr. EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *op. cit.*, 2012a, p. 92.

²⁷ Cfr. DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDIOS SOCIALES Y OPINIÓN PÚBLICA DE LA FUNDACIÓN BBVA, *Estudio internacional BBVA sobre estudiantes universitarios de seis países europeos*, available at www.fbbva.es/TLFU/dat/resultados_universitarios_2010.pdf, 2010, accessed on 10-11-2013, p. 16.

either in Spain or abroad. As of June 2013, about one third of job openings in Spain required foreign language skills. Of those, 89% required knowledge of English, whereas the second most demanded language, French, was required in just 7.66% of openings²⁸. All in all, most undergraduates are not taking advantage of current technological advances to learn or extend their knowledge of English. Original versions seem to be largely regarded as a necessary evil they have to put up with to watch shows which are unavailable on free-to-air channels in Spain. Certainly, this is an improvement over previous generations, yet the fact remains that dubbing is still alive and well in Spain, even among better-educated, younger people.

As said before, the English competence of Spaniards is well below most Europeans, especially in oral comprehension. Contrary to common belief, differences in oral comprehension across Europe are mainly related to exposure to the language through original version media, not to the design or funding of the national curriculum. In fact, exposure accounts for 21% of comprehension performance in tests²⁹ and has an effect equivalent to “between four and twenty years of English education at school”³⁰.

In Spain, more and more subjects are being taught in English at every stage of the curriculum³¹, from primary to college level, yet nothing is being done to promote original versions and, as a matter of fact, even a tentative proposal to make original-language tracks the default audio option on DTV broadcasts³² has been shelved following heavy criticism from the industry. Policymakers, however, should be very aware that foreign language learning policies will not be as successful as they could unless they “promote informal learning opportunities outside school and consider the exposure to language through traditional and new media, including the effects of using dubbing or subtitles in television and cinemas”³³.

Consequently, we would suggest the allocation of public resources to increase original version broadcasts in prime time and raise awareness of the importance of exposure to foreign languages through media. Funded by taxpayers since 2010, the national pubcaster RTVE could start airing US shows in English with subtitles. Incentives could be provided so new episodes of popular series aired in original version *only* on commercial networks within 24 hours of US airing, which in turn would help them fight digital piracy. Institutional advertising should help create demand for original version TV, convincing Spanish audiences that it is an effective, non-costly and entertaining tool to learn and practice English.

We would like to finish by pointing out some limitations of this study and suggesting further research that might overcome them. First, data were collected in 2012, so the results fail to capture the surge in sales of tablets and smart TVs over 2013, and the launch of affordable streaming TV services such as Wuaki.tv and Yomvi. A new

²⁸ Cfr. INFOEMPLEO.COM, “El 61% de las ofertas de empleo solicitan candidatos con titulación universitaria”, available at blog.infoempleo.com/blog/2013/06/20/el-61-de-las-ofertas-de-empleo-solicitan-candidatos-con-titulacion-universitaria/, 2013, accessed on 23-06-2013.

²⁹ VEZ, José Manuel *et al.*, “La exposición y uso ambiental de la lengua extranjera en contextos no formales mejora su comprensión oral”, in *Estudio Europeo de Competencia Lingüística. Volumen II*, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Madrid, 2012, p. 42.

³⁰ RUPÉREZ *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 22.

³¹ Worrying for the future is that 50% of respondents who rated their comprehension skills as average and 30% of those who rated them as poor were pursuing the degree of BA in Primary Education.

³² Cfr. COMISIÓN DE EXPERTOS PARA EL FOMENTO DE LA VERSIÓN ORIGINAL EN LA EXHIBICIÓN DE OBRAS AUDIOVISUALES, *Conclusiones y recomendaciones*, Ministerio de Cultura y Ministerio de Educación, Madrid, 2011, p. 6.

³³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *First European Survey on Language Competences. Executive Summary*, available at ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/executive-summary-eslc_en.pdf, 2012b, p. 13, accessed on 01-08-2013.

version of the questionnaire could be produced to study whether these recent developments have actually had any effect on the viewing habits of young people. Second, the data obtained from questionnaires were mostly quantitative. An integrated, quantitative-qualitative approach, based on the combined use of focus groups and surveys, could provide further insight into how and why students watch US TV shows. Finally, the study relies on the work of others to recommend foreign language exposure through media. Treatment and control groups could be established to further test the effects of regular viewing of original version TV on oral comprehension.

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