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The language of NBC's *Friends* and naturally-occurring conversation: Functional differences

This study compares the language of an American situation comedy, *Friends*, with naturally-occurring conversation. A corpus of transcripts of nine seasons of the television show and the American conversation subcorpus of the *Longman Grammar Corpus* are used for analysis. A corpus-based/grammatical approach guides this data-driven study, which combines multi-dimensional (MD) methodology (Biber, 1988) with a frequency-based analysis of a large number of linguistic features associated with the typical characteristics of face-to-face conversation.

Despite the striking similarities between the two corpora shown by the MD analysis, a closer look at the linguistic features revealed important functional differences between *Friends* and naturally-occurring conversation. These differences pointed to distinct functional patterns (e.g., vagueness, emotional/emphatic content, colloquial overgeneralization) suggested by the association of linguistic features sharing similar discourse functions, which ultimately characterize each of the corpora.

The results of this English as a Second Language (ESL)-motivated study indicate that *Friends* shares the core linguistic characteristics of face-to-face conversation and can thus be used in the ESL classroom as a representation of naturally-occurring conversation. However, teachers and materials developers should be aware of the functional differences characterizing each of the corpora. The results of this investigation also suggest that television dialogue has the potential to provide researchers with appropriate data for certain linguistic analyses and should thus receive more research attention.

Reference:

Biber, D. (1988). *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.