Representations of Multilingualism in American TV Shows

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century multilingualism has not only become important, but rather vital as we live in a world where one language is simply not enough. Although English is the global language, based on the motto “the more the merrier”, there has never been a better time to learn a foreign language. The ability to speak foreign languages other than the native language has been proven to be beneficial in many ways while allowing people to explore new linguistic territories. Whether viewed from a personal or professional perspective, being able to communicate in multiple languages is a great asset to cognitive processes.

Languages have not only been gaining more recognition in real-life situations but also the fictional world seems to appreciate multilingualism now more than ever. The importance of being multilingual has been noticed by the makers of television shows as well and multilingualism is finally being represented realistically by multilingual characters in these shows. Television is a popular medium to represent the world and society; it is influential to the extent that most children spend a lot of time watching TV shows and, in a way, they grow up with them. Therefore, it is important that the networks deliver the right message without promoting neither cultural nor linguistic prejudice. TV shows are mainly meant to entertain the audience but at the same time, they also have the obligation not to enforce stereotypes but instead set an example for society by tackling current problematic issues and providing the audience with solutions to them.

The television landscape is currently experiencing a profound transformation due to the inclusion of multilingualism, all while establishing it to be a norm rather than an exception. At this point, it is important to note that all TV shows mentioned in my thesis are American TV shows. With the arrival of online streaming sites such as Netflix and Amazon Video, however, they all have a global audience unlike shows from other countries, as they are available anywhere at any time.

Taking the aforementioned factors into account, this thesis will first give an overview of multilingualism in non-fiction, referring to real life situations. I will provide several definitions for multilingualism, explain the stages in which multilingualism has emerged as well as discuss the everchanging reputation of the phenomenon. While it is considered a privilege to speak multiple languages in today’s society, the thesis will show that this has not always been the case.

As a further step, I will discuss the appearance of multilingualism in fictional work such as books and focus on the representation of multilingualism in TV shows. Here, I will present the
data collection which I have gathered throughout the past five years. I will introduce a hypothesis which I pose based on my own viewing habits throughout many years, namely that of the overrepresentation of the English language in the television landscape. Considering that we live in a multilingual world, the TV sphere is mostly failing to depict the fictional world as such. This thesis will thus investigate how English is overrepresented, but also prove that a counter-movement is underway, by analyzing carefully chosen scenes from significant TV shows which will prove the claims mentioned above.

Furthermore, this thesis will give an insight into the various representations of multilingualism in American TV shows, taking into account how multilingualism is used in order to inform about a person’s identity or rather, identities. The next aspect which will be dealt with is how multilingualism is used in order to depict the representation of multilingual females in TV shows. A further analysis of selected scenes from TV shows will involve the correlation of language and power.

Finally, this thesis will encompass what seems to be the consequence of the misuse of the previously mentioned aspects in which multilingualism is used: stereotypes. This chapter will tackle various issues that have an impact on the representation of foreign characters in the TV landscape and prove that awareness of these problems and a commitment to correcting them results in a more diverse and truthful depiction of multilingual people.
2. MULTILINGUALISM IN NON-FICTION

To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration supposed by many (particularly, perhaps, by people in Europe and North America who speak a ‘big’ language): it is, rather, a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today. Edwards (1994: 1)

As Edwards explains in the quote above, it is indeed true that the ability to speak multiple languages is necessary for the majority of people, considering half of the world is multilingual. Thus, in order to understand how multilingualism is portrayed in the fictional world which is the purpose of this thesis, we need to establish an understanding of what multilingualism means in real life situations and in our everyday lives.

What is multilingualism by definition and is it equivalent to bilingualism? How has multilingualism evolved? What are the reasons for the growth of multilingualism? These questions will be addressed in the following chapters. Furthermore, the question of whether or not it is still advantageous to speak multiple languages will also be addressed while carefully examining the changing reputation of multilingualism.

2.1. Definitions of Bilingualism and Multilingualism

There are different definitions of the term bilingualism as researchers choose to focus on different aspects of the said phenomenon and the definitions seem to depend largely on the target audience. Beardmore (1986:1) argues that the term bilingualism has “open-ended semantics”. It appears that the term seems to mean different things to different people but the most common definition for the term is that bilingualism is “the use of two languages” (Chin & Wigglesworth, 2011: 3).

Other researchers tend to have a rather narrow definition for bilingualism. Bloomfield (1933:56), for instance, argues that bilingualism implies “the native-like control of two languages”. In other words, he believes that a bilingual speaker’s linguistic competence should be equally high in both languages. Grosjean (1982: 235) argues the opposite when he states that “most bilinguals use their languages for different purposes and in different situations, and hence balanced bilinguals, those who are equally fluent in both languages, are probably the exception and not the norm.” Not only does Grosjean raise an objection to Bloomfield’s claim that the bilingual speaker is expected to be equally proficient in both languages, he also expands his
definition of bilingualism. Together with Weinreich (1968) and Mackey (1962), Grosjean (1982:145) generously define bilingualism as “the alternate use of two or more languages”.

But despite the broad definition of bilingualism provided by the linguists above, researchers have also been engaged in finding a separate definition for multilingualism (e.g Weinreich 1953; Vildomec 1963). While, just like bilingualism, multilingualism is also a complex phenomenon, the following definition encompasses the essential values of the term. A multilingual speaker is someone who has “the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing (…), different languages are used for different purposes, competence in each, varying according to such factors as register, occupation, and education” (McArthur 1992: 673; see also Edwards 1994; Vildomec 1963).

A more detailed definition of multilingualism is presented by Rita Franceschini (quoted in Aronin & Hufeisen 2009: 33-34):

The term/concept of multilingualism is to be understood as the capacity of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage on a regular basis in space and time with more than one language in everyday life. Multilingualism is a product of the fundamental human ability to communicate in a number of languages. Operational distinctions may then be drawn between social, institutional, discursive and individual multilingualism. The term multilingualism is used to designate a phenomenon embedded in the cultural habits of a specific group, which are characterized by significant inter-and intra-cultural sensitivity.

Multilingual speakers are not equally proficient in all languages, instead they are said to follow the Complementarity Principle (Grosjean 1982). This means that multilingual speakers tend to use a certain language in a certain context, rather than speak the languages equally well in all contexts. Dewaele (2010) has dedicated his research to the study of how emotion affects a multilingual speaker’s use of languages and has proven that many use each of their languages for distinct situations, rather than interchangeably (e.g. express love in one and anger in another, or use one language in the private and one in the public sphere).

For reasons of concision and convenience, I will use the term “multilingualism” as a cover term, meaning the ability to speak two or more languages, instead of making a distinction between the terms bi- and multilingualism. This will be especially relevant in chapters four, five and six, where it is evident that all characters depicted from the TV shows are defined as multilingual speakers though, at times, they might be bilingual speakers in a multilingual context.
2.2. The Emergence of Multilingualism

Being multilingual was formerly considered to be something negative, as it was believed that God introduced the idea of multiple languages in order to confuse the people as a punishment for their audacity. This is evident in the Bible’s Book of Genesis (11: 6-7): “The lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”” However, scholars and linguists do not look at linguistic diversity as a punishment. On the contrary, they consider it an essential part of human life.

In our modern, globalized world, a multilingual speaker is usually admired for the ability to communicate in a multilingual manner. However, it was not until Braun (1937) and Vildomec (1963), that multilingualism was classified as its own field of study. These researchers were the first to focus on the positive aspects of multilingualism, a phenomenon which is now seen as an opportunity to enjoy “a broader knowledge about cultures” (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009: 2) instead of being considered an “aberration” (Edwards 1994: 1).

But how has multilingualism increased and what are the reasons for its growth in competence? John Edwards (1994: 33) explains that one of the reasons for the rise in a multilingual environment is the migration of people. This is a common experience in most societies when people move to a new country. They do not solely bring themselves along but they also bring along different languages.

Another reason for the rise in multilingualism is, according to Edwards (1944), territorial expansion, which is another type of movement of people but provides similar outcomes. Unlike the migration of people, the territorial expansion can be compared to imperialist and colonial expansion as it does not take a large number of people to physically move in order to bring a new language with them. Instead, they bring their language into contact with other people through military and economic pressures, such as sending soldiers, merchants and bureaucrats to a new country to impose their language on them. As an example, Edwards (1994: 33) explains that nowadays, out of 80 million inhabitants worldwide, approximately 75 million people speak English in addition their mother tongue.

A further context in which multilingual competence is established is the political union of different linguistic groups of a country. A lot of people live in a community where only one language is spoken. While they might be emotionally closer, their linguistic competence is limited as they are exposed to only one language. However, in countries such as Switzerland, which
has four official languages–German, Italian, Romansch and French–people are exposed to more languages at the same time and thus, can expand their linguistic competence. In Belgium, the official languages are Dutch, German and French (cf. Edwards 1944: 34). Kosovo’s official languages are Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish, Romani and Gorani. The latter is an Indo-European language spoken in the border area between Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. Gorani is an accurate example for the rise of multilingualism often observed in border areas.

Educational reasons are also accountable for the growth of multilingual competence (cf. Edwards 1994). Nowadays, many students study in a language that is not their mother-tongue. English, for instance, is a popular language in which students in India, Pakistan and many African states are educated. Other students spend time abroad to enhance their linguistic skills. This “educational bilingualism” is intensified by the fact that many of the teaching materials are not always published in their native language. Thus, students are, in a way, forced to learn one of the languages that their study material requires (cf. Grosjean 1982:35). Further reasons for the growth of multilingualism are business or work reasons, simple linguistic preference or motivation.

But in any case, it can be observed that multilingualism is an important and especially necessary phenomenon. Edwards (1944: 34) argues that “the moral which can be drawn is that multilingualism is largely a practical affair that few people become or remain multilingual on a whim.”

The idea and concept of multilingualism started rather early. However, deepened insight into multilingualism was only provided when researchers started to investigate the field more thoroughly in the late 1980s and 1990s. Up until this time it was believed that bilingualism was the collective term for “two monolingualisms” (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009: 2). Additionally, it was also believed that multilingualism did not simply mean speaking more than two languages. To be able to analyze the results of bilingual research, and to provide more information on this matter overall, a field of study called Second Language Acquisition (SLA) was formed. Those results were then applied to questions of multilingualism and multiple language acquisition (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009: 2).

Between 1992 and 1997, several meetings, as well as workshops, were organized in the framework of the German Association of Applied Linguistics. After 1998, Ulrike Jessner and Jasone Cenoz decided to establish an international conference in Innsbruck, Austria. Jessner and Cenoz inspired more international conferences such as in the Neatherlands in 2001, Ireland in 2003, Switzerland in 2005 and in Scotland in 2007. (Aronin & Hufeisen 2009:2)
At the same time as the conferences, the decision was made to create an association of researchers who were interested in carrying out more investigations into all fields that were associated with multiple language acquisition and multiple language learning. Thus, Britta Hufeisen, Jasone Cenoz, Ulrike Jessner, Muiris O Laoire, Larissa Aronin, Patricia Bayona, Gessica De Angelis, Jean-Marc Dewaele and Peter Ecke founded the “International Association of Multilingualism” (Aronin & Hufeisen 2009:3). In the following years, international journals on multilingualism were published and the main branches of multilingualism were set in the following research domains: Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Neurolinguistics, Pragmalinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Teaching/Instructing/Learning and Applications to the Concrete Learning Events with Initiatives such as CLIL, Immersion, and the Common Curriculum (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009:3).

2.3. The Reputation of Multilingualism

Multilingualism is without a doubt part of our life’s experience. In the past few decades, the linguistic and cultural variety has increased immensely. A number of migration waves are examples of growing multilingual environments and society appears to be more multilingual than ever. It seems almost fashionable to speak numerous languages and more and more people seem to be able to communicate in more than one language on a daily basis. Thus, it is evident that multilingualism does not only seem to characterize an individual person who speaks more languages, but instead is also a characteristic of a whole society.

Unfortunately, the ability to speak more languages has not always been considered an essential enrichment to our society. In the early 19th century, parents were advised not to raise their children bilingually as problems such as “mental confusion, inhibition of the acquisition of the majority language, identity conflicts, split loyalties, even schizophrenia” were said to occur. Furthermore, bilingualism was considered “a burden on the brain” (Baker 2006:143). In his book, Baker (2006: 143) quotes the academic Laurie (1890: 15), a University professor who held the belief that bilingualism was disadvantageous:

If it were possible for a child to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled, but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances.

Laurie was a professor at Cambridge University and disseminated that bilingualism was disadvantageous in one’s intellectual development in her lectures (Baker 2006: 143). Her stance was
reinforced when Saer (1923) conducted studies which brought forward the results that monolinguals were more intelligent than bilinguals. One of his studies investigated 1,4000 Welsh-English bilingual children aged between 7-14 in five rural and two urban areas of Wales (Wei 2000: 16).

Wei (2000: 16) quotes Saer (1923) concluding the tests by claiming that “bilinguals were mentally confused and at a disadvantage in intelligence compared with monolinguals.” Those tests, however, later proved to be full of methodological flaws and the conclusions drawn from them were rather misleading. Thus, researchers began to investigate this field more thoroughly to achieve proper results.

Nowadays, the issue that is often evident with multilingualism is that when people live in a country where a socially considered important language is already spoken, there is a lack of encouragement for enhancing linguistic skills which lead to multilingualism. Edwards (1994: 1) argues that “a monolingual perspective is often, unfortunately, a consequence of possession of a powerful language of wider communication, as English, French, German, Spanish and other such languages are sometimes styled.”

Considering this all happened close to a hundred years ago, multilingualism’s reputation seems to have turned around completely in today’s society. Crystal believes that there are many myths as to why multilingualism has often had a negative connotation. In one of his lectures, David Crystal says the following on multilingualism:

Multilingualism is the default human condition. When we look around the world, that is what we find. Estimates can never be precise, in the language field, but the best opinions suggest that three-quarters of the world’s population use at least two languages in their everyday lives, and perhaps half use at least three. Only a few nations – chiefly those with a recent colonial past – have developed an egotistical monolingualism. These are the countries where the case for multilingual educational philosophy needs to be made, and the UK is one of them. This would be a pointless lecture in, say, Switzerland or India or Nigeria. There may be arguments in those countries about the way multilingualism should be managed, as with health or the environment, or any other domain which makes demands on the public purse, but no-one would question for one moment the relevance of multilingualism. It is seen, quite simply, as one of the facts of life. (cf. Crystal Plenary lecture given to the CILT Primary Languages Show, ‘From the Word to the World, Liverpool 4 Mach 2011).

Multilingualism, as Crystal puts it, is vital to life. Therefore, more and more languages are introduced not only in educational institutions and in social life but also in fictional work. Books, movies and TV shows seem to be integrating the diversity when it comes to languages just as much. The following chapter will deal with multilingualism used in such fictional work,
especially in books and the TV landscape, while also distinguishing between the formal and functional aspects of multilingualism.

3. MULTILINGUALISM IN FICTION

Multilingualism has always existed in reality, in some form or another. Because it has become such a strongly manifested concept, fictional works are catching on and are adapting their representations of reality. Over the course of the following pages I will analyze and demonstrate how multilingualism is being used in fiction, what function it serves and whether there is a growing tendency to include multilingualism in the arts.

There are various ways to show the usage of more than one language in fiction. But what is noticeable is that most of the time, fictional works follow the monolingual path as they do not usually consist of more languages. This is especially evident in fictional books as most books are written in only one language and foreign content is omitted. Authors of such works seem to have the tendency to support monolingual mindsets. The result of using only one language is the emergence of negative stereotypes which are created by excluding other languages. Bleichenbacher (2008: 21) explains that “monolingual mindsets have dominated literary and cinematic production in most periods of the history of Western literature, with a particular focus on instances of negative stereotyping”.

3.1. Formal Aspects

Admittedly, there are not many fictional works, in terms of books, which consist of more than one language. Books are usually translated into the language the targeted audience speaks if the source language is foreign. According to Bleichenbacher (2008: 22) the formal aspect is “the context of literary production”. Texts which consist of only one language are monolingual texts, while texts which consist of a number of languages are called multilingual texts. As an example of texts where two languages are used for one half of the text each, Bleichenbacher (2008: 22) mentions the Rosetta stone, a stone from the ancient time consisting of writing in two languages, i.e. Egyptian and Greek. It is remarkable that multilingualism has been portrayed in works of art even as early as 196 BC.
Texts which contain more than one language are usually intended for readers who also understand the languages which appear in the text. Thus, multilingual texts are targeted at a multilingual audience. Critics of multilingualism might argue that this may be a reason to limit the number multilingual texts, as most countries have only one official language. Nowadays, however, this has changed as countries already offer students at least a second language in educational institutions at a very young age. An appropriate example to name here is Switzerland, which has four official languages, those being German, French, Italian and Romansch. So, if the audience of a multilingual text were to be Swiss, and the four languages above were used, texts would easily be understood by the majority of the people in Switzerland.

However, in the selection of most texts, traditional texts overall tend to be monolingual as they present little to no multilingual discourse. Due to the habit of using the native language of the people in a text, it does not come as a surprise when once a different language is used, it is indicated by special marking (Bleibenbacher 2008: 22). Thus, it is this special marking which creates two dimensions in a text, one being the familiar language to which readers are already used to, and the other being the other, foreign language. It can be observed that in the written texts where foreign languages are indicated as foreign, the authors seem to have a tendency to support monolingual mindsets rather than welcome and integrate the new language into the text. Furthermore, indicating that another foreign language is added in such an apparent way, may cause the audience to establish a sense of marginalization. The reader may unconsciously grow accustomed to the fact that this otherness exists everywhere and realize this exclusion in their social life as well.

In order to represent a multilingual society or mindset, however, a book can already be multilingual if it contains some foreign words. There can be single words that are not translated in order to keep the authenticity of a language. The following quotation demonstrates such an example.

To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years, is no longer speaking to you, the *mexicanas* call you *rájetas*, that denying the Anglo inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black (...) (Anzaldua, 2007: 216, 7-10)
The section above represents lines seven to ten of the poem called “To Live in the Borderlands Means You” written by Gloria Anzaldúa (2007: 216), an American scholar of Chicana cultural theory. The poem deals with the conflicts in the borderlands, in terms of race, politics, culture and identity. What is interesting about the poem in this context, however, is that it is written in English and Spanish. In other words, the context of the poem is presented in two languages, though Spanish is not used to the same extent as English.

The usage of two languages reveals much about the context of this poem. It can be assumed that the author is bilingual. As a reader, one does not need to be able to speak Spanish in order to read the poem, however, there is a different meaning attached to it. By using both languages, Anzaldúa manages to create a poem that represents two different experiences: being on the inside and relating to her predicament as a speaker of both languages, and feeling like an outsider and relating to the alienation of only speaking one while experiencing the other as foreign. As an audience, it is not crucial to understand all the languages used in a work of fiction. The use of multilingualism serves a higher purpose than mere linguistic communication; it is able to transmit a feeling of belonging or being alienated, of experiencing a dual identity or being an outsider looking in.

3.2. Functional Aspects

Multilingualism in fictional texts has a number of functions. But because every individual text contains different contextual information and the target readers are not always the same, Bleibenbacher (2008: 26) claims that it is an “impossible task to encompass all functions of multilingualism in a fictive work.”


Unless there is a close agreement between author and audience about the specific meanings of different languages, authors incur a high risk of having their stylistic choices misinterpreted, especially the more remote their audience is.

In other words, if the author and the audience do not share the same language, the text may be misunderstood and thus, misinterpreted. While there are a number of functional categories, Bleichenbacher (2008: 26-30) focuses on three major categories: realism, social criticism, and humor.
Realism is one category of functional aspects which is discussed by Grutman (2002). The usage of multiple languages in a fictional text usually serves the purpose of portraying the truth as realistically as possible. According to Grutman (2002: 333) quoted in Bleichenbacher (2008: 26) and based on Bleichenbacher's translation from French, presenting realism in fiction is important to the extent that, even if the audience is aware of the fact that the work is a piece of fiction, they still want the work to be meaningful. The audience, therefore, wants to relate to the work with regard to real life situations. Multilingualism thus contributes to realism being represented very truthfully in fictitious works.

One accurate example where multilingualism aims at representing realism truthfully is when languages are used to indicate geographical settings (Bleibenbacher 2008: 26). The audience knows a story is set in Italy, for instance, when the Italian language is presented in passages of the text. When considering TV shows, the scenes are set abroad or at least the way the set is decorated indicates that the scene is supposed to take place there. In this case, the visuals already give away the location. However, in contrast to the portrayal of multilingualism in books, in TV shows, the language is partly only heard in the background. Bleichenbacher (2008: 27) quotes Mitry (1997: 237) who argues that “out of all the fictional representations of spoken language, movie dialogues most closely reproduce the spontaneity of real-life conversations.” The same principle also applies for television programs which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The next functional category Bleichenbacher (2008: 27) introduces is social criticism. He claims that there is a serious reason for the usage of a mixture of different languages in a text. The reasons for that matter are not meant to lead to a monolingual mindset, instead they might be used to educate about culture.

Furthermore, Bleichenbacher argues that another narrative function of the contrast between the dominant language and the other languages is to create an emotional level between audience and text. This means that the audience is supposed to establish a feeling of compassion with the characters. But at the same time, this might also be used to create a different connotation of the word “foreign” (Bleibenbacher 2008:28).

Finally, Bleibenbacher introduces the third component of the functional categories, namely humor. There is an observation that the use of multilingualism in fiction seems to be connected to comedy. While using a second language is not necessarily associated with comedy in real life situations, it seems to be the case in fictitious works. Bleichenbacher (2008: 29) quotes Sollors
(1998a: 9), when he explains that the reason for multilingual discourse being considered comical is the monolinguals' “desire for pure languages and traditions.”

This urge to present a monolingual Television has led to the overrepresentation of the English language. In most scenes in TV shows, multilingualism is apparent when there is situational comedy of misunderstandings or linguistic wordplay. Why is a person who is capable of speaking more than one language someone others make fun of? Multilinguals are mostly depicted as the characters who do not know much, or as the ones who constantly make language mistakes. Those mistakes are mostly indicated by code-switching or exaggerated pronunciation. Multilinguals often turn into monolingual speakers when conversing with monolingual people as they must stick to the only language their interlocutor speaks. The problem emerges when multilinguals decide to use another language – one which their interlocutor does not understand. It is this moment that the audience considers the given situation comical. These instances make it seem as if the multilingual speaker has a lack of fluency in their L2. Thus, a multilingual speaker is shown to be incompetent due to their accent or linguistic errors instead of being admired for their ability to understand and being able to converse in more than one language.

The following chapter will expose the overrepresentation of the English language in the Television landscape while providing an explanation as to why English has become so dominant in a multilingual world, fictional and real.

4. OVERREPRESENTATION OF ENGLISH

Due to the fact that English has been the most prominent language on TV for the longest time, it has not always been the case that multilingual characters were depicted in a favorable light in TV shows. On the contrary, it appears that the TV landscape seems to have mostly supported a monolingual mindset throughout the years. Looking at popular TV shows from the 1970s to the early 1990s, a clear monolingual pattern can be observed. Some of the most widely watched shows during those years according to the American Nielsen Media Research (cf. Brooks, 2007) are Columbo (1971-1978), Charlie’s Angels (1976-1981), Hart to Hart (1979-1984), Knight Rider (1982-1986) and Mcgyver (1985-1990). None of these shows feature many diverse, multilingual casts, and as a result, hardly any foreign language is used as a means of communication.
The tendency to feature multilingual characters has fortunately changed in the 21st century. But what is the reason behind the fact that it took the networks this long to include languages other than English in the TV landscape when most characters were multilingual anyway? The long wait is also remarkable as the situational context would have been more authentic in the original language instead of using English. Considering the fact that America has never been a monolingual country, it does not make sense that English was the only dominant language throughout all these years.

Kemp (1972: 105) quotes John Wallis (1969) who explains in his Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae, that “all kinds of literature are widely available in English editions, and, without boasting it can be said that there is scarcely any worthwhile body of knowledge which has not been recorded today, adequately, at least, in the English language” (quoted in Crystal 2003: 72). In the 21st century this argument still seems to be valid and it especially makes sense when considering the dominant language presented on Television.

But the need for an international language has always existed. Crystal (2003: 7) explains that the Latin language became an international language during the Roman Empire. While one of the reasons for becoming a global language requires the high number of people who speak it, Latin was only considered international because the Romans were more powerful and not because they were high in number.

According to Crystal (2003: 4), there are two different ways for a language to become global. He explains that while all global languages need to achieve a special place within a community, a language can become official when it is used as “a medium of communication in domains such as government, law courts, educational systems and the media “. It is then often considered a complementary language to the already existing official language, the mother-tongue. English, for instance, has a special place in over 17 countries (Crystal, 2003: 4). Furthermore, media mostly report in English and in most countries TV shows are not dubbed but rather shown in the original language, which due to most shows being produced in the US, happens to be English.

A second way in which a language can become global according to Crystal (2003: 4) is when a language “can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even if the language does not have an official status.” It is then that it becomes the second language which is taught in schools and thus available to children as well as adults. As an example, Crystal (2003: 5)
mentions the Russian language which had a privileged status in countries of the former Soviet Union.

English is a global language, as it is recognized and understood by a large number of people from all over the world. It is especially prominent on TV where it is spoken by politicians and celebrities alike. In fact, it is the dominant language in various instances in life, especially when it comes to traveling. English signs and advertisements are visible in almost every country and restaurant and hotel staff members all present adequate English language skills. It is difficult to get along in a world that centers on a language like English as it serves as the mother-tongue in the US, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and several Caribbean countries (Crystal, 2003: 3-4).

So, by having English become the new global language, advantages, such as higher numbers in bilinguals and the fact that it is easier to get along in the world knowing that people can communicate with each other and understand each other, are visible. But does the popularity of one language immediately lead to the unpopularity of the other languages? This argument seems to be especially valid in the TV landscape of the previous decades. While English has become a fundamental language in which most TV shows seem to be in, it simultaneously means that the role of other languages has also receded into the background over the years.

There are countless articles and studies focusing on the overrepresentation of white people on Television. Many criticize TV networks for a lack of diversity in their line-up. Even less diverse seems to be their use of languages other than English. It turns out that even shows with diverse casts, such as Grey's Anatomy, only represent monolingual characters. Has the English language been undermining the importance of multilingualism by solely presenting monolingual characters of the English language throughout all these years? Why is it that English is the dominant language in TV shows even if multilingual characters are introduced?

Current TV shows have caught up on the issue and are trying to make the audience aware of it by implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) referring to such situations while using irony or sarcasm. More multilingual characters who now seem to have the freedom of speaking in their mother-tongues in TV shows are shown. Instead of walking the monolingual path, the networks now seem to embrace the change from monolingualism to multilingualism and welcome diverse characters and foreign languages. According to recent surveys, 2015 was stated to be the most diverse year for TV (cf. Carlin, 2015). While the diversity here implies cultural diversity rather than linguistic diversity, it can be argued that culture goes hand in hand with language and the
one highly influences the other. Examining the list of the highest rated TV shows in America in 2015 (cf. Tops of 2015: TV and Social Media) shows an obvious rise of languages other than English. The first five TV shows which appear on the list are the following: Game of Thrones, The Walking Dead, Empire, Navy CIS and The Big Bang Theory. Most of these feature multilingual characters.

The following paragraphs will expose some of the reasons for the overrepresentation of English up to the the 21st century, by examining selected scenes of American TV shows and at the same time, highlighting languages which are underrepresented in the American television landscape.

4.1. Overrepresentation Due to Generational Differences

One way of overrepresenting English in TV shows is by showing the generational differences between the characters in TV shows. While the immigrant parents or grandparents grew up with a mother-tongue other than English, their children were raised in an environment dominated by English. This extreme Americanization, which also comes into effect due to the overrepresentation of English, leads many young people to neglect their multilingual heritage in favor of adapting to and blending into a monolingual society. It appears that many immigrant children in the U.S. refuse to speak their heritage language although they are encouraged to do so by their parents. For young children, however, there is the constant pressure to fit in and use the English language as it is the language everyone else around them uses. Therefore, children might try not to speak their mother-tongue in order to avoid exclusion. They are surrounded by English 24 hours a day living in the U.S., and thus, they have to speak English with everyone but their parents.

Most children are concerned about fitting in and making friends, so their advanced conversations are with people who are closer to their age than their parents. This leads to multilingual children behaving like monolingual ones. As their mother-tongue is suppressed, English becomes more and more the dominating language in their lives. The same phenomenon is also depicted in TV shows where the new generation of immigrants either avoids the language completely or cannot speak their parents’ native language at all. Strong examples for this overrepresentation of English on TV are the shows Master of None, Jane the Virgin, and Modern Family. All three shows exhibit a different way of how English is overrepresented on television by implying that generational gaps lead to the underrepresentation of languages other than English.
4.1.1. Master of None

*Master or None* is an American comedy-drama television series, which was released on Netflix in 2015. The show was created by an actor of Indian descent, Aziz Ansari, who also stars in the respective main role. The story is about a 30-year-old Indian actor, Dev, who tries to live a creative life in New York City. The show appears to be loosely based on Ansari’s life. The series presents his immigrant experience, yet, the protagonist never speaks what is presumably his mother-tongue.

The show depicts various situations where Dev speaks English with his parents and not Tamil, an official language spoken in India. In later episodes, it turns out that this is due to the fact that Dev does not speak Tamil at all as he has grown up in the United States. His parents still preferably communicate with one another in Tamil, while their communications with Dev are always conducted in English. Dev does not only seem to be disconnected to the language, he also reports to have no connection to the culture and being Indian does not mean anything to him.

In the Episode *Parents*, Dev visits his parents at their house. Dev is sitting on the sofa in the living room as his father walks in cursing while he is trying to find out what is wrong with his iPad. Dev begins to talk to him about the movie he has auditioned for and tells him that he has even received a call-back. His father does not seem to pay much attention to what he is saying and instead asks him to help him update his appointments to his new iPad instead.

![Fig. 1: “Parents.” Master of None, created by Aziz Ansari and Alan Yang, season 1, episode 2, minute 1.40-3.00, Netflix, 2015. Netflix.](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80065724?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C1%2C6533d bc9-6d8f-4130-a540-430c54d6265f-68589737)

1. **Dev**: Hey, so I got a call-back on the black virus movie. Could be
2. **cool.**
3. **Father**: Shit, shit shit, shit.
4. **Dev**: What, what’s wrong?
5. **Father:** Ayooo, I just realized my calendar is not updating. Dr.
6. musami visiting. I forgot to pick him up in the train station.
7. **Dev:** Oh, oh, that’s cold. Friend’s visiting you all the way from India,
8. seems like you should pick him up.
9. **Father:** I have all my appointments in the calendar. In the morning,
10. a ding comes. “Ding, ding”. I plan my day. “Ding, ding.” I see what
11. I have to do. There was no “Ding, ding” today.
12. **Dev:** That’s cuz you got a new iPad. You have to transfer you’re your
13. appointments.
14. **Father:** Why don’t the dings transfer automatically?
15. **Dev:** “Dings” is not a term. You got to stop saying “Dings.”
16. The appointments don’t transfer automatically. You have to transfer
17. them yourself.
18. **Father:** I’ve been calling you to set it up. You never call me back.
19. Now, Dr. Ramusami probably wandering around Penn Station eating
20. pretzels.
21. **Dev:** Okay, you don’t know that he’s eating pretzels. Also, that’s an
22. adorable worst-case scenario for someone lost alone in New York.
23. **Father:** I have to go and pick him up. Could you please fix up this
24. iPad for me?
25. **Dev:** (sighs) Can I just do it later? I’m going to see this X-Men movie.
26. I don’t want to miss the trailers. I got to go. I’m not your personal
27. computer guy.

In this scene, Dev and his father conduct a conversation in the English language. While Dev speaks fluent English without an accent whatsoever, his father speaks English in a strong Indian accent. A few grammatical mistakes can be observed in lines four and five (cf. lines 5, 6 and 19), however, his linguistic skills in terms of grammar and vocabulary are usually correct.

In situations, such as the one the dialogue above depicts, it can be assumed that code-switching may be involved, as is usually the case with most multilingual speakers. In this specific case, however, Dev and his father only communicate in English. Interestingly enough, in line five, an exception can be observed as the father utters the emotional expression “Ayoo” before he continues to complain about his iPad. By using the non-word “Ayoo” he expresses his anger after he finds out that his iPad had not automatically transferred his appointments. While this expression is not an actual word, it is a commonly used slang expression in Tamil to indicate anger, disappointment but also excitement, depending on the context in which it is used (cf. tamildictionary.org/ayoo). Thus, the use of this word in the given context may suggest that the older generation, represented by the father in the dialogue, still seems to be emotionally tied to Tamil, even though the communication in the US is usually conducted monolingually. It seems that the father used the expression so naturally, that he did not even realize that the word is not known in the English language.
This emotional tie is also evident in the next scene which is shown as a flashback in the episode. There, Dev’s father is depicted as a young boy living in the year of 1958. The entire flashback is presented in the original language, providing the audience with English subtitles. The flashbacks in the original language highlight his emotional connection to his mother-tongue and make the audience assume that he misses being in his hometown and talking in his native language.

Dev has lived in the US his whole life where he acquired English as his first language. He grew up in a culture that is Americanized in a way that it has made not only him but also his parents seem foreign to their own culture, heritage as well as language. All their conversations are held in English. Strangely enough English is even used in situations where the multilingual characters both share Tamil as a mother-tongue. This leads to the assumption that the English language has always been the dominant language in their household. This also gives an explanation as to why Dev never learned his parents’ native language. By being exposed to English in school as well as at home, it was almost impossible for Dev to learn his parents’ heritage language.

English is dominantly represented in a situation that could just as well feature a conversation in Tamil had the parents taught Dev the Indian language. The show accurately represents the first generation Indian-American experience, where children grow up with English and have no emotional ties to the language which their parents grew up with. This leads to the overuse of English in their daily lives and the immigrants’ children do never seem to have the same connection to the language as the first generation does.

### 4.1.2. Jane the Virgin

*Jane the Virgin* is an American satirical romantic dramedy telenovela, which premiered on The CW in 2014 and was created by Jennie Snyder Urman. The show features the English, Czech and the Hispanic language. It centers on the life of Jane Gloriana Villanueva, a 23-year-old Latina who vows to save her marriage, but is accidentally artificially inseminated. Jane lives with her Venezuelan mother and grandmother in Miami. The show features a very multilingual landscape as it presents a number of multilingual characters. But at the same time, it shows the effects of being overexposed to an English-speaking environment.

The show is multilingual as it moves effortlessly between English and Spanish, in a way that feels natural and authentic to a multilingual audience. Jane’s grandmother Alba speaks to Jane
and Xiomara in Spanish, but the two women always respond in English. This happens much in the same way in multilingual families where the parents usually speak in the native language and the children respond in another language.

In the episode, Chapter Two of season one, Jane finds out that she has been artificially inseminated by mistake by an incompetent gynecologist. In the first part of this scene, Jane tells her mother that she has decided to deliver the baby and give it to the father, Rafael, who will then raise the baby with his wife, Petra. Xiomara expresses compassion with her daughter’s situation and advises her to take good care of herself during her pregnancy.

Fig. 2: “Chapter Two.” Jane the Virgin, created by Jenny Snyder Urman, season 1, episode 2, minute 25.30-28.00, The CW, 13 Oct. 2014. Netflix, https://www.netflix.com/watch/80060554?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C1%2C85ae9ab-0535-44f8-b7ab-cc2fc9a1fb1e-83285689

(Part 1 – Jane is sitting on a swing hammock - Xiomara enters)

1. Xiomara: See, this, this right here is why I keep saying to sue. Because
2. you’re gonna have a lot of pain. And all because of this frickin’ doctor.
3. And your life is now hard and complicated in ways it shouldn’t be.
4. Jane: Mom, don’t you cry.
5. Xiomara: I’m not. I mean, me? I… I’m a screw up. I mean, I deserved to
6. get knocked up, but you? This isn’t fair.
7. Jane: Stop. I can’t go to that “it’s not fair” place.
8. Xiomara: We won’t go there then.
10. Xiomara: We can go to the “it sucks” place, right?
11. Jane: Yeah, I think that’s where I’m at right now. It sucks, all around.
12. Xiomara: Yeah, it does. But it’s gonna suck worse for you. And you gotta
13. remember that.
14. **Jane**: That’s supposed to make me feel better?
15. **Xiomara**: I’m just saying. You get to be selfish now, you don’t have to
16. take care of anyone else. Just yourself, okay?
17. **Jane**: Yeah, thanks. And you know, you’re not a screw-up, Mom. I mean,
18. the way you chase your singing dream. That’s some brave stuff. I could
19. use some of that right now.

In this scene, mother and daughter are having a conversation about the latest events. While they
are both native speakers of Spanish, the conversation is still conducted in English. Xiomara and
Jane both grew up in an English-speaking environment, however, throughout the show it be-
comes obvious that Xiomara’s mother has always used Spanish as the main language in the
household.

Despite the grandmother’s attempt to establish Spanish as the dominant language, her daughter
and granddaughter seem to have undergone a process of complete Americanization. Similar to
the dialogue of the TV show *Master of None* in the previous chapter, there is no code-switching
involved in the dialogue between the mother and daughter. The speakers do not once use a
Spanish expression in their exchange of words but instead have a pure monolingual conver-
sation. Xiomara even uses English slang expressions throughout the dialogue which creates an
even larger distance between her and her Spanish roots and instead makes her appear more
Americanized.

The scene above is also a great example of the representation of the new Mexican-American
generation. While Xiomara is representative of the second American-Mexican generation, Jane
is an example of the third. Unlike many others, however, she is still fluent in Spanish as can be
seen in several episodes later, but decides to always talk in English. This may lead the audience
to ask themselves why Jane and her mother do not speak Spanish with each other when they
are both fluent in the language. But Xiomara and Jane have grown up in a culture that is so
American that they seem unaware of the fact that their conversation could have been conducted
in Spanish as well.
In Part 2 of the scene, Alba, asks what the two of them are doing and decides to join them. Jane tells Alba that they were talking about the pregnancy. Alba is very religious and explains that she is sure God has a special plan for everyone and she hopes that God’s plan for Jane will be a good one. When she understands that Jane has decided to keep the baby, she asks if they can finally stop calling the embryo “milkshake”. This expression triggers a memory from Jane’s Quinceanera and Alba reminds Xiomara of her terrible singing performance.

(Part 2 - Alba enters)

1. **Alba**: De que hablan ustedes dos?
2. (Alba: What are you two talking about?)
3. **Jane**: I guess… I guess it’s just hitting me that I’m having a baby.
4. **Xiomara**: And how much it totally sucks. (– looks at Alba –) In a way
5. that doesn’t offend God and whatever higher plan he has for us.
6. **Alba**: El tiene un plan. Yo de veras lo creo. Nada mas vale que sea
7. bueno.
8. (Alba: He has a plan. I truly believe that. But it better be good.)
9. (all characters laugh; Alba holds Jane)
10. **Alba**: Bueno esto quiere decir que Bueno y a podemos de dejarle de
11. decir “Milkshake” por fin?
12. (Alba: Alright, does that mean that we can stop calling it “Milkshake”, finally?)
13. **Xiomara**: Where does that expression come from anyway?
14. **Alba**: Es cuando tu te pusiste a cantar. Es cuando (…)
15. (Alba: It was when you did that singing. It was …)
16. **Jane (at the same time as Alba)**: You know, I really, I can’t even
17. remember.
18. **Alba** (interrupts): Es cuando tu te pusiste a cantar como loca en sus quince años.
19. (Alba: It was when you did this crazy singing at her Qinceanera)
20. **Jane**: Abuela! Mom! I’m sorry, okay. Don’t be upset about that.

Jane’s grandmother speaks Spanish while Jane and her mother usually respond to her in English, which she understands perfectly well. This is especially evident in the scene depicted above as Alba speaks Spanish right after she enters the scene and Jane responds in English right away. Multilingual speakers of Spanish whose dominant language is English will understand everything that is said in the scene without having to rely on subtitles as this scene represents a very realistic depiction of multilingual family conversations. It is very common that the person who immigrated still speaks the mother-tongue and that the children understand the native language but decide to respond in English. Moreover, it seems as if Jane and Xiomara do not even notice that Alba asked them the question in Spanish due to their immediate response in English.

Because it is Alba’s wish to speak Spanish at all times, it can be said that the three women live in a Spanglish household. What is interesting, however, is that the characters rarely mix the two languages as is usually understood by the term “Spanglish.” Instead, both languages are individually integrated into the characters’ daily lives. Thus, the household is Spanglish in the sense that Spanish and English are used, however, not in the process of code-switching but individually instead.

Moreover, it seems that Alba is too proud to speak English as she never seems to make exceptions. In lines ten to eleven, however, Alba code-switches for the first time by using the English word “Milkshake” to refer to Jane’s baby. The scene is emotional as Jane is crying and Alba is comforting her. This emotional situation may be the reason why Alba uses the English word instead of translating “milkshake” into “batido de leche” as she usually does when Americanized words come up. Alba seems to be emotionally tied to her mother-tongue and so she uses it to express her thoughts at all times. As Jane’s dominant language is English, Alba decides to use the English term in order to emotionally connect with Jane, make her laugh and thus be closer to her.

In episode *Chapter 20* of season one, Alba talks English for the first time in the show. She is on a date with a priest she has recently met and whom she usually also speaks Spanish to. The priest understands most of what Alba says in Spanish, but he is a native speaker of English and therefore, he always responds in English. He code-switches from time to time in this scene,
however, his Spanish language skills are only contributed in a comical context. But as Alba realizes that she is starting to develop feelings for the priest, she switches to English to express her feelings for him:

Fig. 4: “Chapter Twenty.” *Jane the Virgin*, created by Jenny Snyder Urman, season 1, episode 20, minute 37.49-38.20, The CW, 27 Apr. 2015. Netflix, https://www.netflix.com/watch/80060572?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C19%2C85acc9ab-0535-44f8-b7ab-ccf2fa9b10e-83285689.

1. **Alba (to the priest):** Bueno, si. If this did not happen, I would not have my new friend.

Alba switches from Spanish to English because she wants the priest to clearly understand how she feels for him. By watching the complete season of the show, a pattern occurs in which is evident that she can only express her inner thoughts in Spanish. However, due to her interlocutor not being a Spanish native speaker, she is forced to switch to English. She speaks English very slowly and with a strong accent. It is clear that she feels neither comfortable nor confident in speaking English. The context in which she switches to English in this episode is the same as in the episode *Chapter Two* analyzed above. Alba is exposed to a situation in which both her interlocutors identify in a language that is a foreign language to her. But in order to get emotionally closer to them, she decides to switch to English.

In the selected scenes, it is clearly shown that the three characters are all a product of generational shift, culturally as well as linguistically. The observation is particularly interesting as the
show demonstrates how a language goes through families in the second and even third generation families. The characters’ experiences are truthful representations of immigrants’ linguistic history.

Similar to Jane the Virgin, *Fresh Off the Boat*, a comedy series which will be analyzed later in the thesis, is worth mentioning in this context as it is the first American show to feature an Asian-American family as protagonists. Like *Jane the Virgin*, the grandmother is the character who always speaks Chinese while the younger characters in turn almost always speak English to her. The show is interesting to the extent that it features not only the Asian culture but also an Asian language in a major way for the first time in the American TV landscape. The Chinese language is one of the languages that has been clearly underrepresented on TV. Never before has there been such a successful TV show with Asian protagonists, let alone a show with such huge exposure of the Chinese language.

Shows such as *Master of None, Jane the Virgin* and *Fresh off the Boat* are new and fresh approaches in a TV landscape which has been historically and linguistically centered on monolingualism for far too long. Jane’s Latino background and her bilingual relationship with her grandmother as well as mother are true representations of what many second and third-generation Latinos in the U.S. experience. The same applies to *Fresh off the Boat*, in which only the older generation seems to have their heart attached to the language while the Americanization of the second and third generation has led the characters to put their multilingualism into the background. This is exactly why an overrepresentation of English occurs.

### 4.1.3. Modern Family

Modern Family is an American mockumentary comedy TV show that premiered on ABC in 2009 and was created by Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan. The show deals with the lives of three families who are all related to one another. It is especially popular because it projects the idea of diversity by featuring homosexual characters, interracial marriages as well as multilingual characters.

One of the protagonists, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, who is originally from Colombia, is married to an American, Jay. The character is depicted as having stereotypical characteristics throughout the show as she has a very strong Colombian accent and is considered feisty. Linguistically speaking, she is a very interesting character as she switches from English to Spanish whenever
she is not able to express herself fully in English. Additionally, she code-switches constantly and there are times in which she is not even aware which language she is talking in. Throughout the show, the character is depicted as having a strong connection to her mother-tongue by explicitly mentioning it. At the same time, she never fails to refer to her difficulties with the English language. In episode seven of season six, titled “Queer Eyes, Full Hearts”, Gloria complains about American people constantly making fun of her language skills when she says ”Do you know how frustrating it is to have to translate everything in my head before I say it? You should try talking in my shoes for one mile.”

But because the Spanish language is so dear to her heart, in episode six of season seven, Gloria wants to desperately encourage her 14-year-old son Manny to learn Spanish as he neither speaks nor understands the language. It turns out, however, that, while Gloria is emotionally close to her mother-tongue, Manny seems to have no interest in taking lessons to learn his mother’s native language. After multiple failed tutor lessons by Gloria herself, she decides to hire a Spanish tutor for him.

Fig. 5: “Queer Eyes, Full Hearts.” Modern Family, created by Christopher Loyd and Steven Levitan, season 6, episode 7, minute 2.30 – 3.00, ABC, 12 Nov. 2014.

2. **Manny**: Hello
3. **Tutor**: Ah, en Español, por favor.
4. (Tutor: Ah, in Spanish, please)
5. **Manny**: Okay, let’s take it down a nacho.
7. (Gloria. Hello, Diego, it’s so nice to meet you in person. Thank you for coming.)
8. **Tutor**: El pacer es mio. And you must be Mr.Pritchett?
9. (Tutor: Likewise. And you must be Mr. Pritchett?)
10. **Jay**: Jay, and I’m just glad you’re here. Gloria tried to tutor Manny.
12. There was less yelling in “The Miracle Worker.”
13. **Gloria:** ‘Cause he wasn’t even trying.
14. **Manny:** I’m sorry, but Spanish just doesn’t seem natural to me. I don’t
15. like the way it hits my ear.
16. **Gloria:** What could be more natural than your mother’s tongue in
17. your ear?
18. **Jay** (to tutor): Do you happen to know a good English tutor?

In the selected scene above, the conversation is conducted multilingually, as both the English
and the Spanish language are involved. It is obvious that Jay and Manny are native speakers of
English while Gloria and the tutor are both clearly Spanish native speakers.

When Manny opens the door, he greets his Spanish tutor in English. His tutor makes him aware
that he is here to teach him the Spanish language so he should also use it in all instances of life
right away such as in situations when he invites visitors in. Manny, however, seems irritated by
the fact that he has to learn the language in the first place. In line four, Manny tells the tutor to
“take it down a notch”. While his message to the tutor is that he should slow down and not
already teach him Spanish before they have even properly met, Manny makes a joke using the
Spanish language. His word play, which occurs in the form of code-switching, is to be consid-
ered sarcastic. It is modified from the saying “to take it down a notch” which means to regulate
a person’s level of enthusiasm. Manny does not seem to have any interest in learning the lan-
guage and by using a sarcastic utterance, he highlights this lack of interest.

In lines 13-14, Manny says that “Spanish just does not seem natural to me”. This can be at-
tributed to the fact that Manny has never learned to speak Spanish. Similar to the protagonist
Dev in *Master of None*, Manny has also grown up in an English-dominant environment where
there was no room for another language.

His indifference towards the Spanish language may be caused by his wish to fit in. Manny is
often considered an outsider at his school, as he is extraordinarily mature for his age. He writes
poetry, has a strong interest in classical music and he likes to talk to adults about marriage,
children and his love for coffee, at only 14 years old. Additionally, he is often picked on for
being chubby and for not dressing appropriately to his age at school. Therefore, Manny has
fully immersed himself in the English language so as at least not to be different in his commu-
nication. Speaking Spanish in front of his classmates, for instance, would simply give the bull-
lies a further reason to exclude him from even more occasions, as his foreignness would be
exposed.
Another reason for Manny to avoid speaking Spanish may have been triggered by observing Gloria’s conversations. Throughout the show, Gloria is almost always made aware of her foreignness. Many of Gloria’s interlocutors make fun of her linguistic skills and especially of her strong Colombian accent in such explicit ways that it is impossible for her son Manny to miss the fact that speaking a foreign language may elicit laughter.

In contrast to Manny, Gloria does not feel comfortable speaking English. Although she lives in a country where English is the dominant language, she is still linguistically dominant in her mother-tongue. This is especially evident in lines 16 and 17 as she explains to Manny that there is nothing “more natural than your mother’s tongue in your ear.” This is a strong example of how much she loves her native language. But at the same time, it exposes her lack of skills in the English language as her sentence does not really make sense.

Gloria’s overwhelming wish for Manny to learn Spanish is comparable to that of grandmother Alba in Jane the Virgin, the show which was analyzed in the previous chapter. Both parents try their hardest to keep their children from being completely alienated from the native language by either speaking to them in the language, as Alba does with Xiomara and Jane, or constantly reminding them that it is important for them to learn the language, even if that means taking lessons from a tutor, as is apparent in Gloria’s and Manny’s case.

Manny’s inability to speak or even understand Spanish is a realistic portrayal of young Latinos in the US. Most immigrant children undergo the same experience where they are either afraid of not fitting in to the Americanized world, or are simply apathetic due to the distance they feel for the language. This scene is an accurate representation of a first generation’s attitude to mother-tongue, versus that of a second generation. While Gloria, who has moved to the US in her early 20s, still demonstrates a strong emotional connection to Spanish, Manny’s representation of the second Mexican-American generation shows an even larger distance and alienation from not only the culture, but especially the language. The generational differences are once again clearly depicted in yet another show and compensated for by the overrepresentation of English.
4.2. Casting Overrepresentation of American Actors in Non-American Roles

A further method, though it is an implicit one, of being overly exposed to the English language in TV shows is by casting American actors who are native speakers of the English language for Non-American roles. Many American actors have been cast to play characters who are said to be from other countries with native languages other than English. One might argue that it is the actor’s job to act, and that therefore playing a character with a different mother-tongue is part of the job. But why do the networks not cast a native speaker of the required language to play the role? The English language is favored in situations where other languages could also be used to enhance the authenticity of the show and still English-speaking actors are preferred to play foreign actors. This is one further way to support the anglocentric view in TV shows and thus the overrepresentation of English native speakers and the English language per se.

When an actor plays a native of a nationality or area other than their own, in most cases the situation will seem completely artificial. Using original native speakers to represent the people of a certain language would definitely add accuracy to the story as well as to the personalities of the characters and therefore, enhance the credibility of a show as a whole. This is when the question arises what it is that moves the networks to still cast Americans to play the foreign characters?

Moreover, looking at some of the newly released TV shows, a pattern occurs in which English native-speakers are cast to play foreign speaking actors. Based on my own viewing habits, I have encountered that American actors and actresses are mostly cast to play Russian and French characters. While there are also other languages which English speaking actors are cast for, those languages seem to appear in most American TV shows. The following subchapters will list TV shows in which this phenomenon of casting American actors to play a foreign role is clearly observed.

4.2.1. The Portrayal of Russian Characters

In a lot of past and current TV shows, where Russian characters have been called for, American actors have been cast. In the TV show Orange Is The New Black, an American comedy-drama series, various American actors are cast to play characters of a nationality other than their own. The American actress Kate Mulgrew was cast to play a Russian character. However, Mulgrew
herself does not speak the Russian language at all. Yet, in many episodes of the show, she is engaged in Russian dialogues.

As a non-speaker of Russian, it is obviously impossible to detect whether or not the characters’ Russian skills are of a native standard. The audience is rather presented with a stereotypical portrayal of the Russian language. This usually means that the Russian language consists of many consonant clusters, many sh-sounds (ʃ) and the language is mostly perceived to sound harsh. In the scope of this thesis, however, I had a Russian native-speaker watch a scene of the show Orange Is The New Black, where Mulgrew, an English native character speaks Russian and analyze her Russian language skills.

![Image](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80017450?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C2%2C82b87729-63da-4237-a454-aeb130005304-23977375)


1. **Red**: Ну и что. Вы договорились, и он свою часть договора выполнил. (Whatever, you made an arrangement, and he is holding up his end of it.)

In the scene depicted above, the character was asked to help a prison guard translate what a woman was saying from Russian into English. Red, however, ends up having a conversation in Russian with the woman herself instead. As a non-native speaker of Russian, an audience member is rather focused on reading the subtitles in order to understand what is going on in the show content-wise. A Russian native speaker, however, has no difficulties identifying Red as a non-
native speaker of Russian immediately. After watching the scene, the native speaker stated the following:

It is so obvious that Russian is not Red’s native tongue. I noticed it from the first seconds. Some of the vowels are unnaturally long, and the major part of the consonant sounds is also disguised. [sic]

In addition to speaking poor Russian, the character Red also pretends to have a Russian accent when she speaks English. In an interview (cf. Radish 2013), the actress was asked how difficult it was for her to find an accent she was comfortable with. Mulgrew stated the following:

It was interesting about the accent. When I went in, they said that they wanted just a light Russian. I said, “That’s an oxymoron. Have you ever met a light Russian?!.”

The character is shown to have a strong accent which as a result, makes her appear as tough, fearsome and imperious to the audience. The representation of the Russian language in this manner leads the character to being perceived as the stereotypical Russian woman. Orange Is The New Black, however, is not the only show in which American actors portray Russian characters in such ways. In the controversially debated show Two Broke Girls the American actor Jonathan Kite, plays a Russian cook named Vanko “Oleg” Glishevsky. The same pattern occurs in the TV series The OA, where the American actress Brit Arling is supposed to be the Russian Prairie Johnson.

4.2.2. The Portrayal of French Characters

A further nationality which is known to be played by American actors is that of France. Instead of casting French, or French-American actors, many American actors are cast to play a French character with a remarkably artificial French accent.

In Season two, Episode 18 of the TV show Gilmore Girls, Michel, a character who is depicted to be French, is being visited by his supposedly French mother. While Yanic Truesdale, who plays Michel, is Canadian and indeed speaks French. Janet Hubert, an American actress who plays Michel’s mother from France, does not speak the language at all, according to a French native speaker.
1. **Giselle**: Michel! Mon Dieu! Come, come, embrasser mama.
2. **Michel**: (...) Mama! What are you doing here? I was supposed to
3. pick you up at the airport, you wicked creature.
4. **Giselle**: I had to come early, I wanted to buy presents before I see
5. you since I know you are materialistic vulture.

This scene shows the reunion of a son and his French mother in a hotel lobby. According to a
French native speaker, it is obvious from the start that they are both not native speakers of the
French spoken in France. Analyzing this scene, the French native speaker recognized that
Michel’s French was “somewhat” (sic) Canadian but the mother was immediately detected to
be a non-native speaker of French.

When Michel’s mother says *Mon dieu*, her pronunciation is completely off. She
says *Diou* instead of *Dieu*, definitely not how a French person would pronounce it.
Then, Michel’s mother says *come, come, embrasser mama*. First, her pronunciation of the word *maman* which means mom in French, is more of an Italian way
than French. The French accentuate the *n* at the end, whereas in the scene it is com-
pletely omitted. The syntax is wrong as well, in French you would say *viens embrasser maman* which means *come kiss your mother* and not simply *embrasser maman*.
They also don’t speak one full sentence, they just throw in English words
with a French accent. They always mix English and French which is something no
one would do in France.

Again, an American actress whose mother-tongue is English was cast to play a French charac-
ter. Even for a non-native speaker of French it seems obvious that the actress is not originally
French. Her language seems exaggerated in the sense that her accent does not sound authentic at all. What is more, the situation appears to be very artificial as the characters neither converse in English nor in French but instead they talk in a mixture of both languages which makes it hard for the audience to understand what the scene is about content-wise.

It is clear that mother and son are reuniting and that the son is welcoming the mother. However, it is hard to understand what one character is saying to the other. One might argue that this is exactly what the scene aims for. Because the actress is not an original speaker of the French language, the focus is not put on the content and thus both characters speak at the same time so that the audience feels overwhelmed and is distracted by what is happening rather than paying attention to what the characters are saying. A further reason why an artificial situation is created is due to the fact that when two people speak the same language, they usually converse in the mutual language. In the selected scene, however, Michel speaks English and his mother speaks a mixture of English and French. According to the native speaker who analyzed the scene, “it is sometimes impossible to understand what they are talking about as some words are not French but actually made up.”

A further accurate example in which an American actor plays a French character is the sitcom *Step by Step*, which premiered on ABC in September 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, and was created by William Bickley and Michael Warren. In the series, the American actor Bronson Pinchot plays Jean-Luc Rieupreyroux, a French character.
5. REPRESENTATIONS ACQUIRED THROUGH LANGUAGE

Apart from the obvious appearance of multilingualism in real life situations, as introduced in the beginning chapter of the thesis, the previous chapter has shown that it has also become extremely common for TV shows nowadays to center more and more on multilingual characters. Fortunately, there is a current tendency to feature various languages other than English on TV and streaming websites. The use of multilingualism in a series seems not only to influence the characters but also the show as a whole. Linguistic diversity enhances the show and also leads to many multilingual viewers identifying themselves with characters from the shows by sharing the same languages.

Netflix, a global provider of film streaming, based in the United States has been adding more multilingual films and TV shows to their collection. In an article, Rodriguez (cf. Rodriguez 2013) highlights the increasing interest in Spanish TV shows and telenovelas. The author quotes Netflix Chief Content Officer, Ted Sardos, “We’re thrilled to be working with Univision and Telemundo as well as a range of amazing Latin American content creators to enrich our Hispanic content mix in the U.S., allowing families to watch some of their favorite shows together when and how they want.”

This apparent trend for more diversity in regard to language is reflected in a number of new shows such as Jane the Virgin, Orange is the New Black, Fresh Off the Boat and Modern Family, which feature multilingual characters speaking in their native languages on screen and the audience is provided with subtitles in most cases.

With the increasing visibility of foreign characters in American TV shows and with this cultural growth, the experience of speaking more than one language is also finally being realistically depicted on TV. In the 21st century, the reputation of multilingualism seems to have changed and it also seems that multilingual characters have gained a better reputation in the TV landscape, especially because they are mostly depicted as powerful, sophisticated and strong characters. Looking at trending TV shows on Netflix, one might argue that multilingual characters are even favored over monolingual ones. The multilingual characters, however, are not simply there to solely communicate in another language. The positive change has rather led multilingualism to often being used as a tool which serves as more than a means of communication. The following chapters, thus, show how multilingualism is used as a tool to make the audience aware of identity issues, to show how gender has an impact on the use of multilingualism and
finally, to demonstrate that power and knowledge are often connected to the languages spoken in the shows.

5.1. Language and Identity

In her Ted Talk, Robyn Giffen, a Master’s student of Linguistic Anthropology at UBCO, talks about the role a language can play in identifying oneself and others (cf. Giffen 2015). To this end, she shares the following incident with the audience:

The other day I was at a seminar facilitating a discussion for a BBC faculty. During a break one of the faculty members came up to me and asked where in America I was from. I gave him a blank stare and said “I am not American and he said Oh, but you’ve lived in the United States”. Again, I looked confused and responded “No”. I then began to think back to what I might have said that could have identified me as American. So, I asked him and he told me “Oh, it’s you’re a’s, I’m American so I recognize the accent”. At this point, I laughed and told him I was born and raised in Canada and aside from very few vacations, I spent very little time in the United States. Although I was laughing outwardly, on the inside, a part of me was quite concerned about this. I do not want to sound American.

The man seems to have perceived a linguistic similarity between Giffen and himself and he used this similarity to start a conversation. But at the same time, by misinterpreting her accent, it made her aware of not being identified as Canadian by others. Giffen expressed herself through language but the man perceived more than what she was saying. This suggests that speaking a language always indicates more than what is actually said. Thus, it can be stated that language is often an expression of an identity, or several identities. It is only natural that people care deeply about the way they present themselves to others. Therefore, identity is a much-discussed phenomenon not only in research but also in everyday discourse. But what is an identity and does a person only have one or rather even multiple identities? How does language inform a person’s identity/identities?

In recent years, the phenomenon of identity has been of great interest in a number of disciplines, ranging from social science to humanities. Many scholars have provided diverse definitions for the term. However, it is rather ambiguous and can be used in varying contexts. The paradoxicality of the term can already be observed in the Latin derivation idem, meaning “the same.” In Latin, as well as generally speaking, it implies both similarity and difference.
As early as 1983, Phillip Gleason (quoted in Fearson 2014: 1) made the observation that the term is rather complex when he explained that “the meaning of identity as we currently use it is not well captured by dictionary definitions, which reflect older senses of the word”. Our present idea of identity is a social and cultural construct rather than a simple definition provided in a dictionary. Although people seem to be able to use the term appropriately in everyday discourse, scholars seem to have difficulties providing a clear explanation which encompasses the range of all its present meanings. On one hand, identity is something unique to every individual and it is what distinguishes one individual from another. But at the same time, people are defined in relation to other people, both individually and collectively. Moreover, it needs to be specified which kind of identity is involved as there are different forms of identity such as “personal identity”, “social identity” (Edwards 2009:19), “national identity, cultural identity or gender identity” where a relationship with another individual is also implied (cf. Buckingham 2008: 1).

According to Edwards (2009:11) “identity signifies the sameness of an individual at all times or in all circumstances.” Buchholtz and Hall (2003: 370) also agree that the term identity “literally refers to sameness.” They (2003) explain that there is the assumption for identity to be most evident in a group of people where they share similarities. But being able to tell if other people are alike already implies that the external viewer also has to have his own identity position from which it determines whether or not there is this sameness.

Edwards (2009:19) explains that “personal identity is essentially the summary statement of all our individual traits, characteristics and dispositions; it defines the uniqueness of each human being.” However, Edwards (2009: 19) goes on to explain that these unique features are shaped by our social environment and that identity is merely a reflection of the society one is in:

Our personal characteristics derive from our socialization within the group (or, rather, groups) to which we belong; one’s particular social context defines that part of the larger human pool of potential from which a personal identity can be constructed. Thus, individual identities will be both components and reflections of particular social (or cultural) ones, and the latter will always be, to some extent at least, stereotypic in nature because of their necessary generality across the individual components. (2009:20)

Language is central to human life and especially in connection to identity. Joseph (2004: 13) has pointed out that language and identity are “ultimately inseparable.” A very accurate example of such a phenomenon is Gloria Anzaldua’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (Anzaldua 2007: 53-64) in which she deals with the difficulties Mexican immigrants face when they grow up in the United States. Particularly, she focuses on the regional diversity which causes her to
speak more languages, and also more regional dialects in order for her to fit in. Many people adapt to the monolingual society to speak the majority’s language, whereas those who do not, tend to be marginalized. This exclusion from a group can then either lead to an additional form of identity, a deletion of a form of identity or a change of identity, depending on a person’s personality. In her work, Anzaldua (2007) emphasizes that people do not need to feel ashamed to speak their mother-tongues because she considers ethnic identity to be equal to linguistic identity.

When speaking a certain language, a certain identity is shaped and therefore a person who speaks multiple languages may also have multiple identities. This is especially evident in cases which involve migrants, as explained by Spickard (2013: 3–4) when he states that “migrants and minority group members have complex identities, often multiple identities at one time, and those identities shift and change over the course of time and changing circumstances.” Migrants experience the world from a different perspective as they are the ones who adapt to the new country in terms of language, culture and sometimes traditions while bringing their own language, culture and traditions with them.

Identity has also been a central theme in American TV shows where the struggles of not knowing who one is and where one belongs is shown through various characters. This phenomenon is especially evident in TV shows which feature multilingual characters. Those characters are mostly immigrants or first generation Americans who struggle with their identity as they are the other Americans with a foreign cultural heritage. Sometimes they struggle to adapt, or to merge their own culture with their new environment. Other times, they are caught between two cultures and find difficulty in defining their own identity. Nevertheless, neither representation is the same and in the end, the multitude of multilingual characters in the TV landscape is representative of the multitude of individuals sharing a similar experience, but ultimately possessing a unique identity.

The following chapters will investigate selected episodes of two TV shows, one depicting how multilingualism enhances one’s identity (Fresh Off the Boat); the other showing the opposite, how the lack of multilingualism leads to a more singular mindset (The Mindy Project).
5.1.1. Fresh Off the Boat

The 21st century has often been lauded as the golden age of television. There has never been such a large number of high quality television as there is now and it seems to be growing even more. However, it is still the case that not every ethnicity and even fewer languages are represented. While Hispanic representation is increasingly growing, the number of Asian-led TV shows is still at best. There has not been a TV show centering on Asian culture and presenting Asian identities on screen since Margaret Cho’s All American Girl in the mid 90’s, which only ran for one season. Although there are a number of Asian characters on popular TV shows, they are mostly presented as minor supporting characters. There was a turning point in 2015, when not only one, but two new shows were aired: Fresh Off the Boat and Dr. Ken. And while it should not be striking to have an Asian-American family as a front runner these days, unfortunately, it has been a rarity until now. However, now both shows seem to be appreciated by the audience as they raise cultural questions in a place which seems to favor cultural assimilation over integration.

Fresh Off the Boat is an American sitcom which first aired on ABC in 2015 and was created by Nahnatchka Khan. The show is loosely based on Eddie Huang’s 2013 memoir of the same name and it presents Huang and his immigrant Asian family in suburban Orlando Florida in the mid-90’s. The show is interesting in terms of language and identity because in it the white mainstream America is portrayed as the foreign perspective instead of the Asian culture for the first time on TV. Moreover, it portrays the childhood of the protagonist and the constant tension between the various cultures in the neighborhood in a way that informs the audience about who the characters feel they are and which culture they do or do not identify with.

In the first episode of season three, named Coming From America, Luis takes his family on a trip to Taiwan in order to reconcile with his brother who lives there. While Luis himself is nervous about the return due to his upcoming conversation with his brother, his wife Jessica seems beyond ready to go back home. Jessica wants her children to get acquainted with the culture and the people of Taiwan as they were born in the United States and have never been to her birthplace before. But once there, she discovers for herself that her long stay in the United States has alienated her from the culture.
1. **Luis**: I’m sorry, Jessica!
2. **Jessica**: Why was the pot already painted?
3. **Luis**: I’m sorry I couldn’t give you a life like the one Gene and Marc have here.
4. **Jessica**: What are you talking about?
5. **Luis**: You’ve always said how much you miss Taiwan. Maybe we should move back. Things would be easier.
6. **Jessica**: No, they wouldn’t. It’s hot, crowded, there’s mosquitos, a sick obsession with the movie *Ghost*, everybody here knows everyone else’s business. Even shopping at the night market isn’t as fun as I remembered.
7. **Luis**: You’re just upset because of what happened with Eddie’s sneakers.
8. **Jessica**: No. That’s not it. I know I’ve been saying how different things are here, how they have changed but it’s not true, they are the same. I’m the one who has changed. And I’m homesick for Orlando.
9. **Luis**: You know what I miss? Bagels. I want a bagel. I didn’t even think I like bagels but I want a bagel.
10. **Jessica**: Besides, no one loves America more than you. As soon as we move back here, you would miss it over there.
28. **Luis**: And as soon as we go over there, you know you are gonna miss it here.
29. **Jessica**: Well, maybe we will never feel completely at home in either place.
30. **Luis**: Oh my god. We are *Ghost*. We are Patrick Swayze in *Ghost*.
31. **Jessica**: Damn it! It is the best movie ever.
32. **Luis**: Mhm.

The character Jessica is played by actress Constance Wu, an American who was born into a Taiwanese family. In an article (cf. Feeney 2015), Constance explained that she does not have a Chinese accent when she talks in her daily life but that she has to pretend to have an accent when she plays the character on the show.

Jessica’s Chinese accent when she speaks English is portrayed as the typical immigrant accent. This is often done in TV shows in order to emphasize the character’s cultural identity as well as to add to the authenticity of the show. Most characters who are portrayed this way, however, are also shown to be marginalized in social or personal contexts. Because of Jessica’s accent, the audience may assume that she could not possibly identify as an American. Jessica’s problematic situation of no longer feeling like she really belongs neither in Taiwan nor in America is a classic example of arguments raised by the scholars Edwards (2009) and Anzaldúa (2007).

Her accent immediately reveals her Taiwanese heritage, differentiating her not only from other Americans, but also from her American born children who speak with an American accent. Her multilingual identity is different from that of her children, who understand Taiwanese but do not speak it.

Throughout the first and second season of the show, Jessica expresses how much she misses her life in Taiwan and many times says that she feels homesick. This goes so far that, in one episode, Jessica is even visibly disappointed when her children choose American food over Taiwanese food for dinner.

Previous to the selected scene above, Luis’s brother Marc showed the audience a video of his picture-perfect life with his wife Gene at his wedding. The video made Luis question his quality of life in America, realizing that they could lead a better lifestyle in Taiwan, and so he apologizes for not being able to provide more for his family. In line 6-7, Luis recalls that Jessica always expresses her wish to live in Taiwan as she misses her home. In line 8-11, Jessica explains that being back home is not what she had imagined it would be. In line 14-18, it becomes
clear that Jessica does not feel that she belongs in Taiwan anymore when she says that she is homesick for Orlando (cf. line 16).

Up until the third season of the show, the audience may have had the impression that because of her accent and her emotional utterances regarding Taiwan, Jessica feels and thus, identifies as Taiwanese. In this episode, however, it becomes evident that the character has developed a larger affinity towards the American culture. What also makes this argument valid is the fact that Jessica speaks English to her husband although he understands Taiwanese and she is not in the States.

In lines 28 and 29, however, both characters realize that they are still connected to both places when they say, “As soon as we move back here, you would miss it over there. And as soon as we go over there, you know you are gonna miss it here”. Jessica and Luis realize that they do not have to feel pressured into identifying with one culture or the other, but that they have developed a culture of their own, a hybrid of American and Taiwanese. They could speak Taiwanese to each other but they choose to communicate in English, a result of their new home. However, their Taiwanese mother-tongue influences their chosen second language English (apparent in their individual accents). Luis’s mother, who lives with the family in the first two seasons, only speaks Taiwanese. Jessica and Luis communicate in both Taiwanese and English with her, whereas their children only answer in English. This shows Jessica and Luis’s aforementioned hybrid identity, as well as the children’s American identity.

5.1.2. The Mindy Project

In recent years, it has been clearly noticeable that the TV landscape has become more diverse than ever and in particular Indian actors seem to have become mainstream in American TV shows. In 2012, three years prior to Aziz Ansari’s Master of None, Mindy Kaling was the first Indian-American to create, as well as star in, her own TV show.

The Mindy Project is an American romantic comedy TV series which premiered on Fox in in 2012 and was created by Mindy Kaling. The show is about a woman who works as an OB/GYN in a small medical practice in New York City. While the protagonist Mindy is of Indian descent, she only speaks English and is completely Americanized, with no real connection to her Indian heritage. Kaling’s depiction of her fictional alter ego is a heightened representation of herself, making the character a satire of a pop-culture obsessed city girl. However, she does so with self-awareness and irony, all while commenting on how shallow modern American culture is.
The show had a successful start until the audience began to criticize Kaling’s character, Mindy, for being *too white* (cf. Sahim, 2015). Episode 18 of season four was shot as a response to the criticism of Mindy neither “being able to speak Indian nor being Indian enough.” In this episode, the show addresses the identity issues of the character as well as those of the actress head-on. Mindy goes on a date with an Indian man for the first time, who tells her that she is not Indian enough for him to be with her. To prove him wrong, she decides to show him just how Indian she really is, but completely exposes her lack of knowledge about her own culture and identity.

Fig. 9: “Bernardo & Anita.” *The Mindy Project*, created by Mindy Kaling, season 4, episode 18, minute 00.00 – 01.13, Hulu, 10 May 2016. Amazon Video: https://www.amazon.com/The-Mindy-Project-Season-4/dp/B01JQAFOOG Retrieved February 11, 2017.

1. **Mindy**: Blind dates are so much fun, so much mystery.
2. **Neel**: You were no mystery at all. When I looked you up online, there were lots of pictures. Most of them from a... Botox testimonial.
3. **Mindy**: Hm, not for the face kind, the armpit sweating kind, best thing I ever did. Ten years ago, no way I could’ve worn this dress. Just dripping sweat. You know, it’s funny, you’re the first Indian guy I’ve ever gone on a date with.
4. (Neel laughs)
5. **Mindy**: No, I’m serious. I don’t think I know any Indian people, except my family. Oh, does West Indian count? ‘Cause I was in a steel drum band for a while.
6. **Neel**: That’s kind of strange, don’t you think?
7. **Mindy**: I know. A 30-year-old woman, single, in a steel drum band.
8. **Neel**: Yeah, it was weird.
9. **Mindy**: Oh, I don’t know. I mean, do you hang out with a lot of Indian people?
10. **Neel**: Yeah, actually. I was in an Indian fraternity at Berkeley, I go to
19. temple once a month and I came in second in the national spelling 
20. bee. I lost on xanthosis. 
21. **Mindy:** I also lost a spelling bee when I misspelled my last name on 
22. the entry form. 
23. **Neel:** I guess I just identify culturally as Indian. You know, because I 
24. am one. 
25. **Mindy:** Oh, me too. I identify as Indian too. Big time. 
26. **Neel:** What part of India are your parents from? 
27. **Mindy:** I want to say there’s, like, a river and some tigers? Don’t 
28. quote me on that.

The selected scene above depicts a situation in which Mindy is implied to be *too white* as she neither speaks nor behaves Indian. In contrast to Mindy, Neel seems to value his Indian identity very much. He is put off by Mindy’s lack of awareness as can be seen in line 12 where he is surprised about her non-Indian identity. His strong connection with his identity is then emphasized in line 18 where he explains that he is confronted with being Indian on a regular basis. In line 23, Neel explicitly says that he “identifies culturally as Indian” while Mindy reacts promptly and says that she herself is Indian too. It is obvious that Mindy has not really put much thought into her identity and she only says she is Indian in order for Neel to like her. Her statement is verified as a lie when she answers Neel’s next question (l 26) in lines 27 and 28. Neel’s accusations then send Mindy into an identity crisis as she suddenly starts to care about her identity.

1. **Mindy**: And this, on the right, is where the magic happens. Actually,
2. Criss Angel sublets one of the apartments upstairs.
3. **Neel**: Really?
4. **Mindy**: Yeah. (attempts to kiss him)
5. **Neel** (moves away): Oh…
6. **Mindy**: Oh… Huh… Okay…
7. **Neel**: I…, sorry.
8. **Mindy**: You were supposed to catch me with your lips.
9. **Neel**: I’m sorry, I just don’t really see this going anywhere.
10. **Mindy**: I did. I only had five garlic knots at dinner ’cause I thought we
11. were gonna make out. I mean, yeah, I brought home a bag with me, but still.
12. **Neel**: Being Indian is a really important part of my life. More than
13. CrossFit, even and I need it to be important to the person I date.
14. **Mindy**: Are you saying I’m not Indian enough for you?
15. **Neel**: Mindy, I think you’re really nice. Scratch that. I think you’re
16. really uninhibited.
17. **Mindy**: But I don’t think I can date a Pescatarian? I made that all up.
18. I hate fish. I eat meat all the time.
19. **Neel**: No, I don’t think I can date a coconut.
20. **Mindy**: Is it because I’m covered in tiny hairs and I fall out of trees?
21. That’s mean.
22. **Neel**: No. Because you’re brown on the outside and white on the
23. inside. I got to go.

In lines 22 and 23 of this scene, Neel exposes Mindy as a coconut, by saying that she is “brown on the outside and white on the inside.” The coconut metaphor implies that Mindy’s skin color may already give away her nationality and also presumably, her identity. But Neel seems disappointed that what is seen on the outside is not to be compared with how Mindy feels on the inside. In lines 12-13, he explains that his connection to his Indian identity is important and that the person he is with should feel the same way about their heritage and identity. Neel cannot be with a person who does not strive to be part of the Indian community. Mindy, on the other hand, handles the situation with humor, using her explicit wittiness constantly in order to avoid the conversation about identity. At the same time, however, she seems surprised that identity matters this much to Neel (cf. l 14). The reason for Neel’s rejection clearly is due to the fact that Mindy does not identify herself as Indian, neither culturally nor linguistically.
1. **Mindy**: Hey, Rishi, we’re both super Indian, right?
2. **Rishi**: Nah. You think you’re white and I think I’m black. We skipped over that whole steez.
3. **Mindy**: Hey! How is that possible? Mom and dad are super Indian. I mean, they have a servant who they’re mean to.
4. **Rishi**: ‘Cause we’re brats. I mean, it’s not our fault. We grew up in the whitest place on the planet, suburban Boston.
5. **Mindy**: Well, that may be true for you, but not for me. I’m not just some white guy trapped in the body of an Indian model.
6. **Rishi**: We represent a new kind of Indian-American, ones with literally zero roots to our past.

It seems to be the first time that Mindy is confronted with identity issues. In previous episodes, Mindy mostly referred to her being Indian with regard to her appearance, describing her heritage as being something exotic, which somehow increases her looks. However, now a man is actually put off by her Americanized personality and this bothers her. This identity crisis prompts her to talk to her brother Rishi about their ethnicity. Her brother explains to her that the place where they grew up has shaped their identity more than their heritage has. He considers himself and Mindy as the new generation who has no connection to their roots whatsoever. According to him, he identifies as a black American while to him, Mindy is a white American. His explanation is an exaggeration of the arguments raised by Edwards (2009: 20) on page 38 of this thesis, which implies that “individual identities will be both components and reflections...
of particular social (or cultural) ones.” Since The Mindy Project is a satirical comedy, this exaggeration actually raises the question whether or not a language informs identity.

Mindy, who is never shown to be speaking Indian and presumably does not even speak the language, is therefore a monolingual character that should be multilingual, but in fact is not. In her case, it is the lack of multilingualism which shapes her identity. Her disregard for her Indian culture has resulted in her being an Indian woman with a completely American identity. Mindy is an interesting character in terms of how input or in fact, the lack of input, shapes one’s character. She has never connected with her native language, not to mention her heritage at large, because she has always striven to be the perfect all-American girl, which she may never be. This episode, thus, highlights that she will always be identified as Indian, mostly due to her appearance, and it leads to Mindy’s realization that she has perhaps sacrificed a part of her identity.

Neel is the complementary contrast to Mindy in this episode as he is the hybrid Indian-American. He lives as an Indian man in an American environment but he actively tries to maintain a tie to his Indian heritage by surrounding himself with other Indians, and most importantly by also speaking the language. Neel points out what Mindy fails to realize, namely that multilingualism leads to a richer and more defined identity. The scenes above may be fictional but the dichotomy is evident in real life situations as Mindy and Neel are representatives of extremes of Indian immigrants in the United States. While Mindy is determined to assimilate, she loses the connection to her roots. Neel, however, holds on to his culture even when creating a hybrid identity. In summation, this episode points out Mindy’s issues with identity and that she is only concerned with it when other people make her aware of them while Neel stays true to his roots and language.

5.2. Language and Gender

The study of language and gender began in the mid 1970s when Lakoff (1975), Thorne and Henley (1975) did research on gender and its correlation to linguistics. In her book, Language and Woman’s Place, Lakoff (1975) discovered that there is a certain register for women which was aimed at maintaining the inferior role of women in society. She argues that women are implicitly taught by society to use certain linguistic forms which reflect the subordinate role of women to men (cf. Lakoff 1975: 7). Her findings have been named the “deficit” and “dominant” approaches, which both imply unequal power relations between men and women in terms of
their linguistic differences. Based on Lakoff’s work (1975), Piller and Pavlenko (2004: 18) have stated that the deficiency and dominant framework consider women as “inferior language users”. Women have a subordinate position in society due to their particular language usage as they rely on “hedges, tag questions, emphatic stress and hypercorrect grammar” Lakoff also explains that this language is forced on them in order for them to sound “feminine” enough (Lakoff 1975 quoted in Piller and Pavlenko 2004: 18).

It was not until 1980 that the new difference framework substituted the deficit and dominant approaches due to Tannen’s (1990) You Just Don’t Understand. The difference framework is a neutral approach which implies equality for both genders. Tannen (1990) considers men and women to be socialized within different subcultures. As a result, men and women communicate differently because they tend to follow gender-specific ways of speaking. Society provides women with a certain register that they are allowed to use in order to sound feminine, while men are expected to use a different register to emphasize their masculinity. Thus, men and women tend to develop different patterns of speech behavior as the unwritten social rules oblige them to do so. According to Pavlenko and Piller (2001: 23), gender turns into “a system of social relations and discursive practices.” This approach aims at explaining the miscommunications between men and women.

One of the most current approaches in gender and language is called the dynamic approach. According to Coates (1986), this approach is also called a social constructionist approach as gender is not something that people have but instead it is considered something which is socially constructed and rather done. This way, gender can be considered as something dynamic and constantly changing. Coates (1986) suggests that gender is to be considered culturally and the differences between men and women’s speech are the results of a society’s expectation of how women are “supposed” to speak in contrast to men. The dynamic approach, thus, allows women and men to be viewed in context, rather than as a homogenous group.

Pavlenko and Piller (2001: 18) explain that the deficit framework (1975) supports the “linguistic lag hypothesis” which considered “minority women to be less bilingual than men and thus, lagging linguistically behind them.” This hypothesis, however, has been already falsified by introducing the difference and dynamic approach. Additionally, in the field of language learning research there has been the idea that women are actually better at learning a foreign language. When it comes to education, girls are often assumed to be in the fore. In the article, GCSE results 2013: girls stretch to record lead over boys, education editor Paton (cf. Paton 2013) reports that “24.8% of exams written by girls were graded A* or A, compared to only
17.6% of exams written by boys.” A further study of young learners at Northwestern University (cf. Burman, Bitain & Booth 2009), UK, revealed that male and female brains process language differently. As a result, this study showed that the brains of the female participants show greater activity in the areas used for language encoding while the males’ brains need additional sensory reinforcement to process the data. Furthermore, according to the language journal Porta Linguarum, studies from all over the world have proven that female foreign language learners tend to use more study strategies when learning a language than male learners (cf. Lopez Rua, 2006).

One of the reasons for the assumption that there is a linguistic distinction between male and female speakers, can be found in the media. Unlike the earlier view that women are believed to be less bilingual (cf. 1975), women are nowadays often portrayed as multilingual characters while men are shown to be monolingual. Based on my own viewing habits, I have witnessed that American TV shows predominantly tend to feature more female multilingual characters than male. More and more TV shows have been supportive of the portrayal of the multilingual woman on television and the networks continue to support this view by emphasizing the importance of multilingualism, especially by portraying a higher number of female protagonists. The following paragraphs will list several TV shows which show that most multilingual characters in TV shows are indeed female.

The TV show Orange Is the New Black is a series about a women’s prison as previously introduced on page 31. It is a female dominated show in which the female characters speak at least two languages. The cast consists of a number of multilingual actresses but even characters who do not originally speak a foreign language are presented as multilingual on the show as can be seen by the character Pousse, played by Samira Wiley. In an interview, Wiley admits that she does not speak the German language at all. She explains that she had a dialect coach to teach her the German lines for the specific scenes (cf. Breger 2014). The male characters in the show, on the other hand, are not depicted as multilingual characters.

A further TV show in which a female character is depicted as multilingual, is 30 Rock. The character Liz Lemon is the main character of the American television show and is played by Tina Fey, who is also the creator of the series. Liz is depicted as a speaker of English and German while most of the male cast is monolingual. In the show, the protagonist’s longtime goal is to learn Spanish. The message of the show essentially is to depict a woman who strives to learn more languages in order to achieve her aim and to become even more successful.
The Colombian actress Sofia Vergara plays the multilingual character Gloria Pritchett in *Modern Family*, a show which was previously introduced on page 27. Interestingly, the show introduces Gloria as the only multilingual character. In later episodes, the audience gets to meet Gloria’s mother and her sister, who both speak English and Spanish. While the multilingual characters are always female, Gloria’s father never appears in the show. What is more, not even her son, Manny, speaks Spanish.

A similar observation can be made in the TV show *Scandal*, featuring the female protagonist Olivia Pope, which will be analyzed in more detail in the next chapter when dealing with language and power. Regarding gender, however, Pope is the only multilingual protagonist in the show. In various episodes, Pope fascinates the audience with her language skills. While she is a native speaker of the English language, she is also shown conducting dialogues in Chinese, Farsi, Spanish, French and Russian. Pope is portrayed as a strong and sophisticated character who is very successful in her career. The male characters of the show are not depicted as multilingual, not even Pope’s father who appears in the show regularly.

In the show, *How to Get Away With Murder*, the character Laurel Castillo, played by Karla Souza, is the only protagonist out of eight main characters who is presented to be multilingual. Souza is introduced as an English speaker. Only in later episodes, does the show reveal that she is a native speaker of the Spanish language when her background is explored more thoroughly in the storyline where her multilingual language skills are shown in various episodes.

Even in the older sitcom, *Friends*, which aired from 1994-2004, the only multilingual character introduced in the show is female. The first season of the show already shows Phoebe translating Italian words into English. In episode thirteen of season ten, it is revealed that Phoebe Buffay, played by Lisa Kudrow, also speaks French when she is asked by a male character to teach him the language. While there are six main characters, the only multilingual protagonist is a female character.

Further TV Shows which depict female multilingual protagonists are The Newsroom (Oliva Munn – speaks English and Japanese), Parks and Recreation (April Ludgate – speaks English and Spanish), Gilmore Girls (Mrs. Kim and Lane – speak English and Korean) and One Day at a Time (Penelope and Lydia – speak English and Spanish). The two latter TV shows will be analyzed in the following chapters to show in which further ways their female multilingual characters are depicted in the show.
5.2.1. Gilmore Girls

*Gilmore Girls* is a drama-comedy American TV show, which premiered on the CW in 2000 and was created by Amy Sherman-Palladino. The show centers around a single mother, Lorelai Gilmore and her teenage daughter, Rory Gilmore, in the fictional town of Stars Hollow in Connecticut. Further protagonists of the show, besides Lorelai and Rory, are Mrs. Kim and her daughter Lane.

![Fig. 12: “Back in the Saddle Again.” Gilmore Girls, created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, season 2, episode 18, The WB, 23 Apr. 2002. Netflix. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80014168?trackId=13752289&ctx=0%2C0%2C76ec4bc0-028f-4929-b8ab-5e8694b9e3cc-29217303.](image)

Mrs. Kim and her daughter Lane are of Korean heritage. While Mrs. Kim is an immigrant, Lane was born in the United States. They speak English to each other due to Lane’s upbringing, however, they speak Korean to Lane’s grandmother who comes to visit from Korea.

Mrs. Kim owns her own antique shop in Stars Hollow. She is depicted as a hard-working, independent woman who has given up everything to provide a happy life for her daughter. Lane is depicted as a smart and well-read student who loves music. She is mostly involved in artistic activities and is always there to help when her best friend, Rory, is in need.

While it is never explicitly mentioned that Mrs. Kim is a single mother, the father is never shown in the original show. It was only in the revival of the show, which was aired in November 2016, when the show revealed in a short scene that Mrs. Kim indeed has a husband, and Lane
has a father. Throughout all seven seasons of the show, a male figure was never shown in the Kim household. It seems that only her mother plays an important role in Lane’s life.

In the show, Lane’s relatives are predominantly female as well. This is especially evident in episode 19 of season six, titled “I Get a Sidekick Out of You”, when Lane gets married to Zach. Most of the invited guests are female characters who speak English as well as Korean. Very few men appear in the scene and not even Lane’s father is shown at his own daughter’s wedding. To avoid the stereotypical depiction which implies that women are not “bilingual enough”, the show features more women than men. This absence of men in this multicultural context may imply that the appearance of multilingual women on TV is more important than the one of multilingual men.

*Gilmore Girls* is a female driven show, featuring multilingual female characters without a male figure in the household. Having female characters being depicted this way shows that even the idea of multilingualism is enough to change outdated paradigms which were believed to be true by scholars in earlier years. Instead of supporting the theories proposed by the deficit and dominance approach (1975), the networks now tend to promote an openness towards gender in the media by portraying more multilingual women and thus eliminating outdated thinking. Multilingual females are depicted in favorable light in order to highlight the importance of the shift from the deficit to the dynamic approach (cf. Lakoff, 1975, Coates, 1986).
5.2.2. *One Day at a Time*

*One Day at a Time* is a sitcom which was premiered on Netflix in 2017 and developed by Gloria Calderon Kellett and Mike Royce. The show portrays the life of the Cuban family Alvarez, consisting of three generations and all of them living in the same house. The mother, Penelope is divorced and raises her teenage daughter Elena and son Alex with her supportive mother Lydia.


Penelope Alvarez, a single mother, is presented as an independent woman who once served in the army together with her (now) ex-husband. In the show, she works as a nurse and provides for her whole family. Her mother, Lydia is portrayed as the traditional woman, who supports her daughter by helping her raise the children. Penelope’s daughter, Elena, is a teenager with a deep interest in feminism while Alex, Penelope’s son, is shown to be socially unfit.

In a number of episodes, the dialogues between Penelope and Lydia are conducted multilingually. They often talk to each other in Spanish, especially when they do not want others to know what they are talking about. The Spanish conversations of the women are not provided with subtitles which aims to normalize the multilingual experience as depicted by the characters.
Here is yet another show that is female driven and which presents multilingual females as protagonists. As already mentioned in the previous chapter featuring *Gilmore Girls*, this show also shows no father or a father figure being present in the show. Penelope is shown to be successful in her job as well as when raising her children with the help of her mother. It is also remarkable to see that Penelope never expresses her need of a man in her life. Instead, she is shown to be the independent, strong woman within a multilingual context. This portrayal may imply that being a multilingual female can lead to a change in the perception of female stereotypes. By showing that the main characters, such as Penelope and Lydia in this show, are multilingual characters, other women may be inspired to learn more languages in order to be just as successful and independent.

The show is a further example which proves that stereotypes as presented by the scholars above (cf. Lakoff 1975) need to be overcome by the representation of more female multilingual characters. As Tannen (cf. 1990) points out correctly, women and men develop different language skills depending on the cultures they find themselves in and thus, as the shows mentioned above already show, it is not up to date to claim that women are less bilingual than men, and especially because there is scientific evidence clearly rejecting those theories. Fortunately, TV networks center around more and more female multilingual characters by making them protagonists and showing that women, too, can be just as multilingual as men.

### 5.3. Language and Power

Language is an essential component of life and necessary for the cognitive development of a human being. In a globalized world with multilingual societies, the command of multiple languages is almost crucial for various reasons but especially because it allows you to be part of more than just one world. It opens doors to participate in cultural activities and to understand and get to know more people from all over the world.

Some of the most powerful global business leaders are speakers of multiple languages (cf. Smith 2015). Leo Apotheker, former CEO at SAP and Hewlett Packard, is a German manager who speaks German, Dutch, French, English and Hebrew. Madeline Johnson, the CEO of Market Council speaks Spanish, Italian and Portuguese in addition to her mother-tongue, English. Paul Bulcke, CEO of Nestlé, is a Belgian manager who speaks Dutch, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Being able to understand and speak more than one language brings a number of advantages. It brings one a wider perspective in life, the ability to connect to more
people easily as well as more career opportunities. Thus, it seems that speaking multiple languages can make a person powerful. But what is power and in which ways does the knowledge of multiple languages make a person more powerful?

Indeed, there are various ways in which a person can be powerful through language and especially multilingualism. A language is a means of receiving and giving information. The more languages a person speaks, the more information is available to them. In a sense, information can be seen as power. In other words, language is a means to power. In a scenario where only one person from a larger group speaks a language which is needed in a particular situation, it is clear that that is the most powerful person within the group.

Someone who is said to be powerful is usually superior to another person. Fairclough (1989: 46) explains that “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants.” In order to understand what constraints are, however, Fairclough suggests that a distinction needs to be made between three types of constraints, those being “contents, relations and subjects”. While contents refer to what is being said or done, relations refer to “the social relations people enter into in discourse” and subjects refer to the persons involved in the situation. Fairclough (1989: 46) goes on to explain that constraints do not have to be enforced directly as they clearly depend on context.

While power relations are clearly shown in situations where people are directly facing one another, it becomes more difficult to tell who has the power when media discourse is involved. In face-to-face communication, the conversations are adapted to the person(s) involved. In media, however, the discourse does not involve solely one interlocutor, but instead a larger audience. Thus, Fairclough (1989: 49) argues that the so-called behind the scenes powers are the “hidden powers”. Because media cannot address every single person in the audience individually, they choose to address the so-called “ideal subject.” That is the reason why the author calls this form of power the “hidden power” as the audience is not aware of who chooses which information deserves to be delivered. Additionally, Fairclough (1989) discusses the issue of “one-sidedness” in media discourse as the audience does not get a chance to respond to the information they are being fed, while in face-to-face communication there is constant turn taking between the interlocutors. The same phenomenon is also evident in TV shows as the viewers do not have a chance to react directly to the person transmitting the information (cf. Fairclough 1989: 49).

Power and language so far have been considered in a context which shows the oppression of one party and the superiority of the other. Thus, it is clear that language can be used to show
these power relations. However, power does not always have to be associated with negative components as exemplified by Foucault. According to him (1991), power can be viewed as a positive force striving to help a society by simply mirroring reality:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (1991: 194)

Speaking one language can already lead to unequal power relations within a society. But how can power be obtained when people speak more than one language? Multilingualism can be depicted in various ways and using it as a tool of power in TV shows is one way. Many characters in TV shows are said to be rather influential due to their ability to speak more than one language. Those characters would probably not have the same opportunities without being multilingual.

In light of this, how does the ability to speak foreign languages really make the characters in TV shows more powerful? The following chapters will explain this phenomenon by providing scenes from the TV shows *Scandal*, which will show that multilingualism may be used as a tool to free the character and *Game of Thrones*, in which it is evident that language and power are important determinants of life and death.

### 5.3.1. Scandal

The political thriller television show *Scandal*, which premiered in 2012, was created by Shonda Rhimes, Betsy Beers and Mark Wilding, and features the multilingual protagonist Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington. Olivia is a former White House communications director who decides to start her own crisis management firm, through which she handles her clients’ scandals. Her team consists of four additional members who call themselves “gladiators in suits.” Together, they specialize in fixing their clients’ reputations, but sometimes they also literally save their lives.

In season four, episode thirteen, titled “No More Blood”, Olivia is kidnapped by terrorists in an attempt to extort the president, with whom she has previously been romantically involved. Her captors then decide to go rogue on the mission and hatch a deal to sell Olivia to the highest
bidder on the black market. However, Olivia manages to take control of the situation, simply by using her multilingual skills.

1. **Iranian woman**: Take off the hood! (pause) Smile for the camera!
2. on the phone: Daram Aksa mifresam
3. (on the phone: I’m sending you the photo.)
4. Je wakht peidash kardi man pule in nashiara bedam. Tshi, Tshi
5. gofti? Dobare tekrar kok. Barainke ma darim je billion charj mikonim,
6. man mikham motmaen basham ke khodeshe.
7. (Let me know when you have a match and I’ll give these amateurs their money. What’s that? Run it again because we’re spending a billion dollars
8. and I want to make sure it’s her.)
9. **Man 1**: This is taking too long.
10. **Olivia**: It’s an ambush. She asked the buyer of the manner in place.
11. As soon as they verify my identity, they’re going to kill you.
12. **Man 1**: Stay out of this.
13. **Olivia**: Do you speak Farsi?
14. **Man 1**: No, and neither do you!
15. **Olivia**: Bebakhsind, khanom?
16. Excuse me, Miss?
17. **Iranian Woman**: Salam!
18. **Olivia**: Mikham bedunind ina wakhti puleshuna gereftan, mikhand
19. bokoshandetun.
20. Just thought you should know these men are going to kill you as soon
21. as they get the money.
22. **Iranian woman**: Zane miged ina darun bamun bazi mikunan.
23. The woman says they’re playing us.
24. (Iranian woman leaves promptly)
25. **Man 1**: What did you say to her?
26. **Olivia**: I told her you brought back up so she ran everything twice
28. before pulling a bullet in your head
29. **Man 2:** What’s going on now?
30. **Olivia:** She asked the buyer if he wants to abort.
31. **Iranian woman** (on the phone): Mikhail tshikar konam?
32. (on the phone) What should I do?
33. **Man 1:** Let me talk to your boss.
34. **Iranian woman:** Don’t take another step.
35. **Iranian woman** (on the phone): Alo, beshun migam.
36. on the phone: Yes, sir, I will tell them
37. So here’s what’s gonna happen! I’m gonna get in my car and drive
38. this way. You’re gonna get in your car and drive that way. Everyone
39. lives, no one is happy! I’m sorry we couldn’t make a deal, gentle-
40. men. Perhaps we’ll have better luck next time.

In the selected scene above, Olivia plays both sides by claiming that each one will kill the other after the exchange. As a result, she manages to free herself by putting her language skills to use. In lines 19-20, she tells the Iranian woman that her captives were planning on killing them while telling her captives the same story in reverse in lines 27-28. Had she not understood the conversation of the woman on the phone, the exchange would have been executed and the protagonist would have been sold to the other party. It is her understanding of the language and her skills in speaking Farsi which enable her to manipulate and take control of the situation. This episode shows a classic case of multilingualism being used as a power tool by liberating the character due to her foreign language skills. Pope’s knowledge of Farsi is her one and only way out of this precarious situation. With that knowledge, she is able to receive and distort information, thus shifting the power relations in the scene. This is a perfect example of how language can be used to gain power as explained in the previous chapter.

The multilingual character is displayed in very good light as she is portrayed to be sophisticated, strong and courageous. Moreover, the surprising revelation that Olivia speaks Farsi makes her even more appealing and interesting to the audience as it shows the lengths to which she goes to be the absolute best at her job. Interestingly, this episode is also representative of the previous chapter, as this scene only depicts females as multilingual characters while all the males involved only speak English.

*Scandal* presents one way of depicting multilingualism as a positive, empowering experience and a way to express power. At first Olivia is the controlled and constrained character, so, the “non-powerful participant”, as Fairclough (1989: 46) puts it. She is physically captivated and there is no way for her to free herself from either fetters or the people who hold her captive. The only powerful tool she has in order to free herself is her language.
Among the advantages of speaking a foreign language are the ability to liberate a character but in a way, also to forward the story line. This is in line with Foucault’s claims about power mentioned in the previous chapter. Anyone caught in such a situation would put their language skills to use if they knew it helped them escape the criminals. Olivia’s foreign language skills lead her to her liberation and thus, language made her more powerful.

5.3.2. Game of Thrones

*Game of Thrones* is a fantasy TV show, which premiered on HBO in 2011, and was created by D.B. Weiss and David Benioff, based on the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. It is set in the fictional continent of Westeros depicting a battle of five kings for the reign of the entire kingdom. There are several languages used in the show which are all fictional. The most common of them is only referred to as “the common tongue”, for which English serves as a stand-in. Others are spoken by the characters and are translated via subtitles.

The character, Daenerys Targaryen, is the exiled daughter of the former king, whose brother decides to sell her to the king (referred to as a Khal) of a nomadic warrior tribe, called the Dothraki. At first, Daenerys is presented as a character who has no choice in her fate. Her brother sells her to the Dothraki with the promise that they will lead his army in his pursuit of regaining the family’s former throne. However, Daenerys soon comes into her own as a Dothraki queen (referred to as a Khaleesi) when she starts to adapt to their culture, and most importantly, learn their language.

In order for her to be accepted as a Khaleesi, she has to learn the Dothraki language. At first, she is terrified by the Dothraki and their violent culture, but she eventually falls in love with her husband, Khal Drogo and, after his death, becomes the leader of their tribe.
1. Drogo: Vezh fin saja rhaesheseres vo zigereo adoroon shiqethi.
2. (The stallion that mounts the world has no need for iron chairs.)
4. (According to the prophecy the stallion will ride to the ends of the world.)
6. (The earth ends at The Black Salt Sea. No horse can cross the poison water.)
8. (The Earth never ends at the sea. There are many dirts across the sea. The dirts of my birth.)
10. (Not dirt. Lands.)
12. (Lands, yes.)
14. (There are thousands of ships in the free cities. Wooden horses that fly across the sea.)
15. Drogo: Kisha vastoki vos alikh hrazefi ido m'adori shiqethi.
16. (Let's speak no more about wooden horses or iron chairs.)
17. Daenerys: Me vos ador. Me...me...throne.
18. (It's not a chair. It's...it's...throne.)
19. Drogo: Throne?
20. Daenerys: Ador finaan khal nevasoe...che khaleesi.
21. (A chair for a king to sit upon...or a queen.)
22. Drogo: Khal vos zigereo adoroon nevasoe maan. Me zigeree s josoon disse.
23. (A khal doesn't need a chair to sit on. He only needs a steed.)
Episode seven of season one, titled “You Win Or You Die”, highlights her language learning experience of the fictional tongue. Daenerys needs to learn the language of the Dothraki in order to become the tribe’s queen. When she talks to Khal Drogo in Dothraki her husband lovingly corrects her mistakes. It shows that through learning this language, they were able to establish a strong emotional connection and become partners instead of her being his property.

In the dialogue above, it can be seen that she already speaks the language of the Dothraki (underlined lines) very well but line 24 shows that she still does not know all the words of the language. When she cannot recall the word for “throne” in the Dothraki language, she replaces the term with the English word, showing that she is still learning the language in order to be able to claim power.

While in the beginning Daenerys was a silent follower of the Dothraki people and terrified of their culture, she later manages to adapt and even begins to command the people to obey her. She would not be able to do so were she not able to speak their language. After Khal Drogo dies, a part of his tribe begins to follow her and accepts her as their leader. It is the very first time that a woman has led the Dothraki. For Daenerys, language is her main claim to power.

The theory that she needed the language in order to claim her power, is further proven in later seasons when Daenerys, now a trained and experienced conqueror, is not able to communicate with the people of Mereen, a city which she takes by freeing their slaves and claiming the throne for herself. There, she lets her advisors speak for her, but some of the people soon grow agitated because they are unable to relate to their new queen. Thus, a small group soon starts an uprising against her, forcing her to flee the city. Unlike the Dothraki, who came to accept her after she learned their language, the people of Mereen reject her because she does not speak theirs. By not adapting to their culture and being unable to speak their language, Daenerys loses some of her power.

The show manages to address the points that are also raised by Fairclough as well as Foucault. The show and in particular the scene above demonstrate that the characters only have a chance at being powerful when they learn their language. Furthermore, the show proves that even when a language is fictional, the same principles of language still apply. The fictional language is used to wield power and thus oppress others just as much as any other existing language.
6. MULTILINGUALISM AND STEREOTYPES

People communicate with a number of different languages, dialects and accents. While there are currently 7,102 known languages spoken in the world, it is safe to say that there are certainly just as many stereotypes attached to the languages and the people who speak them. But the way people speak is crucial to the formation of their personality and in TV shows, of their characterization. However, when a person speaks a foreign language in a specific way, such as with an accent, it can distinguish them from the rest of a group in a rather negative way. When a foreign language is used to mock people, it leads to a negative representation of multilingualism. This is especially evident in TV shows in which foreign characters are represented stereotypically, showing the stereotypical features of a nation which society has constructed. By reducing a character to stereotypical characteristics, it may lead the audience to having a perpetual perception of people from a certain country. Thus, it is important that characters on TV are not depicted stereotypically in order not to support the prejudices people have against others. Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) explain that stereotypes lead to a limited worldview:

Stereotypes limit our understanding of human behavior and of intercultural discourse because they limit our view of human activity to just one or two salient dimensions and consider those to be the whole picture. Furthermore, they go on ideologically to use that limited view of individuals and of groups to justify preferential or discriminatory treatment by others who hold greater political power. (2001: 169)

While multilingualism may be mostly depicted in a favorable light, there is always the danger of stereotyping the characters by equipping them with prejudicial linguistic features. And while there is nothing wrong with stereotypes per se, they can become dangerous when the audience picks up on those features and applies them to other people outside of their TV screens and thus limit their view on life due to paying attention only to those perceptions. Lippmann (1998) explains that the hallmark of a stereotype is that “it precedes the use of reason”. He continues to say that it “is a form of perception” and that it “imposes a certain character on the data of our senses before the data reach the intelligence.” But how do stereotypes come about? Lippmann (1998: 95) attempts to give an explanation, stating the following.

The systems of stereotypes may be the core of our personal tradition, the defenses of our position in society. They are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted.
Multilingualism may be used in order to inform a person’s identity. It is also often used to defend gender stereotypes as well as to show how language is constantly related to power. But multilingualism may also be represented in what might first appear as a humorous way to the audience. Many characters are portrayed as comical but also as less important in TV shows. This is shown in the way that the characters code switch in their dialogues. Furthermore, their accents are mostly highlighted to emphasize the foreignness. Bleichenbacher (2008: 18) explains that “linguistic stereotyping often serves as a convenient alternative to more gross but less admissible forms of racist discourse.” In other words, linguistic stereotyping can lead to linguistic racism. When a character is portrayed in such comical ways, it might lead to the creation of a certain stereotype of a culture. Having the character use a certain phrase repeatedly in the comical context is what may lead to linguistic racism as the language will not be taken seriously any longer.

A further stereotypical pattern can be observed when the shows are considered in terms of popularity. While the depiction of stereotypes in the TV landscape used to be very common, my previous examples have shown that due to the popularity of more diverse shows, this seems to have largely changed over the past decade. However, the stereotypical depiction has still prevailed in a number of current TV shows. It seems that the shows aiming at a mainstream audience, which enjoy good ratings but are often panned by critics, tend to show more stereotypical features.

Fig. 17: “Secrets, Lies and Firetrucks.” Fuller House, created by Franklin J., season 1, episode 8, minute 5.47, 2016, Netflix: https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057604?trackId=13752289&tcxt=0%2C0%2C0824dbd9590e083167f779f9cb10502040366de2%3A47a872efeb7f1843086aafc201b0941d58045c3
Fuller House is an American family sitcom and sequel to the 1987-95 TV show Full House, which premiered on Netflix in February 2016 and was created by Jeff Franklin. When it comes to diversity, the show seems to have adapted to the modern representations on TV. Race and sexual orientation have become the norm instead of being the exception in American TV shows. The plot of the series now centers around the adult lives of D.J Tanner-Fuller and Stephanie Tanner, the children who also appear in the original show, and their friend and neighbor Kimmy Gibbler. The latter character is shown to be married to Fernando.

It seems that, while the show is adapting to the TV landscape of the 21st century, it is still facing difficulties in representing minorities without depicting them in the most stereotypical manner. Kimmy is shown to have biracial daughter, a phenomenon which did not occur in the original show as the series was rather monolingual and included almost no diverse cast. But the diversity only seems to apply to the surface as the stereotypes still are predominantly emphasized. The misuse of stereotyping lies especially within the depiction of Kimmy’s Argentinian husband, Fernando, who speaks English with a very thick accent. Most of the other characters constantly make jokes about not understanding him. Fernando is afflicted with all the stereotypes that are said to be Hispanic. While he is the typical Latin lover, he is also presented to be of lesser intelligence. These features, together with the stereotypical accent make him the butt of the joke. This goes hand in hand with Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) who explain that stereotypes are “often used to justify discriminatory treatment by others who hold greater political powers”. Fernando is treated as an outcast because he does not sound like the rest of the American characters. Fernando’s jokes are only considered funny in relation to his accent, thus the accent is what makes up the character and his linguistic lack is what is presented as his sense of humor. Luckily, his daughter Ramona and her friend Lola are depicted to be in contradiction with this stereotypical depiction by often criticizing Fernando’s character.

A further show, in which the stereotypes of a character are perpetuated is Modern Family, a show previously introduced in Chapter four. Just as Fuller House, Modern Family also stereotypically depicts the Hispanic character Gloria Pritchett. By featuring a gay couple with an adopted Vietnamese child and introducing a Hispanic character as one of the protagonists, the show has been lauded for its representation of diversity. But while Modern Family projects the idea of diversity by representing minority groups in America, it also manages to maintain the stigma of those minorities by presenting the minority characters in the most stereotypical way. Gloria Pritchett is depicted as the loud, feisty, feminine wife of the very masculine Jay who happens to be 25 years older than her. Gloria’s most humorous part is the most insulting, namely
her lack of language skills and her accent. Even though Gloria has lived in the United States for a long time, she still struggles with the English language and as a result, she code-switches from English to Spanish at all times. She also tends to translate most of her sentences directly from Spanish into English which often leads to confusion and the inability to conduct a conversation with her. The main source of her humor, just like in Fernando’s character in Fuller House, is her thick Columbian accent and the inability neither to understand nor speak American colloquialism.

While Gloria’s accent may mark her cultural background, at the same time, it excludes her from the rest of the American family. But in many situations, this marginalization also results in other characters patronizing Gloria or treating her like a stranger as if she had not experienced life in the United States. Due to her language problems, Gloria is often depicted as the “stupid Latina” and it is assumed that she is mostly uninformed about and not interested in the typical American way of living. As a result, Gloria is immediately defined by her accent. To quote Lipmann (1989: 81), “for the most part, we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.”

Interestingly enough, however, the audience seems to find such stereotypical depictions funny, especially since the cast won numerous prizes for their work on the show for “Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series” (cf. Rosen C., 2014). According to Nielsen Company, Modern Family is the number one scripted program on television (cf. The Nielsen Company, http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com, retrieved February 11, 2017).
The shows mentioned above are examples of how not only the audience seems to enjoy the cliché filled stereotypes in characters but also how some TV show creators are oblivious to this linguistic racism and actually seem to find it funny while failing to realize how problematic such depictions are. However, if used in the right context and executed correctly, stereotypes can also be used to make an ironic argument about this type of racist presentations. An example of how to use stereotypical characters to make the audience aware of the problematic issues is perfectly demonstrated by the TV Show *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*.

*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* is an American sitcom, which premiered in March, 2015 and was created by Tina Fey and Robert Carlock. The show centers around Kimmy’s adjustment to her life in New York City after having spent the past 15 years as a captive in an underground bunker.

Kimmy befriends Dong in her GED class as she wants to catch up on her High School graduation which she missed as a result of her captivity in the bunker. Dong, a Vietnamese immigrant, attends Kimmy’s school to improve his English skills in order to apply for a residence permit. The character is also depicted as the stereotypical Asian-American with a thick Vietnamese accent and a broken English. However, in contrast to the aforementioned shows, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* depicts his language skills with so much irony that it is impossible to take this
depiction seriously. It seems that the show’s storylines are so heightened that they make fun of these enforced stereotypes, showing a fine line between oblivion and awareness.

The show has been heavily criticized for some of their storylines which the audience has sensed to be racist and insensitive. However, it seems that the audience has failed to recognize the explicit irony that is infused into every episode. The creators’ intent is not the portrayal of stereotypical characters in order to enforce prejudicial beliefs. On the contrary, the show is intentionally trying to be accurate in the exaggerated portrayal of stereotypical characters to show just how inappropriate such depictions are. While Dong is equipped with linguistic and cultural stereotypes of an Asian-American, his portrayal is rather ironic and intended to evoke questions and awareness of the problematic issues such as stereotypical representation in the TV landscape.
7. CONCLUSION

English has been the predominant language on television ever since its inception. It is its dominance that has led to other languages being considered less important and thus have less value. Especially when we consider in which contexts other languages appear, it becomes evident that the dominance of English seems to evoke patterns of negative stereotyping with regard to the use of foreign languages, as well as the speakers of those foreign languages per se. In other words, the usage of the English language has become so practical in the world that even TV shows have avoided the appearance of other languages in a positive context for the longest time.

One main reason for the English-favored depiction is the hegemonic power of white America. In order to make the audience aware of this phenomenon, the Americanization of the world is what is essentially reflected in the scenes of the analyzed shows in this thesis. The TV shows *Master of None, Jane the Virgin* as well as *Modern Family* address this problem head on by using an ironic and sarcastic method covered with explicit self-awareness. The shows point out that the generational differences have led to the multilingual characters viewing themselves as monolinguals due to the domination of the English language, implying that the characters simply do not find it important enough to communicate in a language other than English. At the same time, shows such as *Orange Is the New Black, Two Broke Girls, The OA, Step by Step* and *Gilmore Girls*, include foreign characters who are played by monolingual English speaking American actors when the networks could have also hired native speakers to do the same job. They would have even enhanced the shows by adding more authenticity to them. As a result of this white American hegemony, some situations depicted in the shows appear neither authentic nor funny. Instead, the speakers are “fake” multilinguals and the dialogues are merely translations from the original languages but do not resemble actual speech as spoken by multilingual people.

The truth is, however, that languages other than English are just as important in real life situations and they are clearly important enough to also be depicted in popular, influential TV shows which are viewed by people from all over the world. *Master of None, Jane the Virgin* and *Modern Family* are accurate examples of this representation of English. While the shows present multilingual cast but monolingual characters, they are presented in a way that the audience is expected to be aware of the absence of foreign languages. The viewers are supposed to understand the underlying message and in a way, question why the multilingual cast does not
speak in their native mother-tongues. The creators’ intention is to raise awareness of these issues by representing monolingual dialogues from characters one would expect to be multilingual considering the context in which they are shown.

Luckily, a positive change in the depiction of foreign languages on television is visible as the global streaming service Netflix, for example, is now producing shows in countries other than the US, and making them available in their original languages worldwide. With the rising importance of multilingualism, more and more mainstream shows are beginning to center around multilingual characters. The multilingual shows portray this positive change by providing examples which clearly show that multilingualism is used to address problematic issues which concern societies all over the world. Multilingual characters are finally introduced as sophisticated and admirable protagonists showing the audience that knowing more languages means knowing oneself and also understanding the world better.

One of the many struggles the majority of people deal with is that of identity. Having a sense of identity is important to most people as it is comforting to feel at ease with oneself. One way of expressing who one is, and thus expressing identity, is language. Many immigrants are often caught in between cultures, traditions as well as languages when they move to another country. Their struggles are often overlooked by the expectation to be linguistically and culturally adjusted to the new environment in a rather short time. Fresh Off the Boat and The Mindy Project show that another language can indeed create a new identity. The shows also depict situations where being multilingual leads to having multiple identities. Both TV show examples are very self-aware and depict realistic situations of the struggles multilingual people often face.

A further contemporary struggle which is often depicted in various TV shows is the stereotyping of gender. While early and very traditional scholars may disapprove, women can be depicted as multilingual characters just as much as men. This is especially well demonstrated in TV shows such as How to Get Away With Murder, Orange Is the New Black, 30 Rock, Modern Family, Scandal, The Newsroom, Friends, Gilmore Girls and One Day At a Time. Being able to name this high number of TV shows which feature multilingual female protagonists already shows that the networks are clearly using multilingualism in order to get rid of the misbelief that only men are capable of speaking multiple languages. These are all female driven shows, presenting multilingual females as their strong, sophisticated and inspiring protagonists.

Multilingualism can also be used to show that the knowledge of multiple languages can make a person more successful and powerful. This clearly applies to real life situations, especially in
regard to career and social life. As the examples of the TV shows Scandal and Game of Thrones show, language can not only free someone from unsettling situations, the use of multiple languages can also make a person powerful in terms of establishing new relationships which would have not been possible without the knowledge of more languages. As these shows have demonstrated, language can literally be a gateway to power, if used correctly.

However, if multilingualism is not portrayed as a positive tool, but is instead used to mock people, the audience will perceive it negatively. Many multilingual characters are portrayed as comical but less important ones, as is quite evident in the examples mentioned in chapter 6 of this thesis. What may first appear as a humorous way of integrating multilingualism, is indeed linguistic racism and the languages presented in this context will not be taken seriously any longer. Not only that, but the people and the culture will also be weighed down with negative connotations.

Fortunately, it seems that the television landscape is slowly changing and embracing this change by welcoming more diverse characters and languages and featuring them in a favorable light. In earlier TV shows, monolinguals were disguised as multilinguals, but nowadays the characters speak their mother-tongues and the audience is often provided with subtitles to follow the plot of the show. Some shows intentionally do not feature subtitles to show that it is not always about what is being said but instead, they use the occasion to make the audience familiar with the sound of a language that might not have often been presented in the TV landscape.

Moreover, the mentioned TV shows deliver a strong message as they address the common problem of foreignness being considered a negative experience. To establish a new, more positive understanding of foreignness, they portray multilingualism to be not only beneficial but also necessary to survive in certain situations. When TV shows incorporate multilingualism in this manner, the shows become more relatable to a larger audience as the viewers share those mutual languages. What is more, a variety of languages can enhance a show on a more personal level, making it more authentic of real life and more relatable for people of many different backgrounds.

The ultimate goal is to depict multilingualism in all shows in a genuine manner. By portraying a realistic image, multilingualism can be used in order to change the perception of foreignness from being alien to culturally and linguistically rich and diverse. Depicting the use of multilingualism has a value for the viewers as it creates multiple meanings, depending on the audience. Furthermore, it may re-create that feeling of alienation for those who have never experienced
it before, thus turning the tables, so to speak. It can create an outside perspective for those who have always been on the inside and consequently invoke sympathy. At the same time, it can also make multilingual people feel understood and accepted in society.

It is necessary to make people aware of these issues as they are more important now than ever, considering that we live in a world where leaders build walls instead of bridges. By watching TV shows which include and depict multilingualism in such a positive manner, as the shows in this thesis demonstrate, we have the opportunity to prove to the networks that we want authentic, creative and linguistically rich programming featuring diversity in terms of race, sexual orientation and most importantly, language. If television is a medium intended to reflect our own world, we need to support the increase of multilingual shows so that everyone, not just some of us, can feel included and represented.
8. SOURCES

8.1. Bibliography


8.2. Filmography


### 8.2.1. Episodes


8.3. List of Figures


Fig. 5: “Queer Eyes, Full Hearts.” *Modern Family*, created by Christopher Loyd and Steven Levitan, season 6, episode 7, minute 2.30 – 3.00, ABC, 12 Nov. 2014. Retrieved 20 Feb 2017.


Fig. 8: “Coming From America.” *Fresh Off the Boat*, created by Nahmachtka Khan, season 3, episode 1, minute 17.55-19.43, ABC, 11 Oct. 2016. Retrieved 20 Feb 2017.

Fig. 9: “Bernardo & Anita.” *The Mindy Project*, created by Mindy Kaling, season 4, episode 18, minute 00.00 – 01.13, Hulu, 10 May 2016. Retrieved 20 Feb 2017.
Fig. 10: “Bernardo & Anita.” The Mindy Project, created by Mindy Kaling, season 4, episode 18, minute 1.14 – 02.05, Hulu, 10 May 2016. Retrieved 20 Feb 2017.

Fig. 11: “Bernardo & Anita.” The Mindy Project, created by Mindy Kaling, season 4, episode 18, minute 05.06 – 05.43, Hulu, 10 May 2016. Retrieved 20 Feb 2017.


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