

**Non-subtitled, uncaptioned TV viewing supports
foreign-language learning: A self-study of the learning
of Greek outside Greece**

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Abstract

In this paper, the author explores the impact of watching a television series in Greek without subtitles or captions as a learning tool. The study assumes that comprehensible input, epistemic agency, reflective learning, and narrow viewing build the basis for adequate independent learning of less commonly taught languages (LCTL). In this self-study, the researcher relies on her experiences viewing 134 episodes of the series *Sasmos*, along with her knowledge of applied linguistics and foreign language acquisition theories to gain deeper understanding of foreign language learning processes. The data set includes reflections, a scrutiny of vocabulary learned as documented in her vocabulary notebook, and the series itself. Findings illuminate several aspects of foreign

language learning. Pedagogical implications regarding the use of a TV series as a central contributor to input in LCTLs are suggested.

Keywords: Greek as a foreign language, non-subtitled/uncaptioned TV viewing, epistemic agency, reflective learning, narrow viewing.

Introduction

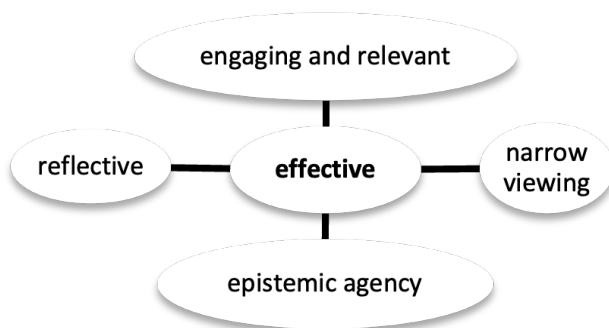
“Television? The word is half Greek, half Latin. No good can come of it.” This quote is attributed to C. P. Scott, a British journalist who was active in the first half of the 20th century (BrainyQuote.com, n.d.). Roughly a hundred years later, much educational value has been attributed to the conscientious use of this medium. One such use is foreign language learning, especially in contexts where L2 input is limited to the classroom, which is usually the case of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL). The benefits of *subtitled* (subtitles with translations) or *captioned* (same-language subtitles) TV viewing is evident from research (Vanderplank, 2016, 2020). Yet, in LCTL the availability of subtitled and captioned materials which are also engaging and relevant is low. Maximizing the learning potential of authentic shows from TV channels that are accessible through the web, then, becomes a necessity in regards to language learning.

The present study focuses on this theme while exploring one adult learner's learning of Greek as a foreign language through consistent viewing of one television series. Its main purpose was to examine in depth to what extent different aspects of a foreign language can be learned by intermediate learners through uncaptioned/ non-subtitled TV-viewing. A secondary aim was to identify key factors that assisted or hindered learning.

Conceptual framework

Comprehensive second language acquisition research comprises a wide variety of fields which provide a solid basis for the study of the impact of authentic TV viewing on intermediate foreign language development. The present study was founded on four main pillars which laid the groundwork for the conceptualization and implementation of the research: (1) engaging and relevant comprehensible input, (2) epistemic agency, (3) reflective learning, and (4) narrow viewing . See figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.



This framework is based on the notion that the elements above interact to produce efficient language learning. First, exposure to language is essential for learning. The type of exposure received is even more crucial. Krashen (1985) discussed relevant and engaging *comprehensible input* (input that is slightly beyond learners' level) as a decisive element in foreign language learning. However, not all learners will search, find, and persevere in receiving such input: A certain amount of *agency* is in order. Agency is defined as an individuals' actions directed at achieving a certain goal (Feryok, 2012). Epistemic agency, in turn, refers to taking responsibility over one's own learning efforts and

advancement of understanding (Muukkonen, Lakkala, & Hakkarainen, 2009). A third element is *reflective learning*. Inviting learners to reflect on their learning and on each strategy and method used to learn the language contributes to their metacognitive development. This in turn ensures a longstanding increase in each individual's learning abilities (Anderson, 2002; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Author, 2018). The last foundation which lays the basis for the present study is *narrow viewing* of TV programs. Extrapolating from vast research on reading and incidental vocabulary acquisition, Rodgers and Webb (2011) draw a parallel between narrow reading (intensive reading of texts on the same topic, for vocabulary repetition) and 'narrow viewing'. In their study, they demonstrated that the recurrence of vocabulary when watching episodes of the same TV show increased subsequent acquisition of specific words. Likewise, Krashen (1996) mentioned 'narrow listening,' a learning activity in which learners carry out repeated listening of recordings discussing themes of their choice.

Theoretical Background

Television-viewing and foreign language learning

There is a variety of studies indicating the positive impact of watching subtitled or captioned TV on different aspects of language learning, including reading fluency (Vanderplank, 2019), reading comprehension (Kothari, Pandey and Chudgar 2004; McCall and Craig 2009), listening comprehension (Lindgren and Muñoz 2013; Weyers, 1999), vocabulary recall in informal language learning (Frumuselu, 2018; Weyers, 1999), and vocabulary learning (Dizon and Thanyawatpokin 2021). Regarding vocabulary learning, Montero Perez (2020) stresses that most TV-viewing studies focus on the type of on-screen support rather than on the benefits of watching without on-screen written support.

Indeed, L2 learners can reap many benefits from watching captioned or subtitled TV; nonetheless, for LCTL, when learners do not have this written support, close attention to the input is inevitable and essential for

understanding. Webb (2015) maintains that given the seriously insufficient exposure to the target language in formal foreign language learning settings, extensive TV viewing in a foreign language can be a rich source of input to fill that gap. The validity of this approach to L2 vocabulary learning is substantiated by Peters (2018), who showed a correlation between watching television without subtitles and L2 vocabulary knowledge amongst university students in Flanders.

Additional studies have focused on exposure to the target language via TV programs and the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Csomay and Petrović (2012) concluded that learners watching discipline-related movies and TV shows successfully acquired technical vocabulary. Likewise, Montero Perez's (2020) study amongst high-intermediate and advanced French learners suggests that watching a program without subtitles or captions positively impacts vocabulary acquisition. An earlier study that focused on listening comprehension

(Latifi, Mobalegh and Mohammadi 2011) revealed that students who watched TV without on-screen written support scored higher in the IELTS listening comprehension exam than those who watched the same programs with subtitles. In general, then, recent research offers evidence for the benefits of TV viewing for foreign language learning. The value of TV-viewing without on-screen written support, however, cannot be underestimated, especially in the case of LCTL.

Why TV series?

Little has been written about the use of soap operas in language learning, but some work has been done on drama in the language classroom. Cunico (2005) focused on the use of dramatic dialogues as deeper texts than those present in foreign-language-learning textbooks, and noted that this depth equips learners with tools for more successful communication. She goes on to say that drama allows us to shift the focus from the transactional to the interactional dimension of language (p. 28). Also, Weyer (1999) found that

many aspects of learners' Spanish as a foreign language improved when they watched 14 episodes of a serial soap opera in class as part of the learning program.

Research on TV viewing and L2 acquisition includes that of Puimège and Peters (2020), who investigated the learning of formulaic sequences through viewing L2 television without subtitles or captions. They noted that advanced learners' knowledge of novel sequences increased after watching one episode of non-subtitled TV series. Peters (2018) studied the impact of out-of-class exposure to L2 and observed a correlation between L2 vocabulary learning and non-subtitled/uncaptioned TV viewing.

The present study

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed above, the research questions that the present study aims at answering refer to the author of the present article as the learner and they are: (1) What was the impact of my exposure to *Sasmos* on the acquisition of vocabulary and of other aspects of the Greek language? (2)

What actions did I take, if any, to internalize the new knowledge?

The present self-study is based on the author's diaries and reflections. In the context of teaching, Vanassche & Kelchtermans (2015) ponder that robust self-studies are based on intentional and reflective human actions, [are] socially and contextually situated, engaging the writer/researcher in interrogating aspects of teaching and learning by storing the experience, [they] implicate the author's sense of self and involve the construction of meaning and knowledge (p. 518). These reflections are often noted in diaries. Although diary studies are dependent on the diarist's subjective perception of experiences (Carson and Longhini 2002), they do provide a unique opportunity to scrutinize processes that cannot be observed by an outsider (Rose 2020). Bailey goes as far as claiming that 'diary studies are

absolutely essential to advancing our understanding of classroom learning' (1991, 87-88).

The subject

The subject of this study, the author, is a multilingual and a lecturer on applied linguistics at a college of education in Israel. I started studying Modern Greek as a hobby and out of professional interest 2 years before the onset of the present study. Prior to starting the present study, my level was evaluated by the director of the school where I studied at the time as a B1 level according to the CEFR. I have been taking online private lessons continually (in some periods once a week, in others twice a week), except for two 3-month hiatuses since the beginning of my Greek studies (a total of six months without formal lessons). I took one 14-hour group course, also online. In addition, I have spent six months in Greece in two separate sojourns 9 months apart, during which I have searched and gained various

opportunities to interact with locals in Greek. I dedicate between 0-3 hours a week for independent engagement with the language (such as reading the news, writing to friends, or listening to songs and studying their lyrics) or homework preparation between lessons, and about 30 minutes a week for a spoken language exchange with a partner online.

Tools

The TV series. For this study, I watched a Greek TV series called *Sasmos* (Σασμός, /sasmos/). The series, aired at Alpha TV, is available online and is not subtitled. It resembles a soap opera in a number of ways: plot closure is avoided (Marx 2008) and the storyline often focuses on home and family issues (Soukup 2016). The viewing was intended as an entertaining learning tool, not as entertainment per se.

Vocabulary notebook. New words, expressions, notes on usage, and observations on grammar were written in a

vocabulary notebook. The strategy follows that described in Dubiner (2017, 2018).

Reflections. Retrospective and real-time introspective reflections took place regularly to facilitate an analysis of the learner's vocabulary development and her L2 learning in general.

Procedure and analysis

Over a period of four months I regularly watched each episode of the series. Up to the time of this writing, I had watched 134 episodes without subtitles, adding up to about 134 hours (8,040 minutes) of exposure to Greek input in context. The series was not subtitled nor is the script available on the internet. Therefore, at times I had to stop and replay a section or a scene of the same episode to better understand it or to look up words in the dictionary.

I kept a paper notebook and electronic files where I took notes. When I deemed it important, I wrote the new

words/expressions/grammar notes on my vocabulary notebook. During most of the viewing sections I paused the video to take notes on the general learning process as well. Sometimes notes were taken after the episode had finished, or after I went back to review a section of the episode to better understand the dialogues. In an attempt to isolate the impact of TV viewing as much as possible, a deliberate decision was made to write down the words without further attempt to engage with, or to remember them. After identifying new vocabulary while watching the episodes, I wrote the new lexical items down in my vocabulary notebook, sometimes with a translation close but not visible (see Author 2017 for a rationale). I chose not to write translations when the meanings of expressions were self-evident or new words from a known word family were the target.

As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), I did not wait until the end of the data collection to start the

analysis. After 10 episodes I could already identify a number of salient elements affecting learning. This allowed me to narrow the focus of the study on the strategies employed and on contextual learning processes. The insights gained from this analysis are detailed below.

Findings and Discussion

While not intended to present novel concepts, the findings of the present study connect the outcomes of the L2 TV-viewing process described above with well-established language learning theories and previous research on the impact of TV on language learning. It is suggested that watching a non-subtitled/uncaptioned series is a powerful language learning tool, especially in LCTL contexts.

***Guilty or innocent?* Suspense as motivation**

The nature of the soap opera is one that leaves the viewer in suspense at the end of each episode, for episodes are not self-contained and event closure often carries on to the next episode. As such, there is a strong motivation to watch the following episode. In her discussion of reader emotion in

fiction narrative, Oatley (1995) acknowledges readers' satisfaction of curiosity as an emotion evoked by the plot. By extension, the viewer's need for curiosity satisfaction may be a factor in assiduous viewing, leading to constant and systematic exposure to the target language. This is parallel to the intrinsic motivation to search for large amounts of input as the basis for L2 learning, as discussed by Krashen (1993) in the context of reading. Examples of such suspenseful episode endings from *Sasmos* include the pending verdict of a trial, an unexpected meeting between two enemies, or the discovery of a love triangle by a fourth party. When the episodes ended with these cliffhangers, my curiosity as a viewer motivated me to watch the next episode, regardless of the language of the show or the comprehension difficulties given the absence of subtitles.

***They're getting married!* Cyclical repetition of vocabulary in context**

The nature of the soap opera is such that a certain theme is covered for a number of episodes, with naturally reoccurring lexical items. This repetition is conducive to internalization of vocabulary by the learner. For instance, five episodes of *Sasmos* revolved around the issue of the upcoming marriage of a young couple. From the context I could understand the word *αρραβώνας* (/aravonas/ - ‘engagement’) and *γάμος* (/γamos/ - ‘marriage’). This finding is corroborated by Rodgers and Webb (2011), who concluded that when watching several episodes of the same TV series a repetition of words takes place, leading to efficacious vocabulary learning. In the context of L2 reading, Huckin and Coady (1999) mention repeated exposure to the same lexical items as a determining factor in incidental vocabulary learning. Nation (2019) emphasizes the number of meetings with a word as pivotal in its learning. Webb (2007) proposes that 10 repetitions are necessary in targeted vocabulary learning. It is

hard to discern whether my learning of vocabulary in this study was incidental or targeted; probably both. One way or another, the repetition that resulted from the narrow viewing was extremely advantageous for vocabulary learning.

In another sequence of episodes, two childhood friends had a rift; family and friends around them mentioned that they should overcome their disagreements; after all, they were best friends. In these episodes the word *κολλητός* (/kolitos/, ‘best friend’) was a high-frequency word. It was needless to employ any additional strategies for comprehension and retention of these two lexical items because of the natural, intensive repetition of said vocabulary item along the course of five episodes.

It is noteworthy that I was certain I had correctly induced the meaning of the word /kolitos/ as ‘close friends,’ based on its resemblance with *κόλλα* (/kola/, ‘glue’) and the clarity of the context. Yet, it turned out many weeks later,

when discussing this word with my teacher, that ‘best friend’ is in fact the precise meaning of the word. This observation resonates with Laufer’s (1997) argument that incidental vocabulary learning has its limitations. She elaborates on how the ‘deceptive transparency’ of some words causes a misinterpretation of clues by the learner and a subsequent wrong guess of the meaning. All things considered, the acquisition of /kolitos/ was rather successful even if its deduced meaning was not completely accurate.

A plethora of additional words that were effortlessly learned because of their reoccurrence in the series were documented during the present study. These were high-frequency words during certain sequences of episodes, substantiating the narrow-viewing assumption. They include trial-related words when one character was accused of murder, like *δολοφόνος* (/ðolofonos/, ‘assassin’), *φονιάς* (/fonias/, ‘killer, murderer’), *οπλισμένος* (/oplismenos/,

‘armed’), *δικαστήριο* (/ðikastirio/, ‘court’), and *δίκη* (/ðiki/, ‘trial’); *έγκυος* (/egios/, ‘pregnant’), when a pregnancy was the theme of a number of episodes; and *παρελθόν* (/parelθon/, ‘past’), when a certain character’s past life was an enigma and object of much curiosity and speculation by other characters.

All is well that ends well: Exposure to multi-word units in context

With continual and systematic exposure to language in context, it is unavoidable that the learner will encounter idiomatic expressions in the foreign language. Depending on the transparency of the idiom and possible connection with the learner’s knowledge of other languages, acquisition of receptive knowledge can occur rapidly and efficiently. For example, it was enough to hear once such expressions as the ones listed below, for they bore parallels in other languages known to the learner. With this one-time exposure I could at least understand the meanings and in some cases also be able to retrieve them later for active use.

One of the expressions, for example, is formed of the word *κάτι* (/kati/, ‘something’), and *προέκυψε* (/proekipse/, emerge). Although I had no knowledge of the word ‘emerged,’ it was evident from the context that the expression meant ‘something’s come up.’ Stopping the video and looking up the word in the dictionary added to the layer of understanding that started with exposure to the expression in context. Some characters tended to use some expressions often, making the narrow viewing an invaluable learning tool. Examples include *Τι τρέχει* (/ti treçi/, literal meaning ‘What runs?’; meaning ‘What is going on?’) and *Περασμένα ξεχασμένα* (/perazmena ksexazmena/, literal meaning ‘past-forgotten’, meaning ‘Water under the bridge’). For additional examples see appendix A.

This finding goes in tandem with Macis and Schmitt’s (2017) and Puimège and Peters’s (2020) observations that engagement with L2 via TV-viewing is one of the factors

leading to lexical acquisition of formulaic sequences. In general, units of word sequences alongside single vocabulary items are pervasive in natural, spoken language (Martinez et al., 2012). Appropriate use of multiword units is not as natural for the L2 learner as it is for the native speaker of the language. In this regard, Laufer and Waldman (2011) showed that EFL learners of various proficiency levels use fewer collocations when speaking English than do native speakers of English. TV programs, then, seem to be propitious for the learning of idiomatic expressions through contextualized exposure, thus potentially contributing to closing the gap between native speakers and L2 speakers.

Here's that word again: Attentive exposure to language in context and the role of epistemic agency

To scrutinize the impact of contextualized input and attentive exposure on vocabulary learning, I created a few lists in my vocabulary notebooks during the course of present study. In

one such list there were 153 items. Out of 153 words and expressions, I had no recollection whatsoever of 28; I had full receptive knowledge of 13; and full receptive and productive knowledge of the remaining 112. Although exposure has been long recognized as a natural, fundamental factor in learning a foreign language, Schmidt (1990, 2001) stresses that conscious noticing of input is an element required in the language acquisition process. He emphasizes that input alone is not always sufficient for new lexical items to be committed to the learner's memory. Rather, learners need to be attentive to input and aware of new vocabulary items in order to acquire them.

In effect, still in the episodes whose theme was a crime and a subsequent trial, the word κατηγορώ (/katiɣoro/, 'I blame') sparked my curiosity because it sounded like 'category'. Yet, I reasoned it was probably a false cognate for this translation did not fit the context. I stopped the video

and checked the dictionary. A connection with the Hebrew word קטגור (/kategor/, ‘prosecutor’, from the Greek word κατηγορος, /katigoros/, ‘plaintiff’) was made. In the next episodes, after conscious and deliberate engagement with this word, the attention to this input was inevitable, as was the successful retention of the meaning of the new word.

The willpower to interrupt a pleasurable viewing to engage in actions intended to enhance learning is highly related to epistemic agency. I was determined to be responsible for my knowledge and willing to make efforts to achieve my goals. Learner agency has also been mentioned by Vanderplank (2019). This is true to other modes of learning as well: how much students invest in learning English irregular verb tenses or practicing their Chinese calligraphy will impact their outcomes and is dependent on each learner’s level of agency. Learner’s determination to mobilize input

from TV-viewing for their autonomous language learning is crucial.

I simply don't get it: Incidental learning is not always enough

Despite the clear acquisition of a considerable number of lexical items and the ongoing reinforcement of grammar, in certain cases incidental learning did not occur. Notwithstanding the amount of attentive exposure, repetition, attention, and analysis of the words/expressions in context, sometimes these were simply not enough. This fault of incidental vocabulary learning has been discussed by Laufer (1997).

My failure to understand grammar structures, as well as vocabulary and multi-word units was not remediated by repetition of input. For example, the expressions *πάει φιρί φιρί* (/pai firi firi/, 'to provoke, to look for trouble'), *κατάφωρη* (/katafori/, 'speaking of the devil'), and *ισα ισα* (/isa isa/, 'rather, on the contrary, precisely') were impossible

to understand from the context. Only after receiving explicit explanations from my teachers could I understand the meanings of certain lexical items. Still, even after the explanations regarding /isa isa/ it took added exposure and continued attentive listening to fully grasp and later internalize the meaning of the expression. Here the combination of repeated input and explicit learning was a key factor in the successful acquisition of these items. Nevertheless, it must be said that the exposure to these items while watching the series led me to investigate their meaning.

Another case that illustrates this point is the verb γουστάρω (/gustaro/, 'I like'). Its meaning was clarified after hearing it in the series and looking it up in the dictionary. The connection with the Spanish *me gusta* ('I like') was helpful in making my receptive knowledge of this word very solid. Its usage, however, was obscure, causing amusement among native speakers when I failed to use the word appropriately.

The fact that it is slang and appropriate in specific contexts had to be explicitly explained to me. To this day, I am not very certain of its correct usage. This is due to the fact that the word has not been used again in the series, and I have not heard it elsewhere. . Given its informal character, it is difficult to “triangulate” and find sources to provide additional input to clarify the meaning of the word.

Additional examples illuminate how explicit teaching complements attentive exposure. The verb *προλαβαίνω* (/prolaveno/, ‘having enough time’) is translated in different online translation apps as ‘to catch up’. Its use is very frequent among Greek speakers in general, but the translation available in the dictionary never really made sense. Only after searching for, and receiving, a clarification from my teacher did I fully understand its meaning. I immediately became able to use it productively and correctly.

The same occurred with the expression *αποκλείεται* (/apokliete/, ‘no way’ [as in an assertive negation in spoken English]). It is a verb translated as ‘is excluded’ (denotative meaning); yet, this denotation was useless when listening to the word in the context of the conversations held in *Sasmos*. Consulting a Greek speaker was indispensable for precise comprehension of /apokliete/ to express a fierce negation, after which acquisition and subsequent retention and productive use were natural and fast.

A critic could point to these examples as a disadvantage of TV viewing without captions or subtitles. Yet, in the context of LCTL, when on-screen written support is unavailable, uncertainty about word meanings prompted a search which led to an appropriation of knowledge.

I respect, you respect, he respects: Grammar acquisition and reinforcement

The positive impact of meaningful input was not limited to vocabulary. Exposure to enormous amounts of

contextualized oral input through the viewing of *Sasmos* provided me with numerous opportunities to examine certain aspects of Greek grammar. Undoubtedly, exposure to verb conjugation in a natural context was an outstanding addition to the parallel formal Greek lessons that I attended. This can be exemplified by my exposure to the verb ‘to respect’ (σεβόμαι, /sevome/), conjugated in the medio-passive voice. These are called *deponent verbs* (αποθετικά ρήματα, /apothetika rimata/), which grammatically behave as passives but whose meanings are active (Alexiadou, 2019). A Greek language learner must learn the verb’s conjugation and simultaneously understand that the meaning is not in fact that of a verb in the passive voice.

Learning this category of verbs in class, doing exercises independently, and then receiving substantial input that illustrated how such verbs were conjugated contributed to the internalization of the related grammar. They became

discernible and salient to the ear after the lesson, indicating a reciprocal relationship of support between two modes – in-class and out-of-class learning. Additional examples of such verbs that were repeatedly identified while watching the series include κάθομαι (/kaθome/, ‘sit’), κουράζομαι (/kourazome/, ‘get tired’), and ετοιμάζομαι (/etimazome/, ‘get ready’), to name but a few. In short, the input I received from the series provided significant support for the formal learning of the conjugation of deponent verbs.

One documented example refers to a farewell scene when a family moved away. One of the characters said Θα μου λείψετε (/θα mu lipsete/, ‘I will miss you’). In Greek, this seemingly simple sentence is constructed differently and can be challenging for an L2 user [will-me (genitive)- miss (you plural)]. ‘To like’ is a verb that behaves in a similar way to the verb ‘to miss.’ I noticed that I underwent a parallel process of strengthening and deepening of knowledge when listening to

the various conjugations of ‘I like’ throughout the series. In effect, I realized that I had learned ‘I like’ as a chunk (μου αρέσει, /mu aresi/), and exposure to these complex structures was beneficial to their internalization.

Conscious and attentive exposure to these structures were critical in their internalization. As a result of this exposure I now use the above mentioned structures much more fluently and naturally. Given that no reference to this topic was made in class in the months preceding its appearance on the TV show, I can isolate its learning to involvement with the language via watching the series. Puimege and Peters (2019) also showed that learners who watched non-subtitled television acquired formulaic sequences, and that the gains differed according to different item- and learner-related factors.

This process may be linked to the developmental stages of acquisition of formulaic sequences described by Myles

(2012). She reported that French learners ‘seem to gradually ... analyse [a] formulaic sequence into its constituent parts’ (84). She describes five stages, starting from an initial inability to modify the learned chunk in stage one to a full manipulation of the structure (use with other grammatical persons) in stage five. I observed these stages in my own learning in light of the repeated input received.

Indeed, recent studies substantiate the positive impact of watching TV shows on the acquisition of grammar in the classroom. Nevertheless, in contrast with the learning that is reported in the present study, in Azaryad’s (2018) study there was a multimodal engagement with the grammar by means of reading the script, doing worksheets, watching shows with and without subtitles, and more. Pattemore and Muñoz (2022) also investigated L2 grammar learning via TV viewing, comparing two learning conditions – with and without subtitles. Participants watched all 10 episodes of one series

(227 minutes) over the period of five weeks. In both situations there was gain: learning with captions was more immediate, whereas structures the knowledge in the without captions situation was retained for longer. The results showed that all 112 participants had significantly increased their knowledge of 27 grammar structures, regardless of the presence of the captions.

***So, tell me, honey...* Learning slang and terms of endearment**

The invaluable intensive exposure to slang served as a means of acquiring this aspect of the language, which is one of the factors that distinguishes a beginner from an advanced speaker. The context of the TV scenes made it apparent, for example, that when someone is taking leave, the roughly parallel American English expression 'I'm off' is the Greek verb *to go* in the past tense. A character leaving for work would tell his family before leaving 'Έφυγα!' (/efiɣa/, 'I left'). Another high-frequency slang that was easily acquired

through exposure of the word in context was ‘Εγινε’ (/ejine/, ‘he/she/it became’). This is a very common word that appears in the context of informally settling an agreement, whose translation into American English could be something like, ‘OK, deal’.

My acquisition of the word τζάμπα (/tzamba/) reflects the incidental learning taking place in the framework of watching the episodes. It was used quite often, allowing me to deduce its meaning roughly as ‘in vain’. The context, however, clarified that it was slang. Checking with my teacher, she confirmed my deduced translation, and provided me the denotative meaning of the word (‘gratis’), which, alas, I have never encountered. Rather, its synonym δωρεάν (/ðorean/) seems to be more commonly used. Finally, the vast exposure to dialogues in the series provided excellent models of conversation starters such as Για πες (/jia pes/, ‘tell me’, literally, ‘for say’) and Δεν μου λες (/ðen mu les/, ‘tell me’,

whose literal meaning, much to my surprise, is ‘*don’t* tell me’). To express tiredness, an expression similar to the English expression ‘I’m dead’ or ‘dead tired’ was identified: *Είμαι πτώμα* (/ime ptoma/, ‘I’m a corpse’).

The connection between language and emotion has been widely discussed. It emerges from research that one characteristic of L2 users is that they are less proficient in the nuances of emotional language that expresses affection (Pavlenko 2008). Given that the natural themes of the soap opera revolve around families and relationships, I received useful input on the usage of many terms of endearment. To give an instance, Greeks add μου (/mu/, ‘my’) after a person’s name to express affection. This was not new to me, but seeing the use of this addition in different circumstances helped clarify in which situations it is appropriate. Before watching the series I had the misconception that addressing an interlocutor with this type of vocative was restricted to

relations of a romantic nature. After just a few episodes I realized that this is used between friends and family members as well.

Likewise, the word ψυχή (/psiçi/) literally means ‘soul’ but very quickly it became clear that this noun is used to address people with whom one has a close relationship, often together with the possessive /mu/ as described above. Another term of endearment is the word παιδί (/peði/, ‘child’), often used with the possessive /mu/, as in παιδί μου (/peði mu/, ‘my child’). It was crucial to see this used between two people in a variety of contexts, since in English, for example, the only appropriate context for ‘my child’ to be used would be when the interlocutor would be much younger than the locutor.

Interestingly, Greek speakers profusely use the suffix -aki as a diminutive form. It is common to receive at a restaurant a ‘small/little’ water (νεράκι, /neraki/) instead of

simply ‘water’ (νερό, /nero/) or to be invited for a ‘little’ coffee (καφεδάκι, /kafedaki/) at a friend’s house (regular form for coffee: καφές, /kafes/). I was aware of this before the onset of this study. Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of diminutives when speaking affectionately (Sifianou, 1992) became much sharper to me. I also enlarged my repertoire of diminutive suffixes through the exposure to the following forms: -κα (/ka/) and -ούλα (/ula/). Examples include Γιαγιάκα μου (/iaiaka mu/; γιγιά, ‘grandmother’+aka+my); and Αργυρό+ ούλα + μου, ‘Argyro (a female name)+ula+my’. For additional examples see appendix B.

Χρ...χρ... Receptive vs. productive knowledge

The data described above suggests that my Greek language development benefited enormously from the narrow viewing that resulted from watching the series *Sasmos*. However, the gains from the learning process described here concerns mostly *receptive* knowledge of the L2. It is evident that the

positive impact that TV-watching had on *productive* knowledge as well cannot be underestimated. This has been previously observed by Weyers (1999), who measured improvements in quality and quantity of oral production following in-class, teacher-mediated viewing of 14 episodes of an authentic Spanish soap opera.

Exposure to grammar in context supported the corresponding formal learning and made conjugation of verbs in productive speech easier and more fluent. In addition, it led to the internalization of vocabulary that was later easily retrieved in many instances in conversation. This is illustrated by the case of the conjunction τέλος πάντων (/telos pandon/, ‘anyway’). I learned it by hearing this lexical unit in the context of a dialogue in the series and looking it up on an online translation engine. It was a high-frequency expression pervasive in many conversations. The moment I needed to use ‘anyway’ as a connector in conversation with my teacher, I

could aptly and effortlessly retrieve it, and immediately verified with her if I had used /telos pandon/ correctly (I couldn't believe I was implementing knowledge from *Sasmos* so naturally). The same process took place with dozens of words; a few examples include κτήμα (/ktima/, 'property'), κερασμένα (/kerazmena/, 'my treat', as when paying the bill at a restaurant), αστυνόμος (/astinomos/, 'policeman'), αρραβώνας (/aravonas/, 'engagement'), and φυλακή (/filaki/, 'prison').

Still, productive knowledge of vocabulary certainly lags behind the receptive knowledge of the words and expressions I learned during this study. A similar finding was documented by Pellicer-Sanchez (2017). The researcher controlled the frequency of collocations in written stories (modified, non-academic language) and examined subjects' learning of collocations. Productive knowledge of collocations (adjective + pseudoword) from incidental learning (0.90 words out of

6) was much weaker than that of receptive knowledge (3.20 out of 6). The following is but one example of the limitations of exposure-only conditions for solid productive knowledge. In a sequence of three episodes, I acquired receptive knowledge of the word ‘obligation’ very effectively. Yet, when trying to use it productively during a formal lesson, I could only remember two phonemes (/xr/) out of the entire word ‘obligation’ (υποχρέωση, /ipoxreosi/). I made an attempt to retrieve the word by pronouncing this digraph to no avail. Having been provided the remainder of the word by my teacher, I produced it a number of times while discussing a certain theme during the 45-minute lesson. After this lesson, retention was completed in both receptive and productive aspects. This learning event confirms Swain’s (1985, 2005) output hypothesis, which states that language production (speaking and writing) is vital in the language learning process. Indeed, only after I had the opportunity to produce

output in a meaningful context was the word ‘obligation’ fully internalized.

***S'agapo!* Learning pronunciation and prosody**

The findings of the present study indicate that pronunciation was an aspect of Greek that I could improve by attentively listening to the language. To illustrate, the phoneme /ɣ/, represented in print by the letter γ (ghamma), is not pronounced as the ‘hard g’ (as in the English word *goat*). Deliberate and attentive listening to its pronunciation was a tremendous aid when trying to understand better its place of articulation and behaviour around other phonemes. Whenever its pronunciation was sharply stressed by the actor in the dialogue, I made a point of stopping the video and replaying it several times, while attempting to imitate the native speakers’ pronunciation. This proved to be a very successful strategy and improvement of pronunciation took place, a finding corroborated by Lee, Plonsky, and Saito’s

(2020) study. The authors reported on the stronger effects of perception-based pronunciation instruction in relation to production-based instruction. Their study draws on Flege's Speech Learning Model, which argues that discerning the phonemes of the target language is a pre-requisite for their accurate pronunciation (Flege, 1988, in Lee, Plonsky, and Saito 2020).

By contrast, it must be added that TV-viewing was not helpful in the improvement of my pronunciation of the phoneme /ç/ as in the word χέρι (/çeri/, 'hand'). It had been pointed out to me during my sojourn in Greece that I, "like all foreigners," mispronounced this phoneme. Although I was aware that I needed to make changes to better this specific pronunciation, listening to it in context, stopping the video, and trying to repeat it correctly proved to be useless. Only after mentioning this obstacle to my teacher and receiving effective training from him, did I understand the exact place

of articulation of this phoneme and only then benefit from massive exposure to it.

Finally, interrogative sentences in Greek have a specific prosody. Distinct intonations can be identified when asking questions of specific types, such as wh-questions, yes/no questions, etc. (Mennen and den Os 1993). In the series, I received abundant input that facilitated the assimilation of one type of intonation that is distinct from the interrogation intonation in all other languages I know. After becoming aware of this difference with other languages, I start to identify this information in other settings. I also became able to effortlessly produce interrogative sentences with Greek intonation.

Conclusions

The research presented here explored the impact of narrow TV-viewing (non-subtitled, uncaptioned), as an out-of-class activity, on the L2 development of one adult learner. It also described the learning process in the period during which the

learner watched a Greek series without on-screen written support. Findings point to narrow viewing as a valuable learning tool that supports foreign language learning. It is hoped that intermediate learners of LCTL and their teachers are encouraged to utilize TV series as educational materials in LCTL, instead of relinquishing this useful tool for lack of subtitles or for lack of faith that learners will invest time and effort in “combining business and pleasure”. Taking the necessary precautions about making any type of encompassing claim based on this self-study, a few insights can be gained from the analysis of the foreign language learning process the author experienced.

First, there is the linguistic factor. It seems that intermediate learners of LCTL can benefit from assiduous narrow TV viewing without subtitles or captions. Vocabulary, prosody, and grammar can be enhanced by large quantities of entertaining comprehensible input attendant to watching a

series. Second, engagement and motivation are extra-linguistic factors essential in learning. The often suspenseful plot of a TV series encourages the learner to search for this input in L2, thus increasing engagement and the amount of input received.

Pedagogical implications

The scrutiny of the language learning process I engaged in watching *Sasmos* had the intention of providing the language learning/teaching realm an insider's view of one of many tools available for the learner and teacher of foreign languages in general, and of LCTL in particular. When sharing a self-study, “the researcher/practitioner offers the professional community an exemplar or model of how a practice works, with the invitation to ‘try out’ these understandings” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 518). Below are some invitations.

Pause. Play it again. What did they say? Who killed him?
Creating a state of alert

The added value of TV viewing without on-screen written support lies in that it creates an incentive for attentive listening, thus fulfilling a condition for learning – namely, attention and noticing. As such, the determined learner watches the shows in a constant state of alert that provides the attentive exposure necessary for language learning. This is especially useful for learners of LCTL. Given the stark absence of subtitled materials, turning to unassisted viewing, rather than relinquishing this useful tool, may help promote L2 development.

Mom, the teacher told me to watch TV for homework.
Combining work and pleasure

It seems plausible to argue that non-subtitled or uncaptioned narrow TV viewing should be part of a broader learning program to maximize its benefits. Suggestions include: (a) teacher modelling of effective episode-watching in class; (b) encourage intermediate to advanced students to engage in

this practice; (c) assign one episode as homework with no additional tasks; (d) promote the use of a notebook to write down any new items of the learner's choice; (e) assign a list of words to be identified while watching the episode; (f) integrate classroom materials and TV viewing without on-screen written support; and (g) assign episode watching in pairs so students can assist each other.

Will learners do it? Believing in our students' engagement

Clearly, this study does not purport that language learners should watch 134 episodes of a series to gain benefit from non-subtitled or uncaptioned TV. It does indicate, however, the potential effectiveness of this tool. Just as not all of our students will prepare their homework before class, not all will engage in significant TV-viewing while holding a notebook and a pencil. Yet, it is crucial to present this as an opportunity, not as a daunting task, to students of *appropriate*

levels. In some cases, suitable pedagogical practices that follow up or prepare students for viewing may heighten the efficacy of TV-viewing as described in the present study. In the case of autonomous or more dedicated learners of a LCTL, it is hoped that this author's experience might contribute to their positive approach to this challenging yet beneficial and enjoyable mode of learning.

Limitations

The value of a self-study for the in-depth understanding of the learning process notwithstanding, the present study lacks in that it focuses on one industrious learner. Expanding the scope of the practice described here to additional populations, as well as larger numbers, would make additional contributions to the field. Also, because of methodological constraints, listening comprehension was not examined though impressionistic evaluations that might have indicated a significant improvement. Using pre-tests and post-tests of listening comprehension might shed light on this aspect of

learning. Additionally, reference to acquisition of cultural knowledge via TV-viewing should also be made in further research. Finally, as summarized by Trauth-Nare, Buck, & Beeman-Cadwallader (2016), “reliability and validity of self-studies are enhanced when the report includes sufficient detail on the complexity and context of the situation to “ring true” for the reader; demonstrates triangulation of data and a range of perspectives on the issues; and makes explicit the relevant educational literature” (p. 53). It is acknowledged that the reliability and validity of the present study’s results could be threatened by the lack of triangulation, but this does not make the findings irrelevant. Most of the reliability and validity parameters suggested above have been addressed in the present study.

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Appendix A. Expressions.

Expression in Greek	pronunciation	Literal meaning and original word order	translation
Τι τρέχει;	/ti treçi/	What runs?	'What is going on?'
Στο λόγο σου	/sto logo su/	[in-word-your]	'Give me your word'
Τέλος καλό όλα καλά	/telos kalo ola kala/	[end-good-all-good]	'All is well that ends well'
Δεν είναι δουλειά σου	/ðen ine ðulia su/	[not-is-work-your]	'It's none of your business'

<p>Δεν χωράει το μυαλό μου</p>	<p>/ðen xorai to mialo mu/</p>	<p>[not-fits-the brain-my]</p>	<p>‘I don’t get it’ *parallel to the Portuguese expression <i>Não entra na minha cabeça</i> ‘it doesn’t fit/go into my head’</p>
<p>Κάτι προέκυψε</p>	<p>/kati proeklipse/</p>	<p>[something- came up/appeare d]</p>	<p>‘Something’s come up’</p>
<p>Περασμένα ξεχασμένα</p>	<p>/perazmena ksexazmena /</p>	<p>[past-forgot ten]</p>	<p>‘Water under the bridge’</p>

Appendix B. Diminutives.

Regular form	Diminutive suffix	Diminutive + my	example	Translation (DIM=diminutive)
Γιαγιά	-α	-α μου	Γιαγιά Γιαγιά μου	grandma (grandmother+DIM) grandma+my
Παιδί	-άκι	-άκι μου	Παιδάκι Παιδάκι μου	Child+DIM Child+DIM+my
Αργυρό	-ούλα	-ούλα μου	Αργυρού λα Αργυρού λα μου	Argyro (a female name) + DIM Argyro+DIM+my

Ψυχή			Ψυχούλα Ψυχούλα μου	soul (a term of endearment, see above) + DIM soul (a term of endearment, see above) + DIM+my
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