**Effect of Catchphrases and Body Images Used in Classical Genres of Television on Modern Society's Culture and Language**


Extended Essay A2 Group 2

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Candidate Name: Tolga Ömer Atalay

IB Number: 001129-011

School: TED Ankara College

Supervisor's Name:  Courtney Susan Shropshire

# Table of Content

# Abstract:

The purpose of this essay is to explore; how a TV show which has become to be known as a classic, can still continue to demonstrate the changes that it had inflicted upon the society. Although there are multiple ways of how a TV show can affect society, only two of those will be explored. These are: the body images and the catchphrases used. The effects of the stated elements on modern society's language and culture will form the basis of the essay.

The reason I chose this subject for my extended essay was mainly based on my passion for classic science fiction and my extensive knowledge about it. Having an opportunity to put that knowledge to use enabled me to write the essay in an easier way. This essay can also be considered as a defensive statement for classic TV shows and that they are in fact, still very influential upon the society.

There will be three shows chosen out of two genres of television; these genres being comedy and science-fiction. Each of the selected shows is known to be one of the best in their respective field, which makes them a noteworthy example in the essay. An initial indication will be made of how each show uses catchphrases and body images to communicate with their relevant audience. This being done, a brief comparison will be done for a justified conclusion of what could be expected in the future if television keeps on having such a big influence on society.

**Word Count:** 252 words

# Effect of Catchphrases and Body Images Used in Classical Genres of Television on Modern Society's Culture and Language

Over the years visual media has had the tendency to leave traces in people's minds affecting the very fabric of the nature in which they live their everyday lives. There are two main subtitles to visual media: cinematography and television. Since the film industry was introduced to the entertainment world before the regular TV, it automatically got the upper hand over its brother to be born thirty years later. Forty to fifty years into the past the little black screen, which now sits majestically in almost every living room, had already started to steal the spotlight from its older relative, the movie industry. The cultural effect of television over the last fifty years –which has imbibed with the support of the faithful audience - is now too immense to be overlooked. To understand this outcome, the factors which need to be analyzed are the methods through which TV affects people's lives. The number of these methods is too much to be counted by hand. Catchphrases being one of these processes have had a major effect over the little aspects of language, used often by a particular fictional character in a TV show. A catchphrase used by a popular character can easily carve itself into a person's everyday vocabulary list strongly enough so that the individual, unaware that he is doing so, starts to use it. Another method, mostly effective in sitcoms and science fiction series, is the creation of specific physical characteristics for a figure. These two contributing factors are related to each other through the fact that both of them use a specific character to communicate with the audience. These two methods are mostly effective over long periods of time; therefore require a certain amount of fame and success from the show as well as quality sequels and ratings. To use a character with the highest level of popularity within the show is a way to increase the rate of success to these methods. By doing so several changes in people's daily vocabulary can be observed as well changes in people's cultural perspective mainly in the region of body gestures and looks based on TV series.

In addition to the precedential conjectures, the scale of the effect on the culture and language caused by these methods differs from person to person based on the lifestyle before watching the show and the intelligence of an individual which is a determinant on how that person interprets a catchphrase or a body image; choosing how to apply it to their life or being captivated it by it. Observing these changes in multiple individuals can be considered evidence for the effect of the TV show in question.

At this point, narrow perspective with a better focus would provide a better database for the effects of the processes affecting someone's everyday life. To divide the TV shows into specific genres and select the best representative of each genre would provide a better peephole into how that genre has affected the audience throughout the years. To better explore the effects of these processes, each aspect will first be analyzed individually with as many examples as possible to provide an agreeable internal assumption and later brought together for a justified conclusion. Although, before the analysis of a TV show can be made, the pattern with which a TV show develops fame throughout the world and slowly makes its way into people's minds must be explored. When analyzed in an in depth manner, it is possible to observe that the patterns used for each TV show resembles a fellow one in many ways.

At the beginning of their airing sequence each TV show has a challenge to overcome if it wishes to become famous for the local audience. That is to complete the first season with success. [1] It is surprising to know how many TV shows were cancelled after their first season. After interviews with the most successful directors and producers of the 80s, it has been determined that the first step to success, is to appear authentic to the audience. This especially poses a problem for sitcoms, which not only need to come up with an original storyline supported by sub stories, but also strong characters capable of engulfing the audience in the first 3 episodes. These are some of the most important steps in the life of a TV series for three separate reasons interconnected to each other on the way to recognition.

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[1] http://www.successtelevision.com/

[2]These reasons are;

- To introduce the lead characters and the supporting characters so as to enlighten the audience on how much attention they need to pay to each of the characters;

- To establish the main plot which will be dominant at least for the first season, and;

- To create diverting episodes dedicated only to drawing the attention of the audience through spontaneous communication.

For most of the TV shows starring known actors and actresses the first episode is chosen as the one combining the aspect of spontaneous communication and the establishment of the plot. In such a case, since the TV show is known to star famous actors or actresses, the first episode generally receives large number of viewers. If the show is thriving in drawing the attention of the majority of the first viewers, this means that it has managed to complete the first step of appearing authentic during its first season. The second step now is to determine the audience to whom the show might appear most successful. Best example to this would be the leader of the science fiction series: *Star Trek: The Original Series.* This show wasn't successful in its first run back in the 60s specifically for the reason of choosing the wrong audience to appeal to. Arranging air dates and times which would be suitable for the adults over the age of 40 was the mistake which dragged down the show after three seasons. In fact the reason for which the show actually lasted three seasons was only because of the interference of some influential people in the industry. Other than that, the show was a sound one. After taking it off air, over 15 nation-wide surveys were carried out in the United States to discover that science fiction appears the most appealing to engineering and physics students with a linear understanding of such fantasy related machines and aspects which were introduced in the show. Past 1 year the surveys which were conducted roughly 10 years after the show was taken off air, meaning around 1975, the show was placed in primetime so as to ensure that college students would be able to catch the show. The same three seasons were demonstrated in the same way as it had been had 15 years before, and the result was tremendously different. The number of viewers had increased by about 180%.

[2] http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/original-thinking/it-project-success-and-lessons-from-tv-sitcoms-25576

This example proves the importance of how the determination of the audience plays a major role in the recognition of the series. After the first two steps the continuity of the show is generally established for the first season.

Now there are many ways for the show to become a basis of recollection for people to think about 10 years later its airing, however only two of these ways will be analyzed. The catchphrases used and the physical body images for a character. To better analyze these factors, specific shows of different genres will be selected.

For each show selected, the same amount of information will be given to ensure a better understanding.

The genres for which the shows will be selected are comedy and science fiction.

The shows which will be analyzed are; TV's *Friends, Seinfeld* and *Star Trek: The Original Series.*

All of the series mentioned above are shows which have had a healthy run for at least 1 generation for over 8 years. Yet all of them are currently off the air. This is what makes them worthy enough to be analyzed. Even though currently not viewed on the black screen, they can still manage to continue to influence the society.

After attaining a certain level of reputation, the show which is going to use catchphrases and body images, first needs to choose the best character (usually the most famous character) in the show which would be most suitable for handling the development of a catchphrase. Although, once a characteristic catchphrase or gesture is introduced through the selected character it needs to be underlined without adjustment.

To start with, TV's *Friends* will be the first show to be analyzed, a show which received [3]56 wins and 155 nominations throughout its airing life and the show which used the catchphrase and body gestures aspect to their fullest potential.  After completing its first season with extreme success by going through the regular steps, the show had also managed to set up a foundation on the catchphrases and body gestures. Known as one of the best sitcoms ever, this show actually had to change the role of the characters.

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[3] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108778/

[4] For the first three episodes, the *Phoebe, Chandler* and *Joey* characters were introduced as supporting characters. For the second half of the first season, surveys in the States showed that the *Joey* character was the most popular in the show. After this, all of the characters were brought into equal focus and while the main plot revolving around the *Ross* and *Rachel* characters was kept alive, the camera time for each of the characters was equally distributed. In the second half of the first season, the two most popular characters were *Joey* and *Rachel*. [5]

The first body still introduced was the hairstyle of *Rachel*. Intentionally having the character maintain its hairstyle for two entire seasons caused the style to be later known as *The Rachel.* This cultural effect of the character's hairstyle can still be encountered throughout the world. Although, after becoming known as *The Rachel* in the initial two seasons, the show attempted to recreate an alternate hairstyle for the character in the seventh season by altering the character's hair from long and straight to a rather shorter style.[6] This attempt failed due to ill-consideration. Because the character was already known to be famous for the same aspect, the alteration done 4 years later for a second attempt in establishing prominence from the same part of the body resulted in failure.

 Besides this cultural affect which changed content of hair styles, the show also had an effect on the language used in people's daily lives. Voted as the most popular character in the show, *Joey* was used to really change the nature of how people speak in their ordinary  lives. The catchphrase: *"How you doin' ?",* used by the character to causally refer to the opposite gender, changed the concept of greeting someone.

[4] *Friends The Audio Commentary (Season 1)* "The One That Goes Behind The Scenes"

[5] *Friends The Audio Commentary (Season 1)* "The One That Goes Behind The Scenes"

[6] **Friends The Audio Commentary Seasons 7-8** "The One That Goes Behind The Scenes"

[7]According to research done by the University of Toronto, the catchphrase had actually developed throughout the course of the show. In fact studies in the University have shown that a date between the couples in 1996 would nearly always start with the catchphrase used both by the man and the woman. [8]Although the catchphrase's practical use decreased after the show's finale, it is still being used as an opening statement in the forums of the fan sites dedicated to TV's *Friends.* The catchphrase made the character one of the most popular TV characters in history. After the finale of the show, in the spinoff revolving around the character *Joey*, the catchphrase was still being used to reflect upon the success of the original show.

Before the phenomenon of *Friends* another legendary sitcom was on air. The show was called *Seinfeld*, centring on a real-life comedian; Jerry Seinfeld. Unlike *Friends* this show managed to establish the supporting and main characters in a more certain way so as to avoid any minor or major change in the storyline. Including real-life scenes from the comedian's stand-ups, the show didn't have much of a problem remaining on air. Each of the scenes was depicted with careful voting within the crew and the cast to ensure amusing content. Even if the episode was bound to receive a bad rating, these real-life scenes reversed the situation. Involving these scenes was actually one of the key aspects of the show. Unlike many other sitcoms, *Seinfeld,* in some of its episodes abandoned comical attribution and dedicated itself completely to relaying the story in an intricate way. Inclusion of these stand up scenes at the beginning, the middle and at the end of each episode ensured that the audience wouldn't be bored from just watching the storyline develop. [9]

*Seinfeld* also made use of the most popular character in the show. *Cosmo Kramer,* introduced as a slightly crazed man with differential behaviour compared to the other characters, was voted as the funniest character to appear on TV in 1992.

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[7] http://individual.utoronto.ca/tagliamonte/Downloads/SATagliamonteCV.pdf

[8] *www.warnerbros.com* – *http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=How%20YOU%20doin'%3F*

[9] **Seinfeld Audio Commentary (Season 2)**

[10] After this award, the show didn't promote *Kramer* to the status of main character but some new characteristics were added to the character's personality and appearance. Throughout seasons 3 and 4, the character mostly appeared in striped pyjamas. This style was introduced into the fashion industry after the finale of the show, along with other collectibles. In addition to that, there was the character of *George Costanza,* which was introduced throughout the show as a character with big round glasses. These glasses also became renowned as another mark in fashion. Although the time for which the glasses remained as an icon wasn't that long, the idea of actually having a character with glasses in a sitcom sprouted from *Seinfeld*. In fact, when *Seinfeld* had reached the middle of its career, another sitcom that would rock the industry had debuted. In TV's *Friends* the *Chandler* character –created to be the funny member of the gang in the show- was first intended to be introduced with glasses. [11] The reason, for which he was not, was so that the authenticity of the show would be in better shape. When the show had reached the seventh season, it had been 3 years since *Seinfeld* had presented its finale. At this point the *Chandler* character was introduced with glasses. It was announced that they took advantage of Matthew Perry's need for glasses and decided to keep the tradition alive started by *Seinfeld* (of having one of the characters known to the audience through their comical attributions rather than their contribution in the main plot wear glasses). Examples of this can also be seen in modern sitcoms like *The Big Bang Theory.* For the sitcoms; catchphrases were used, the looks of the characters were kept of utmost importance. Although only two examples were given, these two examples were the first real comedy TV series which attained extreme success, to which the modern sitcoms look up to at the present time. [12]In fact the show *How I Met Your Mother* is defined by critics and fans as: "*a recap for those who weren't around to see Friends*". This proves that the authenticity of modern sitcoms isn't as stable as the first ones. However, the fact that most of the modern sitcoms look up to these two examples eliminates the competition based on the general idea of trying to appear totally original.

[9] **Seinfeld Audio Commentary Season 1** [10] **http://www.sonypictures.com/tv/shows/seinfeld/**

[11] **Friends Auido Commentary (Season 1 Episode 1-2-3-4-5)** *"The One That Goes Behind The Scenes"*

[12] **http://www.tv.com/news/how-i-met-your-mother-is-the-new-friends-18467/**

Moving onto science fiction, it will be possible to see that the representative of this genre makes better use of catchphrases and body language in a more effective way. The most successful and inarguably the best science fiction show there ever was, is *Star Trek: The Original Series.* This show uses countless catchphrases and body images to influence the audience. The audience to which the show appeals to is generally people with interest in science. So the majority of the viewers have a high IQ level. [13]Surveys conducted after 1985 have shown that the show was immensely popular among technical university students such as, *Caltech* and *MIT.* [13] Interviews have shown that most of the students defined *Star Trek* as a visualization of what they hoped to achieve in the future. That seeing what they have been studying, in a fictional world makes them feel more secure with themselves. Although Star Trek defines a very unrealistic future where the human race has reached near perfection, it still holds a torch for idealists (unlike the show *Battlestar Galactica* which depicts a more conceivable future where the human race is almost extinct).Like other TV shows which have used catchphrases and body language as a way to communicate with people, *Star Trek* has also used the same technique of determining the most popular character(s) and developing their personality so as to include characteristic catchphrases which will affect the audience and refer to their subliminal mind of thought deeply in the future. Although no actual comparison has been made of; to what degree sitcoms and science fiction affects their respective audience, when separate surveys are brought together, it is possible to see that the viewers of science fiction are more easily affected despite their higher level of knowledge which directly connects them to science in general. As an icon of science fiction, *Spock* has had a huge effect on the audience by using catchphrases which were carved into the minds of the viewers after a couple of episodes. The phrase: "*Live Long and Prosper*", accompanied by the hand gesture is probably the best combination of the two factors with the best results.

[13] **http://www.surveymonkey.com , (Star Trek The Next Generation Audio Commentary Season 1) The Original Series Reference**

[14]The reason for why this combination is so popular is because, it reflects upon the complexity of the character. Known as a very clever man, the characteristic gesture of *Spock* is also a difficult function which not everyone can do. This physically challenging gesture not only describes the character as the intelligent man he is who can carry out difficult deeds,  but also makes the viewers who can likewise do the gesture feel equal to the character himself. This hand gesture was very popular in the 80s during the show's second debut, specifically among engineering students who praised themselves with this gesture. During these years *Spock* became an idol for most of the teenagers and young adults obsessed with science fiction. Combined with its meaning ("*Live Long and Prosper")* people started using this as a way to express compassion and appreciation. This phrase was excessively used on the Internet and in universities. Other catchphrases include the ways with which *Captain Kirk* gives orders to the crew of the star ship *Enterprise.* Not as influential as *Spock's* phrase, *Kirk's* way of giving orders did lead to students recreating certain scenes from the show in role-playing games. The people normally considered to be too old for such games, were easily seduced into the fictional world of *Star Trek.* Sometimes in other TV shows even sitcoms, it is easy to run into Star Trek role-playing even with adults when it is least expected,.[15]Apart from catchphrases, the looks in *Star Trek*, such as *Spock's* ears and the costumes of the crew lead to the creation of new themes for costume parties. The uniform of the crew was put on sale along with the other collectibles after the show's second run.

[16] The different colours used in the uniforms to indicate the rank of each crew member was also used in modern day plays. Especially in costume parties of universities*,* influenced by the students who wore support red, teachers began to wear command gold to express their superiority.

 [14] **Star Trek The Original Series Audio Commentary (Season 2)(David Gerrold, Gene Roddenberry preview)**

[15] **"Joey" (Season 2 Episode 17 Star Trek Reference)**

[16] **www.startrek.com**

Although no official observation was made, interviews with students from the time when the show was at its prime are considered enough to prove that their professors were indeed trying to address them in the language of *Star Trek* by wearing command gold. [17]

It is easily seen that there are many examples of how TV shows managed to affect some of society's key aspects; culture and language. The above information also includes lots of examples and the technical knowledge necessary to present proof for the crucial answer the question: "Why should people care about their lives being manipulated by an object which they paid to be put in their homes?" The little black screen, very much like a puppet master, has managed to gain a very large collection of dummies, some of which have happily let themselves to be manipulated while the others struggled desperately to break free but in the end found themselves sitting in an inclinable armchair with the remote in their hand. The main point here is that TV's science fiction and sitcoms have managed to leave such deep footprints in culture and language without the majority of the people even realizing in less than fifty years. It is not very hard to say that science fiction and comedy have a very keen sense of affection when it comes to their respective audience which consists of the majority of the television owners. It is a fact that most of the popular TV shows on air are either science fiction or comedy. A literal rising in the number of shows included in the specific genres of the TV, which can most successfully affect and control people to some extent, is not a very good sign for the communal population which have no control when it comes to what they want to watch on the screen. Humanity should seriously be concerned about their future being engulfed by the little box which not only evolves in content but also on the outside to become much more appealing to the eye. If television has managed to cause such impact in less than fifty years through simple means like catchphrases and body images, it is unnerving to think what it could do in 200 years. For a more independent humanity, not affected by TV's genres, a new source of entertainment must be created for people to access from the comfort of their own homes.

[17] www.startrek.com (Articles) , Star Trek The Next Generation Audio Commentary (Season 2-3) The Original Series Reference (Jonathan Frakes) , http://www.tvhistory.tv/1960-2000.htm

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    3. *Audio Commentary Based on the featurrete* "The One That Goes Behind The Scenes"

    4. *Released in 1995, 2001(behind the scenes featurette, cutscenes, bloopers)*

- *Seinfeld Audio Commentary (Individual Seasons)*

    1. *Released by Sony Picture Home Entertainment*

    2. *Larry David, Jerry Seinfeld (writers)*

    3. *Andy Ackerman, Tom Cherones (directors)*

    4. *Tim Kaiser, George Shapiro, Howard West, Jerry Seinfeld (executive producers)*

    5. *13 hours exclusive special features based on season commentaries*

- *Star Trek The Original Series Audio Commentary (Individual Seasons)*

    1. *Released by Paramount Home Entertainment*

    2. *Gene Roddenberry - Robert Justman (creator, writer – executive producers)*

    3. *Released in 1970, 1999(digitally remastered copy), 2010(exclusive blu-ray edition)*

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