SPANISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' USE OF AUTHENTIC VIDEOS AND THEIR MOTIVES FOR ENGAGING IN THIS INFORMAL ACTIVITY: A STUDY WITH EFL LEARNERS OF DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS

EL USO DE VÍDEOS AUTÉNTICOS POR ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS ESPAÑOLES Y SUS MOTIVOS PARA REALIZAR ESTA ACTIVIDAD INFORMAL: UN ESTUDIO CON ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA DE DISTINTOS NIVELES DE COMPETENCIA

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Astract

This paper examines informal learning practices of Spanish university EFL learners of different proficiency levels with authentic videos in English and the reasons for engaging in this activity. For this purpose, one hundred and fifty-six students of mixed proficiency levels completed a questionnaire. The general percentages revealed that the majority of them are exposed to authentic videos with very high or considerably high frequency, they normally undertake this activity alone using their computers, laptops or mobile phones, and they tend to watch authentic videos with captions/subtitles either in English or in Spanish. The Internet and streaming services were identified as the two most commonly used sources. Furthermore, many of the respondents enjoy this activity and find it particularly useful for developing their listening skills and lexis. A statistical analysis of the results revealed a clear impact of the proficiency level on the frequency of exposure, the use of subtitles/captions, the sources and reasons for doing this informal activity.

Keywords: authentic video, informal learning, proficiency level, captions, subtitles.

Resumen

El presente estudio examina el uso informal de vídeos auténticos en inglés así como las razones para estas prácticas de los estudiantes universitarios españoles de

inglés como lengua extranjera de distintos niveles de competencia. Con esta finalidad, ciento cincuenta y seis estudiantes de niveles mixtos de competencia lingüística en inglés respondieron a un cuestionario. Los porcentajes generales revelaron que la mayoría de ellos están expuestos a vídeos auténticos con una frecuencia considerablemente alta o muy alta, suelen usar ordenadores, portátiles y teléfonos móviles como dispositivos para ver los vídeos, y normalmente los ven con subtítulos en inglés o en español. Se constató también que las fuentes que usan habitualmente para realizar esta actividad informal son Internet y servicios de transmisión de vídeo. Asimismo, muchos de los encuestados disfrutan realizando esta actividad y la consideran particularmente útil para desarrollar sus habilidades auditivas en inglés y el aprendizaje de nuevo vocabulario. Aplicando un análisis estadístico se observó un claro impacto del nivel de competencia en inglés de los estudiantes en referencia a los resultados de la frecuencia de exposición a vídeos auténticos, el uso de subtítulos, las fuentes de estos videos y las razones para desarrollar esta actividad informal.

Palabras clave: vídeos auténticos, aprendizaje informal, nivel de competencia, subtítulos.

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1. Introduction

Due to recent developments in ICT (Information and Communication Technology), particularly online technologies (e.g. videos-on-demand, streaming services, smart TVs, etc.), these days English language educators and learners have easy access to different sources of authentic videos, which can be used for informal learning practices of English at all stages of education with learners of different proficiency levels. Furthermore, scholars emphasize that viewing authentic videos can be beneficial for English language learning in many ways: they provide input in the target language (TL) through video, audio and subtitles/captions, allow learners to observe communication in real-life situations, and motivate learners to spend hours practicing doing this activity (Cruse 2007; Talaván 2007; Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia 2014). Consequently, many papers have addressed questions concerned with how English language learners use authentic video material in an informal environment, their opinions on the effectiveness of this activity for achieving progress in language learning, and the real efficacy of watching authentic videos for the acquisition of foreign language skills. In general, questionnaires about the informal practices of learners of English from Spain and other parts of the world with authentic videos indicate that they tend to do this activity in their free time and perceive it as a possible way to enhance their language proficiency (see, for example, Talaván 2011; Ismaili 2013;

Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera 2015; Talaván et al. 2016; Trinder 2017; Muñoz et al. 2018; González Vera and Hornero-Corisco 2019; Lertola 2019; Muñoz 2020; Wang and Chen 2020; Muñoz and Cadierno 2021). It is important to note, however, that none of the above-mentioned works considered the possible relationship between the level of proficiency of EFL learners, how they manage authentic videos outside the classroom and their motives for performing this informal activity. The present study provides further analysis of the informal use of authentic videos by Spanish EFL learners and addresses the issue of the possible effects of their proficiency level.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. English Language and Proficiency

English has long been considered the international language, whose dominance all over the world can be explained by economic, technological and cultural factors (e.g. Crystal 2003; Dewi 2013; McKay 2018). Consequently, in Europe, English is nowadays among "the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 Member States where it is not an official language" (European Commission 2012: 21), and around 70% of Europeans consider English as "one of the two most useful languages for themselves" (European Commission 2012: 7). Following the classification of *World Englishes* (Kachru 1991), we can make a distinction between native (L1), Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (SL or L2) users of English. In Spain, English is normally studied and used as a Foreign Language (FL); that is, it is not an official language and exposure to it is mainly limited to the educational environment. At the same time, the terms *Lingua Franca (LF)* or *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)* are frequently used whenever referring to English as a tool of communication employed by people from different countries who do not have any other language in common (e.g. Seidlhofer 2005; Berns 2009; Jenkins 2009).

Irrespective of the term applied in reference to a person who studies and uses English, all constant English language learners share one feature: as they advance in their acquisition of English, their proficiency level should also improve. The concept of the proficiency level came under the spotlight in the 1970s (Harsch 2017). Verhoeven and De Jong provide an exhaustive summary of numerous works that contributed to the development and understanding of aspects involved in the term 'proficiency' from different perspectives: from "the theoretical understanding of human language processing with respect to the modularity of mind (Chomsky, 1982; Fodor, 1983; Sternberg, 1980; 1985b; Vygotsky, 1962), to speaking and its underlying cognitive operations (Levelt, 1989), to the process of reading (Perfetti, 1985; Ballota, Flores d'Arcais & Rainer, 1990), and to the

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process of writing (Bereiter & Scardamelia, 1987; Flower 1988)" (1992: 2). Different opinions were expressed regarding the divisible or unitary concept of proficiency. Thus, Oller (1979) claimed that proficiency is indivisible into smaller units, whereas Palmer and Bachmann (1981) stated that proficiency can be separated into different aspects or competences.

Today's most commonly cited reference of language proficiency is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*, which was put forward by the Council of Europe. The CEFR defines proficiency as "guided by 'can do' descriptors rather than a 'deficiency' perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired" (2001: 28). The general simplified profile consists of six proficiency levels and is boosted by introducing many descriptor scales, which are reference tools for various language competences and skills involved in the TL learning-teaching process.

On the whole, the CEFR descriptors are a useful tool for determining the progress of English language learners, although they can be reflected differently in the various aspects and skills involved in the TL learning-teaching process. It is also worth noting that a TL learner's proficiency level can be considered as one of the factors that affects the process of new language learning and the choices made by TL learners during this process. Some studies, for example, provide evidence of the positive relationship between the higher proficiency level of TL learners and their learning of new vocabulary while viewing authentic videos (Tekmen and Daloğlu 2006; Chen et al. 2017; Peters and Webb 2018). Other papers reveal differences in the choice of the learning strategies employed by TL learners of lower and higher proficiency levels for acquiring different aspects and abilities of the TL (Salahshour et al. 2013; Habók and Magyar 2018; Kocaman et al. 2018, among others).

2.2. Authentic Videos and Informal Learning

ICT has facilitated informal practices of learning English all over the world (Stevens 2010). Informal learning occurs in contexts "that take place outside of school" (Meyers et al. 2013: 356), and it is usually "not linked to any course or institution" (Trinder 2017: 402). Thus, for example, Toffoli and Sockett refer to the term *Online Informal Learning of English (OILE)*, which "involves language development through online activities such as social networking, streaming and/ or downloading television series or films, listening to music on demand and web browsing" (2015: 1). Authentic videos can therefore be considered one of the sources of informal learning practices.

Authentic videos, such as TV programmes, TV series, films, documentaries, commercials, the news, internet videos, etc. (see Sherman 2010: 1), are produced

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and released in TL speaking countries (in the case of English, the UK, the USA, Australia, etc.) and are "originally created for native speakers of the language" (Talaván 2007: 7). When imported by other countries, they then need to be adapted for viewers. Two of the several possible approaches for adaptation are subtitles and captions (European Commission 2011; Albergaria Almeida and Dinis Costa 2014). While subtitles are "a printed statement or fragment of dialogue appearing on the screen between the scenes of a silent motion picture or appearing as a translation at the bottom of the screen during the scenes of a motion picture or television show in a foreign language" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*), captions include not only "the type-written version of the audio component", but also "visual display of the dialogue, narration, music and sound effects" as they are particularly designed for the hard of hearing (see Jelinek Lewis 1999).

In the last few years, several studies in different countries of the world have used questionnaires to examine whether learners of English use authentic videos for informal learning of the TL. These include the study by Hyland (2004), who analysed the out-of-class English language learning practices of students in Hong-Kong and concluded that watching videos and TV programmes in English was one of the most frequently carried out activities. Similar results were observed in the survey administered by Inozu et al. (2010) with Turkish students from the English Language Teaching department in Adana and Mersin Universities. In the study by Toffoli and Sockett (2010), non-specialist learners of English from France replied that watching authentic videos (e.g. TV series and films) was one of the most predominant informal activities for acquiring English. Eighty-seven percent of the participants from Lertola's study, who were studying Italian language at the National University of Ireland, stated that they watch FL movies and 56% of the respondents "frequently watched subtitled movies and 28% frequently watched both dubbed and subtitled movies" (2012: 65). Trinder (2017) reported that films and television series were among the most frequently chosen sources for the acquisition of different skills of English by Austrian university students. University students from a wide range of academic disciplines at two public universities in northern Taiwan also responded that they "watch YouTubers' English-teaching videos mostly for finding learning resources" (Wang and Chen 2020: 342).

In Spain, this issue has been addressed in papers by Talaván (2011), Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera (2015), Talaván et al. (2016), González Vera and Hornero-Corisco (2019), Muñoz et al. (2018), Muñoz (2020), and Muñoz and Cadierno (2021), among others. The studies by Muñoz et al. (2018) and Muñoz and Cadierno (2021), for example, compared Danish and Spanish teenagers and young learners' contact with authentic videos in English with different types of subtitles. The results showed that the Danish participants were more frequently exposed to

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authentic audio-visual material in English than their Spanish counterparts: more than one third of the Spanish respondents did not watch authentic videos with subtitles in English or without any kind of subtitles (Muñoz and Cadierno 2021). Similarly, Muñoz (2020) revealed that although watching YouTube videos was the second most frequently practiced activity by Spanish learners of English, more than half of the respondents never watched movies or series in English without subtitles, and around half of the respondents were not exposed to authentic videos with subtitles in English in their free time.

The results of the questionnaire conducted by Talaván et al. (2016) revealed that the great majority of the participants primarily opted for films and TV series as a source of informal learning rather than books or radio programmes. Thirty percent of the undergraduate students of the Degree in Primary Education in the study by González Vera and Hornero-Corisco (2019) reported using video clips outside the classroom, although not very often. In reference to the frequency of exposure to authentic videos, Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera found that the vast majority of the participants from the UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) used audiovisual material "almost on an everyday basis" (2015: 155). Regarding the use of subtitles, 74% of the students from the Official School of Languages in Spain claim that they use subtitles, especially in the TL, as a support while viewing authentic videos at home (see Talaván 2011). In the study by Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2015), half of the participants from the UNED prefer interlingual subtitles/captions, whereas the other half favour intralingual ones.

Overall, the results of the above-mentioned questionnaires seem to point to the idea that the so-called *iGeneration* (see Twenge 2006) of students and learners of English from all over the world are normally open to the use of authentic videos for TL learning outside the classroom. It is worth noting, however, that the issue of the possible impact that a TL learner's proficiency level can have on how they use authentic videos in their free time as well as their reasons for embarking on this activity has not been raised in the papers cited in this section.

2.3. Advantages, Potential Difficulties and Effectiveness of Viewing Authentic Videos

Authentic videos open up many opportunities for TL learners in their pursuit of improving their language skills and other aspects of their learning. Thus, for example, they can enhance their language competence "particularly, in their increasingly fluent speech, more native-like accent and a growing repertoire of useful expressions for informal social contexts" (Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia 2014: 4). Watching authentic videos engages both left and right hemispheres of the brain (Schlaug et al. 1995; Hébert and Peretz 1997). Moreover, a video

provides a TL learner with multimodal input: visual, audio and verbal information (Talaván 2007; Williams and Lutes 2007), the combination of which can greatly contribute to language performance across diverse contexts.[1]

Another advantage of viewing authentic videos is that they "offer the range of situations and settings, the knowledge of and insights into target language attitudes, values and behaviour" (Vanderplank 2016: 20), and they can provide information regarding the habits, traditions and culture of the TL speakers (Talaván 2007). Besides, videos communicate with viewers on an emotional level so they can motivate TL learners to engage in this informal activity and dedicate many hours to it (Cruse 2007; Bajrami and Ismaili 2016).

Nonetheless, viewing authentic videos can pose certain difficulties for TL learners. The first is the challenge of understanding natural language, particularly for low level TL learners (Harmer 2003), as authentic videos do not "provide modified input (e.g. foreigner talk) like educational videos do" (Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia 2014: 7). Furthermore, although a combination of words and pictures can foster the learning process, a high level of interactivity of several elements of authentic videos (sound, video, subtitles, grammar, etc.) can limit the processing capacity of a TL learner.[2] Among other drawbacks, we can mention poor viewing conditions and the content of what is being watched, which may not always be suitable for all age groups of viewers (e.g. videos with violent content) (Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia 2014). Also, it is frequently the entertaining side of authentic videos that attracts and motivates TL learners to engage in this activity, particularly if it is carried out in an informal environment (King 2002; Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia 2014). Language learning, therefore, might not be the main focus of the watching process.

Concerning the effectiveness of viewing authentic videos for TL learning, it is worth noting studies which, by means of surveys, have examined TL learners' views on the usefulness of this activity (Seferoğlu 2008; Wang 2012; Ismaili 2013; Shabani and Pasha Zanussi 2015; Kabooha 2016; Trinder 2017). Their results generally indicate that TL learners believe that it can contribute to the acquisition of different skills and aspects of the language they are studying. For example, Ismaili (2013) reported that the respondents see movies as a good way to practice and improve their vocabulary. The participants of Shabani and Pasha Zanussi's survey (2015) believe that watching and listening to documentaries and TV series can be beneficial for improving their listening, speaking and lexis skills, whereas the respondents of Trinder's study consider films and TV "the most useful medium for improving listening skills and pronunciation" (2017: 407). Most importantly, however, the positive attitudes of English language learners are corroborated by experimental studies that provide numerical evidence of the effectiveness of

viewing authentic videos with different subtitling/captioning conditions (interlingual, intralingual, standard and reversed) for acquiring different aspects and skills of the TL. For instance, incidental acquisition of new lexis was reported in the studies by Zarei (2009), Lertola (2012), Rodgers (2013), Frumuselu et al. (2015), Ávila-Cabrera and Rodríguez Arancón (2018), Chen et al. (2018), Lertola (2019) and Pujadas and Muñoz (2019), whereas Mitterer and McQueen (2009), Darmawan (2018) and Wisniewska and Mora (2020) reached the conclusion that watching authentic videos can facilitate TL learners' attunement to an unfamiliar accent as well as the acquisition of other pronunciation features (e.g. stress, intonation, etc.). Incidental learning of other aspects of a TL (cultural and intercultural awareness, pragmatic awareness, listening comprehension, writing, etc.) while viewing authentic videos and completing tasks related to subtitling/ captioning in the TL was also reported in the studies by Talaván (2011), Borghetti and Lertola (2014), Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2014), Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera (2015), Lertola and Mariotti (2017), and Talaván et al. (2017).

Finally, it is interesting to note that some experiments show that learners with higher linguistic competence tend to benefit more from different types of subtitles/captions than lower level learners of a new language (see Bianchi and Ciabattoni 2008; Lwo and Lin 2012; Chen et al. 2018). Thus, for example, the results of the study by Chen et al. (2018) with young learners of English revealed that students with a high level of linguistic competence scored higher in aural form recognition and form-meaning knowledge tests than those with intermediate and low levels of competence. In Lwo and Lin's experiment (2012), high-school students with a more advanced proficiency level benefitted more from captions in the TL than in their native language in terms of reading comprehension, although no such effect was observed for vocabulary learning. Similarly, Bianchi and Ciabattoni (2008) found that beginners scored higher in vocabulary and language-in-use post-tests when viewing authentic videos with subtitles/captions in L1, whereas more proficient students of English benefitted more from subtitles/captions in English.

3. The Survey

3.1. Research Questions

Previous research showed that learners of English in Spain and other parts of the world normally turn to authentic videos as a source of informal learning practice. Nevertheless, no research has so far focused on the relationship between the proficiency level of Spanish university EFL learners and their use of authentic videos in an informal context or their reasons for engaging in this activity. For this

purpose, a questionnaire was designed and the following four research questions were formulated:

- How do Spanish university EFL learners use authentic videos in their free time?
- What are the reasons for performing this informal activity?
- Does the level of proficiency of the EFL learners have a significant impact on their use and reasons for fulfilling the informal activity of watching authentic videos?
- Is there a significant difference among the three proficiency groups (B1, B2 and C1) regarding the use of authentic videos and the reasons for engaging in this informal activity?

3.2. Participants

One hundred and fifty-six university students from the University of Alicante (Spain) completed the questionnaire (see Table 1 for detailed characteristics of the participants). The great majority of the participants were native Spanish speakers, but there were also four respondents of Russian, Arab, Polish and Romanian nationalities (respectively), who have a native-like competence of Spanish and are residents in Spain. Their proficiency level (which was corroborated by means of official certificates such as those issued by the University of Cambridge, Trinity, etc.) was mixed, ranging from B1 to C1 (according to the CEFR).

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Age		
	• 18-20	• 122
	• 21-23	• 25
	• 24-26	• 6
	• 27-29	• 1
	• 30+	• 2
Gender	• Male	• 125
	• Female	• 31
L1	• Spanish	• 152
	• Other	• 4
English Proficiency Level	• B1	• 36
	• B2	• 76
	• C1	• 44
Degree subject	• English Studies	• 136
	• Translation and Interpreting	• 20
Year of Studies	• First	• 105
	• Second	• 23
	• Third	• 22
	• Fourth	• 6

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents

3.3. Structure and Procedure

For the purposes of this study, an anonymous online questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was piloted, firstly, with three colleagues from the English Philology Department (University of Alicante). Their comments helped to ensure that the questions were appropriate and well-formulated. At this stage, some changes were made to the questions about the use of subtitles and sources of authentic videos: some answers were grouped under more general categories (e.g. Netflix, Amazon, HBO under the category 'streaming services/platforms'). After that, thirteen English Studies undergraduates with different proficiency levels were asked to answer the survey and give feedback regarding the clarity of the questions. No significant problems were detected at this stage of piloting the questionnaire.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of two parts (for more detailed information, see Appendix A). The first six questions aim at collecting background information about the participants' L1, gender, age, proficiency level of English, etc. They are followed by six main questions designed to elicit specific information concerning how frequently, with whom, and on which device(s) they watch authentic videos in their free time and the source(s) of these videos, whether they watch authentic videos with different modes of subtitles/captions, and what their reasons are for engaging in this informal activity. These questions shed light on the conditions under which Spanish university students who study English as their main degree watch authentic videos, which can affect the quality of the watching process and the attention paid during this informal activity and, consequently, its possible benefits. It is important to note that, in answer to the first two main questions of the survey, the participants could mark only one option, whereas when responding the other four main questions they could choose more than one answer.

The questionnaire was administered at the end of a university lecture. The participants had around 20 minutes to answer it and the author of this paper was present throughout the whole process in order to advise and help the participants in case they had any doubts or questions.

3.4. Results

The participants' responses to the questions were subjected to frequency counts: we counted the number of times the respondents chose one, or in some questions, more than one option provided for them. The results of the frequency count are presented in percentages. Fisher's Exact Test of Independence was applied to analyse if there were statistically significant differences in the percentages obtained for the three proficiency groups. The more rigorous Fisher test was used instead of the more commonly used chi-square test due to the limited sample of the participants. The results are presented following the order of the six main questions explained in the previous section and respecting the format of the answers to each question.

3.4.1. *Question 1*

Question 1 enquired about the frequency with which university EFL learners are exposed to authentic videos in English. The general results (see Figure 1) reveal that almost two-thirds of the participants (61%) chose the answer *every day*, which was followed by *2 or 3 times a week* (29%). Very few of the respondents watch authentic videos only *2 or 3 times a month* (2%).
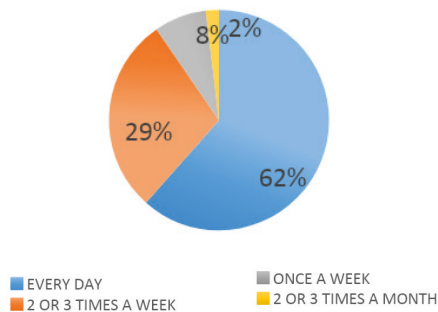

Figure 1. General results: frequency of watching authentic videos

Regarding the effect of the competence level, the Fisher test revealed a statistically significant difference across the three conditions with a *p* value of < 0.01. As can be seen in Table 2, the C1 level students watch authentic videos most frequently (91%, *every day*), whereas the most commonly marked option by the B1 level respondents was *2 or 3 times a week* (44.4%).

Level	Every day	2 or 3 times a week	Frequency Once a week	2 or 3 times a month	Total
B1	36.1%	44.4%	16.7%	2.8%	100.0%
B2	56.6%	34.2%	7.9%	1.3%	100.0%
C1	90.9%	6.8%	0.0%	2.3%	100.0%

Table 2. The effect of proficiency level: frequency of watching authentic videos

3.4.2. *Question 2*

In response to the second question of the survey, concerned with the use of subtitles/captions, over half of those who answered the questionnaire (54%)

usually watch authentic videos with subtitles/captions in English (Figure 2). 29% of the university EFL learners prefer subtitles/captions in Spanish, whereas 17% of the survey respondents indicated that they habitually watch them without any type of subtitles/captions.
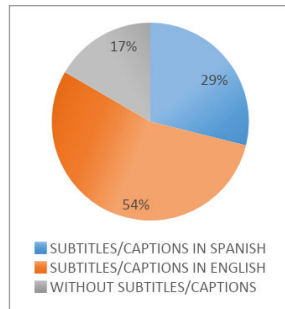

Figure 2. General results: the use of subtitles/captions

As to the possible influence of the proficiency level, the Fisher test detected a statistically significant difference with a p value <0.01 among the three proficiency groups (see Table 3). Although the students of the three proficiency levels seem to use subtitles/captions in English equally, the respondents of the higher competence level (C1) watch authentic videos without subtitles/captions more often than the EFL students of the B1 and B2 levels. Moreover, the B1 level respondents prefer to activate subtitles/captions in Spanish more frequently compared to the EFL learners of the advanced proficiency level.

Level	The Use Of Subtitles/Captions			
	Subtitles/Captions in Spanish	Subtitles/Captions in English	Without Subtitles/ Captions	Total
B1	44.4%	44.4%	11.1%	100%
B2	28.9%	57.9%	13.2%	100%
C1	15.9%	56.8%	27.3%	100%

Table 3. The effect of proficiency level: the use of subtitles/captions

3.4.3. *Question 3*

The general results of the third question, which asked with whom university EFL learners normally watch authentic videos in English, are presented in Figure 3 (each pie chart corresponds to one of the four options available to the respondents).

The great majority of the respondents indicated that they normally watch authentic videos in English alone (96%). Almost a quarter of the respondents (23%) view authentic audio-visual material with friends, while an equal number of those surveyed (10%) replied that they watch them with their family or partner.

Regarding the possible effect of the proficiency level, the Fisher test did not demonstrate any statistical difference among the three proficiency groups for each one of the four options (see Table 4): *with friends – p* value of 0.327, *with my family – p* value of 0.459, *with my partner – p* value of 0.257, and *alone – p* value of 0.375.
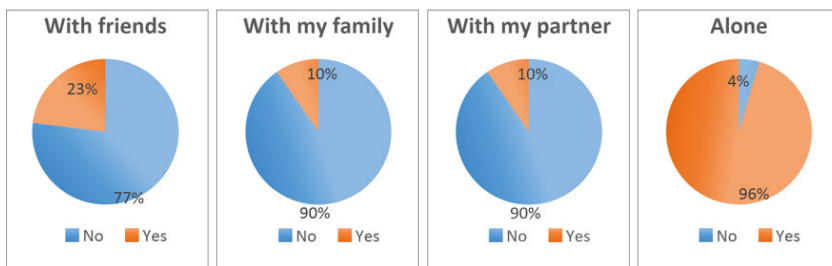

Figure 3. General results: with whom Spanish university EFL learners watch authentic videos

Level	With Whom			
	With friends	With my family	With my partner	Alone
B1	13.9%	5.6%	8.3%	94.4%
B2	26.3%	13.2%	6.6%	94.7%
C1	25%	6.8%	15.9%	97.7%

Table 4. The effect of proficiency level: with whom Spanish university EFL learners watch authentic videos

3.4.4. *Question 4*

Figure 4 shows the general results related to the type of devices the Spanish university EFL learners use for viewing authentic videos. The majority of the respondents in the sample indicated that they use their mobile phones (78%) and computers/laptops (86%) for watching authentic videos in English. Tablets are the least used device as only 19% of the participants marked this option. Thirty-one percent watch authentic videos on TV by changing the audio to English or viewing satellite television.
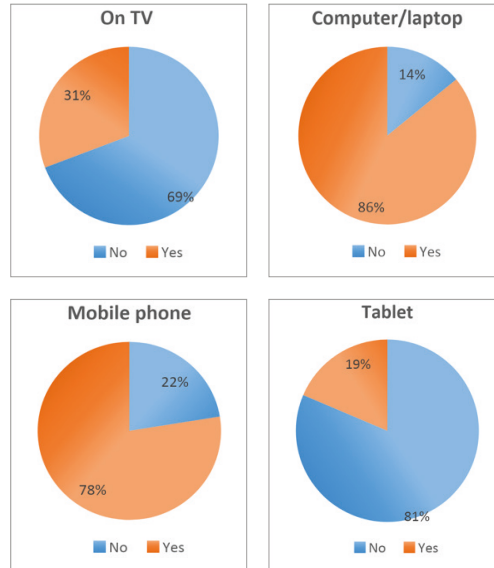
Figure 4. General results: devices for watching authentic videos

When broken down by proficiency groups, the Fisher test revealed a statistically significant difference for the option *computer or laptop* (p value of 0.044). This device is particularly popular among the B2 level Spanish EFL learners (see Table 5).

Level	Devices			
	On TV	Computer or laptop	Mobile phone	Tablet
B1	25.0%	75.0%	72.2%	13.9%
B2	28.9%	92.1%	73.7%	18.4%
C1	38.6%	84.1%	88.6%	22.7%

Table 5. The effect of proficiency level: devices for watching authentic videos

3.4.5. *Question 5*

Figure 5 reflects the general results of the fifth question concerned with the sources used for viewing authentic videos in English. The two most popular sources of authentic videos utilised by the university EFL learners are *streaming services* (92%) (e.g. Amazon, Netflix, HBO, etc.) and *the Internet* (97%). Only 10% and 11% respectively make use of Spanish TV channels or view authentic videos in the cinema. Less than 20% of the respondents watch foreign TV channels.
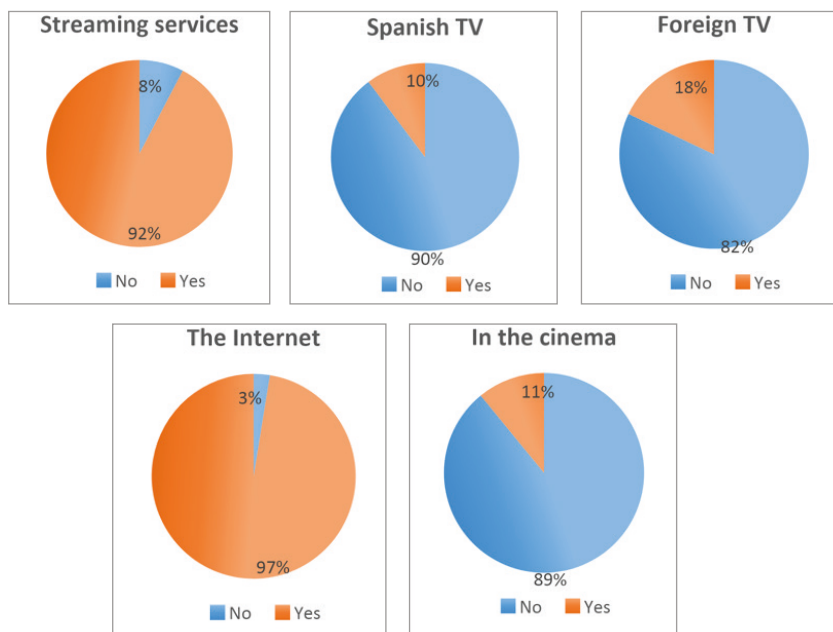
Figure 5. General results: sources of authentic videos

Concerning the effect of the proficiency level, the Fisher test revealed a statistically significant difference among the three groups (B1, B2 and C1) only for the option of watching authentic videos *in the cinema* (p value of 0.039). In particular, the C1 level respondents tend to watch authentic videos in the cinema more often than the B2 or B1 respondents (see Table 6).

Level	Streaming services	Spanish TV channels	Foreign TV channels	Videos on the internet	In the cinema
			Sources		
B1	86.1%	8.3%	8.3%	94.4%	2.8%
B2	92.1%	6.6%	17.1%	98.7%	9.2%
C1	97.7%	18.2%	27.3%	97.7.%	20.5%

Table 6. The effect of proficiency level: sources of authentic videos

3.4.6. *Question 6*

The last question of the survey looked into the reasons why the Spanish university EFL students engage in the informal activity of viewing authentic videos. The pie charts in Figure 6 reveal that 83% of those who answered the survey watch
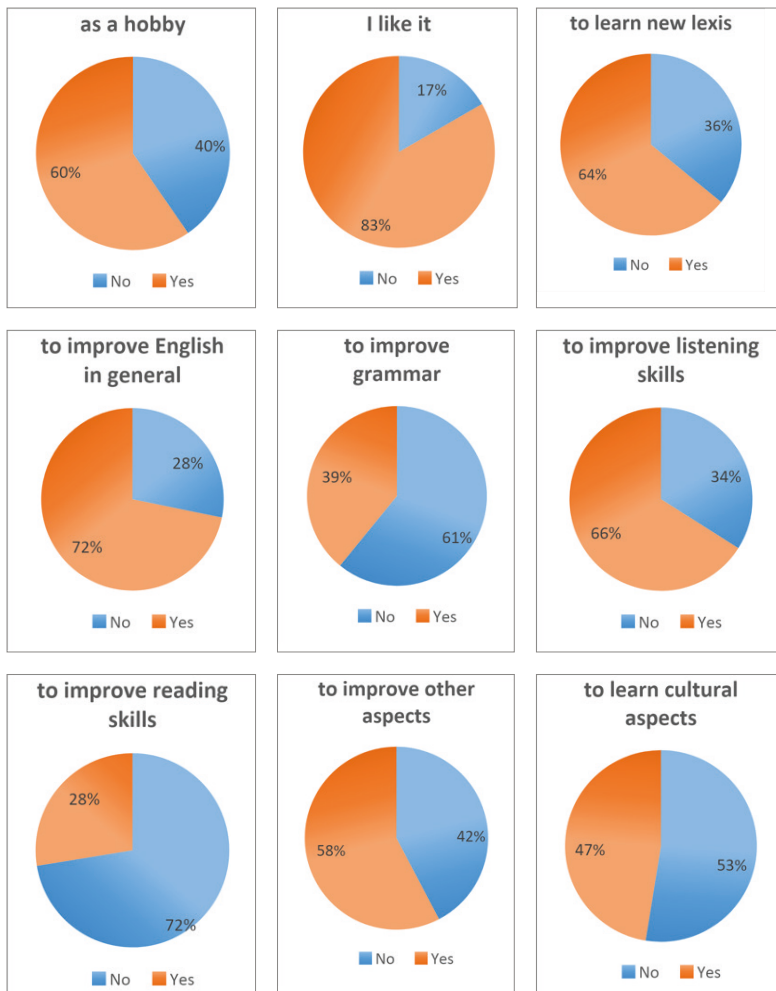
Figure 6. General results: reasons for watching authentic videos

authentic videos because they enjoy this activity and 72% believe it can help them improve their level of English in general. Sixty-six percent of the respondents see this informal activity as useful for improving their listening skills, while 64% of the participants find it positive for acquiring new lexis in English. Sixty percent of the students consider viewing authentic videos a hobby and around 60% of the respondents feel they can improve other aspects of their English (e.g. pronunciation). Almost half of the respondents believe they can acquire some cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries while viewing authentic videos, whereas 28% and 39% of those surveyed, respectively, indicated that exposure to authentic videos can be beneficial for improving their reading skills and their English grammar.

Table 7 summarises the answers of the respondents of different proficiency levels. The Fisher test found a significant difference for only five of the nine options: *to learn some cultural aspects*, *p* value of 0.025; *to improve the listening skills*, *p* value of 0.013; *to learn new lexis*, *p* value of 0.001; *I like watching authentic videos*, *p* value of 0.007; *as a hobby*, *p* value of 0.021. Thus, unlike the B1 level students, the more advanced level EFL learners (B2 and C1) believe they can acquire cultural information through exposure to authentic videos. Similarly, the more advanced respondents perceive this informal activity as a hobby and enjoy it, in contrast to the B1 level EFL students. In their turn, the students with the lower competence level (B1) find this informal activity particularly beneficial for increasing their vocabulary in English. Moreover, the B1 and B2 level students believe watching authentic videos can be effective for developing their listening skills.

Level	Reasons								
	As a hobby	**I like it**	**To improve English in general**	**To learn new lexis**	**To improve grammar**	**To improve listening skills**	**To improve reading skills**	**To improve other asepcts**	**To learn cultural aspects**
B1	41.7%	66.7%	72.2%	80.6%	44.4%	72.2%	33.3%	52.8%	27.8%
B2	60.5%	85.5%	75.0%	68.4%	43.4%	73.7%	27.6%	64.5%	53.9%
C1	59.6%	93.2%	65.9%	43.2%	27.3%	47.7%	22.7%	50.0%	52.3%

Table 7. The effect of proficiency level: reasons for watching authentic videos

3.5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the informal practices of Spanish university EFL learners with authentic videos as well as their reasons for engaging in this beyond the classroom activity, with a particular focus on the differences among students of lower and higher proficiency levels. The results are discussed following

the order of the survey questions, followed by general conclusions based on the research questions.

The general results of the first question revealed that the great majority of the respondents (90%) are exposed to authentic videos either every day or 2/3 times a week. Firstly, this finding is in accordance with previous surveys administered to learners of English from Spain and other countries in the world (Toffoli and Sockett 2010; Talaván 2011; Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera 2015; Talaván et al. 2016; Trinder 2017; Lertola 2019; Wang and Chen 2020). Secondly, it seems to indicate that the informal activity of viewing authentic videos constitutes part of the ordinary weekly routine of Spanish university EFL learners. This fact, taken together with the evidence from previous experimental studies regarding the positive effect of viewing authentic videos for incidental learning of different aspects of the TL (Baltova 1999; Mitterer and McQueen 2009; Zarei 2009; Talaván 2011; Rodgers 2013; Borghetti and Lertola 2014; Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón 2014; Frumuselu et al. 2015; Lertola and Mariotti 2017; Chen et al. 2018; Darmawan 2018; Lertola 2019; Pujadas and Muñoz 2019; Wisniewska and Mora 2020, etc.), makes a strong case for the use of authentic audio-visual material in an informal environment due to the possible benefits it can bring to Spanish EFL learners in their pursuit of acquiring English.

A statistical analysis of the possible impact of the proficiency level confirmed that Spanish university EFL students of higher and lower competence levels differ in their exposure time to authentic videos. The more competent students (C1 level) tend to watch authentic videos every day, whereas the B1 level respondents perform this informal activity with a slightly lower frequency (*2 or 3 times a week*). This result does not seem surprising as viewing authentic videos requires a high degree of control of various aspects and skills of English. For example, Vandergrift warns about the complex nature of the listening comprehension skill, as "the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of utterance" (1999: 168). Furthermore, Webb and Rodgers determined that in general "knowledge of the most frequent 3,000 families may be the vocabulary size from which movies may become useful for language learning" (2009: 20). As a rule, B1 learners of English might have a knowledge of 2,750-3,250 most frequent words (see Milton and Alexiou 2009: 198), which is not sufficient to feel comfortable when performing this informal activity. It would, therefore, be fair to say that the level of difficulty of the majority of authentic videos is usually more appropriate for more advanced learners and may have the effect of putting off low level EFL learners.

Concerning the use of subtitles/captions, the results revealed that the majority of Spanish university EFL learners normally watch authentic videos with subtitles/ captions either in English or Spanish, which concurs with the positive attitudes to the use of subtitles/captions expressed by young people in the *Final Report of the Study on the Use of Subtitling* (European Commission 2011) and in the questionnaires administered by, for example, Lertola (2012), Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2014), Lertola and Mariotti (2017), Talaván and Costal (2017), Lertola (2019), Talaván (2019). This is certainly a positive outcome of the present survey, especially considering the fact that the facilitative role of subtitles/ captions for TL learning has been reported in various experimental studies (e.g. Bianchi and Ciabattoni 2008; Winke et al. 2010; Frumuselu et al. 2015; Montero Pérez et al. 2017). Some differences among lower and higher-level learners, however, emerged from the statistical analysis: while the B1 level EFL learners use both English and L1 subtitles/captions, more proficient respondents (B2 and C1 levels) tend to give preference to subtitles/captions in English and C1 students prefer not to activate either of the two types. This difference can be explained by the fact that in general advanced EFL learners are more linguistically skilled and confident. As a result, they are more likely to feel comfortable watching authentic videos with subtitles/captions in English or without them, and perceive this informal activity as an opportunity to discover all the knowledge they have in the TL. It is also worth noting that previous research has demonstrated that TL learners of lower and higher linguistic competence can distinctly profit from subtitles/captions. For example, Bianchi and Ciabattoni (2008) found that subtitles/captions in the TL were less useful for B1 level students for acquiring the vocabulary comprehension skill. Similarly, the study conducted by Chen et al. (2018) reveals a more beneficial effect of subtitles/captions for students of higher proficiency level (C1) in terms of vocabulary learning than for their counterparts with lower competence levels (B1 and B2).

The answers to the third and fourth questions of the survey generally suggest that Spanish university EFL learners usually watch authentic videos alone on mobile phones or computer/laptops. No evidence of a statistically significant effect of the proficiency level was found regarding the answers to these two questions except for only one option: *computers or laptops*. This option was narrowly significant thus suggesting that laptops and computers are particularly popular among the B2 level respondents. A comment, however, should be made concerning this result: when applying the commonly used chi-square test, no statistically significant difference among the three proficiency groups was found. Bearing in mind the results of both statistical tests, it seems reasonable to suppose that the significant result of the Fisher test for this option was obtained simply by chance and that with a bigger sample size of participants it could have resulted statistically insignificant.

Consequently, it can be inferred that proficiency level does not seem to determine with whom Spanish university EFL students view authentic videos or on which devices. Instead, social and affective factors (Gardner and Lambert 1972; Cook 2001), such as participants' or their family's income and purchasing power, their relationships with people (e.g. whether they rent a flat alone or share it with several roommates; if they are in a relationship or single, etc.), are possibly of more relevance.

With regard to the sources employed by Spanish university EFL students for viewing authentic videos, the Internet and streaming services were by far the two most popular options marked by the respondents. This result can be explained by the undeniable popularity of the YouTube website, which "was created as a forum for people to create and share short video clips online" (Terantino 2011: 10), but turned into one of the most popular sources of all types of videos. Similarly, we can observe the increasing power of streaming services (e.g. Netflix, Amazon, etc.) in the media world, with millions of subscribers all over the planet (Wayne 2018). A statistical analysis revealed that generally proficiency level does not seem to affect EFL learners' choice of sources, except for one option: viewing authentic videos in the cinema. More advanced EFL students watch original versions of films in the cinema more frequently, which is reasonable given the fact that viewing a full-length authentic film in the cinema is a challenging task that requires a good command of all English language skills, an ability which B1 level EFL learners are less likely to possess.

Finally, concerning the reasons why Spanish university EFL learners watch authentic videos in their free time, the results suggest that it is because they enjoy this activity and believe it can be useful for improving their English in general and the listening and vocabulary aspects in particular. The latter concurs with the findings from previous questionnaires reported by, for example, Seferoğlu (2008), Wang (2012), Ismaili (2013), Shabani and Pasha Zanussi (2015), Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2015), Kabooha (2016), Talaván et al. (2016), and Trinder (2017). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the respondents with different proficiency levels vary in their motives for engaging in this informal activity. Unlike B1 level students, for whom it is mainly a source of opportunities to improve some of their English skills (more precisely, listening skills and lexis), more advanced respondents tend to focus on the entertaining side of it and find authentic videos useful for acquiring some cultural knowledge. This difference is understandable because for low level EFL learners (B1), the main priority is to acquire the basic aspects of the language. For example, EFL learners' linguistic competence is directly related to vocabulary knowledge because "words are the main carrier of information and conceptual knowledge" (Baltova 1999: 16), and

when an EFL learner wants to say something in English "it is usually the words they feel they struggle for rather than grammar or pronunciation" (Cook 2001: 66). As EFL learners progress in their pursuit of English learning, the range of unknown lexis, grammar structures and other aspects decreases. Consequently, more advanced EFL learners become fonder of discovering new features of the language they are studying, particularly the cultural aspects, which is one of the most neglected aspects of English in all European educational systems (see Jones et al. 2012).

Overall, the data from this study indicate that Spanish university EFL learners usually engage willingly in the informal activity of watching authentic videos with very high or considerably high frequency. They normally prefer to do it alone and tend to activate subtitles/captions either in their mother tongue or in English. The devices most commonly used for this activity are computers/laptops or mobile phones, and among the most preferred sources of original videos we can find the Internet and streaming services. Furthermore, the majority of EFL students enjoy this informal activity and consider it valuable specifically for improving their listening skills and for expanding their vocabulary knowledge. The results of the study also demonstrate a clear effect of the proficiency level with regard to the frequency of exposure to authentic videos, the use of subtitles/captions and the reasons that motivate them to engage in this informal activity. Broadly speaking, more advanced learners tend to perceive this activity as entertainment and more keenly engage in it with high frequency in order to acquire some cultural information. Conversely, lower-level students have a more practical attitude and focus mainly on the educational value of this activity related to improving their vocabulary and listening skills. Given the findings of this survey, and taking into account the potential benefits of authentic videos for English language learning, the informal watching of videos should undoubtedly be promoted among university EFL learners. This should, however, be accompanied by appropriate technological and methodological guidance from English language teachers as well as adjustment to the needs of EFL learners of different proficiency levels (Toffoli and Sockett 2015; Trinder 2017), especially when dealing with low-level learners.

Additional studies in this area are desirable, particularly considering the fact that students from only one Spanish university took part in this study and, as a consequence, the results should not be extrapolated to any other teaching and learning contexts. Moreover, further research could focus, for example, on strategies employed by EFL learners when they view original versions of videos in English, on different types of authentic videos, and on the different ways of using videos for English language learning and teaching purposes.

Notes

1. See the *Dual Coding Theory (DCT),* by Paivio and Sadoski (2017).

2. See the *Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML),* by Mayer (2005) and the *Cognitive Load Theory (CLT),* by Sweller (1988, 1994).

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Appendix A

Part 1

Age	• 18-20
	• 21-23
	• 24-26
	• 27-29
	• 30+
Gender	• Male
	• Female
L1 (Mother Tongue)	• Spanish
	• Other:_____
English Proficiency Level	• B1
	• B2
	• C1
What Degree are you studying?	• Your answer:_____
	•
Year of Studies	• First
	• Second
	• Third
	• Fourth

Part 2

1. How frequently do you watch authentic videos in English in your free time?
• every day
• 2 or 3 times a week
• once a week
• 2 or 3 times a month

2. How do you use subtitles/captions when viewing authentic videos in English?
• with subtitles/captions in Spanish
• with subtitles/captions in English
• without any subtitles/captions

3. With whom do you usually watch authentic videos in English? (you can mark more than one option)
- with my friends
- with my family
- with my partner
- alone

4. On which device/devices do you usually watch authentic videos in English in your free time? (you can mark more than one option)
- on TV (e.g. Spanish TV channels, I change the audio to English or watch satellite television)
- on my computer or laptop
- on my mobile
- on my tablet

5. What sources of authentic videos in English do you usually use? (you can mark more than one option)
- streaming services/platforms (e.g. Netflix, Amazon, HBO, Disney+, etc.)
- Spanish TV channels (I change the audio to English)
- foreign TV channels (satellite TV)
- videos on the Internet sites and webpages (including You Tube and videos downloaded from the Internet)
- in the cinema

6. Why do you watch authentic videos in English in your free time? (you can mark more than one option)
- as a hobby
- I like watching them
- it's good for my English in general
- to learn new words and expressions in English
- to improve my English grammar
- to improve my listening skills in English
- to improve my reading skills in English
- to improve other aspects of English (e.g. pronunciation)
- to learn cultural aspects