

Teenage dramas and pop culture media essay



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American teenage drama series such as Glee, Gossip Girl, 90210, One Tree Hill, the O. C. and etcetera have won over the hearts of adolescents in this era. These teen drama series have become pop culture phenomenon such that they have expanded their fan base in Asian countries like Malaysia. The teen series craze is rather palpable among the students of Mara College Banting. However, to what extent are we aware of the effects of watching these teenage drama series? Are these trend-setting drama shows a good or bad influence on the students of Mara College Banting in terms of language and cultural interaction?

These questions have inspired me to investigate my research question, “How Does Watching American Teenage Drama Series Affect Mara College Banting Students’ Written Vocabulary?” The main focus of my paper will be investigating how the dialogues of the characters and the visual stimulations of the teenage drama series affect Mara College Banting students’ own vocabulary. I specifically chose teenage drama series from the United States due to the intriguing colloquial language and the massive influence they have on the viewers.

My area of study encompasses written vocabulary, particularly in terms of informal writing. It is worthy to realize just how much we have learned from watching these teen series and incorporating them in our daily language. Hence, observations on daily written texts in social networks, online conversations and diary entries will provide solid evidence relevant to this research. The focal aim will be colloquialism, abbreviations, idiomatic expressions and expansion of vocabulary.

This research question is worthy of investigation because it scrutinizes the effects of watching American teenage drama series towards Mara College Banting students. From this research, I can determine whether or not the students incorporate what they learned unconsciously from watching these series into their daily written production. Language is so vital to human culture and social interaction.[1]After all, the Western media have greatly influenced the youths of Malaysia. With the growing popularity of teenage drama series, it is best to consider the implications it might have on the students' English, specifically vocabulary.

Background

Mara College Banting students are truly huge fans of American teenage drama series. To conduct my research, I randomly selected 30 students from different types of courses (Medicine, Engineering and Biotechnology). The age group of my respondents ranges from 18 to 20 years old. To prove how much these teenage drama series have affected Mara College Banting students, I have extracted two Facebook[2]entries.

" Azzeem Shahren : I'm out of GG, out of GLEE and out of Vampire Diaries... and there's just no waiting for the next episode/season when you only got 2 weeks left... can someone supply me with other things to watch?"[3]May 28, 10: 51 pm

" Azmir Seed Fakkri: been watching Gossip Girls, Glee and next up is the Vampire Diaries."[4]May 26, 2: 26 pm

Evidently, the students of Mara College Banting are loyal fans of these teenage drama series. In fact, 93. 3% of my respondents have admitted that
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what appealed to them the most about these series is the interesting storyline. The central characters are mainly adolescents, so the dilemmas that they face are relatable to the students. All the drama that drives the plot of the series is what keeps audiences glued to their television sets or computer screens. Mara College Banting students look up to the characters of the series because they envy the characters' attractive appearances, talents and fabulous lifestyle.

Diagram 1: Factors that appeal to the students most from watching teen series

The bar chart illustrates the main factors that make teen series appeal to the students of Mara College Banting. Each respondent selects two main factors.

With such a strong fan base, how much impact has these characters made on Mara College Banting students' vocabulary? We should consider whether the dialogues performed by the actors are appropriate for us to apply in our own Eastern society. Most importantly, do watching these teenage drama series improve the students' vocabulary or worsen it? If it indeed affects their language, what aspect of vocabulary does it influence? These questions will be answered once we probe the vocabulary used by Mara College Banting students in their informal written production.

Colloquialism

Colloquialism may be defined as a word or phrase that is not formal or literary, and is typically used in ordinary or familiar conversations.

[5]Sometimes, it may come off as mildly pejorative, due to its intended use for informal settings.[6]There are many branches or types of colloquialism

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found in American teenage drama series, many of which are quickly learned by the students of Mara College Banting.

Slang or contemporary youth language

Slang is usually considered to be a low form of language and consistently associated with younger speakers.[7]Consequently, slang is more commonly adopted in informal conversations among friends. The characters in teen series use these slangs to avoid from being perceived as out-of-date.[8]Many students in Mara College Banting have confessed that they prefer using slang when communicating among friends because the phrase is much more catchy. “ Spread by television, music and now the Internet, American youths have generated a lexicon of their own.”[9]

As previously stated, characters in teenage drama series are trendsetters. The students of Mara College Banting have adopted the slang that they use as well. The following table shows a list of slang or contemporary youth language that they have learned from watching American teenage drama series.

Table 1: Slang/ contemporary youth language[10]

SLANG

DEFINITION

SERIES

Bro

Friend; commonly used for greetings

Glee

Pot

Marijuana

90210

Freak out

To panic/lose control

Glee

Dude

A name for everyone, stereotypically surfers and skateboarders

Expressing awe or emphasis

90210

Crack head

One who partakes in smoking crack cocaine

Gossip Girl

Whacked

Demented

Glee

Babe

Endearing term used for girls, and sometimes describe boys

Glee

Booze

An alcoholic beverage

90210

Noob

Lacks intelligence or experience in a specific field

The O. C.

Hot

Attractive

90210

Mara College Banting students commonly use slang during informal conversations. This is a branch of functional linguistics- a theory of language that adopts a view of language as social interaction. According to Tom McArthur, slang is the equivalent of fashion and serves the same purpose. “ Like chic clothes and modes of entertainment, effective slang must be new, appealing and able to gain acceptance in a group quickly.”[11]For instance, the students greet by referring to each other as ‘ dude’, ” bro’ or ‘ babe’ in social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Myspace.

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" Fizree Azreen Azhar : safe journey, bro"

" Aizat Finggly : okay dude, I will consider"

" Naqjwa Naq : Happy Birthday Ezzy babe!"

These slang terms act as social tools that enable teens to communicate and express themselves freely. They act as substitutes to certain words or phrases that may sound too formal. For example, if one wants to express his or her panicked emotions, that person would not say, " I am in a state of panic!" as this would be considered out-dated or just plain silly. Instead, the students of Mara College Banting would express their emotions as such:

" Arlina Arshad : I freak out knowing everyone has started or finished their homework." [12] June 8, 1: 39 am

" Nadd Khar : haha, omg omg [13] he's hot. * drool * June 11, 1: 30 am

Social network is defined as a style of organization of social relationships characterized by highly mobile, interconnected links between individuals or groups. [14] After all, the main purpose of social networks and online chat rooms is to reconnect with old friends and perhaps make new ones.

Therefore the tone or register of the written text should be informal. The students are free to use slang as they wish because their audience is just fellow teenagers.

However, the use of slang is not limited to just social networks alone. The students also use contemporary youth language in their blogs [15] because these sites allow the freedom of writing and self-expression. This area of

study is known as ethno methodology or conversational analysis. The student wishes to express his or her feelings towards her peers, and hence would apply slang to make the blog more accessible and conversational. The following extracts are a few examples of blog entries and text messages from the students of Mara College Banting:

" I'm not dead y'all. I just haven't been writing for 4 months." [16]

" Whaddup homie"

Slang is sensitive to current styles so it changes rapidly in time. Most slang terms used in these teenage drama series are ' cool' now, but would ultimately disappear from use within our generation or become standardized after frequent usage.

Swear words /Vulgar terms

Swear words, or bad words, on the other hand, are an extreme form of colloquialism. Consequently, some or all members of the society frequently consider these words taboo.[17] These words are mostly intended for offensive remarks and at extreme conditions; they affect racial and cultural issues. Cursing is not an unusual problem among the teenagers of America. Unfortunately, the students of Mara College Banting are slowly picking up this colloquial language themselves.

Many, if not all American teenage drama series include vulgar terms in the dialogues. The curse words are underlined:

Table 2: Curse words used in American teenage drama series

SERIES

DIALOGUE

MEANING OF WORD

Glee

Season 1 : Peggys

Puck: Sup, MILF?

Acronym for Mother I'd Like to Fornicate

90210

Season 1: Pilot

Naomi: Well, you sound like a little bitch. And just to be clear, you are so disinvited from my birthday party.

Annoying and whining female.

Navid: Why didn't you kick his ass?

To describe the buttocks

Gossip Girl

Voice-over: As much as a BFF can make you go WTF

Acronym for what the fuck

Twitter entry by a student:

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" I think I see a double chin. FML (fuck my life)"[18]

Facebook comment by a student:

" Hey ass hole listen up!"[19]

The swear words used by the characters are quickly picked up by the students. In fact, 80% of my respondents agree that the language used in American teenage drama series include vulgar terms. Visual stimulation from these teenage drama series is also to be blamed for injecting the students with vulgar vocabulary. The most recent and prominent example would have to be the advertisement campaign for Gossip Girl in April 2008:

gossip-girl-omfg. 0. 0. 0x0. 432x325. jpeg

The term ' OMFG' stands for Oh My Fucking God- a rather abrasive and extremely colloquial phrase. The commercial for this campaign itself explains exactly what this word means to the public. No doubt, the show used this term to attract viewers and boost their ratings. Every respondent who watched Gossip Girl learned what ' OMFG' meant just by watching the advertisement for this series. Due to the controversial nature of this term, Gossip Girl has succeeded in gaining popularity.

However, the students of Mara College Banting do not resort to such profanity. They often use euphemisms to replace the ' F word' with words like ' screw' or ' shit'. The students are rather cautious on what they write in the Internet because it is public domain. According to Kimberly Cunningham, one's positioning in social networks has a large implication on the span of an individual's power in a contemporary informational society.[20]Considering

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that the students want to fit in and make new friends, they would surely be careful in choosing their words.

Making a good impression in order to make new friends online is really important to teenagers. Hence, the students of my college rarely write swear words in their profiles. After all, these students would only use curse words with friends that they are truly familiar with. When dealing with new friends or acquaintances, Mara College Banting students make use of slang in order to break the ice. As the friendship develops even further and the students become closer together, then the circumstances would permit the students to use these swear words.

Abbreviations

With the growing use of the Internet, written texts have evolved tremendously. The Internet is primarily a reading medium that encourages brevity, but often of the wrong sort.[21]Real-time text-based communications such as Facebook, Twitter, e-mail and Short Message Service (SMS) have caused the emergence of a new language suited to the compactness of this new media.[22]

Teenagers like the students of Mara College Banting use acronyms instead of typing full sentences because it is more convenient. They utilize acronyms as much as they can to save time and money. The following table shows the acronyms that my respondents have learned from watching American teenage drama series.

Table 3: Acronyms learned from watching teenage drama series

ACRONYM

TRANSLATION

SERIES

OMG

Oh My God

Gossip Girl

MILF

Mother I'd Like to Fornicate

Glee

XOXO

Hugs and kisses

Gossip Girl

LOL

Laugh Out Loud

90210

'XOXO' actually symbolizes hugs and kisses. The 'X' symbolizes a kiss and 'O' is the shape of a hug. It is popularized through Gossip Girl because '

XOXO' is the narrator's catchphrase. In most episodes, the narrator would always include it as such:

" And who am I? That's one secret you know I'll never tell... You know you love me... XOXO Gossip Girl." [23]

This abbreviation has become popular among the students of Mara College Banting. A lot of them use ' XOXO' to express their fondness among friends while others simply write ' XOXO' to quote Gossip Girl. This clearly shows how much impact watching teenage drama series had on the students' vocabulary. In fact, 83. 3% of my randomly selected questionnaire respondents use acronyms in their text messages and written productions online. The following phrases are comments written by the students in social networks:

" Dhania Haron : Hey Farah! We'll have to wait for Fred for the venue and date. XOXO, Dhania " [24] June 1, 10: 03 am

" Azmir Seed Fakkri : ...careful Mr S, the internet might bring more benefits than you think it is... XOXO... gossip girl"

" Azmir Seed Fakkri : ... can you give me your blog link?... XOXO blogger boy..." [25]

May 26, 8: 01 pm

" Azhari Rosli : I'm awesome-er hahaha... I know you love me... XOXO haha" [26]

June 11, 3: 33 pm

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However, the most frequently used acronyms are ‘OMG’ which stands for Oh My God and ‘LOL’ which is an abbreviation for ‘laugh out loud’. The ‘OMG’ acronym is picked up from many teenage drama series, mostly from the characters’ dialogue and text messages. It is usually to portray disbelief or awe. ‘LOL’, on the other hand is usually intended for written texts to express laughter. A lot of Mara College Banting students apply the acronyms they learned from teenage drama series in their text messages and social networks.

” Nadiah Bajunid : OMG I wanna go if there’s a hot guy too! Is this the one in OU?”

” Rofi Dang : LOL. Totally. Haha”

” Azzeem Shahren : Btw (by the way)... upload the vids (videos)... whoever has it!”

” Farah Farhana : babe... sorry I was away.... Will do the comment *ASAP (as soon as possible).”

Expanding vocabulary

New Terminology

A lot of teenage drama series tend to create new terms to keep audiences wondering what those terms really mean. As preciously stated, Gossip Girl had popularized the acronym ‘OMFG’ and used ‘XOXO’ as its trademark. However, it is not the only teen series that have introduced new terms. My questionnaire respondents interestingly pointed out some terms that they

have learned from watching other teenage drama series; most of which are not even in the dictionary.

For instance, 'Chrismukkah' is a term that was popularized in the O. C. whereby it is a celebration of both Christmas and Hanukkah. The character, Seth Cohen had parents who had separate beliefs. His father was Jewish whereas his mother was Protestant. Hence, to combine both beliefs, Seth claimed to have 'created' this holiday.[27]The term had already existed prior to the series, but it was the O. C. that had made the term popular among viewers, which include the students of Mara College Banting.

Another example would be the pop cultural phenomenon- Glee. This teenage drama series had literally invented a term of its own. Episode 11 of Season 1 was entitled 'Hairgraphy'. The definition of this term was explained in the dialogue of Rachel Berry with the Glee Club advisor, Mr. William Schuester. The following excerpt is Rachel's description of the term:

" What they were doing were all just smokes and mirrors- it's called hairgraphy. All of the whizzing of their hair around just to distract from the fact that they're not really good dancers and their vocals were just so-so." [28]

Besides that, Glee also coined the term 'Lima loser'. A Lima loser is a person that will not amount to anything and would always be a loser for the rest of his or her life. Lima is actually an abbreviation for 'lost in the middle of America' (L. I. M. A.) where the characters in the series live.[29]This term was introduced through Quinn Fabray's dialogue when Puck confronted her:

" You're a Lima loser and you will always be a Lima loser." [30] Season 1
Episode 4

From the dialogue performed by the characters, the students of Mara College Banting now understand the definition of the word ' Hairography' and ' Lima Loser' even if they did not exist previously. Considering that Glee is a musical series, the terms introduced by this teen series will most certainly be related to music. The perfect examples would be ' Mash-Up' and ' Theatricality'. Once again, the character explains the definition of the term verbally. The following is the script that describes the terms:

" Mr Schuester : A mash-up is when you take two songs and mash them together to make an even richer explosion of musical expression" Season 1
Episode 6

" Shelby Corcoran: But being theatrical doesn't mean you have to be a nuclear explosion. It can be like, like a quiet storm. You just have to radiate emotion, express what's deep inside you. That's what theatricality is truly about." [31] S1 Episode 20

The musical jargons are also introduced from the dance routines. In the episode ' Throw down', Sue Sylvester's character wanted Mike Chang to show his ' pop and lock' moves. Mike Chang started to dance to the pop and lock style, thus demonstrating what the term really meant without saying a word.

14. 1. jpgimages. jpeg

'Pop and lock' is a style of break dancing which involves short, rapid movements of the arms and the legs (popping), combined with brief pauses in between movements (locking).[32]Mike Chang's character had perfectly demonstrated these dance moves in many episodes. Rather than explaining it in lines, Mike shows it to the audience. This is an example whereby visual stimulation from teenage drama series can expand the students' vocabulary.

Therefore, teenage drama series had clearly been educational to some extent. The students who are not musically inclined are now more knowledgeable in music by watching teenage drama series like Glee. The new words that they have learned, regardless whether or not they were invented by the series or established in the English dictionary have greatly expanded their vocabulary.

Even Fox Entertainment Boss, Pete Rice quoted, " In just one year, Glee has transcended the television landscape and emerged as a global pop culture phenomenon." Glee has gained so much popularity worldwide that the fans of Glee have been given the nickname ' Gleek'. The word is actually a combination of ' Glee' and ' geek'. Therefore, all the students of Mara College Banting that are obsessed with Glee would refer to each other as a ' Gleek'.

Adjectives

In relation to learning new words, a minor group of Mara College Banting acknowledged that these American teenage drama series had taught them new adjectives. Since adjectives are important to describe the characters'

emotions or actions, a lot of these adjectives are added into the students' ever expanding vocabulary.

Table 4: New adjectives learned through watching teen series:

ADJECTIVE

SERIES

DEFINITION

Abrasive

Glee

A person who is rude and unkind

Fugly

Gossip Girl

Fucking ugly

Slampy

One Tree Hill

Very small; not covering much

Most adjectives used in American teenage drama series are in a sense, invented. Only one or two new terms learned from watching these series are actually real English words. Words like 'fugly' and 'slampy' are terms that the series have introduced on their own. Fugly uses the 'F word'

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(euphemism for fuck) to give a much stronger impact or emphasis on the adjective 'ugly'. Slampy is also another negative term created by teenage drama series.

(c) Idiomatic Expressions

Despite the negative terms that have been injected into the vocabulary of the students of Mara College Banting, there are also pros to watching these teenage drama series. Some teenage drama series include idiomatic expressions in the script. My respondents have learned many idioms while watching these shows.

Table 5: Idiomatic expressions learned from Glee (extracted from questionnaires):

IDIOM

DEFINITION

Cock o' the walk

Used to describe a person who is 'too cool for school'

On the down low

A man, who for all intents is straight, however once in a while likes to engage in gay sex

Over the shoulder boulder holder

Large bra

One in the oven

Pregnant woman

Washed up

Someone that has once led its peak of greatness far too long ago

Judging from the list of idioms used in the script of teenage drama series, there is no denying that watching these series can also be educational. It is difficult to learn idiomatic expressions through memorization. Hence, the visual stimulation from teenage drama series would make it easier for the students to remember the idioms. When the terms are applied in daily situations like the teenage drama shows, the students would know the proper way of applying those idioms. They would be able to widen their vocabulary with ease.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this Extended Essay is to investigate on how watching American teenage drama series can affect the vocabulary of Mara College Banting students. The dialogue and visual stimulations of the teenage series have indeed affected their written vocabulary, particularly in informal written texts. Applications such as social networks, blogs and text messaging provide the students the freedom of language and self-expression.

Therefore, the students incorporate the vocabulary they have learned from watching those series into these applications.

Collectively, these teenage drama series have added slang or contemporary youth language into the students' vocabulary. Considering that the register

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in social networks and text messaging is informal, the students feel free to use slang. Besides contemporary youth language, the students have also applied abbreviations in their vocabulary. Acronyms are used, as they are more convenient compared to writing out complete sentences. This technique is picked up from watching the characters text using their phones or any other visual stimulations of the sort.

However, these American teenage drama series often introduce terms that are rather offensive. Swear words are often written in the script to portray teenage angst and the degrading language in our society today. If used carelessly, these swear words might offend other teenagers and damage their self-esteem. The tone of conversation among youngsters may be informal, but care must be taken not to use colloquial language irresponsibly.

Though there are some negative implications of watching teenage drama series, there is no denying that these shows are also beneficial to the students of Mara College Banting. More often than not, new terms are being introduced to these students. A lot of the students have learned new words by simply watching these shows. The visual stimulus also helped them memorize the words better. Hence, watching these teenage drama series have indeed affected Mara College Banting students' written vocabulary. The new terms are learned and applied in informal written production such as social networks, text messaging and blogs.