Abstract

The paper falls in the area of discourse analysis and presents an initial framework for research into the nature of audio-visual text, namely the discourse of film dialogue. This preliminary exploration should serve the purpose of finding areas worth further examination. The corpus to be studied is an episode from Friends (2002/2003). The utilized method is a SWOT analysis (an analysis in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) within which specific features are indicated and observed. In the paper it is proposed and discussed that the strength of the studied discourse is its being a paragon of neutral/informal speech and idiomaticity of the language; the weakness is seen in the relative ‘unnaturalness’ of the verbal conduct; the opportunities are represented by their potential to build pragmatic awareness and intercultural competence in viewers; the threat can be embodied in an incautious choice of the title or topic with regard to the viewers’ age and intellectual capacity. The explored features are explained and exemplified utilizing portions from the target corpus. The preliminary enquiry triggers further questions and implications.

Key words

film dialogue, sitcom, SWOT analysis, phonetic analysis, sentence structure, verbal behavior

1 Introduction

Douglas Biber (in Foreword to Quaglio’s “Television Dialogue – The sitcom Friends vs. natural conversation”, 2009, xiii) poses thought-provoking questions:

Don’t we talk just like people on television? Or rather, don’t those people talk just like us? Conversations on television seem completely natural to the normal viewer. But is that because we have come to expect a particular style of interaction on TV, or because those interactions accurately capture the actual linguistic characteristics of everyday conversation?

Such thinking directs our attention to the question of whether or not (and if so in what aspects) audiovisual text (on the term, cf. Romero Fresco 2009), more specifically a film dialogue, can serve as a model for its viewers’ linguistic behaviour. TV discourse has many distinctive features. As viewers we are exposed to informal and vague lexis, loose grammatical structure, expressing personal emotions, narrative features, etc. Moreover, a film dialogue is often