

Language and/in film

Linguistics workshop at the *Anglistentag* 2022 in Mainz

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Programme

Saturday, 03.09.2022		
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11:30-12:00	Chiao-I Tseng	Multimodal discourse organisation in film
12:00-12:30	Patricia Ronan	The spread of a telecinematic structure: <i>My bad</i> and its spread through corpora
12:30-13:00	Verena Minow	"I can bring you in warm or I can bring you in cold": Language and character development in <i>The Mandalorian</i>
<i>Coffee break</i>		
14:30-15:00	Melanie Keller	Korean English on Television
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15:30-16:00	Catherine Laliberté, Melanie Keller & Diana Wengler	Linguistic strategies of estrangement in <i>Bridgerton</i>
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15:00-15:30	Sven Leuckert & Asya Yurchenko [hybrid]	'Her language, her body, herself': The linguistic construction of women in horror films
15:30-16:00	Daniela Landert	This can't be true: Presenting lies in television series
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The spread of a telecinematic structure: *my bad* and its spread through corpora

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As a contemporary mass phenomenon, telecinematic discourse has the potential to reach a large proportion of language users and influence their language practices. This study investigates the use of a structure that has been popularized in telecinematic genres, namely the collocation *my bad*, which is a colloquial way of offering apologies (OED, s.v. *bad*, N²4).

So far, this structure has received little attention, even though it can be considered an instance of what Chambers (1993), before the rise of Web 2.0, described as an example of the “obvious effect of mass communication on dialect is the diffusion of catch-phrases” (1993: 138). Elsewhere it is shown that the spread of *my bad* outside telecinematic genres has been slow and seems to come in the wake of its rise in movies and television series originally in American English (Ronan, fc.). Its rise in the telecinematic genre is still underresearched, however.

The present study traces the development of *my bad* in telecinematic genres and investigates how it is taken up in international telecinematic varieties of English. For this, dedicated telecinematic corpora are used: the *Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue* (Bednarek 2018), the SOAP- (Davies 2011), TV- (Davies 2019) and MOVIE (Davies 2019) corpora.

On the basis of the varieties represented in these, it is shown how the spread of this structure gains momentum over time and across varieties of English in the language of film, thus allowing for a world-wide distribution of a new linguistic feature.

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“I can bring you in warm or I can bring you in cold” – Language and character development in *The Mandalorian*

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In the pilot episode of the TV series *The Mandalorian* only roughly twenty per cent of all tokens are actually uttered by the character that gives the series its name. But the very first thing we do hear the Mandalorian say in minute four of the episode to the *Mythrol* who he has been commissioned to capture is “I can bring you in warm or I can bring you in cold”, and this line, together with the depicted action and of course the character’s appearance, immediately serves to characterise him as a tight-lipped no-nonsense bounty hunter. However, by the end of that episode, it has already become evident that there are more facets to this character.

On the one hand, characters in TV series appear to be stable, which is reflected in their dialogue, and “this linguistic stability is the norm for many contemporary television characters [...]” (Bednarek 2011: 203). However, this may be dependent on the genre. For example, Mandala (2011: 223) has shown that the character of Seven of Nine in *Star Trek: Voyager* changes quite drastically over the course of three seasons and that “[t]his fundamental change in her character is made manifest through changes in her language [...].”

The Mandalorian *Din Djarin* likewise undergoes significant changes throughout the first two seasons of the series, going from lonesome bounty hunter to adoptive single father on the run during the first season and being forced to increasingly question his Mandalorian beliefs in the second season. This then begs the question to what extent the changes this character experiences are also reflected in his language use, which is the main aspect I want to focus on in my paper. In particular, I am interested in whether the character becomes more talkative throughout the series. On the surface, this appears to be the case: While he does not engage much with the overtly chatty *Mythrol* in the pilot episode, this has already changed by the fourth episode, when he is shown speaking affectionately to *The Child*, who can’t speak yet: “You ready to lay low and stretch your legs for a couple of months, you little womp rat?”

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“Uhm, Bean.” – Non-natural dialogue in comedy including language as sound

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This contribution investigates dialogue in comedic films and sketches, particularly those of Rowan Atkinson (as Mr. Bean). The comedian employs dialogue only sparingly, often notably and expressly altered from expectable interactional patterns and conventions. Sometimes language is deliberately incomprehensible, turning into mere sound. We argue that this deviation from naturally occurring language use is used for comedic effect in two ways: for one, it creates an incongruity in certain scenes; and for another, it serves to exaggerate characters and indicate their absurdity.

Toolan (2011) argues that because of its role in film narrative, fictional dialogue lacks some of the regular features of natural dialogue, for example, “unresolved topics, incomplete exchanges, ignored or misheard turns, selfrepairs and recycled utterances” (p. 161). In fact, film dialogue is characterized by “teleological efficacy” (ibid.). However, it has also been proposed that not all screen dialogue is designed to be fully accessible to the audience (Kozloff 2000), especially when the characters use the sociolects of ethnic groups.

In the case of Mr. Bean, it is not a sociolect but the speakers’ idiosyncrasies that challenge the boundaries of established interactional patterns. The main character is known to use very few words, a seemingly unnatural tone of voice, and a low and mumbly voice. Often gestures and facial expressions carry the semantic load while language turns into an unintelligible stream of sounds. Consider the example below, in which Mr. Bean is approached by the parking valet at a hotel reception:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1 Valet: | °(inaudible) your car, |
| 2 | Sir,° |
| 3 Bean: | ((puts suitcase on reception desk, opens it, hands the valet a steering wheel)) |
| 4 | ((audience laughter)) |

In this example, the audience is not meant to understand the valet’s words so that the visual of the steering wheel then allows for the retrospective completion of the valet’s words. Language essentially consisting of meaningful discriminable sound units is deliberately dephonemicised into a merely prosodic stream of suprasegmental verbal emission. This representation of dialogue as indistinguishable sounds sets up the humorous situation and displays the absurdity of Mr. Bean’s character relying solely on the characters’ embodiments, props, and general context for the production of meaning.

In analyzing deliberately non-natural dialogues, also involving the employment of language as sound, such as in *Mr. Bean* films, and in comparing the original versions to the German synchronization, we contribute to our understanding of (1) language for the audiovisual medium of film, (2) language and humor, and (3) scripted language that thoughtfully plays with the degree to which it reflects natural talk-in-interaction.

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Multimodal discourse organisation in film

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In this presentation I show that some notions from the textual organisation of verbal texts appear also to give insights to the discourse organisation of films. In particular, this talk shows how methods for analysing filmic discourse organisation are useful for unpacking the complex meaning interpretation of so-called puzzle films (Kiss and Willemsen, 2017).

Our analysis focuses on the *beginnings* of puzzle films because film beginning suggested to operate as indicators of those films' strategy for development and so serve to set up expectations for guiding the viewer's hypotheses and selective attention during film viewing (Hartmann, 2009).

By means of an empirical study, I demonstrate that the beginnings of puzzle films exhibit specific kinds of discourse organisational features, which dominantly complement spatio-temporal undecidability with amplified cohesion (Bateman and Tseng, 2013). Moreover, these amplified cohesive devices are substantially realised in the language mode.

The empirical result will further suggest that the interplay between spatio-temporal complexity and amplified cohesion often correlates with the overall narrative strategies pursued in the films as a whole. These discourse organisational features may then function as crucial indicators for viewers concerning just what kinds of interpretative processes they will face throughout the film.

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Korean English on Television

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The Canadian sitcom *Kim's Convenience* (2016-2021) was groundbreaking in its representation of Korean immigrants as main characters on English language television. The show revolves around the Kim family, consisting of the Korean immigrant parents Appa and Umma, and their two Canadian-born children. The parents speak English as a Second Language (ESL), though both actors are actually L1 English speakers. "It's who Appa is—not the accent, but that's his makeup. [...] he had to learn English at a very late stage of his life, so he's going to have vestiges of his original voice, his mother tongue," Paul Sun-Hyung Lee explains his choice to speak Korean English when playing Appa (Lee 2016). The show's cast members talk often about portraying Asian accents and being deliberate in doing so respectfully. Lee claims "our biggest thing is to create authenticity, so the accent is never the joke for us," (Lee 2019). This proposed paper will explore the alleged authenticity and structure of the Korean English in *Kim's Convenience*.

A qualitative analysis of Appa's English in Season 1 found that the "phonological features of his English effectively share those of Korean English, whereas the syntactic representations are characteristic of a simple register" (Jang and Yang 2018: 1). This current paper aims to look more closely at the morpho-syntax of both Appa and Umma's speech and identify patterns in the actors' portrayals using corpus linguistic and variationist sociolinguistic methods (Tagliamonte 2012). The results will then be compared to data collected in the US from seven Korean immigrant speakers of ESL (Korean American ESL). This comparison will assess the extent to which features in Appa and Umma's speech align with observed features in Korean American ESL.

The only comprehensive study done on Korean English shows the reduced plural marking after quantifiers as the most characteristic morpho-syntactic feature (Rüdiger 2019: 84). Therefore, this analysis will focus on plural marking variability in addition to other features attested in the Korean American ESL data, such as past tense marking and article use.

Features identified in Korean American ESL are expected to occur in Appa and Umma's speech as well, though not with the same frequency or regularity. Both actors reproduced their own interpretations of Korean English for a largely English-speaking Canadian target audience, so the occurrence of non-standard features is likely constrained by intelligibility concerns as well as the actors' own vernaculars. This paper thus argues that the Korean English in *Kim's Convenience* is (and had to be) far from "real-world" Korean English with regard to morpho-syntax; it is instead strategically peppered with salient features that index Korean immigrant identity to an outsider audience.

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One of Multiple Voices: The Representation of Black Namibian English in *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation* (2007)

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This paper deals with the representation of Black Namibian English and linguistic diversity in the film *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation* (2007 [2010]), which is based on the autobiography of Namibia's first president, Sam Nujoma, and tells the story of the country's path to independence from the South African apartheid regime. By combining linguistic with film analysis (cf. Hodson 2014) and against the background of Namibia's complex linguistic and cultural make-up (cf. Schröder & Schneider 2018: 339), our study focuses on questions of linguistic authenticity, code-switching and language ideology.

The consequence of Namibia's colonial and apartheid history "was a population fragmented along ethnic and linguistic lines" (Schröder 2021: 245). The year 1990 then not only marks Namibia's independence but at the same time represents a linguistic turning point, as the new government introduced an official monolingual language policy, making English Namibia's sole official language (Frydman 2011: 181). Almost 32 years after independence, English is now firmly established in the country. According to Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2017: 12), Namibian English (NameE) is in the early stages of phase three within the Extra- and Intra-territorial Forces (EIF) Model, and hence developing variety status.

While English was probably still in the foundation phase during the time in which the film is set, it was shot over 15 years after the country's independence and therefore features many actors and actresses born after 1985, who had therefore been strongly exposed to the English language prior to their involvement in the film (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 128). We will show that such characters indeed employ variety-specific features which have been identified previously as potentially Namibian, most noticeably the realisation of the NURSE vowel as [e], the pronunciation of /r/ as trill or post-alveolar approximant, and mergers of the FLEECE and KIT vowels, as well as of the GOOSE and FOOT vowels.

Ficto-linguistic analyses of brief exemplary film clips will reveal further potential NameE features which have not been mentioned in the literature before, but partly for other contact varieties of English (cf. Krug 2013), and which may therefore be indicative of phase two or three in Schneider's Dynamic Model (2007). Among these are syllable optimization by schwa epenthesis, a merger of the BATH and STRUT vowels, monophthongisation of diphthongs, TH-fronting, /z/-devoicing, and voicing of inter-sonorant /s/.

In a final step, we will present morphosyntactic features employed by the Namibian cast, many (but not all) of which are common in varieties of English around the world (cf. Kortmann, Lunkenheimer & Ehret, eds., 2020). These features include nonstandard uses of prepositions, auxiliary *will* for hypothetical contexts, zero articles, omission of expletive *it*, nonstandard distributions of indefinite articles, omission of an adverb marker, absence of 3rd person singular inflection in the present tense, and pluralization of adjectival *other*. In summary, this study contributes to a phonological and morphosyntactic description of Namibian English, an emerging variety of English, as well as to the thriving fields of ficto-linguistics and World Englishes in the media.

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Linguistic strategies of estrangement in *Bridgerton*

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Much like science fiction and fantasy, historical fiction presents us with worlds removed from our own and relies on estrangement as a formal device (Adams 2017). Historical fiction narratives must reconcile representations of the past with present-day audiences. Author Hilary Mantel, for example, describes the language of historical fiction as "broker[ing] a compromise between then and now" (Brayfield & Sprott 2014: 135-136). The genre relies on distinct linguistic conventions to distance the modern reader from the present and evoke the past (see e.g. Mandala 2010:71-94). TV series in this genre follow suit in employing such linguistic conventions to portray olden times. This study explores some of these features in the *Bridgerton* novels (2000) and their televisual adaption (2020-), both set in the Regency era. Corpus linguistic and variationist sociolinguistic methods (Tagliamonte 2012) will be used to interrogate how these features evoke the past while maintaining a firm grounding in the present.

In the paper, we will focus on two linguistic features whose usage depends on degrees of formality: clitics and modality. Regarding the former, author Barry Unsworth explicitly advocates the "avoidance of contracted forms" when writing historical fiction (Unsworth 2009). Modals and semi-modals have changed in significant ways since the early 19th century (Krug 2000), with studies showing that modals (shall, must, need) have been declining for decades, while semi-modals (have to, need to, be going to) have been on the rise. This decline is closely tied to the colloquialization of English and shifting conventions regarding formality (Leech 2013). Since the currently declining modals are thus perceived as overly formal and old-fashioned, we expect these to be over-used in the series and its literary source, compared to present-day English. Semi-modals may, in turn, be less frequent. Relatedly, we presume that clitics will be comparatively dispreferred.

Despite their difference in medium, the *Bridgerton* novels and TV series are expected to be linguistically similar and to reflect the strategies employed in this genre generally. This comparison will show that televised period dramas do not attempt to reproduce actual historical language but further entrench features that are typical of present-day historical fiction.

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'Her Language, Her Body, Herself': The Linguistic Construction of Women in Horror Films

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The final girl as a character rose to popularity in the 1970s and can be found in horror movies up to the present day but has experienced numerous changes in depiction over time regarding her agency. Carol Clover's (1987) essay 'Her body, himself' is the first example of scholarship analysing the 'final girl' trope, which is now one of the most well-known staples of horror films: Typically starting as a damsel-in-distress, she emerges victorious as the last survivor of a horrifying killing spree and, according to Clover (1987: 221), alternates between feminine and masculine characteristics.

For our investigation of the linguistic construction of female characters in horror movies, in particular final girls, we have built a corpus of 70 movies and their scripts released between 1970 and 2019, featuring a balanced composition of female and male protagonists. Our qualitative and quantitative analysis builds on the analysis provided in Ahlin (2007) and seeks to answer the following questions: How much are female characters allowed to say in horror movies; in particular, is there a gender imbalance in speaking time and word count? How frequently do female characters in horror movies use linguistic features stereotypically linked to women's language (based on Lakoff 1975) and how much truth is there to Clover's (1987: 221) claim that the final girl "alternates between [feminine and masculine] registers from the outset"? Finally, how do script writer's directions for characters' behaviour ('parentheticals'), such as '(freaking out softly)', differ between female and male characters?

Our findings suggest that female characters in horror movies indeed do more pleading, begging and bargaining than their male counterparts. Furthermore, parentheticals often portray women as rather powerless or helpless in contrast to men. Men, in turn, curse substantially more and are often depicted as strong and less emotional. However, our corpus also features examples of movies that 'flip the script' by not adhering to stereotypical gendered language. In addition, there is diachronic variation in the linguistic portrayal of women in horror movies, thus allowing us to pinpoint the existence of different 'eras' (cf. Trencansky 2001) in horror cinema.

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This can't be true: Presenting lies in television series

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Films and television series include many characters who tell lies. Sometimes, lies are told by the villains of the story, who deceive others with ill intentions, but even characters who, overall, are portrayed in a positive light do not always tell the truth. Lies are told to save loved ones, to protect one's reputation and to conform to norms of polite behaviour. In fiction, many such lies drive or at least affect the plot and often the audience is made aware of a lie before the lie is revealed to the other characters in the fictional world. However, this double communication to the audience and to the characters of the fictional world presents challenges. How can lies be revealed to the audience while plausibly maintaining that the fictional characters remain deceived?

In this study, I investigate this question from a linguistic perspective. By studying lies in 18 pilot episodes of popular TV series, I identify a range of verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal communication strategies that make it possible for the audience to understand that a character is lying. My analysis is based on a close reading of passages from the 18 episodes in which characters tell lies, and I apply a multimodal analysis that includes positioning of characters, gestures and facial expressions.

Previous research has already identified a number of narrative devices and communication strategies that are used to reveal lies to the audience. In their linguistic study of deception in Shakespeare, Archer and Gillings (2020) identify several linguistic features that are associated with lying in non-fictional interaction and that occur in clusters in deceptive turns by villains. They also emphasise the role of soliloquies and asides as formal devices to reveal deception. While these are not common features in TV series, they can still be used for this purpose, as Sorlin (2016) shows for the series *House of Cards*. Other strategies include narrative voices in voice overs (Landert 2017), as well as the presence of linguistic characteristics associated with lying, such as hesitation phenomena (Arciuli, Mallard and Villar 2010; Jucker 2015). My study focuses on identifying additional linguistic strategies that are used to present lies. In addition, I investigate the differences in lies between heroes and villains, protagonists and side characters, lies that are told to friends and to enemies, and lies in comedy and in drama.

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Writing and performing deception: An analysis of deception markers in the Netflix series *Criminal: UK*

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The Netflix Original series *Criminal: UK* (2019–) is a police procedural anthology drama filmed as a chamber play. Each episode features an intense interrogation of a prime suspect by the Metropolitan police, which must end in a decision on whether (or not) to press charges against the alleged perpetrator. The show is particularly interesting from a forensic linguistic perspective as it allows us to gain insight into people's beliefs about deceptive behaviour, which have been shown to not always correspond to actual deceptive behaviour (Vrij 2008).

This paper sets out to analyse the interrogations from the series for the presence of deception markers to find out whether the deceptive statements from the interviews correspond to actual lies or simply to our beliefs about what a lie should look and sound like.

As the basis for our analysis we will take the selection of actual and believed cues as compiled by Vrij (2008: 124), which consists of 24 cues classified into three different categories, namely vocal, visual and verbal. The inclusion of visual cues allows us to conduct a multimodal analysis taking into account the body language, gestures and facial expressions of the actors.

In our study, we aim to examine two opposing hypotheses. The first one being that the deceptive statements from the series contain more behavioural cues shown to correlate with deception in literature (cf. DePaulo 2003) than the truthful ones. The rationale behind this is that on the one hand, screenwriters' own beliefs about deceptive behaviour might lead them to insert more potential cues into the script. On the other hand, actors are often taught to "play to the last row" (Cameron 1999: 367), i.e. to overact, potentially causing them to amplify certain behaviours that are more subtle in real life. Alternatively, the deceptive statements are hypothesized to contain fewer cues because potential deception markers such as dysfluencies or errors may be perceived as disruptive to the narration. The findings will offer insights into the interplay of language and the visual level in film and TV and to what extent our own beliefs affect the writing and performing of certain speech acts such as deception.

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