

Global English: The proliferation of English varieties in American television series

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It is no secret that a linguistic community's attitudes towards its perceived outsiders has a lot to say about its self-perception, its self-confidence, its identity. Thus it is that the habits displayed by national broadcasters with regard to the language varieties they employ can prove very telling indeed. In England, where – historically speaking – class has always played a more significant role than regional origin, Received Pronunciation (RP), an accent generally imposed by elite educational institutions such as the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge as well as the Inns of Court in London and the Church of England, held universal and uncontested sway over the airwaves until relatively recently: “Only in the 1960s was the policy of insisting on RP speakers on radio and television abandoned, and at about the same time the requirement of a prescribed and relatively homogeneous accent became relaxed also in the public schools and the Church of England” (Milroy, 2006: 188). As the following observation of Cran et al (1992: 21) demonstrates, this was by no means an unpopular decision forced on a reluctant public: “During the Second World War, the BBC tried to use well-known personalities with local accents, such as the Yorkshireman Wilfred Pickles, as newsreaders. The experiment was abandoned after listeners complained. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, rapid social change was reflected by a widening of the accent spectrum heard on BBC broadcasts”.

In the US, rather than the aspect of class, the predominant question of language varieties was concerned with another question altogether:

The bitter divisions created by slavery and the Civil War shaped a language ideology focused on racial discrimination rather than on the class warfare which erupted particularly fiercely in Britain in the early years of the twentieth century and remained evident during the tenure of successive Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997. In the United States, the need to accommodate large numbers of non-English speakers, from both long-established communities (such as Spanish speakers in the South West) and from successive waves of immigrants gave rise early in the history of the nation to policies and attitudes which discriminated against these speakers (Milroy, 2006: 204).

These vestiges of racial discrimination were especially noticeable in the “[m]edia images of Americans of African descent”, which “have usually varied from the blatantly to the latently racist” (Downing, 1988: 46).

However one may view these developments in Britain and the US, it should be clear that they serve only as background considerations in the context of the present essay. After all, these are discussions turned inwards, discussions concerning the use of language by each respective country's population. Current debates of standardisation and language use will inevitably have to address the national and cultural outsider, since this is the prime concern of the globalised world which we all undoubtedly inhabit. Implicitly, then, this debate on language varieties and their representation in television series will include or at least refer to ideas of linguistic communities as well as national stereotypes and their respective representation in television shows. Besides

discussing the sheer quantity of language varieties included in recent television series, the present essay will also endeavour to discuss the qualitative characteristics of their representation.

In order to conduct this discussion in as lucid a manner as possible, the present essay will proceed from a taxonomy of television series which categorises them according to the way in which they introduce language varieties. In this, it takes its cue from Brie's (2008) analysis of the basic formula underlying a classic of American television, *The Waltons* (1972-1981): "After establishing a sense of cozy normality, the narrative introduced some form of societal or interpersonal conflict which would bring disruption to Walton's Mountain. For the most part, this conflict was perpetrated by an outsider who would disrupt what was essentially a tight-knit, self-sufficient community".

While this may sound a rather old-fashioned and simplistic blueprint for a television show, it is still used surprisingly frequently in contemporary television, particularly in sitcoms. Other, more prescient categories can be developed from this basic outline, but shows of this simple structure will be the first to be considered here.

Intrusion

As in the constellation briefly outlined in the quotation above, the first category of the use of varieties of spoken English in American television series occurs when a show's small and usually relatively homogeneous main cast is augmented by the sporadic appearance of outsiders, which in the shows of most interest to the present essay, will be marked as outsiders by means of linguistic difference. This kind of intrusion is frequently orchestrated in many a television series in order to provide new impulses for story lines as well as new potential for conflicts. The most orthodox and conservative form of this phenomenon is to be observed in the classic sitcom format, which relies on a small cast and often has little or no series memory (cf. Thompson, 1996: 14), i.e. does not rely overly much on elaborate story arcs extending over several episodes, an entire season or even over several seasons. This allows additional characters to crop up for an episode or two without having to be integrated in any mid-term plans for the further development of the show.

Wherever the newly introduced stranger happens to be a speaker of a variety of English originating from outside the United States (or even of a variety of English originating from within the United States but markedly different from that spoken by the main cast), that variety will serve as a distinguishing feature employed to allow easy – and usually stereotypical – characterisation. Thus a man speaking with an Indian accent, for instance, will not put in an appearance in an episode of a sitcom simply because one occasionally encounters men with Indian accents in real life but because what is needed for some of the jokes in that episode to work is the audience's stock response in the form of commonly held prejudices about people of Indian origin. With its reliance on half-hour episodes, its constant need for new impulses to jolt its limited cast into action, and its freedom to introduce new characters without having to integrate them into a

longer story arc, the classic sitcom is of course the main format in which this particular use of language varieties is to be observed.

However, even sitcoms with a pronounced series memory will be happy to introduce speakers of foreign varieties for the exact same purpose. A widely known example to cite here would be Helen Baxendale's portrayal of the character of Emily in the fourth season of *Friends* (1994-2004), a sitcom famously featuring cliffhangers in season finales – a sure sign of a very strong series memory. Emily is an Englishwoman introduced in season four as Ross's love interest very much against the wishes of the audience who are still holding out for a reconciliation between Ross and Rachel. Rather typically in terms of the conventions of US television, Emily happens to come from the South East of England, thus presenting the audience with an accent that they can immediately recognise as "British" (even though it is really only spoken in a tiny portion of the British Isles). First and foremost, Emily's accent marks her as an outsider and both her pronunciation and her vocabulary provide a decent supply of jokes about the quaintness of perceived Britishisms. Beyond making her language different from that spoken by the main cast, however, the *kind* of accent she speaks evokes a stock response in the American audience, marking Emily as a haughty character imbued with old-world arrogance. This is especially visible in the appearances of her parents, portrayed by Tom Conti and Jennifer Saunders, both speakers of impeccable RP, even though Conti is of course Scottish.

Given her structural function as a potential wedge between the audience's dream couple of Ross and Rachel, Emily's character is bound to be perceived as unlikable to a certain degree. The fact that she is so clearly marked as a linguistic outsider as well as a speaker of a language variety usually associated with haughtiness and snobbishness, serves to reinforce that impression. Rather tellingly, Helen Baxendale would go on to star in English television series *Cold Feet* (1998-2003), where she played a character not entirely unlike that of Emily. Surrounded by a cast of other speakers of various varieties of English habitually encountered within the British Isles, she is far less of an outsider and became the audience's favourite, even if her character was somewhat ironically called Rachel.

The phenomenon that the linguistic outsider is introduced to a television series as an unwelcome intruder on the lives of the main cast is not restricted to comedy series, however. As a case in point, consider the character of James, portrayed by Jacqueline Bisset in the fourth season of *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010). As in the case of the character of Emily in *Friends*, James's arrival on the scene of *Nip/Tuck* must be considered an intrusion on the show's regular cast, though it turns out to be of a much more sinister nature. An extortionist and trader in (illegally acquired) human organs, James is also characterised by her recognisably British accent – Bisset was born in Surrey and raised in Berkshire. Again, James's accent is used to emphasise her structural significance in relation to the main cast: James is evil, James finds ways of gaining power over her opponents, James is not only an outsider but a human being of a different order. The main cast may be prone to the occasional moral blunder – but however hard they might try, their moral

shortcomings will never reach a category comparable with the evil James habitually meddles in. Jacqueline Bisset is famously bilingual, having been raised by a francophone mother. Asking her to play James with a French accent, for instance, would thus have not represented an impossible challenge to her. But a French accent would have conveyed ideas of either sophisticated charm or innocent naivety, not that of emotional disengagement and icy arrogance.

As can be seen in the brief discussion of the characters of Emily and James, both comedy and drama series avail themselves of relatively brief appearances of characters marked as outsiders by their linguistic features, and they do so with a basic recipe in mind: mark someone out as different, give them a maximally dislikable accent, let their accent go along with common preconceptions regarding said accent. It may seem a bit simple to draw this universal conclusion from one comedy series and one drama series, but the phenomenon is well-nigh universal in American television series, as, for instance, the preposterous art teacher in season 6, episode four of *Monk* (2002-2009) and of course Ian Hainsworth, Susan's intermittent love interest in *Desperate Housewives* (from 2004) may serve to illustrate. The fact that British accents (or rather – approximations to RP) are used in these circumstances is certainly no coincidence. To American audiences (and increasingly to world markets for broadcasting rights and DVD sales), RP is felt to represent old-world snobbishness, arrogance and general snootiness. These characters, perhaps most memorably encapsulated by Joan Collins's portrayal of Alexis in *Dynasty* (1981-1989), are habitually brought on to threaten, bully or look down upon the main cast, with whom the audience's sympathies will inevitably reside.

A very interesting part to look at in this context is Lucy Davis's portrayal of Sara in *Reaper* (2007-2009). Sara can certainly be said to intrude on the show's main cast by convincing Ben to enter into a sham marriage with her in order to get her a green card. Despite her demure appearance, Sara remains a threatening presence throughout her run on *Reaper*, making it very hard for the gang to shake her off. Unsurprisingly, Sara is another native of the English South East, though rather tellingly her accent owes a lot more to Estuary English than to RP, thus conveying less authority and more eccentricism. Presented as an idiosyncratic and psychologically flawed character, Sara fulfils the role of the outsider to an admirable degree, but this is no mere cultural outsider – but rather someone operating outside the boundaries of common sense. Her accent may mark her as a linguistic outsider, but it doesn't categorise her as anything other than peculiar. It is her actions that turn her from a quaint character in the series to an actual threat. As will be seen at a later point in the present essay, this use of linguistic varieties can easily be integrated into another, and perhaps a more recent category of television series. Before considering these, however, the present essay will briefly look at another rather traditional approach to language varieties in television series.

Exposure

One domain in which linguistic variety has always been in evidence consists of television series in which the main characters, rather than being intruded upon, frequently venture out into foreign

cultural and linguistic contexts, where they are habitually exposed to terrible risks – as well as different languages and varieties of English. As workplace-based television shows go, espionage adventure series probably feature the highest rate of foreign language and foreign accent per screen minute. More or less recent examples of this phenomenon are the drama series *Alias* (2001-2006) and *Covert Affairs* (from 2010) as well as the distinctly comedic *Chuck* (from 2007). Since everyone will be familiar with the structural properties of this phenomenon (if not from these three series, then at least from, say, the *Bond* films), I will not spend any time dwelling on individual examples and summaries of episodes. I would, however, like to consider a few problematic points in order to illuminate the qualitative nature of the use of language varieties in this category of television series.

First of all, many espionage series are not only conspicuous for the number of English varieties on display but for the number of foreign languages they employ. It would appear that viewers of such series are much more tolerant when it comes to reading subtitles than American viewers of foreign-language films. These subtitles are, however, an entirely universal requirement as even native speakers of the languages in question will rarely manage to make much sense of what is being said, such is the circumspection of those casting the relevant roles and the respect afforded these languages in the average spy series. Mercifully, the subtitled sequences never last very long as eventually (and sometimes inexplicably) the conversation will inevitably switch to English. The cultural monocentricism at play in these instances will usually lead to the following sequence of events: the hero or heroine of the series will approach a foreign dignitary, operative, contact, or civilian and address them in their own native language. Having been trained by the very best, our hero or heroine will of course speak said language with no discernible accent whatsoever. The minute the conversation switches to English, though, their opposite number will of course be completely unable to match the hero or heroine's language skills and will invariably speak in a thick Russian, German, or Chinese accent.

As that last sentence intimates, the accents encountered in these shows are usually fairly predictable and are to be found to originate from countries which currently or historically can be recognised as hostile to American interests. As such, they are of course not to be considered varieties of the English language. The occasional variety of English on display in these series is typically enough a clear-cut RP, as in the case of Oregon-born actor David Anders in the role of Julian Sark in *Alias*, a role that – in purely linguistic terms – he would later revive in *Heroes* (2006-2010). In his *Alias* role he became a something of a cult phenomenon, in no small part owing to the mixture of charm and arrogance his accent in the role conveys. Despite Julian Sark's popularity among fans of *Alias*, the structural use of these accents in television series is much the same as that in those series labelled here under the phenomenon of *intrusion*: they mark antagonists as an indisputable “other” threatening the “self” of the homogeneous group of the main cast. As far as the phenomena described here as *intrusion* and *exposure* are concerned, American television series tend to remain true to tried and tested means of manipulating audience responses to those characters marked by means of linguistic difference.

As has been intimated at the end of this essay's previous section, however, there are also a number of television shows approaching the phenomenon of linguistic variety from a completely different angle, as the discussion of the next two categories will serve to illustrate.

Inclusion

The reason that Sara in *Reaper* should be considered an interesting example is that Lucy Davis manages to take on a relatively similar role (with rather more appearances) in *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (2006-2007). Her accent remains the same, her role makes her slightly more demure and less eccentric but more importantly, she does not represent a problem or potential conflict brought to the quite extensive cast of central characters in *Studio 60*, she is a part of the entire *Studio 60* setup. What is also interesting about Davis's role in this series in the present context is the fact that while her accent may imbue her character with a certain mark of difference and may hint at a more variable back story, the exact reason why this particular character needs any conspicuous accent at all remains undisclosed.

One domain in which this question is answered much more easily is of course the sitcom, as the example of Oklahoma-born Nyambi Nyambi's character on *Mike & Molly* (from 2010) demonstrates. The role of Senegalese waiter Samuel – including the appropriate accent – is a frequent source of jokes from domains other than the ones the sitcom habitually taps, such as relationships and overeating. Comparing aspects of the main characters' lives with the goings-on in his native Africa, Samuel can add surprising perspectives to the show, the only drawback being of course that this will only work if the audience's most common preconceptions about life in West Africa are pandered to. This is not to say that Samuel is confronted with any prejudice on the part of the other characters, but for the comedy he is supposed to bring to the programme to work, he broadly needs to adhere to stereotypes and behave in line with commonly held preconceptions. A similar, though somewhat more integral role is that portrayed by London-born Kunal Nayyar on *The Big Bang Theory* (from 2007). The character of Dr. Rajesh Ramayan "Raj" Koothrappali is an integral part of that show's cast of geeky scientists working at the California Institute of Technology. His portrayal of an ambitious astrophysicist who is constantly nagged by his parents, frequently refers to common conceptions of Indian society and is far too shy to ever speak to a woman is somewhat mitigated by the fact that at least two of the other three main characters in the show are equipped with an equally stereotypical background: Sheldon is the Texan son of a devout Evangelical mother and thus occasionally serves to confirm the relevant stereotypes (though in the form of anecdotes rather than in his personal behaviour), while Howard still lives with his overbearing Jewish mother.

That foreign accents do not have to serve the purpose of identifying national or ethnic stereotypes even in the sitcom format is perhaps best illustrated by English actress's Jane Leeves's role *Hot in Cleveland* (from 2010). Again, her accent is of course conspicuous within the series, but it does not function as a mark to distance her from the rest of the cast and the vast majority of the storylines and jokes her character is involved with would work just as well without the accent, so

that its function is far less obvious than in the case of most other sitcoms and much more akin to the uses of varieties of English in a significant number of current drama series which include their speakers in their regular cast.

One case in point would be the character of Dr Robert Chase in *House* (from 2004), portrayed by Australian actor Jesse Spencer. Little is ever made of the fact that he is Australian, and neither his accent nor his nationality has any structural function for his role in the series as a whole. His nationality or accent are rarely cause for any humorous comments, so no comedy is derived from them. So in contrast to many of the examples discussed in the category of *intrusion*, there seems to be little reason why the role should have gone to an Australian (and an Australian allowed to speak in his own accent at that). The fact that the eponymous protagonist of the series is supposedly American but portrayed by an English actor is simply a rather surprising casting coincidence. One drama series in which this is not the case is *Lie to Me* (from 2009), in which the main character, psychologist Dr Cal Lightman, is portrayed by English actor Tim Roth. Lightman's back story involves oblique hints at working for British intelligence, run-ins with the IRA and a criminal past. As such, it contains elements which are familiar to American television audiences at least by name, but are exotic enough not to encourage close scrutiny by the audience so that it can be added to at will as the show continues. By and large, however, the show is rarely concerned with marking its protagonist out as different in terms of his cultural identity (though he is of course a deeply eccentric character).

As can be seen from these examples, the phenomenon labelled *inclusion* in the present context may occasionally have its origin in considerations of dramaturgy. However, these reasons are never quite as crass as the simple use of outsiders as stereotypical foreigners carrying conflicts into an otherwise peaceful and harmonious constellation of characters. Interestingly, this is a relatively new phenomenon belatedly mirroring what has long been a simple reality in urban America: that all over the country, many people speaking decidedly different varieties of English are to be encountered in all manner of professional and social contexts. Given that this has been the natural situation ever since the founding of the United States, it is astonishing that American television series got by with such a severely limited scope of accents, that they only recently seemed to have cast off their linguistic homogeneity. It is primarily in historical drama series reflecting earlier stages of American history, such as in recent examples *Deadwood* (2004-2006) and *Boardwalk Empire* (from 2010), that linguistic variety is accepted as a given.

One final subcategory of linguistically inclusive television series consists of a relatively small number of shows but is all the more interesting in cultural terms. These are the shows availing themselves of what I would describe as *knowing inclusion*. That is to say that these shows exploit commonly held preconceptions regarding various accents to such a degree that they implicitly challenge such notions, thus calling into question the audience's attitude with a knowing wink. Thus Canadian culture and linguistic idiosyncrasy (especially in the form of Canadian raising) are frequently made fun of in *How I Met Your Mother* (from 2005). The way these ideas of

Canadianness are presented, though, namely predominantly in the form of cast member Robin Scherbatsky (played by Canadian actress Cobie Smulders) and her former career as teenage pop sensation Robin Sparkles, is so exaggerated that the audience cannot simply sit back and find their prejudices about Canada and Canadians quietly confirmed. Instead, the extreme exaggeration invites a reconsideration of national stereotypes and stereotyping. A similar case can be observed in the character of Rita Leeds (played by Charlize Theron) in *Arrested Development* (2003-2006). The very fact that said character lives in a fictional British quarter of Orange County named “Wee Britain” should suffice to demonstrate the exaggerated nature of the series’ portrayal of ostensible Britishness. As a double reflection of cultural and national stereotypes, Wee Britain even has an American-themed restaurant in which the British staff put on American accents and serve what they think of as typically American food. A third case in point does not so much play on the audience’s prejudices but rather on the audience’s ignorance: after all, the exchanges that New Zealanders Jemaine and Bret are frequently exposed to at the hands of their American interlocutors in *Flight of the Conchords* (2007-2009) serve to highlight not Americans’ prejudices regarding New Zealand but the simple fact that no one in the US seems to know anything at all about that country. Another character that could, perhaps somewhat charitably, be seen in this light is that of Hiro Nakamura, played by Masi Oka in *Heroes* (2006-2010). As a character near-eponymous with the series’ title, Hiro embodies much of its main characteristics, down to its fascination with comic-book culture. With regard to his being Japanese, Hiro’s portrayal is so clichéd as to border on the ridiculous. His English (whenever he is forced to speak it) is of course the heavily accented and well-nigh rangeless language easily and unthinkingly associated with the supposedly culturally insular Japanese. His personal attitude towards work and his family’s overbearing ambitions for him frequently clash. Rather typically for mainstream expectations of Japanese culture, Hiro is an avid reader of comics and thus the only one of the heroes to have spent any time thinking about super powers before discovering his own. In a series that features many a non-American character and is not generally conspicuous for its constant insistence on superficial stereotypes, Hiro is the one clear-cut exception. Since he provides much of the comic relief on offer in *Heroes*, his role could be seen as a knowing inclusion in the sense described above, were it not for the fact that the show in which he features belongs to a different category of television series altogether.

Fusion

The phenomenon of globalisation in all its manifold forms has resulted in “a new world-space of cultural production and national representation which is simultaneously becoming more *globalized* . . . and more *localized*” (Dissanayake and Wilson, 1996: 1). The series discussed thus far predominantly proceed by favouring the local and defining intrusions from the outside as a conservatively represented “Other”. Even spy shows consciously pointing out the existence of global networks, threats and alliances more or less stick to this recipe. As has been demonstrated, a number of series also manage to introduce foreign language varieties as a natural, though oftentimes unremarkable part of their everyday settings. The past decade has, however, also seen the rise of a limited but influential number of shows eschewing this easy classification and

confronting the global head on. They do so by choosing the global, even if in the case of *Lost* (2004-2010) the basic recipe seems to consist of bringing together a global cast in a closely defined locality. The many flashbacks and parallel storylines do however make sure that the show reflects a truly global concern. Before looking at this series and its quantitative as well as qualitative use of language varieties, however, the present essay will look at another show employing a comparable wealth of English varieties, *Heroes*.

As a show about people all over the world discovering that they have supernatural powers, *Heroes* is practically forced to feature a global cast and global settings. Where in previous decades, premises like that of *Heroes* were given the caveat that everything out of the ordinary that ever happens, happens on American soil (think UFO sightings and the like), *Heroes* follows the path of an escalation of cast and setting. From the Englishman Claude – played by Christopher Ecclestone and named after Claude Rains, the English actor who starred in *The Invisible Man* in 1933), to the Indian researcher Dr Muhinder Suresh (played by Chicago-born Sendhil Ramamurthy), from David Anders's appearance as Adam Monroe to the siblings Maya and Alejandro Herrera (played by Dania Ramirez and Shalim Ortiz), from Hiro (discussed above) to the Haitian (Jimmy Jean-Louis in what happens to be no big speaking role, admittedly), *Heroes* offers a veritable panorama of nationalities and languages. Even the most minor and ostensibly unremarkable aspects of this escalation of cast and setting are of significance in the present context. So when Peter Petrelli (Milo Ventimiglia) finds himself stranded in Ireland, he encounters people who have Irish accents not because they need to represent some preconception that people have about Ireland but because Ireland happens to be as real a part of the world portrayed in *Heroes* as any other.

As a show about people in possession of supernatural powers, *Heroes* certainly is under little obligation to be particularly realistic in the general sense of the term, but where matters of language and national identity are concerned, it has a structural interest in avoiding the exploitation of language varieties for cheap effects. The global domain in which these characters struggle as exceptional individuals will not allow their language to become the mark of a stereotypical collective identity.

In many ways, much the same can be said about *Lost* (2004-2010). The premise of the show is that of the crash of an international airliner, so of course the cast could be expected to include non-US nationals. If that had been the sole reason for not producing the show with an all-American cast, however, the series creators would have found ways around this. As will be seen, the international cast of *Lost* is thus not a structural necessity and burden on its creators but one of their chief desiderata. Of course, *Lost* also features a number of RP speakers and may thus be thought to exploit those phenomena related to said accent as they have been discussed above. However, it is conspicuous that this accent predominantly occurs in minor characters or in those in which the effect of stereotypes may be intended, such as Charlotte Lewis (from Essex, played by Rebecca Mader from Cambs) and Penny Widmore (London-born Sonya Walger).

Elsewhere in the series, British characters are given much more distinct accents that avoid the typical preconceptions. Thus, Desmond Hume (Henry Ian Cusick) is given a Scottish accent, perhaps because he is named after Scottish philosopher David Hume. Charlie Pace (Dominic Monaghan) on the other hand is given a Manchester accent, perhaps to make him recognisable as an enfant terrible rock star. After all, in terms of British bands finding fame in the US, Charlie's band is obviously modelled on Oasis (and his brother is called Liam). By focusing on a regional variety rather than sticking to RP, *Lost* manages to avoid those preconceptions typically associated with the latter variety.

Among the non-native speakers of English, *Lost* follows a route similar to that generally taken by *Heroes*, as Nigerian, French, Korean and Iraqi accents are used to mark where characters are from rather than what they are like. In both *Heroes* and *Lost*, then, individual characters are mostly equipped with accents to make the point that everyone is connected to everyone else, no matter how far apart they have lived in the past. Conveying this idea of global interconnectedness should be seen as one of the major ambitions of these shows. That this is not an automatic result of having an extensive cast can be demonstrated by means of a quick look at *Desperate Housewives*, a show that harbours no such ambitions and yet is the only network show with an even bigger cast than those of *Lost* or *Heroes*.

Conclusion

It is of course easy to ascribe this gradual development from a fairly conservative concept of intrusion via a no less traditional idea of exposure towards inclusion and fusion to the abstract and well-nigh indefinable phenomenon of "globalisation". One very obvious example of this is the simple fact that there are now more non-US actors working in the centres of American TV production than ever before and that they simply bring their native accents to the screen. While this may be true to a certain extent, the overwhelming evidence would point in another direction. After all, Oxford-born Hugh Laurie in *House* and Sydney-born Yvonne Strahovski in *Chuck*, Essex-born Stephen Moyer and Canadian-born New Zealander Anna Paquin in *True Blood* (from 2008) as well as fellow New Zealander Alan Dale in *The OC* and *Lost* have all been cast in roles in which they have to adopt new accents. Conversely, an American like David Anders had his most famous roles adopting a British accent, so that the idea of the simple availability of foreign actors as a cause of an increase – both quantitative and qualitative – in foreign accents on American TV is a contributing factor at best.

Since those series most conspicuous for their internationalist agenda (purely in terms of accents, of course) were produced during the Bush presidency (2001-2009), a strongly romanticised liberal point of view might suggest that film and television makers were out to promote an alternative world view to the one of absolute cultural and political hegemony in those years, but this would be difficult to prove without express utterances by decision-makers to this effect. At the very least, however, the inclusion of language varieties in domestically set American television shows

for purposes other than easy characterisation and adherence to commonly held preconceptions points to a belated recognition that the grand idea of the Melting Pot does not necessarily have to entail complete linguistic (and implicitly cultural) assimilation. Those shows representing speakers of non-American accents as average Americans in everyday situations without going out of their way to exploit stereotypes may simply try to redress a conflict at the heart of American language culture: that “the United States is inherently a multicultural and multilingual nation” on the one hand, but that it has historically been characterised by “an ideological focus on monolingualism and assimilation” on the other (Milroy, 2006: 193).

Less romantically, perhaps, one could argue that TV goes where the money is. And the money is not just to be found in gross viewing figures, it is in certain demographics, the most important of which seems to be that of young, urban and affluent viewers. And members of this key demographic will in the course of their education or their working lives have encountered speakers of different varieties of English. The world they are thus shown on television is simply gradually becoming more like the world they already know. Another unashamedly pragmatic aspect to be considered here is the way in which the marketing of American TV series has evolved. With global broadcasting rights as well as DVD sales and downloads as well as peripheral marketing at stake, the realistic depiction of foreign nationals and accents has simply become a matter of self-interest for the US entertainment industry. An expanding international audience capable of speaking (and more importantly: understanding) English means an increasing interest in the original versions and a willingness to forego the hitherto common institution of dubbed series. Under these circumstances, the presentation of national stereotypes may be acceptable to an international audience in the context of brief appearances in sitcoms and possibly in the roles of unadulterated villains. As soon as any kind of identification is required, however, there is little more alienating than a one-dimensional character with a terrible accent purporting to come from your home country.

That the past decade has seen the rise of many an interesting, challenging and ultimately entertaining television series of exceptional quality is without undoubted true. That economic factors may have contributed and will continue to contribute to this is a relative certainty. The integration of language varieties into American television series has taken an interesting turn in that decade, offering up paths previously untrodden. That the use of RP speakers as authoritarian snobs will continue in some contexts is beyond doubt. Equally, French accents will continue to be used in order to variously convey ideas of seductiveness, innocence or sophistication. African, Caribbean and Indian Englishes will continue to be exploited in order to provoke lowest-common-denominator responses on the part of American TV audiences. The past decade has, however, given us a taste of an entirely new and much more interesting way of representing global English on television. And while economic factors and national prejudice are fairly likely to play a part in TV productions for the foreseeable future, it is to be hoped that this will one day also be said of those strategies variously described in the present essay as *inclusion*, *knowing inclusion* and *fusion*: the realistic representation of language varieties for the sake of representing a shared

humanity and a fascinating human diversity.

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