

## **Workshop proposal: *Pop culture and linguistics* (Valentin Werner)**

### **Outline**

The investigation of aspects pertaining to pop culture has essentially, and some would argue, naturally, been the subject of cultural studies (see, e.g., Takacs 2015; Danesi 2015; [www.mapaca.net](http://www.mapaca.net)). However, as a text-based domain, in principle it also lends itself to analysis and use in other language-related disciplines. As regards its pervasiveness, the language of pop culture (PL) is a type of language which is hard to avoid (Trotta 2010) or, differently stated, which is ubiquitous and continues to grow in importance (Pettijohn & Sacco 2009; Moore 2012). Due to its sociocultural history as well as globalization-related developments English has become the prime pop language in today's multilingual world.

In spite of its extraordinary social relevance, it is highly surprising that PL represents a hitherto understudied area in English linguistics. This is shown by the facts (i) that pop registers (such as lyrics, the language of fictional TV series, the language of comics and cartoons, the language of social media, the language of gaming, etc.) barely feature among the text categories included in any of the general reference corpora of English, (ii) that the number of empirical studies explicitly devoted to PL is growing (see, e.g., Kreyer & Mukherjee 2007; Bednarek 2010; Walshe 2012; Werner 2012, *forthc.*; ensslin 2012; Bértoli-Dutra 2014; Kreyer 2015) but still comparatively scarce, and (iii) that the linguistic perspective is at times combined with some kind of aesthetic evaluation, mocking its own subject (see, e.g., Theroux 2013).

In addition, while it would be exaggerated to claim that PL does not have a place in applied linguistics at all, it is fair to say that its didactic potential, despite earlier attempts heralding its power (Loew 1979; Melpignano 1980; Murphey 1990), has largely been underexploited for (second) language instruction (Trotta 2013), as exercises involving PL are regularly relegated to “fun” activities (that is, generally speaking, those not regarding the introduction and exercise of “hard” grammatical structures) situated at the end of lessons and units (Summer 2011). However, this may also be due a lack of adequate description of PL (see above) in the first place.

In essence, what unites both the descriptive and applied linguistic dimension is that the treatment of PL is hardly recognized as a serious, and therefore academically overly worthwhile, endeavor (see also Queen 2015). To address this situation, it is the main aim of this workshop to showcase the various facets of PL “in action” and thus to bring the study of PL closer to the mainstream of linguistic analysis. As a secondary aim, it aims to reveal the latent didactic potential of PL manifestations to further the instruction of English to speakers of other languages.

While the workshop is open to any topics related to PL in English, it particularly welcomes contributions on the following issues or combinations thereof:

- *General considerations*: Is it warranted to speak of a single variety of pop culture English? Or do we rather observe considerable internal variation?
- *PL features and style*: Which structural (morphosyntactic, lexical, etc.) features are characteristic of PL? Is there something such as a specific “grammar of pop”? Is PL really “conversational”, as has often been claimed (e.g. by Murphey 1990 or Moore 2012)? Does PL represent authentic or stylized language (see, e.g., Quaglio 2009)?
- *Register and mode*: How and where can PL be situated in terms of a register analysis (Biber 1988) or along the spoken-written continuum (Koch & Österreicher 1985)? Or is PL (as one form of one-to-many communication) rather a completely different category? How can PL be related to notions such as “digital discourse” (Pegrum 2014; cf. Zappavigna 2012; Seargeant & Tagg 2014; Tagg 2015; Werner forthc.)?
- *Contrastive perspective*: Can we speak of a universal PL across languages (potentially determined by English influence) or are we rather looking at language-specific PLs?
- *Methodological challenges*: Which issues have to be considered when treating manifestations of PL with existing linguistic tools (e.g. as regards automatic part-of-speech-tagging when no sentence boundaries are present or when structures are elliptical)? Which text types count as genuine parts of PL?
- *Applied perspective*: How can we exploit the ubiquity of PL in a linguistically and didactically informed way? How do pop content and theories of language learning relate to each other?

## References

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### **Number of talks and approximate audience size**

The expected number of talks in this full-day workshop will be eight to nine papers. The approximate audience size will be 25 participants.

## **Paper selection and participants**

The following participants, who are in personal contact with the workshop convener, have already agreed to give papers:

- Patrícia Bértoli-Dutra (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)  
A multidimensional analysis of song lyrics
- Frank Bramlett (University of Nebraska at Omaha, USA)  
Representation of conversation in comics
- Cecilia Cutler (City University of New York, USA)  
Rap songs on YouTube: Language mixing, creative orthography, and language play
- Theresa Summer (Independent scholar, Germany)  
Pop culture and teaching English as a Foreign Language (tentative title)
- Caroline Tagg & Philip Seargeant (The Open University, UK)  
The expression of social roles on Facebook
- Joe Trotta (University of Gothenburg, Sweden)  
Linguistics and popular culture, is that, like, a *thing* now?
- Marcia Veirano Pinto (Sao Paulo Catholic University, Brazil)  
Variation in the language of American television
- Michael Westphal (University of Münster, Germany)  
The sociolinguistics of performance: Jamaican Creole lyrics and linguistic appropriation

The following scholars have further expressed their interest in taking part:

- Cristina Mayer Acunzo (Sao Paulo Catholic University, Brazil)  
A register study of social media in English and Brazilian Portuguese
- Stephan Mordstein (University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany)  
Dialectal features in Oasis songs: A study of stylization and indexicality

## **Equipment**

No special equipment apart from a video projector and a sound system is needed.

## **Format**

Along the lines of the main conference, twenty minutes presentation + ten minutes discussion.