Part I

Introduction

1   *Television Dialogue*

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Many of us have a favourite line of dialogue from a TV series. It might be 'to boldly go where no one has gone before' (*Star Trek*), 'Winter is coming' (*Game of Thrones*), 'I am the one who knocks' (*Breaking Bad*), 'Treat Yo'self' (*Parks and Recreation*), 'Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose' (*Friday Night Lights*), or perhaps something more nerdy like 'She's an assistant professor in the Linguistics department ... They're wild!' (*Friends*). It is unquestionable that television dialogue has given us many such memorable lines, but it also fulfils important functions in its more mundane incarnations, in the lines we do not consciously remember. As part of the mass media, television is one of the 'agents of socialisation' (Lippi-Green 2012: 101) and significantly shapes our sociolinguistic environment (Coupland 2007: 185). We can speak of a culture–media dialectic, where TV dialogue both constructs and reflects cultures and their ideologies. Dialogue is hence an important source of information about language and society, in addition to being fundamental to how televisual narratives work (Queen 2015).

Undoubtedly, television series are a significant social and psychological phenomenon; they have an immense cultural impact and often demonstrate artistic sophistication. They are popular cultural products, consumed by millions of viewers world-wide: 'even a moderately successful series, if it continues for enough years to go into syndication, is seen by hundreds of millions' (Douglas 2011: 21).[1] Highly popular US TV series such as *Lost* are licensed to more than 180 international territories (Pearson 2007b: 255–6). English-language TV dialogue is thus consumed by many viewers who do not speak English as a first language. When consumed in the original (rather than dubbed) version, television dialogue can be a key way in which learners encounter English-language conversations, and it may constitute an influential model for such viewers (Mittmann 2006: 575). Indeed, Bleichenbacher

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(2008: 2) quotes a European Union survey in which interviewees stated that watching films and television was the second most frequent situation for the use of English as a second language. Clearly, from an applied linguistic perspective it is a worthwhile endeavour to analyse the kind of language such learners of English encounter.

This book offers just such an investigation of the language used in contemporary US television series. In particular, its aims are:

- to develop a new categorisation of the multiple functions of TV dialogue
- to identify and explain the salient linguistic characteristics of TV dialogue
- to examine non-codified language phenomena in TV dialogue[2]
- to provide new insights into production and consumption aspects of TV series, and to connect these to the linguistic analysis.

In analysing TV dialogue, this book uses a new, carefully designed dataset of TV dialogue, the Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue (SydTV). The name derives from the fact that this corpus was designed and built at the University of Sydney, with funding provided by the university. SydTV is a small, specialised corpus (~275,000 words), representative of the language variety of contemporary US TV dialogue. In total, it contains dialogue from one episode each from sixty-six different TV series (first season). About half of the corpus comes from comedy genres and the other half from drama genres, since this is one of the major distinctions made in the TV industry.[3] Based on the rise and importance of so-called quality television, about half of the corpus comes from Emmy- or Golden Globe-winning or -nominated series, and the other half does not. The corpus design and construction is described in more detail in Chapter 5, and a list of all included episodes is available in the Appendix (Table A.1). When citing examples from SydTV in this book I will simply provide the name of the TV series, as additional information can easily be retrieved from the Appendix. For example, a dialogue line will be attributed to 'SydTV, *Pushing Daisies*' rather than 'SydTV, *Pushing Daisies*, season 1, episode 7, "Smell of success"'. Season and episode number are specified only for dialogue from episodes that do *not* come from SydTV, on which I will occasionally draw.

More precisely, SydTV will be analysed using corpus linguistic and computer-assisted approaches to identify the linguistic characteristics of TV dialogue. Given that US TV series are consumed by so many viewers worldwide, it is important to discover what this language looks like. From an applied linguistic perspective it is vital to know the input that learners are exposed to. Insights into TV dialogue can

inform the use of TV series in language learning and teaching as well as the teaching of televisual literacy in the university curriculum. All of these aspects are explored in this book. Further, a special focus of the analyses of SydTV is on non-codified language, including non-standard language use and linguistic innovation.[4] These analyses aim to contribute to the emerging body of sociocultural linguistic research on contemporary television narratives (e.g. Lopez & Bucholtz 2017).

These linguistic analyses of SydTV examine TV dialogue from a 'product' perspective. However, this book has a more ambitious aim, which is to connect these analyses to aspects of production and consumption. I therefore also draw on ethnographic research. To do so, I undertook a survey of pedagogic scriptwriting material as well as interviews with five Hollywood scriptwriters. I also report on my findings from a questionnaire with almost 600 German university students about their consumption of English-language TV series. I therefore bring together the three perspectives from which TV series can be approached (Bednarek 2015d): that of the process of creation/production, that of the outcome/product, and that of consumption. This allows a richer contextualisation of TV dialogue in terms of how it is produced and consumed (see also Richardson 2010a). The focus on language use in a professional context (the television industry), on scriptwriting pedagogy, and on learning and teaching provides an applied linguistic lens on TV series. This is complemented by perspectives taken from media linguistics and sociocultural linguistics.

I do not want to repeat here what I and others have written about the value and significance of media in general and TV series in particular. I assume that readers who have decided to read this book do not need any further convincing that linguistic analysis of such media texts is a worthwhile endeavour. Interested readers can consult the justifications for analysing language in the media in Coupland et al. (2016), and in films and TV series in Bednarek (2010a: 7–11; 2012b: 199–202; in press a), Androutsopoulos (2012), and Queen (2015). Suffice it to say that many linguists agree that fictional mass media require more attention, including 'much more analysis of the structural characteristics of media representation of language, of different genres, formats' (Stuart-Smith 2011: 235). In the midst of a 'golden' age of television, we need a comprehensive investigation of language use in televisual narratives. This book contributes to this endeavour, and explores three main themes about TV dialogue. Put simply, they can be paraphrased as follows:

- TV dialogue fulfils a range of functions relating to the audience.
- TV dialogue is both similar and different to spontaneous speech.

- TV dialogue is innovative and contains non-codified language, which is essential to its character.

In this first chapter I provide an introduction to television dialogue (Section 2), televisual narratives (Section 3), how TV dialogue is produced (Section 4), and its participation framework (Section 5).

2 What Is *Television Dialogue*? Clarification of Terms

So far, I have used the term *television dialogue* without explicitly defining it. Put simply, I use the term to refer to dialogue from television series. In contrast, the term *film* or *movie dialogue* refers to dialogue from films/movies. I borrow Piazza et al.'s (2011: 1) term *telecinematic discourse* as a cover term for both kinds of dialogue. I also use Queen's (2015) label *narrative mass media* to refer to both films and TV series. It is important to emphasise at this point that there are both similarities and differences between television series and films. Both feature fictional, audiovisual narratives that address an external audience (see Section 5) and both include scripted and poly-functional dialogue with some similar storytelling techniques (Thompson 2003; Piazza et al. 2011; Androutsopoulos 2012; Bednarek 2015a).

On the other hand, there are manifold differences between TV series and films (Thompson 2003; Douglas 2011; Redvall 2013; Bednarek 2015a; Mittell 2015): this includes the serial nature of an often long-running TV narrative – as Richardson (2010a: 136) puts it, 'much television drama operates on presumptions of continuity'. And unlike films, traditional network TV series are structured around ad breaks and feature dispersed exposition (Thompson 2003). In addition, the stability and consistency of televisual characters (see Section 3) leads to significant depth of audience involvement.

These two cultural products are also differentiated by their business models, target audiences, rules and regulations, and production processes (including differences in the role of directors and writers; amount of content per year; time frames; budgets, etc.). Thompson (2003: xi) concludes that '[f]ilm and television are [. . .] two different (if overlapping) media'. The industry recognises these differences by offering special courses and manuals on writing *for television* (see Chapter 10). Such differences can impact on language – for example, changed funding models affect the use of language variation (Queen 2015: 19). In sum, my assumption is that we cannot automatically assume that film and television dialogue are identical, and further, that it is crucial to have specific terms that allow us to distinguish them from each other where relevant. The term *television dialogue* permits us to do so. However, both components of the term *television dialogue* – (1) television series and (2) dialogue – require further explanation.

First, by *television series* I essentially refer to scripted, fictional (imaginative) narratives,[5] with characters and plot strand(s), and include series and serials that are intended to run over several seasons.[6] The label covers both scripted narrative series that are produced by television networks and those that are produced by companies such as Amazon or Netflix, for instance *House of Cards* (sometimes referred to as *web series* or *web television series* or *internet drama series*). There are well-known differences between such outlets (network, cable, subscription, etc.), which impact on language use, especially in relation to the use of particular swear/taboo words, which are censored only in network/broadcast television. Technically speaking, shows such as *House of Cards* are not *television* series, as they are not produced by TV networks and not originally broadcast on TV. They may nevertheless be broadcast on television in certain countries, in the same way in which an HBO subscription programme may end up on free-to-air television through processes of syndication and export. Rather than using Bednarek's (2015a) term *digital series* (DS), I will employ the term *television series* as a cover term for both; and the same broad reference applies to *television dialogue*. Further, TV series are nowadays consumed via a range of platforms or mediums (television, tablet, laptop, mobile phone, etc.), but I will refer to them as *TV series* regardless of how they are experienced.

Second, I use the term *dialogue* as shorthand for all character or narrator speech, whether this speech is by one speaker (monologues, asides, voice-over narration, etc.), between two speakers (dyadic interactions), or between several speakers (multiparty interactions). As such, dialogue is differentiated from screen directions, which may refer to elements such as location and time, angle, special effects, transition, sounds, setting, clothing, name/age, mental state, actions, pauses, and voice source. Some instances of TV dialogue are represented in examples 1 (voice-over by a narrator), 2 (voice-over by a character), 3 (dyadic interaction), and 4 (multiparty interaction).

(1)

TV dialogue instantiated as voice-over by a narrator (VOICE)

VOICE: At this very moment at the Longborough School for Boys, young Ned was nine years, forty-one weeks, fourteen hours and three minutes old and exhausted. For despite the endless waking hours spent assuring himself that his heart was on the mend, Ned discovered the truth in his sleep. Sadly, not a single night had passed since the death of his mother that he didn't dream of her coming back to him. Realizing he couldn't rush his heart into healing, he concocted a plan, to reconnect

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with his mother in a way that only he could. For young Ned wasn't like the other children, or the other adults for that matter, which, in this case, delighted him, briefly. Although young Ned knew he couldn't taste the pie lest the fruit rot again, he didn't care. The mere smell of it made him feel, if only for an hour, exactly like he wanted to feel, safe and warm and loved. Which is why he became the pie maker, who at this very moment, was planting flowers to make Chuck feel as safe and warm and loved as he once did.   (SydTV, *Pushing Daisies*)

(2)

TV dialogue instantiated as voice-over (V) by a character

EARL (V):   Me and Jessie had a good thing goin', and it was all happenin' pretty fast, but not as fast as it happened later that night with Joy. In just seven hours, I went from having a semi-serious three-week girlfriend to bein' the husband of a pregnant woman whose name I kept forgettin'. I thought about callin' Jessie to talk to her and tell her what I had done, but then I realized I'd have to talk to her and tell her what I had done.   (SydTV, *My Name is Earl*)

(3)

TV dialogue instantiated as dyadic interaction

ANN: Andy. Andy, we need to talk.
ANDY: Hey, uh, we're just about to start. Could you grab me a triple whiskey and water?
ANN: You would like that wouldn't you.
ANDY: Yep.
ANN: You have two perfectly good legs, get it yourself.
                                        (SydTV, *Parks and Recreation*)

(4)

TV dialogue instantiated as multiparty conversation

PENNY: Hey, guys, guys, some of the other waitresses wanted me to ask you something.
LEONARD: Oh, it's called trestling.
HOWARD: It combines the physical strength of arm wrestling with the mental agility of tetris into the ultimate sport.
PENNY: Yeah, that's terrific, but what they wanted me to ask you was to cut it the hell out.   (SydTV, *The Big Bang Theory*)

As audiences (and researchers) we can engage with such dialogue in various forms, for instance by reading official and unofficial scripts, transcripts or subtitles, or by experiencing the audiovisual performance (dubbed or not, on television or via other mediums). In this book I am interested in on-screen dialogue – the dialogue that the audience encounters when watching a TV episode. In terms of mode, such dialogue can be characterised as 'THE SPEAKING OF WHAT IS WRITTEN TO BE SPOKEN AS IF NOT WRITTEN' (Gregory 1967: 191, original capitalisation). But as a whole, the television narrative is a multimodal and multisemiotic text, and it must be acknowledged here that a focus on dialogue does not capture all elements of meaning-making (Bednarek 2010a, 2015a; Richardson 2010b; Valentini 2013; Toolan 2014).

3 Televisual Stories and Characters

Dialogue contributes significantly to the fundamental goal of TV series, namely 'the telling of a narrative, one which might absorb, entertain, inspire, and move the viewer' (Toolan 2011: 181). To better understand such narratives, I provide a brief overview of televisual stories and characters in this section. Since studies in narratology and stylistics mainly focus on prose fiction or literary drama (e.g. Pfister 1988; Bal 1997; Rimmon-Kenan 2002; Prince 2003), with some also commenting on film (e.g. Chatman 1978; Culpeper 2001; Toolan 2001, 2014; Fludernik 2009), my overview instead comes from TV scriptwriting manuals (e.g. Finer & Pearlman 2004; Priggé 2005; Douglas 2011), and research in television studies (Thompson 2003; Pearson 2007a; Mittell 2015).

In such work, televisual stories are considered to consist of a succession of events, typically with a trajectory and involving one or several participants. Structurally, they are broken down into acts and scenes or beats (story points). The structure of particular TV series varies, as does the number of acts. Comedies tend to have two or three acts, but dramas have four or more. Landau (2014: 184) gives a breakdown of almost fifty series, including several included in SydTV. In TV series that have a title sequence (opening credits, intro, credit sequence – see Bednarek 2014b, c) this can be preceded by a recap ('previously on') or new dramatic material in a so-called teaser/cold opening (Douglas 2011: 91).

Stories are typically talked about in terms of an Aristotelian structure with a beginning, middle, and end, including turning points/twists or, potentially, cliff-hangers, with the latter story elements structured around commercial breaks in traditional network series. Comedic

scenes can have a distinct structure, for example in sitcoms where punchlines are often included at the end of an exchange (Smith 2009: KL 995–6).[7] In a single TV episode, we can find multiple storylines (A, B, C stories), which are distinct, complementary, parallel, or interwoven. These storylines can be 'open' (with plot and character arcs continuing across episodes or seasons) or 'closed' (achieving closure or resolution, for example within an episode). Many series that resolve storylines within an episode also have ongoing stories.

The desires or goals of characters are seen as central to many storylines, to the extent that it is argued by some that 'story *is* character' (Finer & Pearlman 2004, emphasis in original). Many emphasise that televisual characters need to be distinct from each other (i.e. not sound alike) as well as stable entities so that viewers can develop relationships with them. In Mittell's (2015: 141–2) words:

> The desire for stable characters with consistent traits and personalities is a major draw for serial storytelling, as we want to feel connected to such characters through parasocial relationships and might be quite disappointed if they changed in ways that violate their initial connections and appeals.

Most television characters are thus stable figures who accumulate life events, experiences, and relationships but do not change from them (Pearson 2007a). Generally, TV characters are hence described in terms of depth, complexity, and dimension rather than change and transformation. Douglas (2011: 14) speaks of vertical instead of horizontal development.[8]

In addition, I have suggested that aspects of emotion, attitude, and ideology are particularly important in televisual characters and have introduced the concept of *expressive character identity* for relevant character traits (Bednarek 2010a, 2011c). Other aspects of character relate to a range of social and personal variables, and include the relationships between characters, as further discussed in Chapter 3.

How are TV characters built? Mittell (2015: 130–1) suggests that audience members infer characters' interior states through explicit exterior marks (dialogue, actions, appearance), the dramatic context, and their knowledge of characters. This is more or less in line with cognitive stylistic models of characterisation (Culpeper 2001). While dialogue 'cues' (Culpeper 2001: 35) are thus not the only means of constructing character, they are one way in which characters are built. Such cues function to indicate character directly/explicitly (naming the trait) or indirectly/implicitly (displaying the trait) (Culpeper 2001: 163–229), and may be reiterated throughout the TV narrative (Thompson 2003: 27). Importantly, television characters are

collaboratively created by writers, producers, and actors, who 'have varying degrees of creative authority and collaborative ownership of their ongoing characters' (Mittell 2015: 119). In addition, cognitive models of televisual characterisation assume that the interpretation of character draws on the prior knowledge of viewers (e.g. Richardson 2010a: 127–50).

According to Culpeper (2001), a wide range of linguistic features can contribute to characterisation in drama, including conversational structure, affective language, lexical richness/diversity, terms of address, syntactic structure, accent/dialect, impoliteness strategies, and (non-)adherence to conversational maxims. While Culpeper's examples come from literary drama and film, his inventory would seem to at least partially apply to televisual characterisation.[9] A wide range of dialogue cues have indeed been examined in relation to the traits of television characters, and many aspects of character identity have been examined, including expressive character identity, gender, sexuality, impoliteness, nerdiness, national identity, affluence, character relationships, and so on (see survey in Bednarek 2017b).

This overview has of necessity been somewhat simplified, since there are various differences between genres and types of TV series as well as individual series. Television series pursue different modes of storytelling, from the more conventional to the more sophisticated, with 'narrative complexity' (Mittell 2015: 17) emerging since the 1990s, enabled by a range of technological, industrial, and reception shifts (Mittell 2015).[10] However, such complex storytelling has not replaced conventional sitcoms and dramas; both exist side by side. While storytelling techniques, story structure, and characterisation are not the focus of this book, the communication of the narrative (characters, happenings, setting) is one of the many functions that TV dialogue fulfils and will be taken up again in Chapter 3.

4 Producing Dialogue for US Television Series

The features and functions of dialogue in US TV series also need to be understood in relation to the production process. Because this book is not located within a political economy framework, I will not discuss aspects such as industrial conditions, business models, ownership, vertical integration, etc. here. Two general points are nevertheless important to keep in mind. First, business models differ between platforms (e.g. traditional network television versus subscription cable or digital distributors), and second, TV series are both creative and *commercial* products – 'hot properties, which enable the extraction of maximum profits in minimum time through