Language and Television Series

This book offers a comprehensive linguistic analysis of contemporary US television series. Adopting an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach, Monika Bednarek brings together linguistic analysis of the Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue with analysis of scriptwriting manuals, interviews with Hollywood scriptwriters, and a survey undertaken with university students about their consumption of TV series. In so doing, she presents five new and original empirical studies. 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, corpus linguistics, and sociocultural linguistics/sociolinguistics. Throughout the book, multiple dialogue extracts are presented from a wide variety of well-known fictional television series including The Big Bang Theory, Grey\'s Anatomy, and Bones. Researchers in applied linguistics, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, and media linguistics will find the book both stimulating and unique in its approach. The companion website (www.syd-tv.com) contains a wealth of additional material.

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Language and Television Series
A Linguistic Approach to TV Dialogue

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Television series made in the United States are sold around the world and constitute a major influence on how English is used. Monika Bednarek’s book is a fascinating study of dialogue from a corpus of programmes from sixty-six US series ranging from gritty drama to light comedy. Most readers of this book will be familiar with at least some of these programmes. TV series of this type have been the subject of academic research from perspectives such as media studies, but this is one of the few books to investigate the language of such series.

The book examines dialogue in TV series from a number of angles. Bednarek offers a detailed categorisation of the functions of such dialogue, including narrative-related functions such as progressing the plot or filling out character, and medium-related functions such as endorsing products or engaging audience emotions. The discussion and illustration of these functions reminds us that TV dialogue is an important part of a carefully crafted artefact designed to inform, entertain, and influence. The book then addresses the issue of how similar TV dialogue is to naturally occurring language, taking a corpus linguistics approach. TV dialogue needs to sound convincingly real without necessarily replicating actual features of natural interaction. An investigation of how this is done is supported by studies of key words and phraseology. Bednarek also presents a close study of what she calls non-codified language. The analysis reveals words and phrases that are invented for individual series, as well as neologisms that are at the leading edge of language change, existing in the community but not yet codified in any dictionary. The role of TV dialogue in supporting such change is fascinating.

Bednarek goes beyond the study of the dialogues as text or corpus (the dialogue as product) by conducting interviews with writers and producers to investigate how scripts are written and produced. This analysis gives an insight into the degree of intentionality and awareness on the part of the producers that lies behind the artefact of TV dialogue. In the final section of the book she also considers the role of TV dialogue in two pedagogical situations: the training of scriptwriters and the learning of English as a foreign or additional language. The latter is based on questionnaires completed by students of English in Germany. The value, and limitations, of TV dialogue as a pedagogic resource is explored in this chapter. In addressing the production
This book has much to say to researchers into language education who are interested in the influence of television on language learning and its potential as a pedagogic resource. Researchers into the role of dialogue in narrative will also find much of interest here. The book also informs researchers who take an applied linguistics approach to the media or who wish to extend their research in that direction. A key feature is that the methodologies used are described in detail, allowing the studies to be replicated on other data. The book offers unique insight into a topic that is popular in every sense, and is a welcome addition to our series.
Acknowledgements

There are many people and institutions that have been instrumental in assisting me with the production of this book. I would like to acknowledge and thank them all most sincerely here. I am grateful to Susan Hunston and Carol Chapelle for commissioning the book for the Cambridge Applied Linguistics series and to the whole Cambridge University Press production team for seeing the manuscript through to publication. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers who provided feedback on earlier draft chapters of the manuscript, and Susan Hunston, who reviewed the final manuscript. Thanks also go to the participants for feedback and suggestions at various research seminars and conferences where parts of the research have been presented over the last few years.

The corpus that I analyse in this book – the Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue (SydTV) could not have been built without school and faculty funding provided by The University of Sydney. I want to thank the research assistants who helped with building the corpus over several years: Cassandra Liardet (née Fawcett), David Lesslie, Samuel Luke, Ganna Veselovska, and Charlie Revett. I am also grateful to Georgia Carr for assisting with the transcription of interviews and editing the book manuscript. Throughout this project, Mike Scott provided help on WordSmith, implemented features, and fixed bugs – I am incredibly grateful for his support. Thanks are also due to the Sketch Engine team for assistance in exploiting SydTV with Sketch Engine, and to Joel Nothman for advice on Excel. Oral historian Tina Wright provided helpful information on the transcription of the data for the Charlotte project.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) under REA grant agreement no. 609305. I wish to express my thanks to the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), University of Freiburg, Germany, for awarding me an FCFP External Senior Fellowship. Much of the groundwork and writing for this book was undertaken in late 2015 and early 2016 during my fellowship. I am immensely grateful for this opportunity and would like to thank Bernd Kortmann and Cristian Mair for fruitful discussions around standardness and corpus

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linguistics. A big thank you is also due to Roland Muntschick for general research assistance and analysis of questionnaire results.

The remainder of the writing was mostly done during my sabbatical in the first half of 2017 at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I would like to thank the Department of Linguistics for inviting me to come to UCSB as a Visiting Scholar and Mary Bucholtz for being my faculty sponsor, discussing language use in TV series, and commenting on earlier draft sections of this book. I am extremely grateful to John Du Bois for giving me access to the Longman Spoken American Corpus, for information on the corpus contents, and advice on transcription. I would also like to thank Stefan Gries for a helpful conversation about corpus statistics, and the participants at the SocioCult research seminar for their advice on dialogue lines in African American Vernacular English. The University of Sydney provided institutional and financial support during my sabbatical, for which I am very grateful.

I also wish to thank the university lecturers in Germany who helped me with undertaking questionnaires at the Universität Mannheim (Ira Gawlitzek, Rosemarie Tracy); Universität Augsburg (Christian Hoffmann); Universität Heidelberg (Beatrix Busse, Sandra Mollin); Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich (Renate Bauer, Susanne Handl, Jennifer Arendholz); Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg (Christian Mair, Brigitte Halford); Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Universität, Aachen (Stella Neumann); and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (Brigitta Mittmann, Cordula Glass, Michael Klotz).

I am extremely thankful, too, to the five Hollywood scriptwriters/showrunners whom I interviewed for this book: Jane Espenson, David Mandel, Doris Egan, Bob Berens, and one writer who preferred to remain unidentified. Special thanks are due to Jane Espenson, who was so generous with her time and assistance. I also appreciate the help from Javier Barrios and Hilary Swett regarding access to official final scripts archived in the Writers Guild foundation’s Shavelson-Webb library in Los Angeles. Copyright for all material analysed in this book remains with the original authors/creators and is used exclusively for criticism and scholarship.

Most of all I want to thank Helen Caple, who acted as a sounding board for ideas, read draft chapters as well as the final manuscript, and always gave me valuable feedback. She also had to endure countless hours of television watching, and the fact that I could never turn off my analytical media brain. Without her love and support in all ways, writing this book would have been so much more difficult!
Acknowledgements

Spoiler Alert

In this book I discuss and analyse examples from many US television series. Readers should be aware that in this process plot elements from some series may be revealed.