

British Audiences, Australian Aboriginal English Dialogue: An Audience Reception Study

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Abstract

In a globalised world, fictional audiovisual texts are a key mediator of linguistic ideologies across physical, social, and cultural boundaries. To understand how such audiovisual products represent identity and diversity, it is crucial to consider the relationship between the representations and how audiences receive them. The vast majority of audience reception studies in linguistics focus on dubbed (overview in Di Giovanni 2018) and/or subtitled (e.g., overview in Nikolić 2018) audiovisual texts. With no prior work undertaken on how audiences from English speaking countries receive dialogue from ‘non-standard’ English varieties found in other countries, this novel study is an initial investigation into how representations of English varieties are received by unfamiliar audiences, with focus on British Audiences and (Australian) Aboriginal English (AbE). AbE is a cover term for varieties of English spoken by “80% of Indigenous Australians” (Rodriguez Louro/Collard 2021b). Representations of AbE in fictional audiovisual texts have become more frequent and prominent in the past years (Bednarek 2023: 134), and several of these texts have been exported to the UK. Drawing on data collected from a questionnaire and focussing on lexical representation in the programmes *Mystery Road*, *The Heights*, and *The Warriors*, this article analyses the comprehension and interpretation of AbE by British Audiences with an eye to understanding the indexicality of telecinematic discourse from a transnational perspective. Results indicate a lack of familiarity of such audiences with ‘non-standard’ English varieties and identify the various associations viewers have with AbE lexis, with subsequent impacts on representation and characterisation.

Keywords

audiences, dialogue, Aboriginal English, reception, indexicality