Proposal for a thematic panel in SS18:
The sociolinguistics of cinematic discourse

Convenor:

    Jannis Androutsopoulos
    University of Hamburg
    jannis.androutsopoulos@uni-hamburg.de

Invited contributors:

    Lukas Bleichenbacher
    University of Teacher Education St. Gallen
    lukas.bleichenbacher@phsg.ch

    Peter Petrucci
    Massey University
    p.r.petrucci@massey.ac.nz

    Gaëlle Planchenault
    Simon Fraser University
    gaelle_planchenault@sfu.ca

    Stavroula Tsiplakou & Elena Ioannidou
    University of Cyprus
    stav@ucy.ac.cy & ioannidou.elena@ucy.ac.cy

Discussants:

    Robin Queen
    University of Michigan
    rqueen@umich.edu

    Kay Richardson
    University of Liverpool
    kay100@liverpool.ac.uk

Keywords:

    Film, fiction, stylization, stereotype, language ideology, multilingualism, discourse, performance

Organisation of the panel:

    This panel requires a three-hour slot, which will be divided into six 30-min. slots accommodating five papers and one concluding discussion session led by the two discussants. The papers will be presented in the following order: (1) Bleichenbacher, (2) Petrucci, (3) Planchenault, (4) Tsiplakou & Ioannidou, (5) Androutsopoulos.

General abstract for the panel

This thematic panel will present current research on language and society in cinematic discourse, aiming to consolidate film as an area of study within sociolinguistics. Language variation in fiction has been examined from different angles and traditions: Stylistics examines the representation of non-standard speech and multilingualism in prose and drama (see e.g. Hess 1996, Mesthrie 2005, Bleichenbacher 2008), and critical researchers such as Hill (1995) and Lippi-Green (1997) have drawn attention to the impact of fiction and pop culture media in the reproduction of linguistic discrimination. Such media is being given increasing attention within current 'post-variationist' sociolinguistics (e.g. Coupland 2007). However, there is still little systematic investigation of the sociolinguistics on film, and a widely agreed-upon framework is lacking. Even though our contributions differ by research question, type of film and language, they converge around a number of common lines and themes, which may be summarised in four interrelated points:

First, we approach film as "discursive social action" (Coupland 2001:346) and therefore as a valid area of sociolinguistic study in its own right. As a consequence we examine language in film not primarily in terms of its "authenticity" or "fidelity" to speech in the "real world", but with a focus on its workings in the fictional narrative, all by bearing in mind how these narratives constitute stylized representations of society with varying degrees or realism.

Second, our approaches are character-based, i.e. we anchor analysis not to linguistic features or language varieties as such, but to characters and the linguistic choices they are allocated to. In such an approach (as long practiced in stylistics), linguistic difference becomes meaningful through character contrasts against the backdrop of dominant language ideologies, rather than through a verbatim reflection of "real" speech (Culpeper 2001, Georgakopoulou 2000, Lippi-Green 1998, Ray 2001).

Third, we view film as a window to popular language ideologies, i.e. "ways in which language affirms and reinforces, at best, mainstream and, at worst, stereotypical beliefs and attitudes" (Georgakopoulou 2000: 119). By so doing, we align with earlier interpretations of linguistic differentiation in fiction (Culpeper 2001, Ray 2001) and engage with their theoretical frameworks, which include Bakhtinian concepts as well as more recent language ideology research. A language-ideological approach ties in with a focus on sociolinguistic stereotypes and stereotyping, and we assume a reflexive relationship in which language in fiction is both shaped by predominant language ideologies and also potentially shaping language ideologies of audiences.

Fourth, we also draw on the notion of stylization (as elaborated by Coupland 2001 and 2007) in order to study how language varieties are used to project social identities in performance. Together with the previous concept, stylization is used to examine the linguistic (and wider semiotic) processes by which narrative *personae* are authenticated in discourse, drawing on stereotypes and an assumed shared knowledge with the audience.

The five papers of this panel will engage with these themes and their interrelations, providing evidence from a range of data, including Cypriot-Greek, English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish films. Specific topics of the individual papers include linguistic discrimination in Hollywood movies, case studies of stylization and language ideology in selected movies, and the impact of translation on the sociolinguistic representation of characters. The panel shall be concluded with commentary by two discussants with substantial research experience in the sociolinguistics of fiction.

Key references

Bleichenbacher, Lukas. 200.8 Multilingualism in the movies. Hollywood characters and their linguistic choices. Tübingen: Francke.

Coupland, Nikolas. 2001. Dialect stylization in radio talk. Language in Society, 30, 345-375.

Coupland, Nikolas. 2007. Style. Language variation and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culperer, Jonathan. 2001. Language and Characterization. People in Plays and other Texts. Hallow: Longman.

Georgakopoulou, Alexandra. 2000. On the Sociolinguistics of Popular Films: Funny Characters, Funny Voices. Journal of Modern Greek Studies 18:1, 119-133.

Hess, Natalie. 1996. Code switching and style shifting as markers of liminality in literature. Language and Literature 5(1): 5-18

Hill, Jane. 1995. Junk Spanish, covert racism and the (leaky) boundary between public and private spheres. Pragmatics 5:2, 197-212.

Irvine, Judith T. & Susan Gal. 2000. Language ideology and Linguistic Differentiation. In: Kroskrity, Paul V. (ed.): Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities, 35-84. Santa Fe.

Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. Teaching children how to discriminate: What we learn from the Big Bad Wolf. In: English with an Accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States 79–103. London: Routledge.

Mesthrie, Rajend. 2005. Assessing representations of South African Indian English in writing: An application of variation theory. Language variation and change 17, 303-326.

Queen, Robin. 2004. 'Du hast jar keene Ahnung': African American English dubbed into German. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8:4, 515-537.

Rey, Jennifer M. 2001. Changing gender roles in popular culture: dialogue in Star Trek episodes from 1966 to 1993. In: Conrad, Susan & Douglas Biber (eds.) Variation in English: Multi-Dimensional Studies, 138-156. Harlow: Longman.

Individual abstracts (in alphabetical order)

Jannis Androutsopoulos (University of Hamburg)
Codes, identities and language ideologies in ethnic comedy
The aim of this paper is, first, to contribute to a sociolinguistic methodology for the study of cinematic discourse, and second, to examine how relations between language and society are constructed in one film marketed as "ethnic comedy". My test bed is *Süperseks*, a German movie set in the urban milieu of Hamburg's Turkish community. Drawing on Lippi-Green (1997) and Bleichenbacher (2008) among others, I distinguish two layers of analysis of cinematic language: (a) a character-based analysis that looks at how movie characters are allocated one or more distinct ways of speaking, and (b) a scene-based analysis that examines choices of and encounters between different codes within a scene. I thereby ask both how the

allocation of codes across a film works as a means of characterisation, and how code-switching (and stylistic variation generally) may index relationships or changes in footing among characters. This analysis presupposes a coding of characters for narrative importance and evaluation (Bleichenbacher 2008) and a reconstruction of the film's linguistic repertoire. The application to *Süperseks* suggests that the repertoires of individual characters differ by narrative importance (i.e. protagonists are given other combinations of codes than minor characters) as well as by gender and generation. In the few scenes featuring multilingual dialogue, code choice and code-switching tend to accompany, and contextualise, dramatically important shifts in character psychology or conflictual character relations. In these scenes, code choice is made iconic to particular characters and their social orientations within the ethnic milieu. The analysis suggests that *Süperseks* is permeated by implicit, and in part also explicit, stereotypes of language and ethnicity, class, gender, and generation, and sustains Hollywood-style distinctions between linguistic difference and narrative evaluation and narrative importance.

Lukas Bleichenbacher (University of Teacher Education St. Gallen)
Linguicism in Hollywood movies?
Hollywood movies have been a prime site for the representation of intercultural and multilingual encounters for decades. As such, they are not only of prime interest to everyday cinemagoers or home viewers, but have increasingly attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines, including sociolinguistics. A main focus of much previous work have been issues of misrepresentation and negative stereotyping of characters constructed as the 'Other', such as speakers of non-standard Englishes, or indeed languages other than English. This has raised the question to what extent the Hollywood mainstream embodies the fictional counterpart of real-life linguistic discrimination, or linguicism. In my contribution, I first discuss the relative merits of different qualitative and quantitative sociolinguistic approaches to the study of mono- versus multilingualism in movie dialogues. These include the analysis of metalinguistic content proffered by movie characters in their dialogues, the interrelation of movie characters' linguistic and non-linguistic biographies, quantitative observations on the amount of dialogue in different languages, and the negotiation of language choice in transnational encounters. The conflicting findings are then set against an analysis of viewers' reactions to the phenomena analyzed published in online forums. I conclude on the question whether there is a long-term trend towards more sociolinguistic realism in the movies, and to what extent this would also imply more multilingualism on the screen.

Peter Petrucci (Massey University)
The translation of cinematic discourse and the question of character equivalence
The subtitling or dubbing of cinematic discourse, though widely discussed in terms of equivalence of form and meaning, is rarely investigated from the perspective of what might

be called 'character equivalence', the idea that when cinematic discourse is translated, a character's representation on the screen may change. Referring to a small corpus of English-, Spanish- and Portuguese-language films whose characters represent different social, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (e.g. *Mississippi Masala, Volver, Central do Brasil*), this paper examines the language-based nature of character representation in film and explores to what extent representations remain intact when cinematic discourse has been translated. Because the development of any character on the screen – regardless of the language through which the character is presented – is arguably co-constructed by the viewer, I also survey individuals about their interpretations of and attitudes towards characters in a particular film to determine whether, and if so which, linguistic features are considered salient markers of a character's identity. Drawing on this data and my earlier work on language diversity in film, I close the paper by raising some questions about language ideologies that may underpin the translation of cinematic discourse.

Gaëlle Planchenault (Simon Fraser University)
Accented French in films: Representations from within, representations from without
In a well-known chapter of her book *English with an accent* (1997), Rosina Lippi-Green demonstrated that in cartoons, accented English is used to typify characters by relying on stereotypes shared with the audience. It seems that it is even more the case with French language as its speakers are extremely aware of any deviations from a norm or a Standard and folk linguistics often relate these to pejorative notions of non-correct, popular, vulgar, rural, (etc.) French (see Lodge, 1993).

In this paper, I propose to show that the performance of accented French in films (these accents being regional - i.e. *Jean de Florette, Bienvenue chez les ch'tis* - or social: *La haine, L'esquive*, etc.) is not a re-enactment of a real linguistic behaviour but, by emphasizing salient features of the chosen varieties, is rather an exercise of stylisation, verging on what Androutsopoulos (2007) calls "styling ethnic otherness" (evident in practices of subtitling as it was the case when Bon cop, bad cop was released in France in 2006 with a translation of the Québécois French). I will argue that what takes place between the audience and the characters speaking accented forms of French are multilingual encounters, bearing in mind that the perception of these accents is often based on social stereotypes (Boughton, 2006).

Working on these forms of cinematic discourses will allow me to bring to the forefront social and ideological perspectives of a French "imaginaire linguistique" (Houdebine-Gravaud, 2002).

Stavroula Tsiplakou & Elena Ioannidou (University of Cyprus)
Stylizing stylization: the case of *Aigia Fuxia*
Language stylization is usually viewed as a host of mechanisms bringing into play stereotyped semiotic and ideological values associated with other groups (Coupland 2001,

2007), i.e. as a way of stylizing the Other, typically a referee group that is not involved in the processes whereby its stylization is constructed (Bell 1999; Rampton 1995). In this sense, stylization is part of the 'metalanguage' of folk linguistics (Preston 2004), a manifestation of a frequently hegemonic 'linguistic imaginary'.

In this paper we examine a particular case of media stylization in *Aigia Fuxia (Fuchsia Goat),* a popular Greek Cypriot sitcom, where a dialect-speaking community arguably stylizes its (imagined) self. The overarching trademark of *AF* is its consistent pinpointing of its intertextual relations to traditional Cypriot comedic media genres (e.g. *Stories from the Village*), in which the stylization of the language and lifestyle of a part of the speech-community is performed in predictable ways. *AF* both observes and diverges from the conventions of these genres, in that it displays (a) *bricolage* with regard to subject-matter, ranging from 'peasanty' to urban/modern, (b) filmic *bricolage* involving overt commentary on the mise-en-scène, the use of the camera etc., and, crucially, (c) linguistic *bricolage* involving the use of basilectal/obsolete Cypriot forms, hyperdialectism, including the Cypriotization of Standard Greek forms (Tsiplakou 2003) and code-mixing between Standard and Cypriot Greek (Tsiplakou *et al* 2006, Tsiplakou 2009).

Such self-stylization has rich interpretive potential. From a cinematic perspective, the foregrounding of the cinematic apparatus and its incorporation in the narrative invites the viewer to focus on the processes of narrative construction (Kolker 1998). From a sociolinguistic perspective, the overtly aberrant stylization of Cypriot Greek may be seen as performative destabilizing of dominant folk linguistic constructs about standard language and dialect as well as tensions between the two in a context of levelling and emergent diglossia resolution (Tsiplakou 2009).