

Kulturní rozdíly mezi britskou a americkou verzí televizního seriálu “The Office”

Batchelor Thesis

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This thesis is framed by claims for the pedagogical value of using television programmes in the language classroom. In her introduction the author suggests that teachers “can use dialogues from popular films to illustrate the point when teaching grammar or to extend their students' range of vocabulary considerably” (p. 7) and further argues that “By actively watching a film/TV series set in those countries [the US & UK], children can absorb the basic cultural patterns alongside its language and the story” (p. 7). The author concludes her thesis with a similar claim, that “It is my sincere belief that it can prove extremely beneficial for teachers of foreign languages to use video material in the classroom” (p. 27). The main body of the work, however, is a comparison of the UK and US versions of the popular sitcom “The Office” which makes no reference to possible practical classroom applications of such a comparison. In Chapter 2 the author outlines some broad differences between US and UK sitcoms, using Fox's *Watching the British* as a main source in making distinctions. (Incidentally, going by the page references supplied, the author of the thesis seems to have used an online PDF version of this book, rather than a print copy as stated in the bibliography); in the third chapter she makes a more specific comparison of the characters in the two versions of the sitcom; some cultural specifics are discussed in Chapter 4, including the UK's Red Nose Day, and racism awareness training in the US; and the final and fifth chapter outlines what the author considers are differences in humour between the two countries.

The thesis would have been more compelling had the focus been on how the chosen sitcom, in both its American and British manifestations, could be used in the classroom, whether in teaching cultural studies or grammar/vocabulary. It would be good to hear more specifically during the defence how the author would use such a vast amount of material (she refers to whole series of the comedy) in her teaching. As it is, she chooses to explore differences in the two series and to extrapolate from them cultural differences. This is always a tricky business, as it is very easy to fall into making rather overstated stereotypical pronouncements, in this case, that British humour is more verbal, while “Americans are fonder of humour based on physicality.” (p. 28). Kate Fox, a major source for the thesis, makes a rather sweeping claim herself, that “I would maintain that the English do have a keener and more subtle sense of humour than most other nations” (Fox 216) though concedes that “If anything, the humour in most English sit-coms is rather *less* subtle and

sophisticated than the Americans” (Fox 216). Given the popularity in the UK of, e.g. Mr Bean and many other examples of physical humour, I feel that the author's conviction that such a US/UK physical/verbal divide exists is far from proven. On Gareth/Dwight, e.g., she writes that 'He often annoys his co-workers and mostly Tim/Jim, who repays him by constantly playing pranks on him' (p. 16), yet, when wishing to emphasise her perceived distinction between US and UK humour, namely that “Americans tend to appreciate physical comedy, the British are fonder of its verbal form” (p.25) she mentions only the American Jim “Another comedy device the Americans are fond of is practical jokes. In “The Office” Jim constantly plays practical jokes at [sic] Dwight” (p. 25), though clearly Tim does exactly this in the UK version too.

The author provides good analysis of specific episodes – the comparison of the Basketball competition and Pub Quiz is particularly interesting. But the examples she uses in Chapter 4, when focusing on cultural specifics, is disappointing in that she shows variety rather than possible sources of useful comparison, i.e. talks about the British charity Red Nose Day and the US racism awareness training. A more fruitful comparison could be made by looking at the treatment of racism in both series, e.g. the UK episode “The Merger” contains an interesting example of David Brent's racist behaviour which could have been compared to the US episode.

There are occasional lapses in grammar (e.g. p. 15 “could not have become nearly as popular as it have”) and also some typos (e.g. Royal Family for Royle Family (p.14) and Dwighth for Dwight (p.16)). Tim and Jim are also mixed up on p. 18. The tone is also at times inappropriately informal, e.g. the opening to Chapter 3.II, “Let us start with Tim Canterbury” (p. 16), but on the whole, the author writes with great fluency and clarity and I am happy to recommend it for acceptance, with a recommended mark of 2/3 depending on the defence.

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