Accents in Telecinematic Texts: The Role of Dialect Coaching

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Abstract
Accents and dialects have been used in fictional representations, including telecinematic ones, as a way to mimic reality, but also to construct particular voices. According to Agha (2007: 213), representations of accents and dialects in classic novels were not 'merely' tools to portray the reality of social life in literature, but they were used to amplify and transform reality, and to construct memorable idiolects. The same reflection can be applied, even more aptly, to the domain of audiovisual products, in which the accented voice can also be heard and provides an immediate clue for character presentation.
Keeping in mind recent multimodal explorations of aural and visual tracks in all their creative potentialities (Bosseaux 2015; Sánchez Mompeán 2017) and studies on the voice in films (for example Kozloff 1988), this contribution intends to investigate the role of dialect coaching in the construction of the accented voice in films and TV narratives. Our purpose is to describe the professional figure of the dialect coach and how his/her expertise helps actors create a plausible and natural speech pattern, an accent, a dialect, or also hone impressions of celebrities. Considering the virtual non-existence of studies on the subject in the linguistic domain, the article will make ample use of paratextual information such as interviews, reviews and other audiovisual or written testimonies relative to this key role and process.

Key-words: accents, dialects, dialect coaching.

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1. Introduction: the representation of accents and dialects in audiovisuals

Never as in recent years has the role of the accented voice in films and television shows been linked to the concept of authenticity in telecinematic fiction. More and more audiences expect naturalness and consistency in the language varieties spoken on screen and the actors' and actresses' vocal performance can be often found, nowadays, consistently mentioned in the promotional paratext of film and TV productions. Actors and actresses often discuss the accents they use in great detail, going through the stages of their preparation with dialogue coaches and justifying their choices.

British dialects[1] pertain to one of the geographical areas of the English-speaking world, in which polarisations (between north and south, for example, but certainly not only) are most evidently ingrained in people's consciousness and thus a favourite means of stereotyping. These regional oppositions, deeply rooted in a thousand years of history, fuel an 'us' versus 'them' ideology (Wales 2002: 61) based almost exclusively on perception rather than on objective assessments.

Mutual (mis)understanding has also had an impact on the construction of characters by authors of literary and audiovisual fiction. Between stereotype and reality – objective or perceived reality – the representation of accents and dialects in fictional dialogue offers a complex and interwoven topic of regional and social nuances to the eye of the researcher.

According to Agha (2007: 213), representations of accents and dialects in classic novels were used to amplify and transform reality, and to construct memorable idiolects. A case happily complicated, in today's audiovisual narratives, by the original and affected accents of the performing actors. If in most cases accented voices are used as tools to mimic reality, they sometimes can be more subtly employed as a form of "embroidery", as aesthetic means to design an idiolect (Ranzato 2019).

[1] The term 'accent' is used to refer to the pronunciation of any variety of speech, whereas the term 'dialect' is employed to refer to features of grammar and vocabulary; see Hughes and Trudgill 1996.

Prosodic features in audiovisual texts have received attention in recent years (Bosseaux 2015; 2019; Sánchez Mompeán 2017; 2019), after the pioneering observations of scholars such as Fodor (1976), Whitman-Linsen (1992), Pavesi (2005), Zabalbeascoa (2001), Baños-Piñero and Chaume (2009), Chaume (2012), with attention paid to phonetic and prosodic features which allow the sociolinguistic message to travel cross-culturally. The voice has of course been explored by film studies scholars in its various declinations, as for example in Kozloff (1988).

The issue of the interplay of accents in film and TV dialogue is also made problematic by the fact that what comes out of the actors' mouths in terms of regional variation may or may not have been originally conceived by the authors (directors, writers) and may have been added along the way or be the result of difficulty in mastering a particular accent. It is also important to note that the screenplay does not often give indications of dialectal features unless they are fundamental for the understanding of plot and setting[2]. However, even when their rendition has been carefully studied and prepared, the outcome of the general sound design will become evident only the moment the actual performance takes place.

The relatively recent role of the dialect coach in film and TV productions will be assessed in this article by taking these preliminary considerations into account. The article is organised as follows: in section 2 we describe the terminology that is used in different countries to indicate the professional figure we aim to sketch, while in section 3 we describe the different backgrounds dialect coaches may have. Section 4 deals with some case studies in Italy and in the Anglophone world. Some conclusive remarks follow.

2. Some terminological observations

The term 'dialect coach' is one among several labels that have been devised to indicate a profession that has become more and more

[2] The evidence is based on a long professional practice by one of the authors as a translator of screenplays. The same claim can be made of theatre scripts, but the fact that dialects are not written does not mean that they are or were not spoken in the performance. See for example Massai (2020), for what concerns Shakespeare's use of dialects in his plays.

popular in the course of the last forty years or so. A dialect coach is an expert who helps an actor create the suitable voice and speech qualities for a character he/she has to play, either for the cinema, television, stage, radio or any other production.

The juxtaposition of the pre-modifier 'dialect' rightly refers to the fact that a high number of productions for the cinema, television or stage represent individuals coming from different areas of the world and speaking different accents and dialects. This label is certainly widely used in North America, although sometimes these professional figures also refer to themselves as 'dialogue coaches', especially when emphasising how they work on a second language or when assisting an actor to hone the acting of the dialogues in his/her second language, dialect or accent. When coaches assist opera singers, especially when vocalising lyrics in another language, they may be called 'diction coaches'. In the United Kingdom, instead, the same figure described so far may be labelled as 'accent coach' and the role does not entail supervision of acting, but preparatory work before shooting.

Finally, the term 'voice coach' may also be used when referring more precisely to techniques of training the voice and its qualities, e.g. breathing, relaxing, replicating certain voice qualities like stuttering, etc., especially in the theatre in the UK. In US English, the same term designates a singing coach, i.e. a vocal coach.

If a change in the accuracy of representation of accents and dialects can be detected starting from the 1970s, recourse to professional coaching began to spread more than a decade later. It was not until Meryl Streep won an Oscar for her perfect portrayal of the Polish-accented title character in *Sophie's Choice* (1982) that audiences began to perceive mastery of dialect as a sign of artistic merit (Bradley 2017).

3. The job of the dialect coach: educational background and professional style

As clearly emerges from interviews and reports by dialect coaches themselves, apart from obvious differences in intervention related to the kind of medium, there are also many ways a dialect coach can get involved, i.e. preparing an actor before the shooting of the film, on set, by taking advantage of some spare moments, or even in

post-production sessions if the actor had difficulties in acting and dialectal features still need to be honed (Blaise 2003: 30).

The figure of the dialect coach often researches into dialects, accents or speech patterns before starting proper training with the actor. Despite differences and idiosyncrasies in individual approaches, a common core of steps is shared by all coaches: they study and observe the variety that needs to be produced, prepare related material, both audio and written, provide instructions and follow the actor in rehearsing (Carey 2003: 101).

Honorof (2003: 106), for example, describes a "fun, actor-friendly, linguistic approach to accent training", which owes much to his experience as both actor and coach, but also to a PhD in linguistics at Yale. Yet, fully aware that linguistics might appear intimidating, he has tried to develop an approach that exploits actors' tendency to rely on their intuitions, their 'passive' knowledge of accents (2003: 107), by supporting them with more specific instructions concerning "coordinated movements within the vocal tracts", with particular attention to vowels (2003: 108). He ignores phonetic transcription[3] and builds his work on a list of lexical sets (Jones 1982), i.e. keywords that are representative of a group of words that share the same pronunciation patterns that are matched with a reflection on vowel pronunciation. In this way he raises awareness of sound-spelling correspondences and irregularities. Finally, together with his colleagues, Honorof (2003: 121-122) has put together a passage that contains a list of examples for practice: known as the "Comma gets a cure", this passage has been adopted by the International Dialects of English Archive, IDEA (https://www.dialectsarchive.com/).

Cynthia Blaise, too, is an academic but also an actress and director, as well as a voice and dialect coach, especially for the theatre. She also works as an editor for IDEA. In a very detailed account of her professional experience, which also describes set coaching, she explains that she prepares beforehand by noticing all

[3] In a very recent article aimed at describing strategies for helping actors deal with accent and linguistic matters in a way that is respectful of their identity (in terms of race and gender), reference is made to awareness of IPA symbols and skills of transcription so as to break down an accent/dialect (Coronel and Feliciano-Sanchez Moser 2020: 199).

the lines where dialect changes occur, because she "doesn't count on the actors to do this work" (Blaise 2003: 26). In this list of words, she does not normally use IPA symbols, but she relies on her own repertoire of tapes from her dialect collection. Sometimes, she clarifies that actors may appreciate her advice on vocal production, and that she may also instruct them regarding "syntax, inflection or stress, but this gets dangerously close to encroaching on acting choices" (2003: 26-27). This latter remark highlights how it is difficult to trace a boundary between the figure of the dialect coach and many other professional figures (e.g. director, scriptwriter, dialogue editor, first and second assistant directors) involved on set. Blaise also comments on most productions being in "dialect denial" because of the "the hurried nature of so much dialect work in film" (2003: 24).

In an interview, Penny Dyer (Carey 2003) confirms preparation about dialects she is not familiar with, supplemented with a bit of history about the area and phonological changes that have occurred in time. Her method includes starting by speaking in the required accent with the actor, while also providing him/her with some background information. Like Blaise, she uses a list of words to practice and then gives the actor recorded materials, i.e. some original speech in the accent, and some notes she recorded as guidance. Likewise, David Smukler, one of the senior voice teachers in the Canadian theatre, confirms that when starting every new job, he begins by "hunting down a native speaker of the dialect or rummaging through my tapes and reference materials" (Smukler 2003: 45). He then concentrates on the script by first identifying the key narrative features and secondly all the elements that might have an impact on the dialect and on how it contributes to character construction. Smukler exploits all possible instruments from IPA to cultural references to annotate the script in order to be ready to use all these elements with the actor, but the way he goes about actor coaching changes according to a set of variable parameters (e.g. the actor's experience with dialect, his/her technique, production time constraints, bias against dialect coaching, budget issues, etc.).

If the coach does not come either from academia or from the theatre or cinema, he/she may have background experience in speech therapy, as in the case of Roisin Carty, who has schooled

many famous stars in productions such as *Casino Royale* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Tims 2015)[4].

The ever-increasing popularity of the dialect coach has favoured the emergence of specific organisations that aim to provide detailed training programmes. Opened in 1986, New York's VASTA, the Voice and Speech Trainers Association, set out initially "to advance the cause of voice and speech training through the promotion of better training programs and the development of more highly trained voice and speech teachers" (VASTA 2021). The association gradually evolved and extended to sectors other than acting by means of annual conferences, embracing other professional figures for whom voice potential was relevant and attracting members beyond the US. The webpage provides links to similar organisations, including the British Voice Association (British Voice Association 2021). The BVA describe themselves as "an association of multi-disciplinary professionals who work to promote the field of voice in its broadest sense". They offer ample information regarding events and activities, as well as free resources and literature on several voice-related topics, including health, which seems to take priority over artistic issues. However, what is significant is that many associations and organisations have been established to ensure maximum professionalism in the training of actors, as, given the increase in the demand for dialect coaching, supply has also rocketed, especially on the web. To help actors navigate this sea of offers, associations such as VASTA also assist potential customers in finding a professional coach (see the "Find a Voice Pro Search" function on the VASTA homepage).

4. Dialect coaches at work: an overview through some case studies

In what follows we report some examples that we find particularly significant to outline the features of what is essentially a new job and its impact on audiences. We first report on experiences in

[4] An interesting example is Kate Firth, sister to Colin Firth, who has a solid background in voice and speech, psychosynthesis psychology, physiology, counselling and applied linguistics (https://katefirth.co.uk/). In addition to the support her brother received from the official voice coach of *The King's Speech*, Neil Swain (see "King's Speech voice coach 'proud' of Firth's stammer"), she provided advice, especially on the possible exercises Logue might have carried out with George VI and his therapeutic techniques (cf. various authors 2016).

Italy, which is far behind the Anglo-Saxon world in terms of actors' coaching. These tendencies should be further observed in the future to see whether the internationalisation of cinema and TV products will eventually push the Italian telecinematic industry to rely more and more regularly on the figure of the dialect coach. Afterwards, we review some different experiences dealing with various 'Englishes'.

4.1. A snapshot from Italy

The Italian situation is, at the time of writing, far less 'professionalised' than is the case with productions in the English-speaking world, and often left to the actors' and actresses' personal initiative. An exception are major international productions, such as, for example, the TV series *The Young Pope* by Paolo Sorrentino (2016), which was able to rely on a whole team of dialect coaches.

A well-known Italian actor[5], interviewed by the authors for the purpose of this research, stated that he applies the same method both in the case of dialects different from his own native one (the actor is from Padua, in the north of Italy) and in the case of films shot in a foreign language. He records the lines spoken with the correct pronunciation by the dialect coach three times: first slowly, then at medium speed and then at normal speed. He first concentrates on sound and only afterwards on sense. More specifically, in the case of English-language films (the actor was also cast by Peter Greenaway), he concentrates on stresses and liaisons.

Another actor that we interviewed, Giorgio Marchesi, whose credits include *Mission Impossible III* and the Italian version of Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia* at the theatre, focuses on speed with his dialect coach:

> Usually I find it very useful to have a first meeting where the coach gives the main rules of the language, reads all the lines giving the right pronunciation of the words and makes me write all the notes I need. The most important thing is then to record the lines at different speed so I can work on my interpretation and last corrections when I try to say the lines. I find the presence of the coach on set during shooting days very useful[6].

[5] The actor wishes to remain anonymous.

[6] The actor's experience, given in English, was partly amended to facilitate reading.

Of the twelve actors and actresses interviewed by the authors and involved in minor and major productions, only the ones quoted above referred to their experience with a dialect coach. The others admitted relying on more amateurish resources, such as asking friends who spoke that particular variety of dialect, or recording voices themselves.

4.2. Switching Englishes

In this section we would like to focus our attention on a particular kind of vocal performance which sees actors acquiring, with varying results, the accents of other Englishes, creating a "sonic spectacle" (Holliday 2015) that draws viewers' attention towards vocal craft and performance. This is what McDonald labels "the spectacle of prestige performance" (2013: 223).

As Dwyer (2018) reports in her analysis of *Top of the Lake*, a 2013 'quality' TV series set in New Zealand, directed and co-created by Jane Campion, the protagonist – the American actress Elisabeth Moss – adopts a highly debatable Antipodean accent. The scholar argues that Moss's "wobbly" accent makes audiences aware of her (and the production's) effort in cueing regional specificity and locale. In addition, Moss's vocal crafting in the series is linked to the increasing importance given to authentic place and to shooting on location in what Dwyer terms "post-broadcast television", in order to achieve more profound audience involvement. The scholar further argues (2018: 15) that "the series strategically deploys the local in order to craft a distinctive, post-broadcast mode of address and promotion 'able to resonate across borders'", as co-director Garth Davis states (quoted in Dillon 2013: 35).

One of the most striking examples of actors using an accent that is not their own but which is part and parcel of the character they portray is Renée Zellweger in the role of Bridget Jones. Even quite recently, when the actress was awarded a Golden Globe for her performance in *Judy* in January 2020, people were somehow surprised to hear her speak in a Southern twang (Gillian, 2020). The general public was probably not aware of the fact that Zellweger was born and raised in Texas, and certainly not of the initial negative reactions that casting her in Bridget's role caused. Director Sharon Maguire was worried about having Zellweger play the role of the

quintessentially British heroine developed by Helen Fielding but Zellweger was kept blissfully unaware of the hostility against her. London-based Barbara Berkery, former actress and already an acclaimed coach at the time, was asked to turn Zellweger into the essence of Britishness.

Berkery, trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, later took a voice-teaching class as a part-time scheme and started coaching actors in dialect and text for major West End productions. Subsequently she became head of the vocal department at the Drama Centre London. Her first important job as a coach was when she taught Kevin Kline to speak in Parisian-accented English for the film *French Kiss* (1995). She was offered the job by her colleague Joan Washington (known for her work on *Schindler's List* (1993), who was working on another film at the time. Interestingly, Berkery describes herself as unilingual, but able to master a plurality of languages she neither understands nor speaks. She has become a reference point for Hollywood stars needing to become fluent in RP or other British accents, after achieving very convincing results with both Zellweger and Paltrow (in *Emma* and *Shakespeare in Love*).

She shares an insight into her approach: "You must play a character who has an accent, but you must never play an accent", meaning that it is not a matter of mimicking (BBC 2008), but of giving shape to a credible character. So, when Zellweger was finally cast in the role, much to the discontent of UK actresses, Berkery met her for the first time in Covent Garden for a first session, which gave her an idea of how receptive the actress was. Afterwards Berkery travelled to Los Angeles to work with Zellweger for a few weeks before the latter moved to London to be fully immersed in London life. For Berkery an accent is like a second skin, something that is first acquired by learning a new way of speaking, by using one's speech organs in a precise way that then becomes more natural because one resorts to 'muscle memory'. Zellweger, who had never tried a British accent before, but was perhaps quite flexible thanks to her own upbringing and her European parents (her mother is Norwegian and her father Swiss), did not speak to anyone about the production until she appeared on set with a full-blown British accent. She had five weeks of full-time intensive coaching with Berkery, during which she practiced verbal exercises in the morning, working on the pronunciations of the twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs

of British English, while in the afternoon they would go around London putting everything into practice, e.g. having tea in various places (Cox 2013). Under the pseudonym of Bridget Cavendish, she was given a temporary job at the publicity department of Picador publishers, on the instruction of the film producers. When filming finally began, she was in command and even her male colleagues found her convincing, apart from minor criticism by Grant, who commented that "there were some early rehearsals where there was a touch of Princess Margaret – she'd gone a little bit posh?". Berkery did not agree and remarked that Renée was not plummy, but put on a 'media accent', that is the typical way of speaking that Home Counties girls use when they want to move into media. Colin Firth on the other hand remarked that Renée always spoke with Bridget's voice, for she "like[d] to stay in the accent". When he heard her native accent in Los Angeles, it sounded weird to him, as if her real 'voice' was the British accent he had known her with (Vincent 2016).

The reverse situation of Brits playing Americans is also very frequent and seems to be more and more so in recent years. Holliday interestingly observes that sometimes "the presence of 'Britishness' is abstracted: a spectre that looms large over the performance of Americanness as it is conveyed on-screen" (2015: 74). In other words, their being British is not forgotten and sometimes is self-consciously underlined within the narrative. Holliday further argues, quoting Thompson and his seminal taxonomy of 'quality TV' features (1996), that by such self-conscious strategies, quality TV series declare their superiority:

> The textual conflation of Britishness and American national identity contributes to the self-conscious aspect of contemporary quality television, a primary signifier of quality drawing upon latent Britishness for storytelling purposes. The portrayals of 'accented Americans' do not move entirely away from the actor's true nationality, but confront it by folding an abstract conception of Britishness back into the portrayal of Americanness (Holliday 2015: 74).

An interesting, and by certain respects unusual, example of British acting in American can be found in the film *King of Texas* (2002), which re-elaborates the Shakespearean hypotext of *King Lear*, setting the story in 19th century Texas and turning it into a

Western. Generally praised for his interpretation of the title role, Shakespearean actor Patrick Stewart was nonetheless criticised for his less than spot-on Texan accent:

> Good performances all around, especially by Stewart. It is unfortunate, however, that nothing could be done about his accent. Stewart has a fine voice. Trouble is he's, well, English. I think they would have been better off leaving things as they were. The Southwestern overlay sometimes distracted from the dialog by generating unintentional humor (comment by rickz-63, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0805268/ June 2002).

What follows, on the other hand, is praise from a blog which expresses an interesting interpretation of the contribution of the accented voice in this film:

> Instead of (abstract) France, the uneasy (and very real) treaty with Mexico looms across the border, and instead of Received Pronunciation (RP), everyone speaks with a Texan drawl. Which, honestly, I love about this movie. It's glorious. And it's not just that it's an unexpected and thus at first funny break from the expected convention. The effect was much stronger than that for me. Instantly, the accent underscores the setting, implies family ties and both warmth and pride, and grounds the characters in their culture. As ridiculous as it sounds at first, there is some strange magic going on there (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0282659/reviews).

For what concerns a variety which is more of a sociolect in British English, Valleriani (2021: 108-109) reports how the whole cast of *The Crown* (2016-in production) worked intensely with dialect coach William Conacher[7] in order to achieve the upper-crust accent typical of the Royal family. They were asked to pay special attention to the reproduction of vowel sounds. In this amusing interview excerpt (reported in Valleriani 2021), actors Claire Foy, Matt Smith and Vanessa Kirby share recollections of their language training, quoting typical markers of upper-class speech:

[7] For more on William Conacher's approach in training actors and actresses to reproduce accents, see Care (no date, https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/interviews-podcasts/perfecting-accent-work-withdialect-coach-william-conacher/, last accessed 26 May 2021) and Bow Street Academy (2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B6QKjm34IU&t=439s, last accessed 26 May 2021).

CLAIRE FOY: There's only one thing to know about that accent and it's that you need to say 'one' [wan]. How do you say 'was,' Matt?
MATT SMITH: Oh, don't get me started on 'was [wɒz]' and 'was [wɔz].' I mean, for God's sake. […] Well, 'was [wɔz]' was apparently the right way. […]
VANESSA KIRBY: It was such a weird accent to do and we ended up having to treat it like a dialect, because if you didn't, you ended up doing a sort of parody of posh accent […].
INTERVIEWER: Could you give me a line?
VANESSA KIRBY: (*in U-RP accent*) What would you like me to say [se:]? It becomes very easy [izɪ], because [bɪkɔz] you have to practice so much. […] Yeah, it's things like because [bɪkɔz], and, I don't know, actually [ɜkʧuəlɪ].

As regards the linguistic phenomenon of 'smoothing', which is among the most frequently used features by upper-class people, Foy later declared in another interview (*The Late Late Show with James Corden*) that the cast was systematically reminded to pronounce the word 'house' as [ha:s]. From the point of view of voice quality, Conacher taught Foy not to open her mouth too much, to relax her jaw and to allow only a limited space between her teeth, thus acquiring the peculiar 'plumminess' of the English upper class (Laneri 2017).

The "quest for socio-historical realism" (Ranzato 2018: 212) in this series is demonstrated, according to Valleriani (2021: 144), by the characters' adherence to the original counterparts in terms of rendition, for example, of single vowel sounds, typically expressed in the general raising of both front and back vowels as an indicator of this type of speech.

The allure of a well-orchestrated blend of regional and social accent is proven by another popular British TV series. The success of *Peaky Blinders* (2013-in production), popular with public and experts alike, depends to a large extent on the choice of the setting and the use of local language. The series is in fact mostly set in the city of Birmingham, which is not a typically used British setting and whose accent, 'Brummie', is one of the least appreciated of the British Isles, as reception studies demonstrate (Crystal 2010: 32). Even Jane Austen's words in *Emma*, in one of the author's rare references to nonstandard accents, show that the opinion was shared in older times: "They came from Birmingham, which is not

a place to promise much, you know, Mr. Weston. One has not great hopes from Birmingham. I always say there is something direful in the sound" (part 2, chapter 18).

According to writer Steven Knight, creator and producer of the series, the scarcity of film and TV productions set in the Eastern Midlands has much to do with the difficulty in portraying the local accent as faithfully as possible: "I've been banging on about doing stuff in Birmingham for years and years, and everyone says, 'We can't, it's the accent thing'. For some reason, it's a very difficult accent to get right, harder even than Geordie." (quoted in Laws 2014).

With the exception of the youngest of the Shelby brothers, played by actor Harry Kirton, none of the main cast in *Peaky Blinders* comes from Birmingham. This has implied careful work and practice by all of the actors with a dialogue coach. The result, in the course of (at the time of writing) 5 seasons of the series, has often been uneven. However, actress Helen McCrory strongly rejected criticism on the subject:

> We know the Georgians, we know the Victorians, we're very used to hearing people say, 'm'lord' and upstairs downstairs, but we've never seen Birmingham in the 20s and we've certainly never heard accents like this. Our accents are 20s Birmingham, you see, and I'd just like to say that now. If anyone's listening to my accent and thinking it's a crap Birmingham accent, it's not, it's spot on. And I challenge any octogenarian Brummie to contradict me in that (quoted in Hurst 2013).

Some evidence to confirm this is provided in an interview granted by director Anthony Byrne, in charge of the *Peaky Blinders*' fifth season[8]. Byrne first underlines the fact that training took place long before he arrived on the set, but also explains that:

> I don't think they ever went back to it, they may have done some brush ups on accents over the other seasons but I don't recall Cillian [Murphy] doing sessions with the dialect coach before he started season five which I directed. I think it was very much part of his work in developing the

[8] We acknowledge Saintain Tavella for including the interview in her 2019/2020 master's thesis on accents in *Peaky Blinders* at Sapienza University. The excerpts from Anthony Byrne's interview are quoted from her thesis.

character of Tommy Shelby and once he locked into the voice and the accent, he didn't really feel the need to go back to it.

Apart from Brummie, however, the last season features other interesting accents and dialects. When asked how the actors dealt with Scottish English, Byrne replied that a dialect coach, Jane Karen, was employed to help Brian Gleeson play the character of Jimmy McCavern. Byrne appreciates Gleeson's hard work, but his accent was criticised, especially by Scottish people. Concerning the gypsy dialect and Cillian Murphy's way of approaching his character, the director remarks that all the actors who speak Romani on screen "learnt it phonetically, transcribed and recorded on an Iphone. This is how the actors learnt the language in order to speak it convincingly on screen. Plus, Cillian Murphy spent some time with the Gypsies Romani at the beginning of the series to prepare for his role as Thomas Shelby".

The actors of another successful TV series, *Poldark* (2015-2019), are a testament to the fact that major film and TV productions carry out careful research which also deals with time specificities. Aiden Turner comments that "Poldark is a Cornish character, but the family was wealthy and well respected, and Ross would have gone to public school, so he probably wouldn't have had a Cornish accent. It made more sense not to have it. And I'm sure it made my life easier!" (Hegarty 2016). Audience members from Cornwall complained about the actors' accents: "Not only were they not very Cornish, they were also so mumbly as to render them almost inaudible". Actress Eleanor Tomlinson defended the cast in similar terms to those used by McCrory for *Peaky Blinders*, claiming they had been coached to do an 18th century accent, which is different from present-day Cornish. She explains that the cast had been taught by dialect coach Ben Trawick Smith to clench their jaw, as Cornish people living by the sea would have done to combat the wind, and this, combined with the salt, created a distinct sound (Merrington 2019).

The experiences included in this section of actors, directors and dialect coaches who had to tackle various varieties of English, show a pragmatic, hands-on attitude towards a craft which is still in the process of defining itself in its own professional terms.

5. Conclusions

What has clearly emerged from this rapid excursus is that the job of the dialect coach is widespread and acknowledged professionally nowadays. Despite differences in training and methodologies, coaches are resorted to whenever films involve accents and dialects that actors are unable to master. Given the recognised tendency to represent linguistic variation and multilingualism in audiovisual products, the ever-increasing recourse to dialect coaches in the Anglophone world comes as no surprise. This is also partly due to the fact that the English spoken by people living in distant parts of the world is far from homogenous, and in fact these national standards are better accounted for as 'Englishes'.

Incomparably different, as far as we could ascertain, is the situation in Italy, where international productions have started acknowledging the issue of authenticity in accent rendition only in fairly recent times, with the ensuing need for professional help to assist actors. Presumably, the picture will evolve rapidly in the near future, so the growing demand for dialect coaching needs to be monitored by means of interviews and personal contacts with various professional figures involved in the business. As we experienced during personal communication with Italian actors, and even more with the interview with the director of *Peaky Blinders*, the best way to understand what is crucial in coaching and what its narrative implications in the cinema are, lies in interviews and contact with professionals.

As we noted earlier, this is a craft which is still in the process of defining itself and finding its precise professional contours. However, this type of more focused and linguistically more grounded approaches to regional and social varieties in film and TV productions, epitomised by the growing importance of the dialect coach, is a testament to a philologically correct attitude which takes both lingua-cultural and time specificities into consideration in a quest to achieve authenticity.

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