

*CREATIVITY and INNOVATION
in
LANGUAGE STUDIES
1st International CILS Conference*

Doh is a perfectly cromulent word! Multimodal perspective on culture and phonology

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Abstract

Playing with the language is very common in comic books and in animated cartoons as well as in comedies. Family Guy (voiced by Seth MacFarlane) uses a Rhode Island accent, Bugs Bunny (voiced by Mel Blanc) a stage stereotype for a Brooklyn accent and Huckleberry Hound (voiced by Daws Butler) for a South-American accent, finally Homer Simpson's noises (voiced by Dan Castellaneta) have been published as neologisms in the OED. On the page many cartoonists employ a phonetic spelling that comes from both British and American literature (Blake N.F, 2006). Pogo, Krazy Kat and Popeye use an even more playful stage dialect that creates humour through the graphic features of typography. Bringing to the class some examples of the use of varieties and variants as part of appropriate considerations about phonological and cultural features as well as negative stereotypes is useful for various reasons. First of all the construction of humour could be based on racism, sexism and xenophobia and a strong accent is more than often used to stigmatize ethnic groups. Secondly a comparative listening task creates the basis for a better comprehension of a standard accent. This would introduce to topics related to malapropisms, synonyms and creative morphological use of the language. Finally multimodality (van Leeuwen 2005, and Machin 2007) should be considered when looking at texts that create meaning through non-linguistic, paralinguistic and linguistic features. Indeed learning to recognize reactional patterns (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001) in a film (McLan 2008), in advertising (Vasta 2000) and comics (Zanzei 2007) allows to ponder the truth value and the cultural contextualization of statements. This also implies a better understanding of a speaker's attitude which is a task often required in high stake language tests. The paper will illustrate examples.

*Università della Calabria - Italy
December 14th - 16th, 2009*