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Nobody Takes Us Canadians Serious!-eh!  
Linguistic and visual characterisation of Canadians in  
*South Park*

Abstract

This article seeks to investigate the linguistic, cultural and visual representation of Canadian characters in one of the most popular and “impolite” American animated sitcoms, *South Park*. References are made to Culpeper’s model of impoliteness, Grice’s Cooperative Principles, and the use of stereotyping as a means of characterisation in audiovisual products. A tendency towards oversimplifying everything that is attached to Canada and exaggerating the differences between American and Canadian characters has been found in all the episodes analysed, from a visual and linguistic perspective.

1. *Introduction*

Non-standard accents and dialects are often used in audiovisual products to convey social and geographical features of fictional speakers. Ranzato (2018a, b) has analysed the use of British accents as a way of representing (among other things) negative characters in contrast with positive characters, which are often portrayed with American accents. This work intends to contribute by investigating the use of the fictional Canadian accent in the series *South Park*. In audiovisual products, Canadian characters have often been portrayed as bizarre people who are linguistically and culturally differentiated from and contrasted with their American neighbours.

*The Simpsons, Corner Gas, Brother Bear, How I Met Your Mother, The Great White North, Zootopia* are just some examples of audiovisual products representing stereotyped Canadian characters. *South Park* has been selected for its consistency in portraying such characters. A corpus of six episodes and a full-length film will be considered:

- *Terrance and Phillip: not without my anus* (S2E1);
- *It's Christmas in Canada* (S7E15);
- *Canada on strike* (S12E4);
- *Royal Pudding* (S15E3);
- *Freemium isn't free* (S18E6);
- *Where my country gone?* (S19E2);
- *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (film).

The episodes have been singled out for their particularly significant contribution to the representation of Canadian characters. This article seeks to compare the sociolinguistic features of Standard Canadian English with their ficto-linguistic representation in the American sitcom. References will be made to Culpeper's model of impoliteness, Grice's Cooperative Principles, and the use of stereotyping as a means of characterisation in audiovisual dialogues. More precisely, this work focuses on ethnic or national stereotypes threatening Canadians' social identity face (Spencer-Oatey, 2002), taking into account the stereotypical Canadian accent, as well as several cultural and visual references.

## 2. Stereotypes

The term "stereotype" is a neoclassical compound deriving from the Greek words *stereos* (firm, solid) and *typos* (impression), "solid impression". Baker (2008) declares that stereotyping implies exaggerating the differences between the two poles of a binary

system, and reducing to a few traits the behaviour, speech and other characteristics of all the members belonging to the weakest pole. He adds that stereotyping occurs where there are significant inequalities of power. According to Giddens (2006), stereotypes are preconceived opinions of the members of a group towards the members of another group; they are very often unfounded and resistant to change, even when they are denied by the direct experience. He adds that most of the stereotypes originate from a psychological mechanism known as “displacement”, where an emotion or impulse is redirected from its original object to another. Schachter et al. (2014) define stereotyping as a process through which people make inferences about other individuals on the basis of their knowledge of the categories the others belong to. Although this is a fundamental process in everyday life – where past experience and mental schemata are of the utmost importance – it might turn into a negative process if stereotypes are inaccurate, overused, automatic and self-perpetuating. Labov (1972) states that stereotypes are socially marked forms, part of the general knowledge of adult members of the society. They are deeply rooted and hardly eradicable. Along similar lines, Hamilton and Sherman (1994) define stereotypes as a set of beliefs stored in memory as a cognitive structure, and Andersen et al. (1990) as “highly organised social categories that have the properties of schemata” (192). The latter add that stereotypes might not conform to any set of objective facts, and that they emerge from forms that have become the overt object of social comment, and have eventually disappeared.

Lippi-Green (2012) is of the opinion that media play an important role in reinforcing linguistic stereotypes and stigmatizing non-standard accents and dialects. According to Gross (1991), the use of stereotypes is a common practice in the process of media characterisation, since fictional characters are meant to be easily recognisable by the audience. Another scholar who has investigated

the use of stereotypes in audiovisual products is Hall (1999), who maintains that

stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. (258)

The selective nature of stereotyping is also at the basis of the process of representation; Ranzato and Zanotti (2018) declare that “representation is always the result of an act of selection of traits and features, both visual and verbal” (1). Hall (1997) ends up defining stereotyping as a “representational practice” (277). It is, thus, a shortcut geared towards easy characterisation. Kozloff (2000), a leading voice in the study of audiovisual dialogues, states that fictional speech is ruled by “issues of power and dominance, of empathy and intimacy, of class, ethnicity, and gender” (26). She adds that non-standard varieties are “ideologically potent”, and “are used onscreen to sketch in a character’s past and cultural heritage, to locate each person in terms of his or her financial standing, education level, geographical background, or ethnic group” (81).

### *3. South Park*

*South Park* is an American satirical animated sitcom created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone in 1997. The series revolves around four boys – Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman, and Kenny McCormick – and their adventures in and around the Colorado town, South Park. Despite its appearance, *South Park* is not a cartoon series for children. The show has often been criticised for its profanity and dark humour that satirises a wide range of topics, such as the clash between Americans and Canadians. Lindsay Coleman (2008) argues

that “*South Park*’s inclusion of offensive material functions as a means of satirically criticizing the real-life phenomena that this material signifies”, and that the creators “satirize the racism that still pervades American social life” (132). In a meta-cinematic play, in *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*, a vulgar television show starred by two fictitious Canadian actors – Terrance and Phillip – is broadcast in the imaginary American city, South Park. Two American spectators degrade all Canadians on the basis of Terrance and Phillip’s vulgar show, which is believed to have a negative influence on American children’s behaviour:

AMERICAN WOMAN: What garbage!

AMERICAN MAN: Well, what do you expect? They’re Canadian.

AMERICAN WOMAN: It seems that everything’s gone wrong since Canada came along!

Boyd et al. (2008) declare that “the idea of blaming the corruption of America’s youth on another country (especially Canada, long under the cultural dominance of the United States) is comically absurd” (62).

The series has been criticised for its “impoliteness”, which in this work acquires a technical connotation. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), linguistic impoliteness stems from Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). People have an identity face that they tend to preserve and promote in their social relations. Impoliteness originates when at least one FTA is used to attack people’s face. Criticism generally threatens people’s positive face (the want to be approved of), whereas requests threaten negative face (the want to be unimpeded). Culpeper – who has applied the model of impoliteness to the study of dramatic language – defines impoliteness as “a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts” (2011, 254); he adds that impoliteness comes about when the speaker communicates face-

attack intentionally, and the hearer perceives the FTA as intentionally face-attacking. Therefore, intentionality is fundamental in distinguishing intentional cases of impoliteness – where somebody intends to offend with full awareness – from cases where somebody accidentally causes offence. Identity face referring to a group – e.g. ethnic, religious, nationality groups – has been called social identity face (Spencer-Oatey, 2002), and involves any group that a person is a member of and is concerned about. The aforementioned dialogue between the two American spectators is a clear example of an FTA threatening social identity face; Terrance and Phillip’s vulgarity is extended to all the Canadians by flouting Grice’s maxim of quality – “try to make your contribution one that is true” (1975, 36). As is consistently shown in Culpeper’s (2011) book on Impoliteness, Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principles are generally flouted when speakers perform FTAs, since they intentionally decide not to cooperate with their hearers. All the instances provided in the following sections are examples of intentional FTAs affecting Canadians’ social identity face, both from a visual and linguistic perspective. Culpeper’s (2005) definitions of positive and negative impoliteness are not mere negations of Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative politeness. Positive impoliteness is rather defined as “the use of strategies designed to [...] ignore the other, exclude the other from an activity, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, use inappropriate identity markers, [...] seek disagreement, use taboo words” (41). Negative impoliteness is defined as “the use of strategies designed to [...] scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other’s space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect” (41). Furthermore, using Culpeper’s terminology, FTAs addressed to Canadians are “bald on record” – they are performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way – and

“without redressive actions” – they do not pay the least attention to the other’s face.

#### 4. Visual code

Straight lines and rectangular shapes characterise everything that is related to Canada, from people’s bodies, to animals, flowers, cars and objects that are round by definition (e.g. wheels). Everything is oversimplified in Canada, even the roads. In *It’s Christmas in Canada* (S7E15), Canada is said to have one road – *The Only Road* – going all over the country from East to West. In all the episodes and the film, American characters have human features, whereas Canadians are portrayed in a more simplistic way, with two black dots instead of realistic eyes, and Pac-Man-like, square heads cut at the level of the mouth. In *Terrance and Phillip: behind the blow* (S5E5), while Terrance and Phillip are performing, an American woman in the audience asks her American husband:

AMERICAN WOMAN: Oh my God, what's wrong with their heads?!

AMERICAN MAN: It's alright, darling, they're just Canadian.

Furthermore, in *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, the American founder of the movement “Mothers Against Canada” declares:

You Canadians are all the same. With your beady little eyes and flapping heads. You're trash! Blame Canada! With all their beady little eyes and flappin' heads so full o' lies! Canadians want to fight us, because we won't tolerate their potty-mouths.

As in the example analysed before, in these two instances Canadians’ social face is threatened by flouting Grice’s maxim of quality. Moreover, in the latter examples, also Grice’s maxim of relevance is flouted – “be relevant” (46) – since there is no relevant connection between the shape of Canadians’ heads and their nationality. The

mere physical appearance is used to disparage Canadians, who “are all the same”. There is no physical differentiation among Canadians, and they are – allegedly – of an inferior ethnicity when compared to Americans; they are “trash”. In an interview, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the producers of *South Park*, declared that during a trip to Toronto they decided to differentiate American from Canadian characters because “that's just the way they (Canadians) all look up there” (2014). In *Terrance and Phillip: Not Without My Anus* (S2E1), Ugly Bob, a Canadian character who is believed to be ugly and wears a paper bag on his head to hide his countenance, introduces himself to Saddam Hussein, the new Canadian Prime Minister, in the following way:

UGLY BOB: I'm Bob. But my friends call me Ugly Bob, because I have the features of a deformed burn victim.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: Really? I thought all Canadians looked alike.

Not only can Americans spot Canadians, but also Canadians themselves are able to recognise other Canadians on the basis of stereotypical and unfounded physical features. Therefore, Canadians are not only the object of derision, but they are also portrayed as self-mocking characters. In *Royal Pudding* (S15E3), Ugly Bob and Ike, both Canadians living in South Park, leave the US to reach Canada to fight for their endangered nation. They recognise each other as Canadians because of their physical aspect. Ugly Bob explains that he used to be called Ugly when he was in Canada, where he was considered as such, but in the US his ugliness corresponds to his nationality. Ugliness – a negative physical feature – is associated with (all) Canadians' physical aspect.

UGLY BOB: Hey. Hey there. [*Ike turns his head to look back at Bob*] You going to Canada too? [*leaves his seat and moves over to Kyle*] What am I saying? Of course you're going to Canada. You're Canadian, sure enough. [...] I'm from Toronto originally, but everywhere I went people were terrified by my disfigurement. I



have to wear this bag on my head because I'm hideously ugly. Had to move here to the United States. Here, people don't think I look ugly. They just think I look Canadian.

In the episodes showing Canadian characters, “pseudo-satire depicts real-world motifs in arbitrary, apparently meaningless ways” (Frim, 2014: 155). The visual representation of Canada and Canadians bears no connection to real-life Canada. The use of rectangular shapes as a means of portraying Canadian objects, landscape and human beings is completely unfounded.

### *5. Linguistic code*

The linguistic variety that is analysed in this article is a fictional representation of the Canadian accent. Ferguson (1998) has coined the term *ficto-linguistics* to describe how languages function within literary texts:

by ficto-linguistics I mean the systems of language that appear in novels and both deviate from accepted or expected socio-linguistic patterns and indicate identifiable alternative patterns congruent to other aspects of the fictional world. (3)

Hodson adds that “the terms ficto-linguistics can be extended to include the study of language varieties in all works of fiction, including narrative poetry, film and television” (2014, 14). Pavesi (2015) maintains that audiovisual speech is non-spontaneous and pre-fabricated; it is inauthentic orality, a mere imitation of spontaneous spoken language. Audiovisual dialogue is an “inaccurate” imitation of natural conversation, which has been

scripted, written and rewritten, censored, polished, rehearsed, and performed. The actual hesitations, repetitions, digressions, grunts,

interruptions, and mutterings of everyday speech have either been pruned away, or, if not, deliberately included” (Kozloff, 2000: 18).

Every pejorative element attached to the fictional Canadian accent is to be seen as a way of mocking fictional Canadian characters, in light of *South Park*'s American-centrism. In the sitcom, American English is portrayed as a “nobler” variety of English, and the Canadian accent as an odd way of pronouncing it.

### 5.1 Rhoticity vs Non-rhoticity

In *South Park*, Canadians speak with a different accent when compared to American characters. The term *accent* should be differentiated from *dialect*: the former “simply refers to pronunciation; [...] (the latter), on the other hand, has to do also with the grammatical forms that you use, as well, perhaps, as any regional vocabulary that you employ” (Trudgill, 1994: 7). The main feature that stands out is the non-rhotic realisation of postvocalic and final /r/. The producers declared that Terrance and Phillip, the first Canadian characters of the series, “weren't necessarily Canadian. We thought Terrance and Phillip were probably like, British or something, and then they just became Canadian out of necessity” (2014). Their British accent started being associated with Canada, revitalising the stereotype according to which Standard Canadian English (SCE) is closer to Standard British English (SBE) than Standard American English (SAE), which is, of course, an oversimplification. Boberg (2010) maintains that

in addition to its colonial and post-colonial relations with Britain, Canada has naturally had a close relationship throughout its history with the US. As Canada's historical ties to Britain have weakened, those to the US have become stronger (30).

He adds that despite Canada's former status as a British colony and member of the British Commonwealth, SCE is influenced by extensive exposure to SAE, which arises from the geographical position of Canada in the top half of North America, and the many historical, cultural and economic ties between Canada and the US. Trudgill (2006) has foregrounded dialect mixing resulting from different combinations of American and British input as a crucial component in the crystallization of Canadian English, but the influence SAE is having on SCE because of the geographical proximity, travel, business, television and popular culture is undeniable. Despite this, almost all the Canadian characters in the series are portrayed with a British accent, which further simplifies Canadians, who lack an individual linguistic differentiation. What linguists call idiolects – the speech of one person – of Canadian characters are eclipsed by their stereotyped “community speech”. The non-rhotic accent is a false reproduction of SCE, which is a rhotic variety of the English language. Both SCE and SAE differentiate themselves from the other main World Englishes of the Southern Hemisphere – Australian, New Zealand and South-African Englishes – mainly in the realisation of postvocalic and final /r/. North American varieties and those of the Southern Hemisphere have been influenced by SBE in different centuries. In the US and Canada, /r/ is always preserved in postvocalic (e.g. farm /farm/) and final positions (e.g. car /kar/), whereas in non-rhotic varieties in the Southern Hemisphere, and in SBE it is not retained. According to Beal (2010), the loss of rhoticity in English can be traced back to eighteenth-century London English, where it was perceived as a vulgarism until the first decade of the twentieth century, when it was recognised as a feature of RP. In the early twenty-first century, the rhotic pronunciations started being marked as non-standard in England. According to Deterding (2010) the pronunciation that is

found in the different anglophone areas can to a certain extent be predicted on the basis of two factors: when the settlers left Britain, and where they came from. Therefore, most speakers in the US and Canada have a rhotic accent because the original settlers left England at a time when rhoticity was the norm throughout most of the country; furthermore, many of the early immigrants came from the west of England, Scotland and Ireland, which still have mainly rhotic accents. In contrast, migration to the Southern Hemisphere took place later, mostly in the nineteenth century, by which time the standard pronunciation in England was nonrhotic, and most of the settlers were from the south-east of England, especially London, where rhoticity is not generally found.

## *5.2 Canadian Raising*

The most evident feature of the accent of Canadian characters is Canadian Raising. SCE differs from SBE and SAE in the pronunciation of the diphthongs [ou] and [ay] when preceding a voiceless consonant. The former, in words like “house” and “out”, is not pronounced as /aʊ/, with an open front unrounded vowel, but as /ʌʊ/, with an open-mid back unrounded vowel; the latter, in words like “wife” and “type”, is not pronounced as /aɪ/, but as /ɛɪ/. This phenomenon originated in the sixteenth century, when the first British settlers arrived in Canada, and significant changes were still occurring in the English vowel system. A similar tendency has been found in Scottish English, and many scholars agree with the fact that Canadian Raising is due to the influence that Scottish immigrants had on the Canadian variety. Trudgill (2006), for instance, is of the opinion that Canadian Raising originated in the primordial mix of transplanted dialects in the early history of Canadian English, while Bailey (1982) considers it to be a distinctive Canadian development.

In *South Park*, this linguistic feature is exaggerated in line with the stereotype according to which Canadians apparently say /ə'bu:t/ (“about”, with a close back rounded vowel) instead of /ə'baʊt/ (“about”), which is true up to a certain extent. Stereotyped forms are based on a divorce from the forms which are actually used in speech (Labov, 1972), that is on forms that no longer occur in real-life language use. Canadian Raising is not a consistent feature of Canadian English as the series shows, yet it “continues to be the basis of the most popular American stereotype of Canadian speech, at least as it applies to /aw/” (Labov, 2005). Canadian Raising characterises the speech of only certain areas of Canada, and is certainly disappearing among the youngest generations. In *Canada on strike* (S12E4), the president of the World Canadian Bureau, Stephen Abootman (note his surname, reproducing the pronunciation of the diphthong [ou]), after realising that no one cares about Canada, announces a national strike to seek more international attention. Among the banners showed during the strike, some say “It’s about time!”, where the peculiar pronunciation is put down in black and white. This is an example of what Hodson (2014) calls *semi-phonetic respelling*, which is a literary technique that authors use to reproduce non-standard accents. According to Hodson, the representation of different varieties of English in fictional texts is approached through three levels: sound, vocabulary and grammar. She adds that sound is the most significant feature of dialect representation. Semi-phonetic respelling attempts to respell a word in a non-standard pronunciation so that when reading that word, it sounds non-standard. Another common technique is *eye-dialect*, which is a “dialect to the eye but not to the ear; [...] it gives the impression of being dialectal when the reader looks at it” (Hodson, 2014: 95). The word “enouf”, for instance, is eye-dialect for “enough” because it does not change the pronunciation but hints at the fact that the speaker has a non-standard accent. According to

Preston (1985, 328), this technique is used "to denigrate the speaker so represented by making him or her appear boorish, uneducated, rustic, gangsterish, and so on". In *South Park*, there are only few visual representations of non-standard pronunciations, which tend to be semi-phonetic respellings.

In the sitcom, *Canadian Raising* occurs every time a Canadian character speaks, but it is in *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* that this linguistic feature is overtly ridiculed. The Canadian ambassador is mocked by the American ambassador for his pronunciation of the word "about":

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR: We don't know what all the fuss is about.

CANADIAN AMBASSADOR: The fuss is about taking our citizens. It's about not censoring our art. It's about... [*the American delegation begins to crack up*] It's about... [*scans the room*] What's so God-damned funny?

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR: [*recovering*] N-nothing, nothing. Uh, could you tell us again what your argument is all about?

CANADIAN AMBASSADOR: This is not about diplomacy, this is about dignity... [*the American delegates chuckle*] This is about respect. This is about realizing that humor is... [*the American delegation cracks up again*]

In the previous dialogue, the American ambassador performs an FTA threatening the Canadian ambassador's social face; it is an example of what Culpeper (2005) calls "negative impoliteness", since it is designed to "ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other" (41). The American ambassador cracks up and chuckles at the Canadian's pronunciation of the word "about", and he even asks the Canadian ambassador to repeat what he has just said with the mere purpose of making fun of his accent.

### 5.3 Eh?

According to Gold and Tremblay (2006), the pragmatic particle “eh?” is “a marker of both the Canadian English dialect and of Canadian national identity”. Orkin (1973, 35) declares that

*eh?* rhymes with hay. The great Canajan<sup>67</sup> monosyllable and shibboleth, “eh?”, is all things to all men. Other nations may boast their interjections and interrogative expletives - such as the Mare Can<sup>68</sup> “huh?”, the Briddish<sup>69</sup> “what?”, the French “hein?” - but none of them can claim the range and scope of meaning that are encompassed by the simple Canajan “eh?”. Interrogation, assertion, surprise, bewilderment, disbelief, contempt — these are only the beginning of “eh?” and already we have passed beyond the limitations of “huh?”, “what?” and “hein?” and their pallid analogues.

This expression became popular in Canada in the 1980s thanks to a television series called *The Great White North*, with its protagonists Bob and Doug McKenzie, who sprinkled their dialogues with eh’s. Although this expression is also common in some British varieties, some specific uses of it can be found only in Canada. The different nuances of “eh?” depend on the intonation with which it is uttered. Gibson (1998, 30-31) has classified eight different types of eh? (Table 1):

Function	Sample Sentence
Reversed polarity	That should be okay, eh? (= shouldn’t it?)
Constant polarity	A: He said “eh” twice. B: Oh, he said “eh”, eh? (= did he?)
Imperative	Look at that, eh!
Exclamation	What a drag, eh?

<sup>67</sup> Canajan > Canadian

<sup>68</sup> Mare Can > American

<sup>69</sup> Briddish > British

Polar interrogative	(Did) you see the game last night, eh?
Wh- question	What are you trying to say, eh?
Pardon	Eh?
Anecdotal (narrative eh)	He went from building, eh, to building.

*Table 1 Gibson's eight types of "eh?" (1977)*

Wright (2006) has added (Table 2):

Insult	You're a real snob, eh!
Accusation	You took the last piece, eh!
Fixed expression	Thanks, eh! / I know, eh!

*Table 2 Wright's additions (2006)*

Apparently, French-Canadian people tend to use "eh?" mostly with the "pardon" function. This might be due to the influence that the French expression "hein?" has on them. Furthermore, "eh?" is stereotypically associated with male, uneducated, working-class speakers.

In *Canada on Strike* (S12E4), a Canadian woodcutter declares "it's like the world doesn't respect Canada at all, eh?", a banner says "honk for Canada eh!", where "eh" is used with its exclamative function. In addition to this, an ice hockey player affirms "nobody takes us Canadians serious!eh!", where the expression "eh" becomes a suffix replacing the morpheme -ly used for adverbs. In linguistics, grammatical morphemes are stronger than lexical morphemes, and changes in grammar are infinitely slower than in vocabulary. The replacement of the grammatical suffix -ly with -eh is a good representation of the strength of linguistic stereotypes. In *It's Christmas in Canada* (S7E15), Steve, a fisherman from Newfoundland – allegedly, all the people living in Newfoundland are



fishermen – speaks slowly and with many pitch changes, which make his accent very melodious. Note the significant repetition of the expression “eh?”:

STEVE: Oh yeah, the Prime Minister, eh? He sure has screwed up things for Newfoundland. Life just hasn't been the same since he made sodomy illegal. [...]

STEVE: We could always take my boat, eh? [...]

STEVE: We gave it our best, but our best wasn't good enough, eh?

The fisherman from Newfoundland, furthermore, uses the possessive adjective “me” instead of “my”, as is common in Ireland, Scotland and the dialects in the North and West of England, where most of the first settlers came from:

STEVE: I can sodomize me boys again.

Besides, in *Royal Wedding* (S15E3), after the princess of Canada is kidnapped during the Royal Wedding, Canadians organise demonstrations to get her back. A banner is shown with “Come back to us, eh!” written on it, where “eh” is used with its imperative function.

#### *5.4 French-Canadian speakers*

In 1535 the French explorer Jacques Cartier reached St. Lawrence river and sailed upriver, discovering an indigenous village in what is now Montréal. A century later, French explorers returned to Canada under the leading of Samuel de Champlain, and decided to settle in what was called Acadia, the current Maritime Provinces. Montréal was founded in 1642, and the area corresponding to Québec was called Nouvelle France.

In *It's Christmas in Canada* (S7E15), several Canadian areas are shown from West to East. Québec is the most bizarre of all of them. Typical French folk music is played, and French and Québécois stereotypes are attached to people: they are mimes, painters wearing berets and having moustaches, people playing accordions, and ice hockey players. Furthermore, shops' signs are written in French, such as "Pâtisserie" and "Berets". As can be seen in the following dialogue, French-Canadians are often depicted as patriotic and independentists. They believe Québec is the real Canada, "za bezt Canada in ze land". From a linguistic point of view, French influences English pronunciation and vocabulary:

FRENCH-CANADIANS: *[Before them, lots of French Canadians cavort like it's Euro Disney, with circus performers of all stripes doing what they do best.]* There'z no Canada like French Canada, it'z za bezt Canada in ze land. Ze ozer Canada is hardly Canada. If you lived here for a day, you'd understand.

MIME: Honh honh honnnh! Welcome to French Canada.

ICE HOCKEY PLAYER: We have everyzing your heart could desire. Trapezes. Trampolines. And lots and lots of cheese.

PAINTER: *[takes off his mustache]* Would you like a moustache?

RICK : Just stay calm, boys. French Canadians are a little... odd.

MIME: You cannot pass through French Canada unless you take zat phone call! Ring-ring. Ring-ring.

KYLE: Hello?

MIME: Allo. If you are going to see za new Prime Minister, then I want to go with you. He has passed a new law forbidding us French Canadians to drink wine.

PAINTER: How can ze French not drink wine?? Travestie!

The voiceless and voiced dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in French. They are generally pronounced as /z/ by French speakers, such as in [ze] for "the", [ozer] for "other", [zat] for "that". The voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ as well is often pronounced as a voiced alveolar fricative /z/, as it happens in French ([bez] for "best"). The word "wine" is slightly nasalised, and the term "moustache" is pronounced with a French accent, [mu'staʃ]. In

addition to this, when the mime answers the phone, he says “âllo” instead of “hello”, which is the French expression used when picking up the receiver. Moreover, in *Canada on strike* (S12E4), the Canadian President has a French accent and mispronounces the alveolar trill /r/ as a voiced labial-velar approximant /w/ (pwesident, fwend), as does the minister of mobile gaming in *Freemium isn't free* (S18E6), who says “oh, it's tewific”, and pronounces the name Phillip with the accent on the last vowel, as in French. [w] is the visual representation of the French voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/.

It is worth noticing that not only does the discrimination against Canada originate in the US – as is shown explicitly in *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, where an American man declares “They're not even a real country anyway! – but also within Canada itself, between French Canadians and anglophone Canadians, as well as between Canadians and First Nations, the predominant indigenous peoples in Canada. They are reproduced as wearing hides, furs, using spears to hunt, and writing on animals' skin using mysterious symbols. The hatred between Canadians and First Nations is reciprocated: the former consider First Nations as primitive, uncivilised, whereas the latter see Canadians as a threat to their survival; they also see themselves as the authentic Canadians, living in Canada since before the arrival of the civilised Europeans.

CANADIAN MAN: God-damned Native Canadians! Think they run the world. [...] Before the noble white man arrived, Canada was populated with these snow monkeys!

UGLY BOB: He (the native Canadian) says Eskimos do hate us Canadians.

Note that First Nations are depicted as “monkeys”, which represent the human preceding evolutionary stage, whereas Canadians are believed to descend from the “noble white man”. In this case, in the binary system Canadians-First Nations, the former represent the more powerful pole; therefore, the Canadian man threatens First

Nations' social face "explicitly associat(ing) the other with a negative aspect" (Culpeper, 2005: 41).

### 5.5 Merger of /or/ and /owr/

A further feature that differentiates SCE from SAE is the pronunciation of words like *sorry*, *tomorrow*, which are not pronounced as /'sari/ and /tə'mɔrou/, with an open back unrounded vowel /ɑ/ as it happens in SAE, but as /'sɔri/ and /tu'mɔrou/, with an open-mid back rounded vowel /ɔ /. According to Boberg (2010), the merger of /or/ and /owr/ in "sorry" and "sore" is virtually complete in Canada, and saying "sore-ry" for "sorry" is a true Canadianism. Rhoticity has caused several mergers having a significant effect on the sound of SCE. Mergers happen mainly in ambisyllabic /r/ environments, where /r/ occupies both the coda of the preceding syllable and the onset of the following syllable (e.g. soR-Ry).

Although in *South Park* this linguistic item is less consistent than the other features analysed in the previous sections, a clear reference to it is made in *Where my country gone?* (S19E2). A Canadian girl is talking to his American boyfriend to apologise for her father's bad attitude towards him:

CANADIAN GIRL: I'm sore-y.

AMERICAN BOY: What's sore-y?

CANADIAN GIRL: Well, that's what Canadians say to express remorse.

The American boy does not recognise as English the standard term "sorry" because of his girlfriend's Canadian pronunciation. The way the girl explains the meaning of the word resembles the kind of explanation that is generally given to foreign words. At the end of

the episode, the American boy appropriates his Canadian girlfriend's accent to ape her pronunciation:

AMERICAN BOY: You don't have to be sore-y. It's me who should be sore-y.

## 6. Conclusions

Much research has been done on the use of fictional, non-standard varieties in audiovisual products, with particular attention to British and American accents and dialects (i.e. Lippi-Green, 1997; Bruti et al., 2016; Ranzato, 2018a, b). This paper has sought to contribute by investigating the way SCE is used as a mean of linguistic characterisation in one of the most popular American sitcoms. As has been mentioned in the Introduction, many are the films and series where the Canadian accent is used. Nevertheless, *South Park* has been selected for its popularity and consistency in representing the linguistic, cultural and visual clash between Canadian and American characters. The fact that *South Park* is an American sitcom, produced by Americans is not to be forgotten. In the series, Americans distance themselves from Canadians by representing them as linguistically, culturally and visually different people. Referring to *South Park*, Keyes declares that "Canada is a place peopled by a race with distinguishing facial features, a penchant for scatological humour, vaguely British accent, and European names" (2009: 150). The representation of Canadians is not free from stereotypes, as well as a superiority complex shown by Americans. In *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*, an American man declares that Canada is "not even a real country anyway". This is not surprising given the satirical vein of the sitcom, always deriding anything and anyone. In a binary system, Americans represent the positive pole, whereas Canadians the negative one, which implies a

power imbalance where the negative pole is the one that becomes focused on (Baker, 2008).

*South Park* is well known and much criticised for its impoliteness, which has acquired a more technical connotation in this article. The impoliteness model, mainly developed by Culpeper in the investigation of dramatic language, has been adapted to this study to retrace the strategies that have been used to mock Canadian characters. This model is strictly linked with Grice's Cooperative Principles, whose maxims of quantity and relevance are consistently flouted to threaten Canadians' social identity face. Linguistically, it should be borne in mind that fictional languages are not faithful representations of how linguistic varieties are spoken in real life. As has been explained in the previous sections, there is a clear difference between sociolinguistic and ficto-linguistic representations of a language. Besides, it should be remembered that what this article has investigated is the accent (and not the dialect) of Canadian characters, that is the pronunciation they are portrayed with. In *South Park*, the sociolinguistic features of SCE have gone through a process of stereotyping, which implies either exaggerating or oversimplifying SCE features. SCE as represented in *South Park* is a parody of it, where linguistic features such as Canadian Raising, the pragmatic particle "eh?" – currently receding amongst young speakers – and the merger of /or/ and /owr/ are overused to differentiate the variety from SAE and make it immediately recognisable by the audience. Canadian Raising is also represented in the written language with what Hodson (2014) defines *semi-phonetic respelling*, a fictional technique used to respell a standard word according to its non-standard pronunciation. SCE shares many features with SAE, especially at the level of pronunciation; both varieties, for instance, are rhotic, which is not the case in *South Park*, where SCE is represented as a non-rhotic

variety, a strategy used to further distance Americans from Canadians.

Oversimplification also affects the visual representation of Canadian characters, the elements of the landscape, the objects. It has been shown that the visual representation of Canada is completely unfounded, bearing no connection to real-life Canada. Unlike Americans, Canadians are not portrayed as human beings but as people with two black dots instead of realistic eyes, square heads cut at the level of their mouths that flap up and down whenever they speak. Furthermore, they are not represented as individuals with their own personalities, but as social types: they are ice hockey players, woodcutters, fishermen, First Nations and French mimes. In addition to this, not only does the “ghettoisation” of Canadian characters originate from the attitude Americans have towards their Northern neighbours, but also among Canadians themselves. The American creators have portrayed Canadian characters reiterating the same stereotypes that are generally attached to them. They are represented as self-mocking characters, as is the case with Ugly Bob and Ike who recognise themselves as Canadians because of their physical aspect. This strategy seems to further belittle the way Canadian characters are represented in the sitcom.

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