



Routledge Studies in Linguistics

THE LANGUAGE OF POP CULTURE

Edited by
Valentin Werner



The Language of Pop Culture

This collection brings together contributions from both leading and emerging scholars in one comprehensive volume to showcase the richness of linguistic approaches to the study of pop culture and their potential to inform linguistic theory building and analytical frameworks. The book features examples from a dynamic range of pop culture registers, including lyrics and language of fictional TV series, comics, and musical subcultures, as a means of both providing a rigorous and robust description of these forms through the lens of linguistic study but also in outlining methodological issues involved in applying linguistic approaches. The volume also explores the didactic potential of pop culture, looking at the implementation of pop culture traditions in language learning settings. This collection offers unique insights into the interface of linguistic study and the broader paradigm of pop culture scholarship, making this an ideal resource for graduate students and researchers in applied linguistics, English language, media studies, cultural studies, and discourse analysis.

Valentin Werner is assistant professor of English and historical linguistics at the University of Bamberg. His recent publications include two books on the present perfect (2014, 2016), a co-edited special issue of the *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research* (2018), and contributions to journals such as *English Language and Linguistics*, *English World-Wide*, and *Corpora*.

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First published 2018
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-05170-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-16821-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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Acknowledgments

As the work and expertise of many people have helped to make the present volume become a reality, I would like to express my sincere thanks.

The organizers (Marcin Krygier, Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, Joanna Pawelczyk, Justyna Rogos-Hebda, and Anna Antkowiak) of the fourth meeting of the *International Society for the Linguistics of English* titled “English in a Multilingual World: Challenges and Perspectives,” held in September 2016 at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland, were daring enough to accept a thematic workshop on pop culture and linguistics into their program. At this occasion, the majority of papers, now included in the volume, were presented for the first time, and ideas were discussed and developed further. This was fostered both by a friendly atmosphere among the workshop participants and by a highly involved audience.

In addition, thanks are due to a longer list of scholars from what could be labeled the expanding “linguistics of pop culture community” who volunteered as referees for individual contributions. Constructive criticism and recommendations for changes were provided by Mansoor Al-Surmi, Salvatore Attardo, Joan Beal, Monika Bednarek, Lukas Bleichenbacher, Marie-Louise Brunner, Katie Crowder, Stefan Diemer, Andy Gibson, Theresa Heyd, Natalia Levshina, Miriam Locher, Christian Mair, Andy Müller, Peter L. Patrick, Barbara Pizziconi, Andrea Sand, Dušan Stamenković, Christina Sanchez-Stockhammer, Friederike Tegge, Joe Trotta, Fabian Vetter, Janina Wildfeuer, and Franciso Yus. With their expert input, they substantially contributed to further increase the quality of the individual chapters.

For help and advice during the publication, I would like to say thanks to two anonymous reviewers who provided helpful suggestions on the contents and structure of the overall volume, and to the editorial team at Routledge, represented by Allie Simmons, Elysse Preposi, Melissa Brown Levine, and Chris Matthews, who—with their outstanding professionalism—ensured a smoothly running production process.

Part I

Context



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1 Linguistics and Pop Culture

Setting the Scene(s)

Valentin Werner

The present volume starts from the general observation that the language of pop culture (LPC) represents an understudied subject area—both in general and in linguistics as an empirical scholarly discipline. This is highly surprising given the ubiquity and high social relevance commonly assigned to pop culture (Kaiser and Sina 2016, 180). It seems even more surprising that the study of LPC is largely ignored in English linguistics specifically, as English has become the prime LPC in today's multilingual world. The understudied nature of LPC is shown by the facts (i) that pop registers (such as lyrics, language of fictional TV series, and language of comics and cartoons) scarcely feature among the text categories included in any of the general reference corpora of English; (ii) that the number of empirical studies explicitly devoted to LPC has been growing (see further Section II.1), but still is comparatively scarce; and (iii) that the linguistic perspective is at times combined with some kind of aesthetic evaluation. This association with ephemeral “low culture” status may be seen as the main rationale that pop culture (PC) artifacts have been neglected as an object of empirical linguistic inquiry or have even been subject to ridicule. Publications such as *Crap Lyrics: A Celebration of the Very Worst Pop Lyrics of All Time . . . Ever* (Sharp 2009) or *The Grammar of Rock: Art and Artlessness in 20th Century Pop Lyrics* (Theroux 2013)—both dealing with lyrics as a case in point—nicely illustrate this state of affairs.

While it would be exaggerated to claim that LPC does not have a place in applied linguistics at all, a second point of departure is provided by the fact that its didactic potential, despite early attempts heralding its power (see Section III), has largely been underexploited for the (second) language instruction of English and other languages, as tasks involving LPC are regularly relegated to “fun” activities—that is, generally speaking, those not regarding the introduction and exercise of “hard” grammatical structures situated at the end of lessons and units. However, this may also be due to a lack of adequate description of LPC, as indicated earlier, in the first place.

In essence, what unites both the descriptive and applied linguistic dimension is that the treatment of LPC is hardly recognized as a serious, and therefore academically overly worthwhile, endeavor. To address this issue,

it is the overall aim of this volume to showcase the various facets of LPC “in action” and thus to bring the study of LPC closer to the mainstream of linguistic analysis. As regards the applied side, it seeks to reveal the latent didactic potential of LPC manifestations to further the instruction of English to speakers of other languages.

This introductory chapter can mainly be viewed as an attempt at contextualizing the linguistic study of LPC, both relating to linguistics as a discipline and to the study of culture more generally. To achieve this, in what follows, it will first define “pop” and discuss PC both as a globalized and linguistic phenomenon. In addition, it will present a selective overview of extant research on LPC, also outlining limitations of a linguistic approach to LPC, but eventually arguing for why the linguistic study of LPC is worthwhile and carries the potential for providing a unique contribution to the study of PC artifacts from a broader perspective. For summaries of the contents of the individual studies featured in the volume, please refer to the abstracts at the beginning of each chapter. Note further that the final commentary by Monika Bednarek contains an overall assessment of common threads and issues emerging from the contributions.

I Pop Culture as Globalized Media and Entertainment Culture

Given the pervasiveness and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, as well as a comparatively short tradition of research (spanning around 40 years) on PC in general, it is not surprising that a multitude of definitions from various scholars (notably from a cultural studies background) exist of what can be considered “pop” and PC. While I do not claim to provide an exhaustive overview of these here, I will present a number of approaches, leading toward a working definition for the material presented in the current volume.

As already stated, no unequivocal definition is available, and striking statements such as “pop culture is fun! That is the only point where researchers and participants [. . .] seem to agree” (translated from Hügel 2003, 1) provide a very broad, yet fitting, summary of the state of the art. In more concrete terms, PC has variously been described as “culture of ‘the people,’” “everyday culture,” “subculture,” “youth culture,” “mainstream culture,” “mass culture,” “culture industry” (the term famously coined by Adorno and the Frankfurt school sociologists), “commercial culture,” etc. (for details, see Hügel 2003, 23–90; cf. Lewis 1999; Firth 2001; Hecken 2009; Danesi 2015; Takacs 2015). These labels can be systematized, for instance, into the categories offered by Merskin (2008). She establishes a fourfold object-oriented scheme to arrive at a multilayered definition:

- (1) A pejorative meaning referring to objects or practices deemed lesser than or inferior to elite culture, i.e., appeal to a mass audience; (2)

objects or practices well liked by many people, i.e., not the small groups of elite or wealthy; (3) work designed with the intention of appealing to a great number of people, i.e., commercial culture meant to be widely consumed; and (4) things people make for themselves.

(Merskin 2008)

It is apparent that definitions (1) and (4) are somewhat conspicuous. Definition (1) establishes a hierarchical relationship and carries the notion of an inherent and latent stigma attached to PC manifestations, which has been defined as “spoiled identity” in terms of a “perceived lack of quality and a form of labeling” (Merskin 2008). It is obvious that this stigmatization is based on aesthetic evaluations and thus highly subjective. On a related note, others have argued that such definitions *ex negativo* are flawed, as there are no clear boundaries between “high” and “low” (and “mid”; cf. Danesi 2015, 6) art, and as aesthetic evaluations are not an issue in PC (and its study) at all, as it “makes little or no distinction between art and recreation, distraction and engagement” (Danesi 2015, 7).

A closer look at definition (4) provides the opportunity to introduce a terminological note. Throughout the book, the focus will largely lie on linguistic matters related to *pop* culture rather than *popular* culture. Even though both terms have been used interchangeably (see also the definitions and references noted earlier), I agree with observers who have considered it helpful to draw a distinction between the former and the latter (see, e.g., Nuessel 2009, 252) for descriptive purposes. This serves to take account of the fundamental difference between the culture of the people (i.e., *popular* culture), which is viewed as folk culture mainly emerging spontaneously “from below,” which has a long tradition in history, and which is thus associated with authenticity and production (Storey 2010, 4). By contrast, *pop* culture is seen as entertainment culture predominantly imposed “from above,” thus with an essentially commercial background and a focus on consumption [Storey 2010, 5; cf. Merskin’s definition (1)]. However, this does not preclude an interaction of (4) with the other definitions, which is true mainly in the sense that even though in the study of PC, people are mainly seen as passive consumers, there are “ways people ‘make do’ with what the reigning cultural industries and institutions provide” (Takacs 2015, 5), and they may appropriate elements from PC. Likewise, there may be parts or styles of popular culture influencing PC at some stages (see, e.g., Firth 2001, 94), and in some areas, it may be hard to draw a line between *pop* and *popular* as defined earlier in the first place (think of issues of categorization as to user-generated podcasts and uploads to video platforms, fan fiction, graffiti, etc.). Thus it is eventually apt to speak of a “contradictory mix of forces” (Storey 2010, 4) and to see *pop* and *popular* as poles on a continuum rather than complementary antonyms.¹

A few additional aspects come into play. The first one is very much related to Merskin’s (2008) categories (1), (2), and (3) outlined earlier—namely, a

“close relationship [of PC] to the media and mass communications technologies” (Danesi 2015, 2; see also Hanson 2008). So not only *objects* (artifacts/products)² as such but also the various *channels of distribution* of PC (relating to the broader issue of mediatization) are worth considering, as they may eventually determine the form of the objects (as well as its geographical spread, which we will see next). Note in this regard that others conceive of the subject even more broadly, also including areas such as fashion, different types of transport, or pornography in their analyses (see, e.g., Strinati 1995, xvii). I mention them here for the sake of completeness, but it is obvious that these kinds of artifacts and manifestations are largely outside the scope of a linguistic approach toward PC (but see, e.g., Marko 2008; Lischinsky 2017 for explorations of language use in pornography and Staubach 2017 for a semiotic analysis of writing and visual elements on adolescent clothing).

A more relevant issue is the geographical spread of PC, implicit in Merskin’s categories (2) and (3) in particular. In this respect, notwithstanding culture-specific constraints, PC can largely be seen as a globalized phenomenon, with modern channels of distribution facilitating a spread of the manifestations worldwide (Miller 2015, 6). However, it is important to note that, when viewed on a global scale, there is a bias toward American(-ized) or Western(-ized) forms of PC (see, e.g., Storey 2010, 160–71), with English as the prime language used. A matter that is inextricably linked to the worldwide spread are the issues of “widespread fame, popularity, and commercialism” (Merskin 2008) that introduce an economic dimension into the debate of what should be considered as “pop.” While some see variables such as market share and sales numbers as non-evaluative key variables in determining “pop” (see, e.g., Merskin 2008; Duff and Zappa-Hollman 2013, 5998; cf. Werner 2012 or Kreyer 2015 for linguistic analyses with a pragmatic operationalization along these lines), others are critical of such an approach (see, e.g., Frith 2001, 102; Rosenbrock 2006, 33), as it may miss important characteristics of PC, such as potential long-term cultural impact.

A second aspect to be considered is the temporal dimension involved. Researchers have drawn attention to the fact that what can be considered PC is to a large degree determined by social circumstances and may vary across “[d]ifferent societies, different groups within societies, and societies and groups in different historical periods” (Strinati 1995, xvii). Therefore, also provided that there is no consensus on when “pop” actually started (with some observers dating it back to the 1920s, some seeing it as a post-World War II development, and yet others determining that it only emerged from the 1970s onwards; see also the “pop culture timeline” in Danesi 2015, 9–11), it is essential to at least provide information on the cultural context and the temporal scope within which individual analyses of PC operate.³

To repeat, the arguments presented in the foregoing suggest that we take conceptualizations of “pop” and PC that are as inclusive as possible, thus taking account of various attempts at definition, but that we also

unmistakably need to specify the contexts where the individual analyses and the volume as a whole are situated. To this end, we will employ a working definition of PC as mainstream media and entertainment culture, taking account of its largely contemporary temporal dimension and its largely commercial and globalized nature, as well as its Western and, as it happens, English-language bias (see Walshe, this volume).

On the one hand, this does not entail that more specific aspects such as PC as “subculture” or historical developments are deliberately ignored, but rather included whenever relevant. On the other hand, it means that the contributions will have to blank out some areas and will, for instance, largely have to stay mute about PC deriving from the Asian sphere (e.g., the “K-pop” phenomenon), which may develop into a strong competitor for Western(-ized) PC in the nearer future. Here a separate research tradition has emerged, both in terms of cultural studies conceived more broadly (see, e.g., Huat 2004; Fung, Erni and Yang 2015, and the contributions in Huat and Iwabuchi 2008) and as to linguistic analyses (see, e.g., Lee 2006). Note, in addition, that the contributions of the volume will largely focus on LPC as one form of one-to-many communication (i.e., lacking an audience backchannel, but cf. Westphal, this volume), thus excluding analyses of LPC as represented in specialized domains, such as the language of gaming (see, e.g., Ensslin 2014; Domsch 2017), or in participatory (chiefly Internet-based) media such as Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook (see, e.g., Greiffenstern 2010; Crystal 2011; Barton and Lee 2013; Tagg 2015; Danesi 2016). The language of advertisements as a form of one-to-many communication with an *explicit* commercial purpose (see, e.g., Cook 2008) is also outside the scope of the present book, but, in principle, shares a lot of common ground with the analyses presented.

II Pop Culture as a Linguistic Phenomenon

Earlier, it was mentioned in passing that many of the PC artifacts are of a text-based nature or at least involve a textual component, both in the spoken and written mode. Thus, linguistics as the study of language seems like a natural candidate for a scholarly discipline taking a leading role in analyzing and describing PC manifestations. However, to date, this clearly is not the case, and linguistic studies on LPC are underrepresented. By contrast, academics from other areas, both conceived broadly (e.g., cultural studies, literary studies, media studies, sociology) and more narrowly (e.g., Black studies, sociology of adulthood), have embraced the investigation of PC to a much larger degree so that its study has become a core element in these research traditions (Prieto-Arranz et al. 2013, 6).

It is challenging to find a rationale for this state of affairs, and we may speculate that the strong philological roots of linguistics have led to an avoidance of PC manifestations due to their association with “moral panics” (see Miller 2015, 6–7) and a tradition of focusing either on “serious”

registers (e.g., literary and scholarly writing, press publications), or—very much in the Saussurean tradition—on more ephemeral material that can be considered “real” from a communicative perspective (e.g., conversations and other spoken data). LPC instead features as a “performed,” “scripted” or “fictional” and thus less “real” or genuine type of language, apparently not worth studying (Coupland 2011, 576; Queen 2013, 217–18; Wildfeuer and Bateman 2016, 57). Another (and partially related) reason that could have played a part is that linguists were particularly aware of (i) PC as a subject area that is hard to define and (ii) the aesthetic stigma attached to PC (see Section I). Therefore, they may have largely refrained from analyzing data that does not carry any purported inherent aesthetic or communicative value, as they feared analyses potentially might be devaluated by others on (subjective) aesthetic grounds. Overall, this could be interpreted as a lag in linguistics to acknowledge the increasingly dissolved nature of the seemingly clear boundaries between “high” and “low” culture,⁴ which clearly has gained momentum in other fields, such as literary studies, where the causalities described in the foregoing apparently do not hold. However, restraints on the study of LPC also seem to be disbanding, or at least weakening, in linguistics, as the following selective overview of relevant research seeks to illustrate (see also Bednarek, this volume; Trotta, this volume).

II.1 Previous Research and Methodologies Used

To date, despite the highly specialized (others would say fragmented) nature of the linguistic conference scene and journals market, there is no dedicated conference series or journal explicitly devoted to LPC. However, while thematic workshops and edited volumes on specific genres (e.g., comics, Bramlett 2012b; TV, Beers Fägersten 2016) or with a particular (sub-) disciplinary focus (e.g., pragmatics, Locher and Jucker 2017) seem to become more and more established, there have also been recent efforts to organize dedicated linguistic strands or workshops at larger conferences, both with a broad cultural or specific linguistic focus, such as the meetings of the *Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture Association* (see mapaca.net/areas/language-and-popular-culture) or the *International Society for the Study of English* (see wa.amu.edu.pl/isle4/workshops.html). LPC also features as a “natural” subject in established series such as *Language in the Media*, while the main focus of this series indeed remains on “real” (i.e., non-fictional) media language. Thus, a few notable exceptions apart (see, e.g., Quaglio 2009; Bednarek 2010; and the edited volumes mentioned earlier), the study of LPC from a linguistic perspective to date has mostly been made up of individual case studies on different genres, spread across various journals and edited volumes. However, the situation that “[n]ot many studies take the actual Popular Culture artifacts, i.e. lyrics, advertising jingles, movie/TV dialog, as the object of linguistic study themselves” (Trotta 2010, 44) appears to have changed slowly but steadily, particularly within the last two decades.⁵

Among the kinds of PC manifestations studied from a linguistic perspective, a few central genres have emerged that have attracted researchers' attention (potentially largely due to the fact that they are the ones with the biggest audience appeal). As these (comics and cartoons, lyrics and music, TV and movies) are also the ones covered in the present volume, the ensuing literature review will mainly focus on these areas.

An important research paradigm, which can look back to a comparatively long history, and where the empirical study of LPC (with a focus on music and lyrics) has both benefited from and informed the development of theoretical principles (such as audience design/referee design, stylization, and enregisterment), is the "sociolinguistics of performance" (Bell and Gibson 2011). A traditional main focus of sociolinguistic research has been the study of speech and related identity issues (Clark 2013, 122). The linguistic construction of identity apparently is also highly salient in performed language, and researchers such as Coupland (see, e.g., 2011, 573–75) have thus argued that the performed nature of the data requires a dedicated theoretical framework, at the same time acknowledging that LPC possesses "socially transformative potential" (Coupland 2011, 582; see further Section II.2). It is important to note that many works situated within the sociolinguistics of performance paradigm focus on pronunciation features (Bell and Gibson 2011, 569). For instance, Trudgill (1983) diagnosed "acts of conflicting identity" caused by different sociocultural forces in terms of British artists using a hybrid accent with features both from British and American English varieties. Trudgill's seminal work inspired a number of follow-up studies (notably, Simpson 1999; O'Hanlon 2006; Morissey 2008; Beal 2009; Gibson and Bell 2012; Gerwin 2017) that expanded and refined his findings, and found an area of conflict between "Americanness" as an indexical of mainstream PC and vernacular usage as an indexical of (local) authenticity. At the same time, this implies that within this paradigm, linguistic areas other than phonology are still largely open to exploration (but see Jansen and Westphal 2017 for a combined phonetic-lexico-grammatical analysis).

As regards further approaches toward music and lyrics, another type of research that has become comparatively prolific recently is represented by corpus-based stylistic analyses.⁶ As one strength of corpus-based work is the analysis of lexico-grammatical (and, with limitations, semantic and pragmatic) aspects, corpus linguistics emerges as some kind of complement to the sociolinguistics of performance with its focus on accent as described earlier. Within the last decade, often in a combined quantitative-qualitative fashion, publications have appeared that provide general stylistic analyses of pop lyrics discourse and thus serve to flesh out pop lyrics as a register or genre (e.g., Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007; Werner 2012; Bértoli-Dutra 2014), often in comparison to other established registers and involving a diachronic dimension at times (Werner 2012). Other analyses have focused on subgenres such as the lyrics from the Eurovision Song Contest (Motschenbacher 2016) or hip-hop (Kreyer 2016). In addition, corpus-based analyses have been used

to characterize the style of individual bands and artists (see, e.g., Whissell 1996 on the Beatles and Hilbert 2012 on Take That), and to explore specific aspects of lyrics, such as metaphors (Kreyer and Mukherjee 2007) or the linguistic representation of gender roles (Kreyer 2015; Motschenbacher 2016).

A third methodological framework that has been applied in lyrics analysis, both from a linguistic (Machin 2010) and literary/cultural studies angle (e.g., Fischer 2016), as well as in sociological analyses (Longhurst and Bogdanovic 2014), is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The trademark feature of CDA as a largely qualitative approach is that rather than looking at individual linguistic features across a larger database, it considers entire texts (i.e., it focuses mostly on the lyrics of one single song). CDA seeks to establish how artists' identities and cultural discourses at large (and issues such as social hierarchies) are represented through language (Longhurst and Bogdanovic 2014, 166).

Special mention needs to be made of another prolific strand of research on music and lyrics (and related issues)—namely, anthropological approaches to the hip-hop complex as an important force in PC. Hip-hop is viewed holistically as a PC practice, and it is evident that the issue of identity (and related matters such as authenticity) and its linguistic representation are salient here. However, analyses go beyond a mere linguistic analysis and seek to describe broader sociocultural forces, for instance, also considering the worldwide dissemination and appropriation of hip-hop (see, e.g., Alim 2006; Pennycook 2007; Androutsopoulos 2009).

Turning to the analysis of LPC as represented in (fictional) TV and movie language, alternatively referred to as “telecinematic discourse” (Piazza, Bednarek and Rossi 2011), it could be argued that it has benefited from the fact that a comparatively large toolbox was already available for the study of conversation—the typical mode of discourse represented in these genres (Bednarek 2017). For instance, conversation analysis and politeness theory (see, e.g., Richardson 2017) could be adapted to the needs of the linguistic exploration of telecinematic discourse. That the study of these genres has turned into a vital and productive domain is revealed by Bednarek and Zago (2017), who provide a helpful bibliography of linguistic research and resources (such as corpora containing relevant material). They show that, in addition to a vast range of articles on various issues, the body of monographs and edited collections on the topic is limited, yet steadily expanding. It further emerges that different linguistic perspectives, such as more traditional sociolinguistic approaches (e.g., Richardson 2010; Buchholtz and Lopez 2011), corpus analysis (e.g., Bednarek 2010; Berber Sardinha and Veirano Pinto 2017), and stylistic (McIntyre 2012) and pragmatic approaches (analysis of humor being one case in point; see, e.g., Bubel and Spitz 2006; Dynel 2016) have been used to assess telecinematic discourse, while case studies of individual TV series or movies (see also the contributions to Beers Fägersten 2016), works on practical matters such as audiovisual translation

(subtitling/dubbing; e.g., Mattsson 2009), and authentic representation of language variation (e.g., Walshe 2009) feature prominently.

Studies of telecinematic discourse have also contributed to the long-standing debate over whether LPC as represented in media can be considered a factor in language change (see Jansen and Westphal 2017 for a related argument on lyrics). While the traditional view saw direct interaction between speakers as the only source of change, and thus has rejected any claims of media influence (Denis and Tagliamonte 2017, 554), recent analyses have taken a more nuanced view and argue (i) that LPC may play a part in the diffusion of change (see, e.g., Stuart-Smith et al. 2013); (ii) that a restricted range of surface structures, for instance the lexicon, can be affected (Denis and Tagliamonte 2017, 573–74); or (iii) that analyses of LPC can at least be used to monitor change (Heyd 2010).

A thriving area in cultural studies that has attracted attention from multiple subdisciplines (see, e.g., the contributions to Bramlett, Cook and Meskin 2017 and the extensive bibliographical database available at www.comicforschung.uni-bonn.de), but is still very much at the margins of linguistics, is the study of comics (and cartoons). This is probably due to the facts that comics scholars either view their discipline strongly rooted in literary study (Wildfeuer and Bateman 2016, 58) or have long been concerned with establishing an analytical framework for the language *of* comics (including pictures and icons) rather than for language *in* comics (Bramlett 2012a, 1–2).⁷ The discourse presented in comics is unique in that, to a large extent, writing is used to communicate speech (and thoughts) of the characters displayed so that the written word covers an essential position (Bramlett 2017, 380–81), notwithstanding the importance of “verbal-visual blending” (Bramlett 2012a, 7; see also Saraceni 2003). In his brief literature review, Bramlett (2012a, 4–5) emphasizes that linguistic studies of comics appeared as early as the 1930s and that comics, comparable to the other PC manifestations discussed in this volume, have been subject to linguistic analysis from multiple angles—for instance, from the perspectives of dialect and register studies, of studies of language variation and change, of metaphor studies, of CDA, and of gender studies, among others (see Bramlett 2017, 383–85). In their overview, Wildfeuer and Bateman (2016) also draw attention to a tradition of combined text-linguistic-semiotic approaches toward comics (see also Tasić and Stamenković 2015), which has developed into the current paradigm of multimodal study of comics (and other artifacts, see also Section II.3). While studies concentrate on English-language material, works on comics and cartoons in other languages also exist (see, e.g., the contributions to Bramlett 2012b; Pietrini 2012), and applied linguists have treated the subject of how to translate them (see, e.g., the contributions to Mälzer 2015).

While this selective overview of research served to outline the scope and potential of linguistic approaches toward central LPC data, the following

section will present arguments of why and what linguistics can contribute to PC scholarship.

II.2 Why the Linguistic Study of Pop Culture Artifacts Is Worthwhile

The foregoing research summary has shown that the study of LPC is an emerging area within (English) linguistics. Subsequently, I argue that there are at least two main reasons why LPC should be studied even more extensively.⁸

The most basic point is what Coupland (2011, 576) has labeled “cultural reach and penetration,” and what Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007, 31) have termed “communicative impact factor”—that is, the ubiquity of PC in present societies and the resulting pervasiveness of LPC. LPC plays a crucial part in shaping current realities, as it possesses “socially transformative potential” (Coupland 2011, 582) in terms of determining people’s knowledge, opinions, and values (Trotta 2010, 44) as has also repeatedly been claimed by researchers from various other fields such as psychology (Pettijohn and Sacco 2009), sociology (Dukes et al. 2003; Scheff 2015), political science (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Cao 2010), health studies (Primack et al. 2008; Holody et al. 2016), adolescent studies (Wright and Qureshi 2015), sex education studies (Hall, West and Hill 2012), and cultural and literary studies (Kaiser and Sina 2016).⁹ Given this extraordinary social impact, it can be considered unwarranted to simply ignore this part of the language in scholarly study, for aesthetic reasons or others (see Sections I and II). In addition, if LPC as a powerful and large part of communication continues to be largely disregarded in linguistic databases and analyses, this arguably leads to flawed theory, or at least to a severely truncated picture of linguistic variation, both of which are in stark contrast to the core aim of the linguistic community to strive for an overall description of language that is as accurate and comprehensive as possible.

In addition, from a purely academic point of view, linguistics as a discipline—to date, clearly underused in this regard—can make a substantial contribution to the broader paradigm of PC scholarship. Even though it has been recognized that PC “can involve a multitude of topics and sites and necessitates a host of analytic approaches” (Miller 2015, 1), and even though linguistics has been mentioned as a relevant discipline for the study of LPC (Miller 2015, 4; see also Coupland 2011, 576), linguistic approaches are largely absent from important PC works with an overview character (such as Miller 2015 itself). This is somewhat undeserved as (i) approaches of linguistics and PC studies may be congruent to a certain degree (e.g., ethnographic approaches draw heavily on cultural concepts), and as (ii) PC studies (and cultural studies in general) could benefit from more empirical approaches often used in linguistics by default. For example, in a long research tradition, linguistics has developed the means and methodology to collect and analyze large datasets (also known as corpora),

and thus to base conclusions on empirical findings (by reporting frequencies, applying statistical testing, etc.). This is not to say that cultural studies are lacking methodology. However, standard approaches used in linguistics could (and can, as the contributions to the present volume show) be used to increase the overall validity of findings, eventually leading to a more comprehensive picture of the PC artifacts studied. On a related note, as indicated earlier, LPC is surrounded by many stereotypes (“light,” “ephemeral,” “simple,” etc.), and more empirical study along the (linguistic) lines advocated in this volume and elsewhere may serve to put them into perspective (or to confirm them). It is evident that language use, on the other hand, is not merely situated in a vacuum, but part and parcel of cultural practices (mutually determining each other). Thus linguistic analysis may benefit from applying concepts developed in PC scholarship (and cultural studies more broadly) without which the assessment and interpretation of specific types of LPC (think of, e.g., hip-hop discourse and the notion of “realness”) would stay at a superficial and meaningless level. In sum, this suggests that both PC studies and linguistics can equally benefit from recognizing each other’s strengths (and weaknesses, which we will see further next), and therefore should aim for active cross-fertilization to go beyond disciplinary boundaries.

II.3 *Limitations of the Linguistic Take*

Even though it may have become evident in the preceding section how linguistics can substantially contribute to a more comprehensive study of PC, it goes without saying that a linguistic take on PC comes with a number of inherent limitations.

Note, first, that a number of observers have been more cautious as to associating LPC with extensive social impact. While they notice that some impact may occur, they emphasize that LPC can be viewed at least as a “*gauge* of social change” (Mishan 2005, 196; emphasis original) in that PC artifacts (besides other cultural manifestations) “chart the social history of their culture and reveal the attitudes, preoccupations and behaviours of its members” (Mishan 2005, 206). I suggest that even this apparently weaker argument still motivates the in-depth study of LPC to be able to trace social realities *ex post*, even though the social impact may be less direct than in the view presented earlier (cf. Trotta 2010; Coupland 2011). Linguistic traditions can arguably contribute substantially to the study of relevant texts.

A second issue to consider relates to types of (physical and electronic) media and modes (textual, aural, visual, etc.; Kress 2010) that are involved in PC. As has already been established earlier, it seems somewhat trivial that linguistics is restricted in its potential to contribute to analyses of PC areas where language plays a subordinate or marginal role (or may play no role at all), such as fashion.¹⁰ By contrast, it is also evident that many of the extant linguistic works on PC artifacts have a seemingly weak point when

it comes to the analysis of interaction between modes (e.g., verbal-visual or verbal-musical), as visual or musical “language” usually is ignored or only regarded as of secondary importance. This is particularly unwelcome, as many of the artifacts where LPC is represented (such as comics, TV series, and movies, as well as lyrics and music) are in fact multimodal and, as some studies (see, e.g., Cohn, Taylor and Pederson 2017) have even suggested, represent an increasing reliance of PC on non-textual elements. This state is also surprising as there has been a comparatively long tradition of semiotic analyses that may have served as a point of departure (see, e.g., the overview on the multimodal analysis of comics in Wildfeuer and Bateman 2016). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a full introduction and outline of the field of multimodal analysis (see, e.g., Kress 2010; Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala 2017), it is evident that multimodal analysis, depending on the individual research focus, possesses a vast potential for imparting knowledge on PC, and a number of contributions to the present volume show some first steps toward this direction. At the same time, this suggests that an informed linguistic description of LPC is part and parcel of a multimodal approach, so linguistics can substantially contribute to the multimodal paradigm.

On a general note, despite the fact that multimodal analysis has proved worthwhile in a number of neighboring disciplines, such as film studies (see, e.g., Bateman and Schmidt 2011; Wildfeuer 2014), and even though a considerable number of multimodal studies exist that feature a (text)linguistic analysis of TV, comics, and lyrics, for instance (see, e.g., Morini 2013 and relevant chapters in Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala 2017), it would be an overstatement to say that multimodal analysis has entered the linguistic mainstream. One reason may be that a fundamental prerequisite, the compilation of multimodal corpora, represents an endeavor that can be both time consuming and costly. However, this may change in the future, potentially with the affordances of digital humanities mentioned earlier.

In the foregoing paragraphs, a number of limitations of a linguistic take on (L)PC have been briefly discussed. However, overall, I would like to argue that the limitations outlined should not be seen as a deterrent from the linguistic study of PC. Rather, researchers have to be aware of the limits of their perspective. This awareness may lead linguists, in cases where this is appropriate, either to extent their repertoire beyond a “purely” linguistic approach or may provide an incentive to work in interdisciplinary teams if grasping a PC artifact *in toto* is the goal of the analysis (see also Wildfeuer and Bateman 2016, 60). Where this is actually done, linguists can make a vital contribution.

III Pop Culture and Applied Linguistics

The subtopic of PC and applied linguistics (conceived mainly in terms of foreign language instruction) necessitates separate treatment. The main

reasons for this are (i) that the motivations for using PC artifacts in language teaching are in part different from the motivations for studying LPC in the first place (see Section II.2) and (ii) that applied linguists and language educators seem to have embraced the opportunities offered by LPC more than descriptive linguists. As regards the latter point, however, teachers from other subject areas (e.g., geography, sociology, sports, among others; see the contributions to Browne 2005) apparently have embraced PC even more strongly so that PC is still underrepresented in the area of language teaching (note that Browne 2005 surprisingly does not contain a dedicated chapter on PC use in language teaching). In a comparable fashion to the previous section, I will first present a selective literature review to contextualize the topic area, followed by a number of arguments why relying on LPC for instructional purposes can be considered helpful (in addition to the claims provided earlier).

III.1 Previous Research and Practical Suggestions

Music and lyrics have played a lead part concerning applications to classroom usage. There are early advocates of song use in second language instruction, such as Stocker (1923), and there have been repeated attempts to show the usefulness of song-based teaching approaches as a versatile means to first and foremost improve listening and pronunciation skills (e.g., Melpignano 1980; York 2011), as well as to broaden the range of vocabulary (Murphey 1990). Further areas mentioned in which students might benefit from working with lyrics are conversation and composition (lyrics content as trigger for writing about a topic), and the vast range of cultural knowledge (see also Section II.2) that songs may convey (Murphey 1990, 168–70; Coats 2016, 1). Despite these and later attempts (see also the overview in Tegge 2015, 1), and despite the fact that the use of music and lyrics can be established as “a legitimate alternative to traditional classroom tasks” (Engh 2013) with a vast range of activities developed (see, e.g., Griffee 1992; Plitsch 2001; Paterson and Willis 2008), it has repeatedly been lamented that lyrics are still underrepresented in textbooks and teaching materials (Summer 2011, 349; Tegge 2015, 197), and underexploited in actual teaching practice (Domoney and Harris 1993, 240; Lems 2005, 20; Ziegler 2016, 74), for instance, as regards grammar instruction. Thus the overall situation does not appear to have changed that lyrics—and this may apply for the instructional use of LPC more broadly (Mahiri 2001, 382)—are viewed as “time fillers” (Abbott 2002, 11), or at best as suitable for “lighter side” activities with the purpose of rounding off a lesson or a week of instruction (see, e.g., Salcedo 2010, 20; Aquil 2012, 83).

The academic study of the use of telecinematic discourse and of comics for foreign language instruction seems to have (re-)gained momentum in recent years in particular. As regards the former, there have been calls, comparable to the ones for using music and lyrics, that “the time has come for film, and

film clips in particular, to take on a more central place in the foreign language curriculum” (Kaiser 2011, 232). In this spirit, corpus-based studies (e.g., Quaglio 2008, 2009; Dose 2012, 2013) have assessed the potential of using the fictional language of TV and movies for the instruction of features of conversation, such as vague or emotional language, while another strand of research has explored the opportunities offered by subtitled and captioned material for listening comprehension and vocabulary learning (e.g., Winke, Gass and Sydorenko 2010). There are also thematic teacher handbooks (e.g., Henseler, Möller and Suhrkamp 2011; Lütge 2012) as well as a number of textbooks with classroom activities (e.g., Thaler 2014) and those that attempt to build a bridge between the academic study of telecinematic discourse and the introduction of important terms and concepts to undergraduate students of linguistics (Beers Fägersten 2016; see also Queen 2015).

As regards comics and cartoons, they have always played a part in language instruction (see, e.g., Sones 1944 for an early advocate), and continue to be used regularly in foreign language teaching, even though, comparable to other types of PC, a certain skepticism toward comics as adequate teaching material beyond mere “decorative” purposes (e.g., as introductory impulse) seems to prevail (Bhuiyan and Draper 2014, 55). While foreign language teachers can rely on established manuals and materials (e.g., Cary 2004), again comparable to the developments shown for the use of music and lyrics and telecinematic discourse, researchers and educators seem to increasingly recognize the extensive potential of comics as a pedagogical resource usable for aspects going beyond mere culture- (Norton and Vanderheyden 2004) and reading-related (Drolet 2010) activities (Bhuiyan and Draper 2014, 61; see also Hodson 2011).

III.2 Why Use Pop Culture for Foreign Language Teaching

After this, of necessity brief, literature review, I will continue with a summary overview of reasons why it may be fruitful to use PC artifacts in the foreign language classroom, drawing from different fields, such as second language acquisition (SLA) theory, psychology, and language pedagogy. Note that the majority of the arguments presented have been explored in detail in connection with music and lyrics (see also Section III.1). However, I suggest that the findings listed equally apply to other types of PC artifacts, as they possess broader relevance.

The first line of argumentation pertains to the fact that by using LPC, teachers may increase their chances to connect to the lifeworld of their students. By using appropriate material (which, as a rule, is easily accessible or can be provided by the target group itself), they are enabled to incorporate learner interests, simultaneously fostering a “real life” connection by providing contextualized and meaningful content and focusing

on authentic “language in use” (Syed 2001, 144). This may also offer the opportunity to students to make further “real life” connections themselves (cf. the “ubiquity of LPC” argument presented in Section II.2). Furthermore, it is increasingly recognized that out-of-classroom learning is an important factor in SLA (Werner, Lehl and Walton 2017). LPC plays a crucial role there, as the amount of LPC (and thus foreign language) contact has been shown to be much larger outside than inside the language classroom (see, e.g., Summer 2011, 354; Duff and Zappa-Hollman 2013, 5999). In particular, this may prove helpful if students realize the significance of LPC by which they are surrounded. LPC actually contains structures and linguistic phenomena introduced in the instructed setting, and thus they may appreciate the relevant artifacts more fully if they have the linguistic means to do so (cf. the concept of “cultural interest” as motivational factor; Dörnyei 2010, 76).

In addition, engaging with PC may lead students to expand their personal horizon to “hold out for new cultural and linguistic relations and for new possible modes of identity” (Pennycook 2010; see also Itō 2010, 9). A closely related argument derived from SLA theory is that students may benefit from “affective engagement” (Tomlinson 2017, 8; see also Sposet 2008, 3)—that is, the emotional quality of the material may lead to a lowered stress level, which in turn facilitates language learning. Note that all of the aforementioned factors have been claimed to raise the (intrinsic) motivation of students, which has been found to be a key psychological variable in successful SLA (e.g., Multhaup 2002, 86; Loewen 2015, 163).

Another cognitive argument pertains to the multimodal nature of PC artifacts (see also Section II.3). Beyond linguistic information, encoding often happens in a second mode (music for lyrics, images for telecinematic discourse, pictures for comics and cartoons, etc.), which may lead to multiple encoding and parallel information processing, which may facilitate the retention of structures and content (Allmayer 2008, 187; see also Mishan 2005, 62). On a related note, it has been argued that different learning styles (aural, visual, etc.) can be addressed at the same time, which does more justice to the individual learner (Mishan 2005, 31–2).

Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, a further important issue is that using LPC in the classroom may offer students the opportunity to go beyond analyses of standard language (as commonly represented in textbooks and teaching material), thus introducing them to actual language use in an arguably natural way and simultaneously raising their awareness for varieties and registers (Mishan 2005, 203; Reaser and Adger 2007, 156; Thaler 2012, 38; Duff and Zappa-Hollman 2013, 6000). This is especially relevant for more advanced students; for instance, when they have to deal with complex issues such as (im)politeness or linguistic identity (and do not have a native speaker available at their disposal).

Notes

- 1 Simultaneously, from a neo-Gramscian perspective (see, e.g., Bieler and Norton 2003), this reflects the fact that PC may serve as a site of contention between dominant ideologies and subversive forces.
- 2 On a related note, consider the term “Gebrauchskunstwerke,” loosely translatable as practical or commercial art (Kaiser and Sina 2016, 180). The label (and the argument presented in the aforementioned chapter) emphasizes that these manifestations are at the interface of art and life across the whole lifespan, justifying their academic study.
- 3 Note that, if taken to extremes, one may also argue that there have *always* been “pop” phenomena that have to be viewed within their specific sociocultural circumstances (think of the literary works of Dickens or Shakespeare in their days).
- 4 This echoes a postmodern view that simply recognizes “culture.”
- 5 Referring to LPC has always been a welcome strategy in popular science communication (see, e.g., Cranz 2016).
- 6 Corpus-based stylistic analyses also feature prominently in the area of literary linguistics. See, for instance, Lahey (2015).
- 7 Another area with some indirect relevance is cognitive linguistics, where the focus is on how readers process the sequential nature of text-image combinations (see, e.g., Cohn 2013, 2014).
- 8 Even though they may act as supporting factors, I will not discuss generic developments such as a growing interest in what is referred to as “digital humanities,” where the language of both pop culture and the media feature prominently for structural reasons, and where linguistics as a discipline can contribute to the methodological toolbox (e.g., through applying and adapting approaches traditionally used in corpus linguistics).
- 9 The social impact of LPC may also extend to less expected areas such as the discourse of Christian worship songs (Ruth 2015). Note in addition that the transformative potential of LPC has been identified in earlier sociological work (such as Horton 1957, 578; see also Frith 2007, 209–12).
- 10 However, this does not mean that the overall *discourse* of fashion is not approachable from a linguistic angle as a myriad of relevant magazines, blogs, TV shows, etc. with extensive textual content prove.

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