

**The representations of Britishness and British characters in the American
television series *Friends* – A case study**

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1. Introduction

English today is a widely-spread and widely-spoken language that is acknowledged as the lingua franca virtually everywhere around the world. It is generally used as the language with which to communicate if none of the parties in a communicative event share a first language, and this naturally brings about people with no shared mother tongue, that is whose native language is something other than English, having to communicate with this widely understood language. As the number of English speaking people (both those whose have it as their first language and those who have learned English as a foreign language for communicative purposes, for instance) increases, so does the variety of accents with which English is spoken around the world. This, in turn, results in people, primarily but by no means solely those who speak English as their native language, acquiring attitudes, preconceptions and stereotypes towards those whose first language is not English. Ideas of “our language” and “those who speak our language” may thus arise (Birch & McPhail, 1997; Gill, 2011), and this contradiction between *us* and *them* may result in stereotypes used in television shows, for example, for a comical or negative effect.

The aim of this qualitative case study is to investigate how the American television show *Friends* (1994-2004) portray characters from Britain, as well as Britishness in general, while the main characters of the show are American. I aim to investigate whether the foreign characters of *Friends* in season 4, namely “Mr. Waltham” and “Emily Waltham” as well as other characters’ in terms of their reactions to these British characters, are portrayed in a certain light (comical, negative, strange, or quirky?) and how these characteristics are portrayed. In other words, I aim to investigate how this portrayal and representation of characteristics associated to Britishness are evident to the viewer.

The show *Friends* is a sitcom (i.e. *situation comedy*¹), and as sources for humour it uses exaggerated and sometimes stereotypical conceptions of people and places. Because stereotypical prejudices are oftentimes recognised at once by the audience, using stereotypes allows for new characters to appear in episodes creating jokes and comical situations without the screenwriters having to include the new characters in the storyline (Gill, 2011, p. 744). This is a factor to be considered when analysing the chosen British characters for this study, as the characters and their characteristics do not represent a comprehensive nor truthful image of their respective nationality, but rather a very specific sample of typical characteristics easily associated to the nationality in question.

¹Situation comedy: “A humorous radio or television series featuring the reactions of a regular cast of characters to unusual situations, such as misunderstandings or embarrassing coincidences” (“situation comedy”, *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, (n.d.))

The method for this study is based on Discourse Analysis (DA). Rather than being regarded as a theory as such, DA, according to Johnstone (2002), is considered a heuristic approach instead, and can offer tools for analysing discourse. Furthermore, Johnstone lists six different categories, the functions of which are to serve as steps or as a guideline in the analysis of a discourse. (Johnstone, 2002) The first of these categories, Intrusion, will be discussed more thoroughly later in section 2. This category will serve as a useful guideline also in the analysis of the chosen characters for this present study, as it presents an important reference point to consider in the analysis of the discourse between the main characters from America and the newly-introduced characters from Britain.

To be noted is the fact that the term “American accent” is used as a collective term in this study, and no distinction will be made between the possible regional variations in the American accents that are present in the show in question, as it is of no particular relevance in regards to my study. In terms of the British accents, however, if need be, I will try and distinguish the regional accents from the accents usually associated with the educated class (RP for example).

Why I have chosen to study Britishness and how it is represented and portrayed outside Britain’s own borders is because an outsider’s view in the debate around British cultural identity has received little attention in the academic societies. A great deal of research of the British cultural identity conducted by an insider is available, whereas research from an outsider’s perspective seems less comprehensive (McAuley, Mycock & McGlynn, 2011). This topic was also of personal interest to me as I have spent a total of 14 months in the UK and have some comprehension of what the identity of a British person as well as Britishness in general is in London. However, I wanted to broaden my comprehension and discover how Britishness is seen from the outside in the perspective of another Anglophone, and choosing an American television series seemed appropriate. Further, the reason I chose to study *Friends* in particular is because not only is it a series I knew beforehand, but it is also a widely known television show around the world, and it presented a fair, yet not too excessive amount of material for the analysis of Britishness that was to be conducted for the present essay.

Given the nature of this study, attention needs to be paid in order to remain neutral and not to impose my personal impressions of the British on analysing the data. As we all have our own ideas of the stereotypical conceptions of certain nationalities, I have to be very careful not to assume any characteristics beforehand, but to analyse the data only. Naturally, the analysis will reflect my own

ideas and thinking to some extent, but I will remain neutral to the data to the extent that I can and analyse only what I have seen and gathered.

2. Background and theory

Representations of different varieties of the English language in American television series has been studied by, among others, Patrick Gill in his article *Global English: The proliferation of English varieties in American television series* (2011). He studied the way in which different varieties of English were represented by the way characters spoke in selected television series, and introduced four categories which each represent a different starting point for depicting characters of another nationality than that of the show's main characters. The first of these categories, namely Intrusion, is relevant in terms of this present essay, and it will be introduced thoroughly, whereas the last three of the categories Exposure, Inclusion and Fusion (Gill, 2011, p. 745) will not be handled in this paper. Because these categories deal with how new, foreign characters are welcomed and included in the main cast's lives and not how the newcomers are presented as intruding characters, the remaining categories are of no particular importance in regards to the analysis of the chosen TV series for this study (*Friends*), and therefore not discussed further.

Intrusion (Gill, 2011) occurs when the somewhat unperturbed lives of the main characters of a television series are disturbed by "an unwelcome intruder" of different nationality or origin (Gill, 2011, p. 745). These intruders are typically outsiders in terms of language, in so that their nationality and thus their accent clearly mark the intruding characters as not belonging to the dominant linguistic group of the main characters. More often than not, this type of juxtaposition between the main characters and the newcomer is caused by the accent and a different set of habits displayed by the outsider, thus depicting the intruder as unlikable and, indeed, an outsider to the main community. As Gill notes, the crucial factor in succeeding to depict the outsiders in a series as unwelcome and unlikable lies in the audience's preconceptions of the intruding character's accent; namely, accents carry a great deal of pre-existing notions of and attitudes towards the nationality associated with that accent (Gill, 2011). Furthermore, just as Birch and McPhail (1997) emphasise, judgments of a person's nationality and their social status as well as, to some extent, their personality are often judged by the accent the speaker has, thus rating the accented speaker in some ways undesirable, unwelcome, or even belonging to a lower social class (p. 95). The preconceptions of a particular language (here British English) and the associations of that language to the speaker's social status are important reference points for the analysis to be conducted for this paper, and will be considered in section 4: Analysis.

In consequence, in order to be able to portray the characters in a television series in a desired way, the characters must have qualities that the audience can immediately recognise and relate to things, places and people displaying those desired qualities. This, I imagine, is often done by using nationalities and ethnicities typically carrying strong stereotypical qualities, and can possibly be seen in the way the British characters are portrayed in *Friends*. This is an aspect that can serve as an important reference point to which return in the actual analysis.

This leads us to the study by Dawn Birch and Janelle McPhail (1997), who studied how accented speech affected the composition and the overall effect of international television advertisements, as well as whether the accent of the speaker in an advertisement affected the advertisement's persuasion and credibility. The study covered various ways in which the accent and general perceptions of the ethnicity associated to the accent caused the listener to subjectively take a certain stand towards the advertisement's speaker and thus towards the advertised product itself (Birch & McPhail, 1997). This notion serves as an important reference point also in analysing the audience's perceived attitudes towards the accented characters in *Friends*, as the characters chosen for the analysis each speak with an accent other than that of the show's main characters, however close the accent (here a certain variety of the British English) might be to the language of the dominant linguistic group (American English). In analysing how the characteristics of a nation are portrayed by using stereotypical representations in characters, the knowledge of whether and how the accent itself may affect the audience's perception of the character's whole personality is important for this study, and will be further analysed in section 4.

Similar to Gill's (2011) category Intrusion, Birch and McPhail's (1997) knowledge of how accents are perceived by the hearer, or, in other words, knowledge of the underlying stereotypical assumptions associated with a certain accent, is yet another crucial factor to consider in the analysis of the certain characters of *Friends*. As emphasised by Birch and McPhail (1997), spoken language relates the speaker to a certain ethnic group as well as to the characteristics typically assumed to that ethnicity or nationality. Thus, the spoken language also serves as a gateway to unveiling what the desired outcome of using characters with an accent is: Does the show want to present the accented character – or the “outsider” in Gill's (2011) terms – in a positive, negative, comical, or awkward light? And how does this affect the interpretation of that character? To this I will return in depth in section 4.

Birch and McPhail (1997) also suggest that people having the same or at least similar accents are thought to share “attitudes, principles, preferences, and opinions”, whereas dissimilar linguistic landscape was said to distance the accented speaker from the main characters (p. 99). This could

perhaps be a means used by television series in order to distinguish “*us*” from “*them*” in the series, and to highlight the unwanted “*intruders*” of a different nationality (a term introduced by Gill (2011)). In other words, and in relation to this study, the producers and screenwriters of the show *Friends* may have wanted to portray some of the characters in a, for example, negative light, meaning that the new characters are clearly portrayed with differing and undesired qualities as opposed to the main characters with the familiar qualities (Birch & McPhail, 1997). This type of use of juxtaposition (i.e. *us* versus *them*) is used in order to make the viewer feel a negative stance towards the intruding character, and is indeed often done by giving the new foreign characters a differing linguistic landscape, as well as other characteristics which reflect, for example, upper-class arrogance, and which can be immediately associated to a particular nationality, as is the case with the British accent. (Birch & McPhail, 1997; Gill, 2011) Thus, this type of juxtaposition becomes an important note to consider when analysing the characters in this study.

To be noted is the fact that because the British characters in *Friends* differ very little from the main American characters in terms of ethnicity, the main differing factor between them is indeed their language variation. In consequence, the spoken accent of the characters becomes pivotal in defining their “Otherness”, also noted by Gill (2011), and crucial in the scope of this study.

3. Data and method of analysis

In this section I will discuss the data used for this study, and briefly explain how I divided the data for analysis. For this study, I will analyse the British characters and the main characters' reactions to them in episodes 14–23 of season 4 of the American television show *Friends* (1994–2004). The analysis will be conducted in the light of how these British characters are portrayed in the otherwise American context, as well as how the portrayals of characteristics typically associated with Britishness are made evident to the viewer. I will be using DA to support the analysis of the data.

To be more specific, the characters of Emily Waltham and her uncle Mr. Waltham in season 4 of *Friends* will be analysed, and the analysis will be divided in four parts: *Mr. Waltham*, *Emily*, *Other characters*, and *The wedding and London*. In addition to the two British characters Mr. Waltham and Emily, I will also analyse some of the other characters in episodes 14–23 of season 4, namely characters that have an important role in depicting something relevant of the Americans conceptions of the British people. These characters include Ross Geller, Phoebe Buffay, Joey Tribbiani, Chandler Bing and Jack Geller, and the analysis consists of dialogue between the British characters and the ones listed above, as well as of these five characters' reactions to the British characters.

3.1. *Friends*

Friends is an American situation comedy which aired during 1994–2004, and which was created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman. During its ten seasons, the show depicts the lives of the six main characters, Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston), Phoebe Buffay (Lisa Kudrow), Monica Geller (Courteney Cox), Ross Geller (Monica's older brother, portrayed by David Schwimmer), Joey Tribbiani (Matt Le Blanc) and Chandler Bing (Matthew Perry) in New York City while they struggle to find balance between work, love and life. The show's ten seasons are accessible electronically on the online media distributor *Netflix*, and as physical DVD copies sold in well-equipped department stores in Finland.

The data of this study consists of episodes 14–23 of season 4 of *Friends*. I collected the data by watching the episodes first throughout on Netflix, and then began to watch them one by one, taking notes at the same time. I watched the episodes roughly 4 or 5 times, but the scenes providing relevant material for analysis naturally received more attention than the ones that did not contain much relevant material in regards to the research questions and analysis. In addition, the data initially consisted of both season 4 and season 5, but as I began to collect the data, I soon noticed

that there was too much material to analyse, and narrowed the data down to season 4 and its episodes 14–23, as those were the episodes providing the most relevant material of the British characters.

The data will be analysed in terms of how the British characters Emily and Mr. Waltham are portrayed in the otherwise American context, as well as how the portrayals of characteristics that are typically associated with Britishness are made evident to the viewer. The present study will also benefit from analysing characters that are American but portray something important of their conceptions of the British people. In other words, attention will also be paid to how the other characters (that are not British) react to the British characters, and what these reactions may reflect of the Americans conceptions of the British.

3.2. Character and plot descriptions

Here I will briefly introduce the characters analysed, and mention how they are related to the research questions of this study.

Mr. Waltham (portrayed by Paxton Whitehead) is the head of the personal shopping department, and Rachel's superior at the department store *Bloomingdale's* where Rachel works as an assistant. Mr. Waltham is British and also Emily Waltham's uncle, and only appears once in the episodes analysed for this study, but he has an important role in depicting relevant information about Britishness and is thus worth analysing. He asks Rachel to join his niece Emily to an opera one night as he himself cannot attend.

Emily Waltham (portrayed by Helen Baxendale) is a British character in her late twenties and lives in London; she is Mr. Waltham's niece and has come to New York for a visit. She is originally meant to be joined to the opera by Rachel but is eventually joined by Ross, who at the end of their date finds himself in a bed and breakfast in Vermont with Emily. Ross and Emily's relationships continues to evolve as quickly as their first date, and after a matter of weeks Ross proposes to Emily. The quick pace of the relationship proves to be significant also in the analysis of how Britishness is portrayed in the series, as the relationship affects how other characters as well as the audience see Emily and Britishness.

The study will also benefit from the analysis of Ross, Phoebe, Joey, Chandler and Jack Geller, specifically in terms of what they say, how they react to the British characters as well as how they react to the realisation of Britishness in the British characters in the American context.

Ross (portrayed by David Schwimmer) is one of the show's six main characters. He works as a palaeontologist, and is known as caring and warm, yet occasionally socially awkward. He falls in love with Emily and in a matter of weeks he and Emily get engaged. He provides important dialogue in relation to the research questions of this study, and will be analysed further in terms of his lines and other possible attributes reflecting something of his reaction to Britishness. The study will also benefit from analysing Ross's father, **Jack Geller** (portrayed by Elliott Gould), a character who provides relevant dialogue for the analysis, and will be analysed in regard to how his character and his dialogue reflect Britishness.

Phoebe (portrayed by Lisa Kudrow) is also one of the six main characters and known for her blunt honesty and quirkiness. To the main crew belong also **Joey** and **Chandler**, who, alongside Phoebe, and in relation to this study, present important dialogue relating to Britishness, and are thus worth analysing. Joey (portrayed by Matt Le Blanc) is a good-natured actor who can be rather childish and simple. Chandler (portrayed by Matthew Perry), on the other hand, is a sarcastic character and best friend to Joey, who often appears as Joey's sarcastic but well-intentioned voice of reason.

The wedding of Ross and Emily will also be analysed in terms of its events and characteristics that portray something relevant for the analysis of Britishness in the series. The focus will primarily be on the character's dialogue, but attention will also be given to the setting and environment. As the wedding is held in **London**, the capital of the United Kingdom, the study will naturally benefit from analysing how the city itself is portrayed in the series, in addition to what pre-existing conceptions of Britain the city's portrayal in the show might reflect.

3.3. Method

The method for this qualitative study relies on Discourse Analysis (henceforth referred to as DA). DA is an approach used across disciplines and concerns itself with written or vocal language use occurring naturally in different social interactions ("What is meant by Discourse Analysis", n.d.). More specifically, the work which is used to support the analysis for this paper is Barbara Johnstone's book *Discourse Analysis* (2002). Rather than a theory, DA is regarded as a heuristic approach to analysing discourse, and can, according to Johnstone, offer tools rather than rules for the analysis that is to be conducted of a discourse. (Johnstone, 2002) Johnstone lists six different categories which function as guiding steps towards the analysis of a discourse (Johnstone 2002, p. 9), and the first of these categories, Intrusion, will serve as an important reference point in the analysis conducted for this paper. They will be discussed in depth in the following section.

According to Johnstone (2002), the world that exists outside the discourse creates and affects discourse (p. 10–12). This means that in regards to, for example, the show *Friends*, the world and context in which the episodes were created affected the making of these episodes greatly; the context of the time of the series has presumably given the series its recognisable comedy effect with the jokes and references of that time. It is also likely that the context has affected how the characters of a different nation are portrayed and how the creators of the show have made evident the references to another nation (were these references stereotypical depictions of that nation, for example?). As can be seen, the scenes of *Friends* as well as the characters in it also create discourse (they *are* discourse), and can thus be analysed as such. This analysis will then give this paper a vantage point from which to study the chosen characters of *Friends*, and to this I will return later in chapter 4.

As further discussed by Johnstone (2002), speaking a language is always a matter of adhering to the rules and conventions of that language, and constructing a sentence or even a larger piece of text or discourse is done by the limitations of that language. According to her, these choices in the structure of sentences and texts are also nearly always rhetorically motivated, i.e. the writer or the speaker had a motivation why he or she chose to put the words in the specific order or why he or she chose to say some words before others. (Johnstone, 2002, p. 12) Sometimes these choices can also be subconscious, meaning that the writer's choices are guided by the pre-existing notions of what is right or wrong, or, say, effective or not in a communicative event, and these notions have possibly been learned throughout the process of acquiring the conventional as well as the persuasive ways to use the language of the society. When these conventions regarding language use are then confronted or challenged by those who do not speak that language as their mother tongue, the native speakers of that language can naturally feel uneasy or uncomfortable, and the contradiction between “*them*” using “*our*” language can arise (Birch & McPhail, 1997). This will be a point to consider in the analysis conducted for this paper.

How this relates to the present study is that the distinction between *us* and *them* can perhaps be seen in the way characters in television series are portrayed. As mentioned by Gill (2011), if characters from a different linguistic landscape come and confront the seemingly unperturbed lives of the main characters, the newcomer's differing set of (linguistic) habits may contradict with the habits of the main characters. This may result in the newcomer being depicted as unwelcome or unlikable, which will then affect how the newcomer's nationality and background is seen by the audience, and this portrayal of nationality (here Britishness) and other characters' reactions to it is exactly what I aim to investigate in this study.

4. Analysis

In this chapter the selected fifteen episodes of *Friends* will be analysed in regards to how these characters and their accents are portrayed in the otherwise American context. The emphasis of the analysis will be on whether the characters are portrayed in a certain light (comical or negative, for example), as well as on how this portrayal is evident to the viewer. The analysis has been divided in four parts (*Mr. Waltham, Emily Waltham, Emily and Ross's relationship, The wedding and London*), as listed in the previous chapter, and where applicable, these sections have then been further divided in three parts, **events** that portray something important of Britishness; **character** itself in terms of whether his/her personality, appearance, accent and vocabulary reflect any preconceptions on Britishness; and **reactions** (of other characters) to the British characters.

4.1. Mr. Waltham

Events, character (personality, appearance, accent and vocabulary), reactions (of other characters)

Emily Waltham is first introduced to the audience through the British Mr. Waltham (portrayed by *Paxton Whitehead*). He is Rachel's manager at *Bloomingdale's* and also Emily Waltham's uncle who asks Rachel to join his niece Emily to an opera called *Die Fledermaus*.

Mr. Waltham talks animatedly about the opera his niece and Rachel are about to see, wearing a brown checked pullover, a beige jacket and a red checked tie (*appearance*), and speaks excitedly about the upcoming opera and its tenors (*accent and vocabulary*). Rachel looks slightly awkward and confused (*reactions of other characters*), which is a first sign for the audience of the fact that there is a cultural difference between these two characters. Note that culture here does not only refer to the national difference, Mr. Waltham coming from Great-Britain and Rachel from The United States, but also to the difference in age and class²; Rachel is a New-Yorker, speaks with an American accent and represents the working middle-class, whereas Mr. Waltham comes from the United Kingdom (supposedly from London as that is where also his niece Emily is from), speaks in impeccable upper-class British English and is in a higher position at work. How he is dressed (in checked pullover and tie as well as a beige jacket, each in an earthy colour) as well as his upper-class pastime (opera) and vocabulary ("*Die Fledermaus*", "tenors") contrast greatly to Rachel's character and her preferred pastimes (dating men and gossiping over a cup of

² Culture: a) "The arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought considered as a unit, especially with regard to a particular time or social group," and b) "The set of predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize a group or organization". ("culture", *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, (n.d.))

coffee at their regular coffee house). Thus, it is clear to the audience that Mr. Waltham's clothing and pastimes, as well as his overall appearance, are portrayed as more upper-class and highbrow than Rachel's, and this can be an indication of Mr. Waltham's higher social status.

In addition, the checked pattern and the colour on Mr. Waltham's clothes could also be a carefully selected detail of the producers of the show to present this British character with another detail easily associated with the British. Earthy colours and checks are quite a strong reference to the rural areas and the countryside, and given the context of the character who, from his accent and vocabulary to his clothing, seems British, these details may rather immediately be associated to the idyllic English countryside. Another indication of the reflection to the rural Britain can be Mr. Waltham's jolly attitude and visible happiness when speaking to Rachel. As argued by Watkins and Jacoby (2007), the rural Britain is greatly associated with good health and an idyll of "stress-free life" (p. 851), and this may quite possibly be reflected in the interpretation of Mr. Waltham's character representation. Because he so clearly appears as a happy fellow, and because his clothing is so earthy in colour, the associations to the idyllic rural Britain are quite strong.

Further, as Johnstone (2002) discusses, the world that exists outside the discourse creates and affects discourse (p. 10–12). In other words, the world and context in which the episodes were created have presumably affected the references in *Friends*, and details such as the earthy colours and a jolly appearance provide important cues about how the characters of a different nation are portrayed in a series, and what the desired outcome of these representations is. Here it would seem that the earthy colours and checked pattern as well as the jolliness reflect the Americans idea of the healthy, happy, and idyllic countryside associated to Britain.

4.2. Emily Waltham

Events

Emily herself (portrayed by *Helen Baxendale*) makes her first appearance in the show when she appears at Monica Geller and Rachel Green's door soaking wet. She is there to go to the opera with Rachel, but when she hears that Rachel is not available after all, she says:

“Oh, that's just lovely, **isn't it**. I must have **missed your call** even though I **didn't leave the flat** all day.”

Her tone makes it evident that she is being aggressively sarcastic. The intonation after the first sentence is falling and signals to the hearer that what she said is meant as a sharp remark, i.e. an interrogative, negative tag follows a declarative sentence with falling intonation (Ward & Hirschberg, 1985). The presence of the interrogative tag alters the declarative sentence in so that instead of Emily merely stating that something is lovely, she, in fact, wishes the addressee (Rachel) to confirm the message of the declarative sentence (Ward & Hirschberg, 1985). But when Emily immediately continues to the second sentence containing a contradiction, namely missing a call even though she has stayed indoors, it becomes clear that her first sentence's actual message was quite the opposite of the message that was meant by it (i.e. metamessage; see Haiman, 1998), and Emily's first utterance becomes a sarcastic comment. Together, these two utterances form a sarcastically meant comment for Rachel indicating that Rachel has not even tried to reach Emily to let her know the plans have been cancelled or altered. Then, on leaving, Emily gives her farewell with an aggressive "Goodbye!", and storms out of the doorway, which is another indication of the fact that this news was indeed not at all lovely in her opinion, reinforcing the sarcastic meaning of her utterances.

As sarcasm is quite often associated with the British and the British culture (Ajtony, 2013, p. 10), this sort of introduction to a character emphasizes the stereotypical conceptions of a certain nationality, here British. What Emily says is clearly a sarcastic remark, supported by Haiman's definition of sarcasm: "[I]n sarcasm the ostensible message (...) is only the vehicle for the pragmatically essential metamessage" (Haiman, 1998, p. 19), meaning that Emily's words "That's just lovely, isn't it" are only a façade hiding the actual message, indicating that by not letting Emily know of the cancellation Rachel has not at all acted in a very lovely manner, but, in fact, rather impolitely. Adding the fact that Emily is introduced to the audience for the first time making this strongly sarcastic remark, the viewer can almost at once relate the sarcasm to Emily's nationality.

Of course, sarcasm is not solely related to the British culture; *Friends* relies strongly on sarcastic remarks as a source of humour (Chandler Bing being a particularly sarcastic character). However, because the viewers indeed meet Emily for the first time when she says a strongly sarcastic remark with an easily recognised British accent, sarcasm in this context can perhaps quite easily be recognised as a sign of Britishness, and interpreted as one of the stereotypical preconceptions of the British that the viewers can recognise a character and her nationality from.

Character (personality, appearance, accent and vocabulary)

Emily has dark brown, mid-cut hair that is always neatly combed; she has a good posture, and each of the times she is seen on screen she wears black, with one exception of her wearing a red top underneath her black jacket. As noted by Damhorst and Reed (1986) via Roberts, Owen and Havlicek (2010), colour black has been found to be associated with competence in regards to women wearing black or dark clothing. Further, colour black was found to be equal with the effects of red in measurements regarding success, aggression and dominance (Roberts, Owen & Havlicek, 2010), which can support the argument that Emily in *Friends* can be associated to attributes such as success, control, power and even aggression (which is how she was portrayed, i.e. aggressively sarcastic, when she was seen on screen for the first time at Monica and Rachel's door, vividly upset about the alteration of her plans with Rachel and the opera). These attributes, success, competence, dominance and power can then further be associated with a higher social status.

Emily's representation of a higher social status can also be supported with the theory of accents; standard speech is typically spoken by the educated, and is often perceived more favourably in terms of competence, success, and status in comparison to the non-standard varieties of that language. (Edwards & Jacobsen, 1987; Giles, 1971) In terms of "*personal integrity*" and "*social attractiveness*", however, the standard form of the British English has been found to be considered less favoured compared to the non-standard varieties; in other words, the speakers of the standard form are considered less reliable, kind, and sociable than those speaking the non-standard varieties (Giles, 1971, p. 280). This could be seen in *Friends* where Emily was oftentimes rather stiff and seemed to keep her distance from the main characters other than Ross, and throughout the episodes analysed, she remained a somewhat distant character. This can be supported by Giles' (1971) argument, which is that the standard form of a language can be considered as one factor for a person or a character succeeding to appear unsociable or formal, albeit competent (p. 280). Therefore, as the accent which Emily has is the standard variety of the British English, she can, through her accent, be seen as representing higher social class (the educated) and therefore also high competence, albeit her accent may perhaps make her seem cold, formal, rigid or distant regarding social attractiveness.

Reactions

When the friends meet Emily for the first time and Emily has left the room, Phoebe Buffay, who is known as an honest and blunt character, says to Joey:

“Don’t you just **love** the way they talk – *oof, ungh!*”

While saying those last two words, Phoebe makes gestures with her hand as if she was trying to appear upper-class and sophisticated. Gestures and reactions of other characters such as these can also tell a great deal about how certain characteristics are seen among a different linguistic or nationality group (Birch & McPhail, 1997). Thus Phoebe’s remark could be a subtle indication of the fact that she sees the British people as intriguing (which is supported by her sounds “*Don’t you just love the way they talk*”) as well as funny (supported by her delighted laugh at the end of her sentence) yet perhaps sophisticated or snobbish (supported by her words ‘*oof*’ and ‘*ungh*’). Her hand gesture could also be a reflection of Phoebe’s idea of sophistication and upper-class mannerism, and because “snobbishness” and “arrogance” are very typically associated to Britishness and the RP (i.e. *received pronunciation*) (Gill, 2011, p. 746), this gesture and the little words ‘*oof*’ and ‘*ungh*’ could be interpreted to mean that Phoebe thinks the British are indeed amusing yet somehow rather snobbish.

Another indication of how other characters react to Emily and her nationality emerges when Ross gets invited to a rugby game organised by Emily’s British friends and gets badly attacked by other players. Emily becomes appalled and cannot believe her friends handle Ross with such violence even though she told them not to, and to this Phoebe says:

“No offence but – you know, sometimes it’s hard to understand you – you know, with the accent and, so...”

Remarks like these are important for the analysis at hand, as they carry plenty of information of how a certain group of people is seen by other people. As Hamilton, Sherman, Crump and Spencer-Rodgers (2009) argue, “*stereotypes* are cognitive structures containing a perceiver’s knowledge and beliefs about a human group, and *stereotyping* involves the ascription of a set of (...) attributes to a group and its members” (p. 191). In the present analysis the above would therefore mean how the show’s main characters see the British characters as well as what the main characters think of the British accent and the British culture in general. Thus, Phoebe’s comment to Emily could be an indication of the fact that Americans **may sometimes find it hard to understand the British**,

although the comical effect here comes from the fact that the people to whom Emily initially addressed her warning words were British, and given their nationality they most likely did not have difficulty in understanding Emily. However, what Phoebe says reflects what she and other American characters might think of Emily's accent, and thus is worth the analysis.

The rugby game itself also serves as an important indication of the portrayal of Britishness in the series. Argued by Storry and Childs (2013), England, in terms of men, is often seen as a masculine culture where drinking beer is an inseparable part of unwinding after the day at work and a way of spending time with the mates in a pub watching rugby or football (p. 103). The two male friends of Emily (the ones who invite Ross to play with them) as well as rugby, the sport that in Britain is typically considered as a "rough's game for gentlemen" (Storry and Childs, 2013, p. 102), serve to support this idea of British men, as the very masculinity and roughness of the sport and of the two men may reflect the masculinity associated to British men in general. Further, according to Storry & Childs (2013), British sport is always associated to certain classes, and rugby is not dissimilar; until as late as the 20th century rugby was seen as "a middle-class game"³ played by "higher-social-status rugby players" (Storry & Childs, 2013, p. 102–103). The British culture and class are therefore reflected in *Friends* through these two very rough and masculine male friends of Emily who invite Ross to the rugby game, and who also ironically but probably not coincidentally happen to be holding beer cans (Storry & Childs, 2013, p. 102–103). The rugby can be seen a representation of the upper-class, indeed by means of its masculinity and the fact that it has been regarded as a game played by those belonging to the upper classes of the society.

What appears to be missing in Emily's lines is the mention of work. When confronted by Ross about her moving to New York with him, Emily only briefly mentions work as a reason for not leaving London, and in other contexts work is not mentioned at all, not to forget the fact she has spent all this time in New York with Ross without any concern over how much she has missed work⁴. As Storry and Childs (2013) note, a "Merchant/Ivory version of Britain" is often presented in British as well as in Hollywood films and television series, and they argue that "[i]n such pointedly socially divided worlds, work persists in its cultural representations as something that the

³ Middle-class here refers to the class above the working class but below the upper-class which consists of the royalty and aristocrats, contrasting with the term "upper-class" in the present study used to refer to the middle class, not the upper class of royalty)

⁴ It is not entirely clear exactly how much time she spends in New York in total, but in the beginning of Ross and Emily's relationship she spends there a minimum of three weeks, thus it is likely that the time she spends there is weeks in total.

upper classes do not do and the working classes wish not to do” (p. 88). In other words, Emily appears to the audience as someone who does not need to work much but can still rather freely spend time with Ross, travel back and forth between London and New York and does not seem to have to care much of her economy altogether. It therefore seems that Emily does not need to spend all her income on the “necessities of life” but can concentrate on the leisure instead, and this in itself is an indication of a higher social status. (Storry & Childs, 2013, p. 186) This also relates to the analysis of Emily’s character in so that not only do the visible cues such as accent and manners indicate Emily’s upper-class upbringing, but also elements that *are not there*, such as the absence of work indeed support the results of the analysis conducted thus far.

4.3. Ross and Emily’s relationship

Events

An event that can be interpreted as showing Britishness in a comical light happens when Emily and Ross go to see a collection of antique door knobs at a museum (a pastime which itself can appear upper-class, sophisticated and pretentious, even). Emily and Ross return to *Central Perk* (a regular meeting place of the show’s main characters) where Emily tells Monica and Chandler about her afternoon with Ross saying “They were so ornate and beautiful” and holding up a door knob. To this Monica then says:

“I don’t know how museums work **in England** but **here** you’re not supposed to take stuff”

and the audience laugh. As simple a joke as this seems to put Britishness through Emily’s character in a comical light, as Monica clearly identifies Emily as someone from a place outside of New York and herself as someone from the inside. As Gill (2011) suggests, as far as sitcoms are concerned, characters of other origin appear in episodes not to make the main characters randomly meet foreign people (albeit that also happens), but rather because the “commonly held prejudices about people of [another] origin” guarantee the desired reaction in the audience to the jokes and comical effects in the episode (p. 744). Although Monica’s comment does not as such express any commonly recognised preconceptions of the British (does not indicate stealing, for example), it does create a contradiction between *us* (the New Yorkers) and *them* (the British), and this juxtaposition, along with Monica’s subtle teasing smile, makes the audience laugh, and puts the British character in a rather comical light.

Another aspect of this scene to consider is the fact that Ross and Emily went to see a **collection of antique door knobs**. This can appear as quite the unusual and posh way to spend time with a loved-one, especially if they have limited time to spend together as Ross and Emily had. As Storry and Childs (2013) argue, “the hobbies and minority interests pursued by Britons [...] are part of the people’s identities” (p. 96). Therefore, even a small detail such as going to see an antique door knob collection in a museum seems to put Emily in a different light in comparison to the main characters of the show, whose main pastime is to sit in a coffeehouse gossiping, and can indeed be interpreted as a reflection of Emily’s identity as well as of a higher social status and more sophisticated pastimes. That, in turn, is indicative of how Britishness is portrayed in the series, and of great importance to the results of the analysis in this study.

As to the relationship of Ross and Emily itself, it evolves quickly. As opposed to how he initially felt about the date with Emily (reluctant and sceptic after meeting the annoyed and sarcastic Emily for the first time at Monica and Rachel’s door), Ross finds out that when not soaking wet and irritated, Emily is actually a pleasant and fun person with whom he finds himself doing new and fun things. After their first date at the opera they end up spending the whole weekend in a bed and breakfast in Vermont, after which they go to the rugby game (a sport that was entirely new to Ross in terms of how to play it); Ross and Emily go to see the antique door knob collection; Ross signs himself up to a helicopter course (which he does not, however, intend to participate); and he even gets his ear pierced. When confronted by Joey and Chandler about the earring, Ross states:

“Well I like it and Emily likes it and that’s what counts. [...] She brings out this – this, this great side of me... I mean I... [*incredulous, nervous laughter*] I love her, you know”.

In the same episode, Emily agrees to marry Ross, and the couple’s relationship has suddenly evolved into something serious. In relation to the topic of this study, Emily’s background seems to have affected the speed of the relationship in so that knowing Emily is leaving back for London in a few days, Emily and Ross find themselves doing things such as getting engaged, which would not have perhaps happened if Emily was not leaving. This, in turn, affects the other characters in so that once Emily and Ross announce their engagement and Rachel hears about it, her smile disappears and pure sadness radiates of her face. At the same time, the audience’s possible hopes for the “dream couple” (Gill, 2011, p. 754) of Ross and Rachel breaks and they might feel contradicted about their feelings towards Emily, who now is Ross’s new fiancé but also the one who shattered the hopes of Ross and Rachel. This does not, as such, tell anything about Britishness, but what it

does it seem to make the audience's empathies lie with Rachel, and makes Emily a rather disliked character.

This is a typical example of Gill's category *Intrusion*, according to which the newly introduced stranger, or an "outsider", to the otherwise rather homogenous linguistic group disturbs the peace of the main characters, and the strangers are marked as outsiders "by means of linguistic difference" (Gill, 2011, p. 745). Emily's accent serves as a clear reflection of her nationality, which in turn has affected the speed of the relationship and created a wedge between Ross and Rachel, and thus between Emily and the audience. By appearing in a rather negative light, the character of Emily seems to move further away as a likable character, and this may reflect some negative light also to Britishness in general, albeit it may not be as evident.

4.4. The wedding and London

Events

In the episode with Ross and Emily's wedding, Chandler makes his toast at the rehearsal dinner, and despite his continuous efforts in trying to make the other guests laugh, he does not succeed and only receives silence, blank faces and shaking of heads from the British guests. They appear to disapprove Chandler's jokes, and this could signal arrogance or little appreciation of Chandler's jokes, indicating perhaps that the British guests consider themselves somehow more sophisticated than Chandler (basing their judgment on Chandler's jokes). The British guests also look rather rigid, which can also be seen as a sign of arrogance or "snobbishness" which is quite typically associated to the British (Gill, 2011, p. 746).

In the same episode, Ross's father, Jack, is trying to settle his disagreement with Emily's father, Stephen Waltham, on the costs of the wedding, and in an argument Jack says to Stephen:

"I'm not paying for your wine cellar, you thieving, **would-be-speaking-German-if-it-weren't-for us**, cheap little man!"

Jack's line could be seen as representing some of the Americans' conceptions on the British in terms of how Americans see their relationship and history with Britain. The line is, of course, a conscious choice on the producers' and screenwriters' part to make the audience laugh, but the words could also reflect a cultural preconception that is easily recognised by the audience, indicating that the Americans consider the British to have been saved from the German invasion by the Americans

during the Second World War. In this light, Britishness is portrayed as a nation that has needed support from the Americans, and it appears as if in this context Britain is made the underdog that has been dependent on America's help.

Further, it becomes clear in the wedding episode that the Walthams have a female housekeeper (which can be interpreted as an indication of wealth and higher social status). This housekeeper answers the phone, and finds Phoebe on the other line. Phoebe begins the conversation on the phone in the way she finds perfectly normal, but receives the following reaction from the housekeeper:

“This is the housekeeper speaking. And by the way, young lady, that is *not* how **one** addresses a person on the telephone. First one identifies **oneself** and then asks for the person **with whom one** wishes to speak”.

The use of the pronoun “one” in addition to the use of the structure “with whom” are relatively formal structures, and rather strongly represent the formal, upper-class variety of the British English (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). This portrayal of British English may reinforce the image of the British as a posh and upper-class society (of course, this type of reflection of a nationality represents only a fraction of the people, but as this study is concerned with how this show portrays Britishness and British people, I will not discuss this further here).

In the same scene, Phoebe gets frustrated with the housekeeper for not receiving information about the wedding. Phoebe then says:

“So if you don't gimme that number, then *I'm* gonna come over there and I'm gonna kick your snooty ass all the way to new Glouken...*shire!*”

On one hand, Phoebe's emphasis on the last “shire” appears to represent some of the Americans' perceptions on Britain (or, the show's producers and screenwriters' conception on what the audience can easily associate to Britain, but as it would have required more research in film studies, in the scope of this study it will not be discussed further). On the other hand, the word “shire” can also be associated to the idyllic image of the rural Britain (Watkins & Jacoby, 2007), and provides yet another example of how Britishness is portrayed in the show.

Accent and vocabulary; Reactions

In the wedding rehearsal dinner, **goat cheese-watercress-pancetta** appetisers are served. These appetisers do not only *sound* sophisticated and posh, and in that way seem more upper-class than what the main characters may be used to; the way Joey reacts to these appetisers (face in disbelief and disgust) also creates a contrast between the typical snacks eaten in New York by the main characters and the ones served in the rehearsal dinner in London, and this makes Britishness and their posh appetisers appear in a somewhat negative light. The negative stance becomes reinforced by Joey's line after he sees what is being served:

“Everything is different here! I wanna go home.”

Joey says those words with a child-like pout, and as comical as it may be, it also creates a wedge between the main characters' lifestyle and the new, posher way of life introduced by Emily, her family and their habits, as Joey clearly dislikes what is happening there in London. This is an example of *Intrusion* by Gill (2011), according to whom this type of juxtaposition (which is caused by a different set of habits displayed by the newcomer in a show) occurs between the main characters and the newcomer, and depicts the intruder as unlikable and, indeed, an outsider to the main community, and this is also what seems to have happened between the British culture, represented by Emily and her relatives, and the American culture, represented by the main characters (and in this particular scene, by Joey).

The scene above is not the only time a wedge between the British and American cultures occurs. There are multiple occasions where habits that are typical in the British culture seem to clash with the habits typical to the American culture, one being a scene where Chandler cannot tolerate Joey's childish complaining of London and says that Joey is merely feeling homesick. This upsets Joey who does not receive the kind of sympathy he expected, and says:

“You're different here, too. You're mean in England!”

Throughout their stay in London, Joey and Chandler have been bickering, which is unusual given the fact that they are best friends and have not been seen truly frustrated and unhappy with each other until the wedding in London. This, according to Gill (2011), is the show's producers' and screenwriters' way of creating turbulence among the show's main characters, and typically the disturbance is caused by an outsider (here Emily) who disturbs the peace of the main characters' lives. Yet another, and perhaps the most striking, wedge caused by the newcomer of another origin (Emily) occurs between Ross and Rachel, the “dream couple” (Gill, 2011, p. 754) which has

throughout the series seemed as a relationship that would eventually happen. Now that Ross and Emily are getting married, the audience's hopes of Ross and Rachel break, and it makes the audience's empathy lie on Rachel and thus makes Emily a rather disliked character. Through Emily's character also Britishness in general may be seen in a rather negative light by the audience.

London

As to the city of London itself, *Friends* depicted the most known tourist attractions in its filming of the settings. Attractions such as the Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace, Changing of the Guard, Big Ben and Westminster Abbey as well as the iconic black cabs and red double-deckers (buses that have two decks) are seen in the background of the scenes in episodes 22 and 23. These all amount to the image the Americans may have of Britain, and London specifically, as these seem to be the most well-known attractions in London. Naturally, the image the visitors are left with is exactly the image that the travel agencies and advertisements wish to portray. In addition, when Joey and Chandler walk past a tourist stand selling souvenirs near the Tower, the most attentive viewer will recognise the seller as Richard Branson who is known as the founder of the Virgin Group (Our Story – The Virgin Group, n.d.). Behind Branson, a black cap displaying the *Virgin Atlantic* logo is also visible, and the viewer can most likely associate this to the internationally known people representing Britain. Adding to the people's representation of Britain is also a scene where Joey meets Sarah Ferguson, and this contributes to the Americans' conceptions of Britain portrayed in the show.

5. Discussion and conclusion

It appears that, in general, Britishness in *Friends* is primarily portrayed as something upper-class and highbrow. In light of the results of the analysis, Britishness was represented in the British characters primarily in their British accent and vocabulary. In both Mr. Waltham as well as Emily's case, Britishness was portrayed as upper-class, snobbish at times, and as representing higher social class. This was often due to their vocabulary and seen, for instance, in Mr. Waltham's lines where he talked about "opera" and its "tenors", as well as in Emily's accent altogether. As argued by Giles (1971), the speakers of a standard form of a language are often perceived as competent and representing higher social class, as were the results of the analysis of Emily, although at the same time these speakers can be considered formal, distant and unsociable (p. 280), again resembling and supporting the results of the character analysis of Emily.

In terms of references to the United Kingdom as a country, *Friends* and its characters also portrayed a set of attributes that were not seen in their vocabulary and accent, but in the seemingly small details in their general appearance. These attributes were strongly associated with the countryside and rural Britain, and included features such as the pattern on Mr. Waltham's tie and shirt, as well as Phoebe's subtle reference to the shires in England. Mr. Waltham also portrayed a jolly and good-natured image of Britain, as the earthy colours and patterns that he wore are easily associated to the English countryside, thus reinforcing the image of rural Britain as the centre of stress-free life, and hearty, down-to-earth people. Emily, on the other hand, was always seen wearing black, which could be interpreted as an indication of power and competence, distance and, indeed, of higher social status.

Furthermore, not only did the visible characteristics associate the British characters to an upper-class society, but features that were not present or mentioned also reflected the idea of the British as an upper-class nationality compared to the US. This was the case with Emily's work, which was only mentioned very few times. The "Merchant/Ivory version of Britain" presented by Storry and Childs (2013, p. 88) was evident in Emily's case, as she was hardly heard of speaking of work, but was nevertheless able to travel between London and New York and concentrate on the leisurely side of life instead of work without it seeming to affect her economic stability. This, according to Storry and Childs (2013), was an indication of a higher social status, as work was seen as something that the upper classes do not engage in, whereas the working classes wish not to (p. 88).

However, not all the factors that proved to be significant for the analysis clearly reflect the British culture per se. Gill's highly useful term *Intrusion*, i.e. a feature where a newly introduced,

linguistically distinguishable stranger to an otherwise homogenous linguistic group disturbs the peace of the main characters (Gill, 2011), proved valuable in analysing what type of wedge Emily's nationality created between the main characters and Emily, and also between Emily and the audience. Because Emily's nationality, and events resulting of her nationality (such as the wedding being held in London), created a wedge between Ross and Rachel (the audience's dream couple) as well as between Joey and Chandler, Emily was naturally forced to take a place as the disliked character who caused turbulence among the main characters.

In other words, even though Ross and Emily's relationship comes between the dream of Ross and Rachel, and due to that Emily is perhaps considered as a disliked character, it does not represent any conceptions or images of the British. Although the intrusion theory supports the findings of Emily being disliked in the viewers' eyes, it does not tell us anything about Britishness as such. It merely puts Britishness in a somewhat negative light due to Emily's nationality and her coming between many of the much liked main characters.

At times, Britishness was also the target of jokes and was thus put in a comical light, but a considerable amount of data provided evidence to the fact that Britishness in *Friends* is primarily portrayed as an upper-class and sophisticated nationality whose representatives were either jolly fellows representing the rural Britain or formal and sometimes arrogant, as well as distant, individuals **from the urban surroundings of London**. One reference also supported the image of Britain being portrayed as a nation that needed support from the Americans, and was thus made the underdog that has been dependent on America's help.

What is important to note of an analysis such as this is the fact that the examples in this study are by no means an exhaustive sample of representations of the British. They are merely a collection of what I have seen, gathered and interpreted in the light of what is relevant for the present study, and they do not provide a completely realistic picture of the British. Furthermore, *Friends* is a sitcom, which is a very particular type of genre, and as sources for humour it uses characteristics that are commonly associated to a certain group of people or to a certain nationality. These characteristics are often exaggerated and, indeed, do not represent the nation as a whole. At the same time, they are characteristics that viewers can almost immediately recognise and associate to a certain nation, as stereotypical or comical as they may be (Gill, 2011). Therefore, studying the stereotypical conceptions of a nation presented in *Friends* and the results of the analysis are not meant to provide a holistic picture of Britain, but to shed light on how Britishness was portrayed in *Friends* and its characters.

Yet another point to make of the analysis is the seemingly small details in the characters' lives that have been analysed in this study. The details such as the checked pattern in Mr. Waltham's pullover, Phoebe's subtle mention of the shires as well as Emily's enthusiasm over the collection of door knobs are all small details and may often go unnoticed. They nevertheless played a crucial role in analysing how Britishness was portrayed in the series, as the minute details are the ones that reflect bigger conceptions of a group of people. These conceptions are the show's writers' ideas of the details which the audience can easily recognise as British and associate to the nation in question, and as such proved to be extremely significant and worth analysing.

Finally, although DA and other references in the background literature, apart from Gill's (2011) *Intrusion*, are mainly concerned with the study of real-life interactions and people, the characteristics that are portrayed in the characters of certain television series are the show's producers and screenwriters' (i.e. real people's) ideas of what characteristics the viewers easily associate to certain nationalities and groups of people. Thus the use of theoretical background primarily concerned with real interactions and people was justified in the analysis of the fictional characters chosen for this study. As this study was primarily concerned with larger social contexts, further investigation of the topic could include a more detailed examination of the phonological differences between the American and British characters in *Friends* as well as if and how these differences affect comprehension of the message that is being conveyed.

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