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LEARNING ABOUT ASPECTS OF EARLY 20TH CENTURY BRITISH CULTURE USING FEATURE FILMS
BA thesis

KARMEN VISNAPUU
SUPERVISOR: Asst. Lecturer ÜLLE TÜRK, M.A.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to establish whether feature films can be used to introduce the aspects of early 20th century British culture. Can the characteristics of the people who lived during that time reflect the cultural aspects of their country to students? What are the factors that make it possible for films to project cultural nuances?

The first chapter focusses on the definition of culture. Multiple definitions by different scholars who have given their input on the matter are presented. The aspects of culture that can be introduced using films are discussed. The second chapter presents an analysis of two sources – the feature film *The King's Speech* and the TV-series *Peaky Blinders* in order to find the cultural aspects that might be useful for students to learn about British culture. The usefulness of the film and the TV-series for the purposes of culture learning is discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a part of every person's everyday life and it can often go unnoticed as people are used to it. However, when a person starts to learn about another country, the cultural differences can be quite overwhelming. The way other people live their lives is influenced by their historical background, geographical location and traditions. However, none of this can be passed down through generations without language, which is an important aspect of culture. It is a tool that is used to spread customs, knowledge, views and thoughts. It is what keeps culture alive and does not let it die. Learning about one's own culture is easy because people are immersed in it. The way of life, behaviours and customs are always there to be seen. Getting to know a new culture can be quite difficult.

In order to learn about another culture, there must be some contact with it. The lack of means to travel or visit other places can become a significant obstacle. This is why films can be of great use when learning about another culture. Movies can give people a small window into other people's lives showing how different life can be. Watching movies at home for pleasure is a common activity, but when film is used as a learning tool at school, there is so much more a student can gain from it. Having students watch a film in the classroom can make them notice aspects they ordinarily would not. Knowing that they need to pay attention in order to later answer the teacher's questions makes them more observant and attentive. A general discussion with the class is something that students would miss when they watch the film at home. Hearing other people's opinions might make them think more critically and see the topic from another perspective.

The focus of this paper is to see whether films could be used to learn about British cultural aspects of the 20th century through the lives of individuals who lived in that era. However, in order to find out this notion, culture itself will be defined, which is what the first half of the paper focuses on. The definition is searched from mostly unknown scholars.

The reason behind this is the need to explore what kind of interpretations lesser known scholars have on the idea of culture. The more well-known names have already established themselves and the author wanted to examine other definitions that have not been mentioned in many articles in order to get a broader overview on the subject. Moreover, it is imperative to know how films channel cultural messages across to the viewers. This inquiry along with the discussion of how films can influence viewers will follow the definition of culture.

In order to see whether films do have cultural aspects that can be used to introduce to students, an analysis of two films will first take place in the second half of this paper. In this case the comparison is made between the film *The King's Speech* and the TV-series *Peaky Blinders*. The reason behind choosing these two is because they are set in the same country, almost at the same time period and their stories are distinctly different. With these selections, students can see how different people's lives can be even though they are from the same country. To see whether the feature film and the TV-series can be useful to students, they will be analysed and a discussion is held over their suitability to use as sources of information on British culture.

1. WHAT IS CULTURE?

This chapter discusses what culture is by considering multiple definitions put forward by different scholars in order to find the ideas useful for the purposes of this thesis. The second section of the chapter considers ways that films can be used to introduce students to new cultural aspects and discusses what kind of effects films might have on people.

1.1 Defining culture

Culture has been understood at different times in different ways and be divided into different categories that can define the idea of it more efficiently. Edward Tylor defined culture as everything that a member of society has acquired through time. Knowledge, morals, art and customs are only some of the factors that could be considered to be a part of culture (Spencer-Oatey 2012).

Culture is often seen as 'high culture' or 'popular culture'. High culture refers to more prestigious factors such as the beliefs, amusements and activities that the educated elite take part in. This category is mostly for a smaller audience who are profoundly interested in the higher arts, literature and theatre. However, popular culture is mainly produced for the masses. Popular culture refers to the everyday world that surrounds most people. The media, rituals, religion, icons and mostly anything can go into this category except high culture (Hinds 2006). Placing culture into different categories can make it easier to define it, which is why many scholars use this technique.

Heidari, Ketabi and Zonoobi (2014) believe in the same idea when it comes to defining culture. They follow the idea which separates the term into two different parts: culture with a capital 'C' indicating formal culture and culture with a small 'c' meaning deep culture. This makes it easier to grasp the idea of culture (Heidari et al. 2014).

They referred to culture with a capital 'C' as the sophistication that is in a society. This category includes manners, customs and a higher understanding for refined cultural

aspects. Moreover, it contains everything that humans have to show for their achievements during their time on this earth and some of the most astounding accomplishments that they have reached are in the fields of works of art, architecture, literature and music (Heidari et al. 2014).

Culture with a small 'c' represents the complete way of people's lives who live in the same area. This category refers to the habits of people who go about their daily routine. It includes their traditions, the way people speak to one another, how they dress, what they eat and how they live during a normal day (Heidari et al. 2014).

With these interpretations in mind we can say that culture can hold multiple meanings inside it. Dividing culture into smaller categories can enrich the definition of culture and give it more interpretation room and depth. Knowing what definitions lesser known scholars have on the matter only enriches the definition of culture or confirms what the more established have said before.

Moreover, the same authors divides culture into two categories: the physical and the psychological aspects. The physical side represents culture as something that could be done with someone's hands. For example, a person can hold a book, paint, play music on instruments and eat different foods from all over the world with their own hands. They can experience these aspects themselves and gain knowledge by doing so. The psychological side concentrates more on how people behave and why they do the things they do. All aspects of culture come from individuals acting for a certain reason. They read because they want to learn, they paint and make music because they want to express themselves and they eat because they need to survive. This indicates that the psychological side consumes the physical one because behind every book, painting, tune or meal there is a need to satisfy a human desire.

Parsons et al. (1961; as cited in Gowyn and Gittell 2011: 303) theorized that culture has three essential aspects that define it: knowledge, values and forms of symbolic expression. Knowledge represents people's understanding of their world and how they perceive it. Values include ethics, customs and norms that have developed over the years. Symbolic expression contain language, art, music and objects that have a significant meaning behind them. These three elements combine a strong definition for what culture should mean. However, Gowyn and Gittell (2011) believe that culture is something that is learned, shared and passed from generation to generation. Knowledge that has brought value to a group of people is remembered and passed down in hopes that the next generation uses this information to learn from the mistakes of their elders and adapt to a new way of living. Moreover, that action can create a whole new circle of traditions, customs and rules that people live by. As time goes by, new trends surface which gives their culture an entirely new meaning. However, through time, certain objects still continue to be held up to a higher standard. These are the artefacts that have shaped a culture and that have given the people their identity. It is important to remember that the significance, meanings and ideas behind these materialistic objects are that actually matter and they should not be forgotten even though times change and people with it. Knowing one's own history is paramount to understanding what made a culture evolve into the society that it is today (Godwyn and Gittell 2011: 303).

Additionally, culture can be broken down into subcultures. Godwyn and Gittell (2011), explain that the same three elements that make up culture can also be applied to subcultures. These subcultures are can be organized by either race, gender, passions, class, religion, politics or even someone's interests. Most anything can be categorized into subcultures. However, the people who create these subcultures are the reason why culture is able to form. If there are no people to manifest certain qualities to their society then there

are no aspects that can be considered of value to the construction of culture (Godwyn and Gittell 2011: 303-304).

Godwyn and Gittell (2011) question why there is even a need for culture and what does it add that styles, behaviours, ethics and norms cannot convey. They speculate that culture implies stability. When looking into ancient preliterate societies, historians noticed that through rough times certain phenomena still persisted and displayed outstanding stability (Godwyn and Gittell 2011: 312). This shows that even then culture was a huge part of everyday life. Customs and norms are what keep a society's morals high when being tested by tragedies. It gives comfort to people knowing that they have something to fall back on.

Moreover, Godwyn and Gittell (2011) have suggested the idea that cultures that shared a common view on a specific matter were evidently from the same area. Not only do the people that live in the same region behave in the same manner, they also have similar outlooks and feelings on certain concepts. This led to the conclusion that culture is something which is developed through similar historical events and shared experiences (Godwyn and Gittell 2011: 312).

To summarise all these aspects, it can be said that through Godwyn and Gittell's viewpoint, culture is a pattern of shared experiences and thoughts that have sculpted the lives of a given group throughout history, as the previous generations have passed down the lessons they have learned through adapting and problem solving (Godwyn and Gittell 2011: 313).

Ferraro (2002: 19) summarises culture as everything that people have, what they think and what they do as members of a society. In order to own something, there must be an object that could be presented. To think, one should have attitudes, values and ideas regarding a certain subject. Additionally, to do something there should be a pattern of

normative behaviour which has developed over time. Moreover, the author mentions that in order to have a culture, more than one person must live in the same society. For values, objects and behaviours to be considered cultural, they must be shared amongst a group of people or a society. Anything less than two people is considered idiosyncratic (Ferraro 1998: 20). His ideas resemble other mentioned scholars' beliefs which means that even though culture has a multitude of definitions, most scholars still see it in the same light.

In order to understand the cultural aspects of the early 20th century individuals, the paper will focus on multiple ideas of culture that the previously mentioned scholars have brought out. Some of the aspects that will be discussed more thoroughly are the behaviours, class distinctions and symbolic expressions of the people. One of the symbolic expressions which is taken under examination is language. The reason behind choosing this aspect is because language is considered to be a huge part of culture and without it, culture as we know it might not even exist. Both are shaped by each other and at the same time make each other whole. Without language, people could not have expressed themselves and shared valuable knowledge with one another that could have significantly improved their lives (Jiang 2000: 328).

When it comes to learning a second language it often seems like learning a second culture. According to Tognozzi (2010: 70), one should first know their own cultural nuances so that they could understand and appreciate that which is different from their own. For example, if teachers wants to introduce a different culture to their students, they should make sure that the views, customs and norms of that culture are known to their pupils. These factors show the true values of the contrasting culture and open a window to an entirely new world. There are many ways from which students could be taught about new cultures; however, one of the easiest methods is using films to widen their horizons.

1.2 Introducing culture through film

Humans collect information from their surroundings with five senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell; however, when it comes to grasping a new culture and its language, sight and hearing are a crucial part in doing so. The combination of these two senses are how people can receive, remember and learn from the information given to them (Engert and Spencer 2009: 85). Therefore, it makes sense to use films as a helping tool for students who want to learn about other cultures.

A helpful way of increasing people's cultural knowledge is to introduce them to the way of life of a specific culture using films. Using this technique gives the students a quick look into another culture without leaving their own country. If students were to only read about cultural nuances they may be able to recognize a pattern; however, they might not show anything for it as a result because writing, speaking and even recognizing the language in listening can be challenging, especially for foreign language students who have to work extra hard on their translations (Tognozzi 2010: 71).

Using films to introduce a culture to students is quite useful because people often use their own experiences to reflect on what they see on screen. This way they can get invested in the film and better understand the emotions and meanings behind the images. In order to keep the audience's attention on the film, the producers often use music as a guide to the film character's emotions. Using a good soundtrack that incorporates well with the scene enhances the emotional connection with the characters or the situation. It is even better when the tune that plays in the background is characteristic to its country. Music can set the scene and tell people how to feel at the same time. This tactic immerses the viewer in the film and gives them an idea of what is happening even when there is no dialogue (Tognozzi 2010: 72). All of these aspects pull the viewer in and make them feel like they are having a good

time. As the students are enthralled by the movie, they hardly notice that they are learning new information. This makes gaining new knowledge easy and enjoyable.

By choosing to use films to introduce a country's culture, students can widen their cultural horizon through professionally produced motion pictures that portray the lifestyle of a country under exploration. Through films, students can hear and see how a native speaker would act in certain situations. They would see the body language that goes along with the actor's sentences as well as hear the words they choose, where the stress goes and mark the intonation patterns. Students could learn about different accents and attitudes of a region as well as acquire new vocabulary and grasp a wider understanding of a differing culture. Moreover, film clips can be viewed repeatedly which makes them extremely useful when trying to learn the pronunciation of the words vocalized by the characters. The speed of the dialogue between two characters can sometimes be too rapid; therefore, pausing after a couple of lines to absorb the new material can be helpful to students (Tognozzi 2010: 72-73).

However, dialogue is only one of the aspects of a film that can impart a message. Body language is a crucial element when it comes to communicating. These nonverbal acts can emphasize what a person is saying or even reveal a hidden meaning (Tognozzi 2010: 73). Additionally, body movements can express how a person is feeling even better than words sometimes. Body cues can indicate if the conversation is tense, relaxed or even forced. Nonverbal expressions are used all over the world; however, some countries do not use many gestures in the same manner. A simple gesture can mean something innocent in one country, but in other countries it might not be seen in the same way. To them the gesture could have the meaning of something offensive or rude. This can cause misunderstandings and even ruin relationships (Fisher-Blando et al. 2010: 184). The differences in cultural behaviours could be something simple as a handshake or the distance people hold when speaking to

another person. Some countries are more at ease when it comes to physical contact and others would like to keep their distance. For example, countries like Italy are quite expressive with their hands and bodies, because they use it in their everyday life and it has become a norm for them. They often greet each other with hugs and kisses on both cheeks. However, countries like Japan like to keep their distance when meeting someone for the first time. They greet people with a respectful bow from an appropriate distance. Giving someone their space is considered to be polite and civil. If two people from different cultural backgrounds meet and they have no clue how to act in each other's presence, then the conversation might end on a quicker note than expected (Fisher-Blando et al. 2010: 186). Therefore, it is imperative to know about another country's social cues when trying to understand their culture. Understanding what to do and what not to do when communicating with a native from another country shows respect for them and their customs which allows for a more considerate conversation between the two cultures. Watching how two people act with each other can give a deep view into their culture and their understanding of normal behaviour. Using films to help students learn from these actions gives them an idea on how to behave accordingly without giving off the impression that they are being rude or not interested in the other person.

Films are windows into culture, which can be used as way of eradicating stereotypes. Through films, students can see the values and ideas that are universally shared and which can support intercultural understanding. By observing the behaviours and cultural elements of others, people might get a better understanding of different cultures which can enhance their cultural awareness (Yalcin 2013).

2. *THE KING'S SPEECH* AND *PEAKY BLINDERS* AS SOURCES OF CULTURAL INFORMATION

The aim of this chapter is to analyse some cultural aspects in the feature film *The King's Speech* (2011) and in the TV-series *Peaky Blinders* (2013) with the purpose of determining their suitability as sources of culture learning. They both depict life in the UK during almost the same period. The TV-series *Peaky Blinders* starts in 1919 after the Great War in France and *The King's Speech* begins in 1925. As time goes by *Peaky Blinders* reaches the period of the reign of George VI. These films provide an opportunity to learn about life in the UK between two world wars as experienced by people from different classes; *Peaky Blinders* showing the life of ordinary working-class citizens and *The King's Speech* depicting the life of a monarch. The aspects discussed in the chapter include the behaviours, class distinctions and symbolic expressions of the nation and the accuracy of the historical events. Moreover, the lifestyles and settings will be explored.

2.1 *The King's Speech*

The King's Speech is a British historical drama which was directed by Tom Hooper and David Siedler and was released in 2010. The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay in the 83rd Academy Awards (Oscars 2011). The film was well received by the public and it has been considered to be one of the best recreations of recent history (Charles 2011).

2.1.1 Plot

The King's Speech tells the story of how Albert Frederick Arthur George Windsor, the Duke of York, later King George VI (1936-1952), with the help of his Australian speech therapist, Lionel Logue (1880-1953) tries to overcome his crippling stammer in order to be able to perform his public duties. The story starts when Prince Albert is struggling with his speech at the closing ceremony of the 1925 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium

and ends with George VI broadcasting Britain's declaration of war upon Germany through radio in 1939 (Hooper 2011).

2.1.2 Class distinction

The social structure of Britain has been highly influenced by classes which separate people on the basis of their income, family background and status (Marshall et al. 1988). *The King's Speech* depicts the life of a royal and an ordinary middle-class man. The film highlights many characteristics that show the differences between the mentioned classes.

The tension regarding the inequality between the Duke of York and Logue are emphasised through the behaviours they exhibit and the discussions they hold. The Australian therapist tries to disregard the social difference by treating the future king as he would any other. His character mixes obligation with rebellion as he continues to resist the imperial order time after time. He recognises the authority but refuses to bow down to it (Merck 2016).

Social hierarchy is initially raised by Albert's wife, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, who seeks help from Logue by going to his office. When Logue remarks that the meetings would take place in his office, she commands, 'you must come to us' which is first time the viewers can see the struggle that is going to be around Albert's and Logue's status. Moreover, Logue's resilience is shown when he declares 'My game, my turf, my rules'. Logue's rebellious character can be traced back to his colonial roots which will be discussed later in the chapter.

At the beginning of the film, Prince Albert treats Logue as a servant who is merely there to do his job. He expects to be treated like a royal for that is all he has known. However, Logue wants them to be equals which is why he tries to call Albert by his nickname, Bertie. He encourages the Prince to call him Lionel and not 'Dr Logue'. At first, Albert refuses but as their relationship evolves they start to call each other by their first name slightly closing

the social distance between them. Even though their relationship evolves during the film and they become closer, many shots are still filmed to represent the distance between the two. For example, in the middle of the film when Logue and Albert sit down to discuss Bertie's unhappy childhood, the topic is quite intimate but the reverse shots that displace both characters on the opposite edges of the frame, making the social distance seem evident. This technique was intentional because the director used the camera angles as an interpretation of the characters' class difference. This is why there are many scenes filmed with wide-angle lenses that portray large character portraits but also take in the background so the director could take in the grandeur of the people (Merck 2016).

The tension around the inequality of the two men's status can also be seen in the cinematography, with the scenes filmed so that they are given equal screen-space (Merck 2016). As Prince Albert is considered to be more important as he is the future king, he should be shown as a larger figure; however, Logue's position in the scenes makes him look like he is equal to his client. The equality is shown in the scene which takes place in the middle of the film, where the two characters are walking in the Regent's Park. The two men seem to be equals because of the way they are framed. The viewer sees bodies that are the same size and dressed quite similarly, with long dark coats and hats. They seem to be two friends who are just walking through the foggy park. The scene changes when Logue gives his opinion about Albert's brother too freely and tells him that he could be a better king than him. Whilst saying this, he puts his hand on the future king's shoulder to show support which makes the Prince quite upset, shouting at him to 'not take any liberties' and that Logue 'speaks of treason'. The conflict can be seen through the way the scene is framed. As Albert walks away, Logue's size becomes smaller as he is walking behind him. The shakiness of the camera increases the severity of the conflict. At the end of the scene, Albert becomes furious and leaves Logue in the park but not before mentioning that he is the son of a King and a

brother of one and that Logue is just a 'jumped-up jackaroo from the Outback'. This is a stab at Logue's status as a commoner from Australia. Is it possible to interpret the relationship between Albert and Logue through the historical background that Britain and Australia share?

Parallels can be drawn with the wider historical context of Britain and Australia. In the portrayed period, Australia was still called a Dominion. The status was gained in 1907 though it had been a self-governing nation since 1901. After the Second World War, it became known as a Commonwealth realm. After fighting in the First World War for Britain, Australians began to doubt their loyalty to Britain because of the decision their leader made that sent them into the scarring events of the war. However, when George VI called their allies to fight Nazi Germany, Australia still answered the call and did it on the same day the call went out. The Australian Act of 1986 removed the final legal ties to Britain which made the country an independent nation. (Merck 2016). The relationship between the King and the Australian is reminiscent of the ideology of loyalism. At the end of the film, after Logue and George VI have a falling out, Logue still stays devoted to the King and helps him with his final speech in the film. When the monarchy needs assistance, help is drawn from the Empire (Merck 2016). Such parallels can be drawn between the monarch and the Australian as well.

Logue's controversial Australian characteristics are further emphasised in the second half of the film where in a scene, Logue sits down on Saint Edward's Chair to aggravate the future king (Merck 2016). Prince Albert is furious, shows visible rage and tells him he cannot sit in that chair because he does not have the right. What aggravates the Albert even more is the body language that Logue has. Although, he is hysterical, Logue is relaxed and talks calmly, making it seem like he does not appreciate the cultural value of the location. Moreover, this shows how highly traditions can be valued and how emotional one can get

when those customs are being disrespected. The anxious moment is emphasised by the shaky hand-held camera which makes the scene look more rapid.

The social divide between the main characters is referenced by the depiction of the two characters' homes as well (Merck 2016). Multiple shots are shown where they live and what their living quarters look like. The royal household looks quite expensive with large rooms and hallways. It seems well kept and there are maids in the background who are meant to help them with household tasks. However, Logue's home interior is quite different. The furniture in his house is not lavish nor is it expensive. The paint is coming off from the walls and the furniture looks a bit worn. It is an ordinary place where a middle class citizen could live. The scenery sets apart the lives of royal members and middle class people.

2.1.3 The importance of family

The living areas of the two characters are different, but somehow both have a warmth to them. This could be because of the family dynamic that is presented to the viewers. Even though Albert and Logue live different lives, they both share the similarity of deeply caring about their families. Both fathers make time for their children and tell stories to them. Logue makes time for his kids between sessions and Albert is seen to entertain his children before going out to an event with his wife. Family means a great deal to the Prince. His father, George V was quite critical and hard on him whilst he was growing up. Affection was something that was not given lightly (McLeod 1999). The opposite can be seen in the Prince's own family. He hugs and kisses his children, giving them the love that he never got from his own father.

At the end of the film, when the Prince becomes King, he goes to greet his family like he normally does. However, this time his children do not run to him for hugs, but curtsy as it is the proper thing to do. This saddens the new King as he takes a long pause and he is seen to contemplate the relationship that has changed. He refuses to stay formal and goes to

kiss his little girls on the head. He does not want the same family dynamic that he had when he was a child.

The way both families talk with one another and hold themselves whilst with each other is slightly different from when they are talking to strangers. Even though Logue and Albert live quite different lives, the importance of family still remains. The viewers get to see the more elite type of living as well as the middle class homes and they can compare the two. They can see that family is an important part of their lives as they make up a huge part of their support system. This shows the values and norms of the usual loving family who are held in high regard.

2.1.4 Use of language

Language is an important part in any social activity which means that, in order to make a good first impression on someone, using respectful phrases can give a positive signal to the other person which can help to develop a new relationship (Clark 1996). Using polite phrases shows respect and good manners. In the scene, where the Duchess of York is going to see Logue, she goes undercover, using the alias 'Mrs Johnson'. This is where Logue unknowingly makes a mistake when he thinks he is speaking to an ordinary client. Not knowing who Logue is talking to, he uses informal language and rude subjects such as being 'just on the loo' and if Mrs Johnson's 'hubby' is present then he should 'pop by' later and discuss his personal matters. This is where the Duchess of York reveals herself by mentioning that she does not have a 'hubby' and they do not 'pop' and moreover, they do not discuss their personal matters, ever. She emphasises the words to point out what terms they are not used to using. The way she says the words sounds like they are beneath her. This is where the social difference can be noted again.

George VI use of language is an important part of the film. The King's stammer undermines the level of authority he is supposed to uphold when he is speaking. The long

pauses between words do not project confidence and it takes the power away from the speaker. He is made to look weak and unsure of himself when he talks. The reason behind this is because the director of the film, Seidler, had battled with a severe stutter as a child himself. He wanted to make a film about a King who also struggles with his own problems. To him, George VI was a hero who he admired tremendously. He listened to his speeches on the radio and found that he was the voice of true bravery (Minier 2016). If a King could overcome his fear of speaking in front of the public than he could do it as well. George VI was a source of true inspiration for the writer and that is why he wanted to portray the King as a courageous man who faced his fears and did not give up on himself.

2.1.5 Setting

When it comes to getting familiar with the climate and scenery of the country, most clips show the stereotypical scene that is often projected on London. In the film, when Prince Albert's wife goes to find Logue for the first time, the streets are filled with such thick fog that the street signs are hard to find and even read. Most scenes filmed outside show a cloudy and foggy site. During the Victorian era, foggy weather was not an unusual site. The thick fog could make travelling quite difficult and almost impossible. However, the fog did not just consist of water molecules, it was mostly mixed with the smoke from the coal fires that kept the factories working. Sulphurous elements would make the fog have a yellowish tone which could not be seen in the film. The smoke became so harmful that during long-lasting fogs, animals would find breathing difficult and would even die. The soiled air intruded homes through windows and doors. In order to stop this phenomenon, attempts were made to eliminate this factor but the industrialists would resist because they wanted to save money even though it was harming their own health as well. (Dirda 2015).

2.1.6 Historical accuracy

Before the filming began the writer, Siedler found Logue's journals that were kept from that period which he incorporated into the movie (Dailyhistory 2019). The costumes,

which the actors are wearing are true to the period and so is the architecture. However, not everything is shown the way it really was. To expand students' cultural knowledge and critical thinking, some aspects of the film should be pointed out that were changed for the benefit of the film. For example, Sir Winston Churchill is shown as a supporter of George VI who was not keen on seeing Edward VIII on the throne due to his controversies. However, this was not the case for he was friendly with the abdicated king and wanted to see him rule the country despite his marriage to Wallis Simpson (Rhodes James 1998; as cited in Dailyhistory 2019). George VI's stammer installed doubt into the highest members of the British Government. Like Churchill, they were hesitant about his abilities to rule a nation. In the end, Churchill came to respect him as the ruler of the United Kingdom as he proved himself to be worthy of that position (Logue and Conradi 2010: 13; as cited in Dailyhistory).

The speeches which are read in the film are the very same that the royal family have read. For the benefit of the movie, some parts of the speeches have been cut out because of their length. This gives the viewers an idea of how people were addressed during those difficult periods and they can hear the words for themselves. The speeches that could be heard are the closing speech at the 1925 Empire Exhibition in Wembley, the Christmas speech of George V, Edward VIII's abdication message and the War outbreak speech at the very end by George VI (Hooper 2010).

Furthermore, one of the misconceptions that comes from the film is the idea that Logue was in the same room as George when he declared through the radio that Britain was at war with Germany. This was not true and the Australian was not present. However, he did help the King with his speech, providing him with notes as to where he should take his time to breathe and where the he should pause to stress an idea. The therapist was shown as a close friend to the King and even though their friendship was real, Logue was not as easy-going as the film showed. In reality, he was expected to be fairly formal with the King

(Logue and Conradi 2010: 167; as cited in Dailyhistory). In an interview, the grandchild of Lionel Logue, Robert Logue, claimed that his grandfather did not swear in front of the King and he did not call him Bertie (BBC 2011). Although their relationship was close, some formal behaviour was still required. He did help the King with his stammer by using innovative techniques as he was a pioneer in speech and language therapy (Logue and Conradi 2010: 145; as cited in Dailyhistory). He gained his skills from experience and that was enough for George even though the movie shows it in a different light where he was quite upset with Logue for not revealing that he is not a real doctor (Logue and Conradi 2010: 115; as cited in Dailyhistory).

Logue was not a certified speech therapist but an amateur actor whose experience came from helping World War I soldiers with speaking disorders. His methods were considered to be unorthodox and controversial yet they worked, but. Other therapists used methods that nowadays would be considered erroneous. For example, it was believed that smoking calmed the nerves and relaxed the throat muscles when in fact it was just harming the patient's health when they asked him to smoke. Logue did not believe in the benefits of smoking. Learning about these old methods gives the viewers an extraordinary look into the medical world of the early 20th century (Hooper 2010).

Keeping these incorrect facts in mind, students can go forward with a more analytical outlook of the events shown in the film. They will develop a more evaluative viewpoint on subjects, knowing that they might be misled with incorrect facts. This teaches them to be more aware of misconceptions that might be in the films they are watching or even what they are told.

In *The King's Speech* the most important cultural aspect that comes out is the differences in status. Seeing the different behaviours of the people who are from different

classes might give the viewers an idea of how people behaved during those times. The body language and the use of words share the cultural nuances that come through the film.

2.2 *Peaky Blinders*

Peaky Blinders is a fictional historical British TV-series about the violent gangs and is set just after the end of the First World War in 1919 Birmingham, England. The British crime drama television series created by Steven Knight and directed by Otto Bathurst has four seasons and more on the way. The series was inspired by a real gang that was named 'Peaky Blinder' even though they have few similarities when it comes to operating the gang. The series was well received by critics who were compelled by the riveting story and the powerful cast (Renshaw 2014). The show was praised when it first came out for its stylish cinematography and fast-paced dialogues.

2.2.1 Plot

The main focus of the TV-series is the influential gang 'peaky blinders' that operate by offering people protection from other threats, gambling and making shady business deals. The main character, Thomas Shelby is the head of the gang trying to gain a better life for him and his family. The show portrays his journey to power and his struggles during it. Although the peaky blinders is a fictional gang, it is loosely based on a real group of the same name who lived in the 19th century. The show depicts what life could have been like after the soldiers came back from the Great War and how they deal with the aftermath (Bathurst 2013).

2.2.2 The aftermath of World War I

As mentioned before, the show begins in 1919 which is just after The First World War. Many of the working-class men who fought in the war never came back the same. The traumatizing events led to many people having to cope with psychological damage which is medically named as post-traumatic stress disorder (Lee and Young 2001).

This stressor is a prominent factor in the first episode of the first series. The effects of the war can be clearly seen in the first half of the scene, where Danny Whizzbang, a gangster, suffers from loss of reality and goes mad thinking that he is back in the war. He storms into a pub flipping tables and breaking the glasses that are on them. The scene is shot with quick transitions from other points of view indicating the quickness of the action. He is pinned down by two of his friends who fought with him in the war. They try to calm him down and snap him out of his dream. They know what he is going through and yet the subject is not discussed. It seems like the shared trauma is supressed and relieved in private with opium and other drugs.

Talking about their mental health and emotional weaknesses is considered to be embarrassing (Long 2017). People would not go and get help because of the stigma that surrounded seeking treatment from mental health services. It was not socially approved and it diminished one's self esteem (Corrigan 2004). Going to see a doctor meant that something was wrong and people did not want to often admit that.

However, considering the fact that many of the soldiers were working-class men who did not have money to spare might suggest that even if they wanted to they could not afford the treatment. They lived in a society where the idea that one could pay a professional to analyse their emotions seemed absurd.

At the end of the first episode, Danny has become a danger to himself and others as he attacks a waiter during one of his meltdowns. He stabs the man and runs away from the crime scene. He was considered a time bomb that could go off at any point and in the end he did. Not confronting his issues about the war has led him down a dark path from which he cannot come back.

As for the women, they live a different life. During the early 20th century, women had trouble with their rights and discrimination (Koven 1990). For example, when a girl got

pregnant out of wedlock she was seen as an embarrassment and cast out of their social circle, although the man did not suffer any consequences. This is what happens in the first series to Ada, the main character's sister, who gets pregnant while not being married. She is advised to abort the baby but she keeps it. When the father of the child finds out that he is going to have a child, he proposes to Ada which redeems her and saves her from social embarrassment.

Girls who did not want to keep the baby had to get an abortion which was quite a dangerous procedure during those times. Despite that, illegal abortion was quite common in the 19th century and the early 20th century. By the 1930s the illegal activity had risen to its peak. The deaths of the women that lost their lives during the procedure were often disguised under a false cause of death to keep the family's honour. However, in reality it was not the young girls who mostly got abortions, but the 30-40-year-old married women whose contraception had failed (Chamberlain 2006).

This series shows quite a different side from what the viewers would have seen in *The King's Speech*. However, knowing the way of life of contrasting people with different backgrounds shows how diverse a country can be. This notion can be led back to the topic of subcultures and how they enrich the entirety of a country. Even though these films are set in the same country during almost the same era, the variety of values and norms for people are quite extraordinary.

2.2.3 Use of language

In contrast to *The King's Speech*, *Peaky Blinders* is a story about ordinary working-class people. The students can hear a different accent that they might have not countered yet. The Birmingham accent is called the Brummie accent which is often spoken in the West Midlands around Birmingham (Clark 2013).

A constant factor in the series is swearing. Speech is vulgarized by constant profanities and recurrent threats. The characters' language use is not that controlled and they express themselves however they want. In most scenes there is a swearword that flies out of someone's mouth after each sentence to make a point. They are free to express themselves and since everyone does it, it has become a norm. However, when there are children around, the women of the family often tell the men that they should watch their language. It seems that the use of language reveals the characters' true values. For example, by not using bad words in front of the younger generation they show that they care what kind of example they set for their children, which shows the respect they have for their family.

2.2.4 The importance of family

The high regard in which the characters' families are held is stressed throughout the show. They start wars with other gangs just because they insulted a member of their family. However, whatever the characters do, they do it with the intention of benefiting their kin in one way or another. Every decision they make, they try to run it by the family first. Viewers could learn about how the characters speak to their family and how they address others. The difference might not be that big but it is the meaning behind those words that really matter.

Moreover, students can hear different kinds of expressions and slangs that people used during those times. The Brummie accent is quite different from the normal British accent which could be heard in *The King's Speech*. Those who might be new to accents may first find it hard to understand what the characters are saying. However, this problem can be solved by using subtitles at the bottom of the screen. That way they can see the words and not miss a single part of the dialogue.

2.2.5 Setting

When describing the area the characters live in, the director has projected a very industrial scene. As the main character walks through the streets, he often passes by the ordinary working-class men who are throwing coal into the huge factory ovens. They look

dirty from the coal as do the children who are running around on the muddy streets of Birmingham. The smoke from the chimneys often mixes with the fog and it gets difficult to see if the haze in the streets is in fact a weather based one or produced by the nearby factories. As explained by Dirda (2015), the fog was mainly the smoke from the factories which were quite close to the characters in this series. The show has a gloomy vibe to it which is enhanced by the lack of sunlight. This scenery only confirms what the students would have already learned about England from *The King's Speech* if they decided to watch the film first. However, by watching *Peaky Blinders* they see the difference of what it is like living in the country's capital versus a smaller city. The contrast between the social classes is evident and by seeing the dissimilarities of the two communities, people can get a wider understanding of how differently life can be lived in the same country.

2.2.6 Historical accuracy

The creators of the show wanted as much authenticity as they could get as they did a thorough investigation into the era they wanted to describe. However, not all aspects of the show are quite true and have been made up for the benefit of the series. For example, the show tells a tale where most of the gang members are full grown adults. This was not the case in real life for most of the gang members were troubled youths. Due to extreme poverty and overcrowded slums, people took drastic measures to survive. They held riots, stole from others and used violence to get what they wanted (Bradley 2013).

It is said that the nickname for the real gang came from the razor blades that were stitched into the front of their caps which were used as a weapon to hurt their victims (Bradley 2013). However, the historian Carl Chinn did research on the matter and discovered that this fact might not be true. Razor blades started to appear in the 1890s, but they were considered a luxury item and were probably too expensive for the peaky blinders to own. Therefore, the name probably originated from just the peaked hats that they wore. The peaks

were quite hard and could have been used as a weapon when head-butting someone to momentarily confuse them (Chamberlain 2018).

In the show, the characters' clothing style was shown as intimidating yet stylish. They dressed better to show power and this was indeed the case. The youths had a dress code that made them stand out and look good at the same time. Some elements were different, but the main idea was the same for the show. Characters had the same haircuts which consisted a closely shaven bottom half of the scalp and a larger piece of hair left hanging on the head. Also, the peaked caps were the same which was a big inspiration for the show. The clothes were quite similar although they did have differences. In reality the gang members wore neck scarves, bell-bottom trousers and heavy leather belts which could not be seen on the series (Pearson 2006: 7).

Another similarity that the show and the reality have in common, is that rival gangs played a huge part in both scenarios. Fights broke out between them over territories or for conflicted matters which were solved by knives, pistols and iron bars (Pearson 2006: 7).

However, a difference can be found when it comes to the relationship with the police. The real hooligans would resist being arrested and fight back. They would gang up on the police officer and assault him (Pearson 2006: 7). The fictional version is somewhat different from the reality. The main characters would not fight the authorities; but they would find ways to get the police on their side and that is why they pay off most officers in the city.

In *Peaky Blinders*, students can see how historical events can shape a community. The war devastated many to the point of psychological disruptions. Men were scarred and women were discriminated against. The quality of life was low due to poverty which led to crime and violence. Students can see the lives of working-class men whose lifestyle differs greatly from the elite.

2.3 The suitability of *The King's Speech* and *Peaky Blinders* as sources of information on British culture

The fictional film and TV-series both depict the lives of people who are in some way exceptional and do not live ordinary lives. The pictures are based on true ideas, but the projection of the two is mainly someone else's interpretation. With this said, the film and the series do try do show similar lifestyles of the people from the early 20th century.

The significance of the class system, which people lived by is notably brought out in *The King's Speech*. The film is filled with small details that demonstrate the social distance between George VI and Lionel Logue as well as the therapist's encounters with the King's wife. The differences are brought out by their behaviour, language and history. Seeing these aspects helps the viewers understand how a royal and a middle class citizen would have interacted with each other. Moreover, they are introduced to the speeches that the royal members of the family presented to the world through small scenes. The historical knowledge that can be gained from this movie makes it a quality source from which people could learn about the British culture. This film is for people who are interested in history and want to see the life of a monarch.

Peaky Blinders is a series that shows the lives of gangsters but behind that the viewers can see what lives were like for the working-class people in an industrial society. The impact that the First World War made on the soldiers who fought in it, can be seen by the psychological damage that it left on them. The scarred men turned to drugs to ease the pain because nothing else would help. Mental health was not topical and it had a stigma around it which made the idea of calling for help ridiculous. Moreover, the women of the time had to go through dangerous procedures to hide the fact that they had brought shame upon their family. They were not seen as equals and their treatment was often misogynistic. With these notions in mind, it could be said that Peaky Blinders can be a source of information on early 20th century British culture.

However, when it comes to showing *Peaky Blinders* to students, it should be noted that several scenes in the series are quite graphic and violent. It has to be considered that some of the students might be too fragile to view such content. Even though university students are quite grown up, the frightful scenes might still not be appropriate enough to show in a lesson that introduces the cultural aspects of a country. Also, nudity and swearing are constant factors in this series. Therefore, choosing to show this series in a classroom might be controversial for some. However, if the students are interested in the lives of working-class families and are fascinated by different accents, then this show is for them. The series shows the darker side of England and does not embellish facts that are usually left out in ordinary films. Overall, this show has a wide variety of cultural nuances which can be discovered if looked for. It gives a different view of what life was like outside of the posh lives that were held to a higher standard.

The King's Speech and *Peaky Blinders* are similar in the way that they care about their families. They would do anything for them and they value the support that is given to them by the family members. This shows the viewers that even in the early 20th century family was still an important element which played a huge role in their lives.

However, another similar factor that is presented in both pictures is the weather. More specifically, the infamous fog that appears from time to time. By searching the reasons behind such an odd phenomenon, viewers can learn that the stereotypical fog that is depicted in the early 20th century streets of Britain is really smog – the combination of water molecules, industrial smoke and the right conditions.

Both pictures have something to offer for students which could benefit them by showing the cultural nuances which they normally would not get to see. However, it seems that *Peaky Blinders* is a more inappropriate choice to show to the students. Although, if the students are interested in seeing the dirtier side of England then there has to be an agreement

between the teacher and the students. In order to choose the right film, one should take into consideration of what the students themselves want. Some might want to see the darker side of a country and others might wish to see the life of a monarch. Both choices will benefit them by letting them take a look into another country's cultural background.

CONCLUSION

The main cultural aspects which were searched for in this paper were the behaviours, language use and historical nuances. These are all factors that could be depicted through films. Movies are designed to capture the viewer's attention with little nuances that might go unnoticed if not paid attention to. Seeing the body language of the characters and hearing the slight change of tone in their voice shows the students a whole different conversation that is happening beside the dialogue. Films can offer a more detailed picture of a subject than a student would get when they were just reading about it in a book. Introducing the way of life in the early 20th century through film can give the students an idea of what life is like in another country while gaining the knowledge without having to travel far from home.

Viewing films to better understand a differing culture is an exceptional way of widening the students' horizons and expanding their cultural awareness. In the case that the film introducing a new culture is an historical one, the students can get to know about the other culture's history as well as their way of life. It should be kept in mind that not all events might have actually happened. Pointing out the real and fictional parts further develop the students' ability to think and see past the surface level information.

Moreover, it is important to choose appropriate and relevant films that can show cultural aspects to students. Choosing a picture which reflects on important cultural characteristics might teach the students more than a film full of actions scenes that they would ordinarily choose to watch at home. Drawing attention to the false interpretations and introducing topical films to students can be beneficial to them for they might not do such thorough research themselves.

The King's Speech and *Peaky Blinders* proved to be useful sources of information on the British culture even though their plots do not deal with ordinary people. The aspects which came from the analysis were the characteristics and behaviours of the people who

lived extraordinary lives. The importance of family is a strong feature that comes out in both selections.

The directors of the two pictures stayed true to the era they were depicting which gives the students a small glimpse of how life was like during those times. The differences between the two lifestyles were notable and the students could see the contrasts between the life of a monarch, the middle class and the working-class citizens. Seeing the peculiarities of certain regions gives the viewers a wider overview of what kind of cultures one nation can hold and using films to do so makes the learning process easier than ever.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Karmen Visnapuu

Learning about aspects of early 20th century British culture using feature films

(20. sajandi alguse Briti kultuuri aspektide käsitlemine läbi filmide)

Bakalaureusetöö
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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärgiks on läbi filmi ja sarja analüüsi tutvustada õpilastele erinevaid 20. sajandi inimeste eludest tulenevaid kultuurilisi aspekte, mis aitavad tutvustada uut riiki ja selle kultuuri. Tahetakse teada, millised filmi omadused aitavad edastada neid sõnumeid, mis aitaksid õpilastel teist kultuuri paremini mõista. Samuti arutatakse, millised probleemid võivad tekkida õpetajatel, kes tahavad analüüsitud filme kasutada klassides.

Töö esimeses osas analüüsitakse kultuuri definitsiooni ning otsustatakse, milliseid omadusi analüütilises osas otsitakse. Samuti vaadatakse, millised aspektid aitavad filmidel edastada sõnumeid, mida tihti tähele ei panda.

Töö teises osa analüüsitakse filmi *The King's Speech* ja TV sarja *Peaky Blinders*, millest otsitakse kultuurilisi elemente, mida õpilastele tutvustada. Film ja seriaal kirjeldavad sama riigi kultuuri, kuid elustiili erinevused aitavad õpilastel mõista, kui erinevad kultuurid võivad olla.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et nii filmil kui ka seriaalil on omadusi, mis osutuksid teise kultuuri tutvustusel kasulikuks. Võrdluses tuuakse ette erinevused käitumises, kõnes kui ka ajaloos, mis aitavad laiendada huviliste silmaringi. Klassis kasutamiseks on sobilikum *The King's Speech*, kuna *Peaky Blinders* näitab alatihti ebasobilikke olukordi.

Märksõnad: Kultuur, film, võrdlevad kultuuriuuringud

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