THE LANGUAGE OF THE HYBRID: VERBAL MANIFESTATIONS OF IDENTITY AND ALTERITY IN G. B. SHAW'S *JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND*

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Abstract: This paper[1] presents the discursive construction of ethnic identities in the verbal behaviour of the three major characters of G. B. Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1904): the English protagonist Thomas Broadbent, and two ethnic Irish characters, Larry Doyle and Father Keegan. The play is approached with the help of micro-sociolinguistic methods, focusing on face-to-face conversational interactions between characters, as ethnic stereotypes. The main linguistic means of expressing ethnic sameness and difference (deictic 'we' vs. 'they', politeness strategies, markers of power and solidarity, etc.) are analysed as conversational strategies that foreground the relationship among these characters and their attitude towards their own and the other's ethnicity and home country. The analysis of these strategies reveal an unusual result: the reversal of ethnic roles which – as a technique of character treatment – proves Shaw to be well-ahead his age, at the same time constructing and subverting ethnic stereotypes.

Keywords: discursive, ethnic identity, ethnic stereotypes, micro-sociolinguistic, Shaw

1. Introduction

The term "hybrid" is defined as "a thing made by combining two different elements" or, as an adjective, "composed of mixed parts" (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). Both definitions match our purpose as both the English and the Irish hybrid, which we are going to analyse in the following, are constructed in such a way as to achieve the "particular aim" of reversed ethnic identities. In this paper we will use the term "hybrid" in a linguistic context, referring to two Shavian characters who prove to be ambiguous from the point of view of ethnic stereotypes, i.e. their linguistic manifestations reflect the stereotypical verbal features of both the English and the Irish.

It must be also added that in our analyses the term "ethnic identity" will be used instead of "national identity" as the former has a much broader span of coverage, it is a neutral and objective concept as opposed to the concept of nation, loaded with ideological connotations and intuitively felt to be more enclosing.

Shaw's attitude to Britain (i.e. his native land, Ireland vs. his chosen home, England) is extremely ambivalent. The young Shaw abandoned Ireland, the colony, for London, the metropolis. But England was not the country in which he was ever going to feel at home. All through his long creative life he felt like a stranger, an outsider there. This quintessential loner always kept the world and its inhabitants at a distance. However, this feeling of estrangement did not make him unsure of his place in the world; on the contrary, it made him stronger and more clear-sighted in perceiving more clearly and

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understanding more deeply the similarities and differences between outsiders and insiders, between the Irish and the English.

In interpreting his literary oeuvre, this ambivalence has a defining salience. Alienation from his native country and not finding a true home in his chosen homeland resulted in a double feeling of estrangement condensed in the language of most of his dramatic characters, but especially found in the ambiguous characters of his less well-known play, *John Bull's Other Island* (1904).

2. Method of analysis

The methodology of analysis applied to the play is micro-sociolinguistic. The key problem in this field of linguistic research is always the origin and nature of the social valence attached to linguistic forms. Choices of form are primarily determined by the social characteristics of participants and setting. As Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, it is precisely in action and interaction that the most profound interrelations between language and society are to be found: this is the field of micro-sociolinguistics. In line with this approach, the Shavian play is taken as an authentic socio-cultural linguistic corpus (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). In this context, the social variables that shape the identity of the characters are related to their language use and social behaviour.

On the other hand, it can be stated that these Shavian characters are not only 'typical' but also 'stereotypical' from a sociological perspective, because they embody Shaw's view of the nationality or ethnicity they belong to. In this way, the Shavian text displays several stereotypical English and Irish characters who behave, act and speak according to Shaw's view about these nations and ethnic groups. For the definition of the Irish stereotype, we consider the work of Matthew Arnold, Shaw's contemporary, whose lectures on Celtic literature (Arnold 1867) had a formative influence on the Irish literary revival. Faced with the barbarism of modern economic society, "Arnold conceived of Indo-European culture as a unity in which the genius of the marginalized Celtic race was an underrated strand. […] He saw the Celtic psyche as 'essentially feminine', ambiguously praising the Celts for their indifference to the 'despotism of fact'. They lacked common sense and steadfast powers of practical application, qualities he attributed to the Saxon" (Welch 1996: 21).

However, nationality and ethnicity form only one side of these characters: like real people, they also bear the features of their own race, class, gender, etc., all the parameters through which their identity is created. As a result, this paper considers them as stereotypes of their ethnicity, but, as the outcome of our analyses, they will be viewed also as counter-stereotypes, diverging from the stereotype, i.e. being basically different from what society expects them to be.

By offering an ambiguous view of the created ethnic stereotypes, Shaw **constructs** and **undermines** at the same time his characteristically paradoxical plot and character treatment. The present paper concentrates on conversational strategies that these Shavian characters employ while they act like a typical specimen of their ethnic group or nationality, and at the same time, exactly in an opposite way. This analysis will not only capture these characters in their linguistic interaction with other characters, but, as their

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ethnical bias is revealed in ways other than language, it will also seize the way they utter certain sentences or make certain gestures, use body language, etc. In other words, the focus of this paper is to analyse how interacting participants use language, which – as a result – shapes their ethnic identity. However, because ethnicity is not neatly isolable from other facets of identity, it is necessary to consider the participants' positioning with respect to other types of group identity (e.g. gender, class, age), as well as personal and interpersonal identities that are adopted, shaped and abandoned in the course of the unfolding interaction. Taking the English and the Irish ethnic stereotype as a starting point, we examine the particular character's proximity or distance from these cultural and ethnic stereotypes, as they appear in the characters' language behaviour.

3. The hybrid British stereotype

The plot of the play is set partly in England and mostly in Ireland, where the ethnic English Thomas Broadbent and his business and working partner, the ethnic Irish, self-exile Larry Doyle pay a visit. Their linguistic manifestations reveal two ambiguous identities.

Thomas Broadbent, seemingly, is a typical (we can say, stereotypical) representative of Englishness. He is employing constructive strategies (see de Cillia et al. 1999: 160) encompassing those linguistic acts which serve to build and establish English ethnic identity: constituting the ethnic "*we*-group", appealing directly to ethnic solidarity and union, but also persuasive linguistic devices which help in inviting identification and solidarity with the we-group, which, simultaneously implies distancing from "others" (in our case, the Irish).

He is a successful, confident man, a faithful descendant of John Bull[2], as his description also underlines it:

> *He is a robust, full-blooded, energetic man in the prime of life, sometimes eager and credulous, sometimes shrewd and roguish, sometimes portentously solemn, sometimes jolly and impetuous, always buoyant and irresistible, mostly likeable, and enormously absurd in his most earnest moments* (Shaw 1904/1977: 67).

His name (Broad-bent), however, which he proudly bears, is in sharp contrast with his real personality. He calls himself a liberal but he is quite conservative and narrow-

[2] John Bull is a leading character in satirical pamphlets, first published separately and later as a book entitled *The History of John Bull* (1712), by John Arbuthnot (1667-1735) that has come to personify the English nation. Arbuthnot's creation is an English hero, who was a tradesman, "an honest, plain dealing fellow, choleric, bold and of a very unconstant temper", not afraid of anyone, but liable to quarrel with his neighbours "especially if they pretended to govern him". His mood "depended very much upon the air; his spirits rose and fell with the weather glass. John was quick and understood his business very well, but no man alive was more careless in looking into his accounts, or more cheated by his partners, apprentices and servants. This was occasioned by his being a boon companion, loving his bottle and his diversion; for to say the truth, no man kept a better house than John, nor spent his money more generously" (Arbuthnot 1712/1976: 50, quoted in Paxman 1998: 184).

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minded: he tries to be humorous ("I have a strong sense of humor which sometimes makes people doubt whether I am quite serious", Shaw 1904/1977: 147) but does not understand Irish humour and misunderstands irony.

He overtly identifies himself with his own ethnic group:

(1) BROADBENT. I am a lover of liberty, like every true Englishman, Mr Haffigan. My name is Broadbent. (Shaw 1904/1977: 69)
(2) BROADBENT. [...] I am an Englishman and a Liberal (Shaw 1904/1977: 70)
(3) BROADBENT. […] I think you will accept the fact that I'm an Englishman as a guarantee that I am not a man to act hastily or romantically […] (Shaw 1904/1977: 103)

He frequently applies to himself the pronoun of inclusion *we* (vs. *they*) in his discourse about his own ethnic group compared to the out-group (the Irish). For him, as for the British stereotype, being English is equal to being a Protestant and a Liberal: the ethnic identification means a religious and a political membership as well. He is a true patriot in the genuine old-fashioned sense of Britishness: in his mentality being English has the same meaning as being British or a Saxon.

He distinguishes himself from the new generation of Englishmen, and has a deep affection for his homeland, calling it "the dear old island". For him, being English is equal to being a gentleman, earnest ("in English earnest", Shaw 1904/1977: 102), honest, polite and having common sense. His negative politeness[3] is often revealed in his attitude to other interactional partners. His way of apologizing is often introduced by hedges (in the examples below foregrounded in italics) in order to mitigate the force of his face-threatening acts, which is also a negative politeness strategy:

(4) BROADBENT. *You see*, as a stranger and an Englishman, I thought it would be interesting to see the Round Tower by moonlight. (Shaw 1904/1977: 101)
(5) BROADBENT. Oh, *I'm afraid* it's too late for tea. (Shaw 1904/1977: 97)
(6) BROADBENT. […] *Pardon my saying these few words*: nobody feels their impertinence more than I do. (Shaw 1904/1977: 122)

He has a strong sense of morality and as such, feels morally superior to everybody around. In this respect, he is the typical representative of the British Empire, considers himself to be the illuminator of the world and believes that it is his moral duty to patronize the colonized regions and people. This is overtly expressed in one of his remarks:

(7) BROADBENT. (*quite reassured*) Of course I am [sure of the English guidance]. Our guidance is the important thing. We English must place our capacity for government without stint at the service of nations who are less fortunately endowed in that respect. (Shaw 1904/1977: 80)

[3] In the Politeness Theory sense of the term (Brown and Levinson 1987).

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Another requirement that would make him a perfect Englishman is to have a perfect family: this is how he proposes to Nora, the Irish heiress suggesting a common future for them:

(8) BROADBENT. […] We're not going to have any rows: we're going to have a solid four-square home: man and wife: comfort and common sense. And plenty of affection, eh (*he puts his arm round her with confident proprietorship*)? (Shaw 1904/1977: 148)

With these stage directions it becomes obvious that his previous suggestion to offer protection to Nora is swept away by this gesture: his body language betrays his true intention. Therefore, the caterpillar, Doyle's excellent metaphor for the English national character is a perfect way to shed light on his genuine identity:

(9) DOYLE. [T]he **caterpillar**: it's a new and important scientific theory of the English national character. […] A caterpillar […] when it gets into a tree, instinctively makes itself look like a leaf; so that both its enemies and its prey may mistake it for one and think it not worth bothering about.
BROADBENT. What's that got to do with **our** English national character?
DOYLE. I'll tell you. The world is as full of fools as a tree is full of leaves. Well, the Englishman does what the caterpillar does. He instinctively makes himself look like a fool, and eats up all the real fools at his ease while his enemies let him alone and laugh at him for being a fool like the rest […]. (Shaw 1904/1977: 84)

Actually, his polite behaviour is only a mask to disguise his true self: the greedy, colonizing Englishman, whose only aim in Ireland is to take possession over everything, to turn it into another John Bull's Island.

Another feature that also distances him from the standard stereotype of Englishness is that he is often overwhelmed by emotion in the presence of the Irish Nora Reilly or when he speaks of political problems, especially those which might be of interest for his interlocutors. This is how he is trying to convince them of the rightfulness of his remarks, pretending that he feels the same way as the Irish do, wanting to gain support from them in order to win the elections and gain a seat in the Parliament. The colonizing imperial power overtly appears in Broadbent's threat, in the guise of a promise, to change the sleepy Irish town into an economically and educationally flourishing English land:

(10) BROADBENT (*sincerely moved, shaking his hand warmly*). You **shall** never regret it, Mr. Keegan: I give you my word for that. I **shall** bring money here: I **shall** raise wages; I **shall** found public institutions, a library, a Polytechnic (…), a gymnasium, a cricket club, perhaps an art school. I **shall** make a Garden City of Rosscullen: the Round Tower **shall** be thoroughly repaired and restored. (Shaw 1904/1977: 156)

The modal verb *shall* suggests determination and imperiousness, which reinforces the implication arising from the speech act of promising in Broadbent's words, "I give you

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my word for that". In actual fact, these covert markers of mixed ethnic identity suggest that there are features in his discourse (negative politeness strategies, pronouns of inclusion, hedges) which approach him to the English stereotype, while others distance him from it, moving him towards the Irish stereotype (emotional outbreaks, overtly expressing his feelings, the fact that if he wants to attain his goal, he speaks and behaves in a more Irish way than the Irish themselves).

4. The hybrid Irish stereotype

At face value, **Larry Doyle**, Broadbent's partner, displays different discourse strategies as the Englishman. To start with, his appearance already contrasts with that of Broadbent's:

> *Mr Laurence Doyle is a man of 36, with cold grey eyes, strained nose, fine fastidious lips, critical brows, clever head, rather refined and goodlooking on the whole, but with a suggestion of thinskinnedness and dissatisfaction that contrasts strongly with Broadbent's eupeptic jollity.* (Shaw 1904/1977:.73)

He belongs to the ethnic Irish community, he identifies himself with them. This identification is explicitly present several times in his linguistic manifestations, the pronoun of inclusion *we* also appears in his speech and, similarly to Broadbent, being Irish means the same as being a Catholic and a Conservative Tory:

(11) LARRY. […] we Irishmen were never made to be farmers (Shaw 1904/1977: 117)
(12) LARRY. […] I am a Catholic […] (Shaw 1904/1977: 118)
(13) LARRY. […] I am not a Liberal: Heaven forbid! (Shaw 1904/1977: 119)

Due to his detachment from his home country, Larry is the New Irishman, who tries to explain the new, changed world to his countrymen:

(14) LARRY. […] You're all children: the big wourld that I belong to has gone past you and left you. Anyhow, **we Irishmen**[4] were never made to be farmers; and we'll never do any good at it. (Shaw 1904/1977: 118)

As highlighted, he is aware of his being an Irishman. This can be seen from the use of the deictic first person plural pronouns, pronouns of inclusion, which, this time, are addressee-inclusive, and at the same time, speaker-inclusive as well (see Wodak et al. 1999: 45-46). This can be said to be a metonymic realisation of *we* as well: *we* stands for speaker, addressee, as well as third persons who are not present, but who should also bear in mind the speaker's words.

[4] My emphasis.

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"I perceive that Ireland is the only spot on earth which still produces the ideal Englishman of history" – says Shaw in the preface to his play (Shaw 1904/1977: 65). Larry Doyle is the perfect embodiment of this paradoxical idea. In spite of the fact that he is presented as an Irishman, he is basically another representative of the English stereotype, if possible, more English than Broadbent. He is the perfect gentleman, "a species extinct in England", who possesses all the best qualities the conservatives believe are necessary for a proper life: he is trustworthy, reliable, polite and considerate.

Doyle is a gentleman, but in a more silent way than his English colleague. As opposed to Broadbent, he is not boasting about being one, but speaks and behaves like a "true-born Englishman" (Defoe). Paradoxically, those features that Broadbent mentions as all the positive traits of the Irish stereotype can be found in Doyle: spirit of liberty, instinctive mistrust of the Government, love of independence, indignant sympathy with the cause of the oppressed nationalities abroad, and the resolute assertion of personal rights at home (Shaw 1904/1977: 133). In spite of all these, in his discourse he detaches himself from this attitude and proves to be a stereotypical Englishman, who is not so full of emotions, but adopts a more realistic, even bitter and ironical attitude towards his home country and its people. Naturally, this is due to his temporal and spatial distancing from his homeland (he has lived in London and abroad for almost twenty years), but also to his change of mentality he has undergone. Therefore, he approaches the English stereotype in the sense that he has the typically English "*inhibitive instinct*" (Shaw's stage direction) missing from the English Broadbent. He is bashfully modest in expressing his real feelings towards Nora Reilly. The small talk they display in the scene where they remain together for the first time after eighteen years, is a good example of the "social dis-ease"[5] that is so typical of the English:

(15) LARRY. […]. (*He yawns slightly; but she looks up quickly at him, he pulls himself together and rises with an air of waking up and setting to work cheerfully to make himself agreeable*). And how have you been all this time?
NORA. Quite well, thank you.
LARRY. That's right. (*Suddenly finding that he has nothing else to say, and being ill at ease in consequence, he strolls about the room, humming distractedly*). (Shaw 1904/1977: 142)

He also overtly states his pessimism about expressing feelings in public, the delicateness of the subject being underlined by pauses and hesitations.

[5] This is an expression borrowed from Fox (2005), who defines it as follows: "The central 'core' of Englishness. Social dis-ease is a shorthand term for all our chronic social inhibitions and handicaps. The English social dis-ease is a congenital disorder, bordering on a sort of sub-clinical combination of autism and agoraphobia (the politically correct euphemism would be "socially challenged"). It is our lack of ease, discomfort and incompetence in the field (minefield) of social interaction; our embarrassment, insularity, awkwardness, perverse obliqueness, emotional constipation, fear of intimacy and general inability to engage in a normal and straightforward fashion with other human beings. When we feel uncomfortable in social situations (that is, most of the time) we either become over-polite, buttoned up and awkwardly restrained or loud, loutish, crude, violent and generally obnoxious" (Fox 2005: 402-403).

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(16) LARRY. […] Well, never mind: these great sentimental events always are failures; and now the worst of it's over anyhow. (Shaw 1904/1977: 144)

The only time when he is overwhelmed by emotions is when he speaks of his home country, Ireland. He has ambivalent feelings towards it: he loves and hates it at the same time. This affection is also observable in the country's personification in his discourse: it appears in the form of a metaphor, a helpless female personality, which is exploited to the maximum.

(17) LARRY (*now thoroughly roused*). […]. Is Ireland never to have a chance? First **she** was given to the rich; and now that they have forged on **her** flesh, **her** bones are to be flung to the poor, that can do nothing but suck the marrow out of **her**[6]. (Shaw 1904/1977: 117)

The personification of Ireland suggests that he looks at his home-country from a male perspective and consequently attributes a female persona to it. As stated by Wodak et al. (1999: 44),

> personifying metaphors […] can be used to give meaning to the phenomena of the world in humanised, anthropomorphised form. […] The very vividness of such metaphors […] favours identification of the addressees with that of the personified collective subjects. In this way, they serve the strategy of animation.

Thus Larry Doyle's affective attitude towards his country makes him a typical Irishman. However, his realistic, frequently cynical detachment from it can be considered an English feature. Therefore he can be labelled as a hybrid stereotype, which combines both positive and negative politeness interactional ethos.

5. The representative of alterity: Father Keegan

It would be obvious to state that the third main character of the play, the outcast Irish priest, being of Irish descent himself, should be Larry Doyle's ally, both of them sharing the same Irish attitude and conversational strategies. At first sight, Keegan is similar to Larry in his bitterness and rejection of the present Irish state of affairs, in "the cold savagery of Irish wit" (Morgan 1972: 124). However, their exchange of words in the last act betrays Larry's true affiliation. When Keegan refers to *you* in his counterattack on Broadbent's plans for Ireland's future, he actually refers to both the Englishman and his Irish partner, implying that he does not share the same hybrid identity with them, he represents alterity in the play. In his great ironic tirade, the priest reveals the two invaders' true intentions:

[6] My emphasis.

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(17) KEEGAN (*with polished irony*). I stand rebuked, gentlemen. […] You are both, I am told, thoroughly efficient civil engineers; and I have no doubt the golf links will be a triumph of your art. Mr. Broadbent will get into parliament most efficiently, which is more than St. Patrick could do if he were alive now. You may even build the hotel efficiently, if you can find enough efficient masons, carpenters, and plumbers, which I rather doubt. (*Dropping his irony…)* When the hotel becomes insolvent (*Broadbent takes his cigar out of his mouth, a little taken aback)* your English business habits will secure the thorough efficiency of the liquidation. You will reorganize the scheme efficiently (*Broadbent and Larry look quickly at one another; for this, unless the priest is an old financial hand, must be inspiration*); you will get rid of its original shareholders efficiently after efficiently ruining them; and you will finally profit very efficiently by getting that hotel for a few shillings in the pound (Shaw 1904/1977: 158)

It is obvious that he addresses both Broadbent and Doyle, as he explicitly states this, using e.g. the plural noun *gentlemen*, a determiner with inherently plural reference and a plural noun *you are both […] engineers*. He echoes Broadbent's earlier words on efficiency, which were used in a positive sense at the time, now – due to this repetition[7] – using this word ironically, turning it into its opposite meaning. The irony is emphasized by the mention of St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, in a very mundane, secular context, making reference to one of the metonymies of political life, the parliament.

The explicit mention of both "hybrids" becomes obvious in Keegan's words when he talks about the "Anglicized Irishmen and Gladstonized Englishman", metaphors standing for Doyle and Broadbent. He overtly dissociates himself from the two characters and, as revealed by his way of speaking and attitude, he raises above the ethnical bias of the other two. The close-fisted, petty political and ethnic fights of the secular world leave him cold. Addressing his words to Broadbent, he claims:

(18) KEEGAN. […] [m]y country is not Ireland nor England, but the whole mighty realm of my [Catholic] Church. For me there are but two countries: heaven and hell; but two conditions of men: salvation and damnation. Standing here between you the Englishman, so clever in your foolishness, and this Irishman, so foolish in his cleverness, I cannot in my ignorance be sure which of you is the more deeply damned (Shaw 1904/1977: 160).

His paradoxical words betray an identity, which is not ethnically biased, showing respect and consideration for little things (bees, coral insects, caterpillars), and for whom the donkey is his brother and the grasshopper his friend. He believes in a country (heaven) not tormented by any inclinations, whether religious, or ethnic or even political. While both Broadbent and Doyle display an overt, explicit patriotism, both of them speaking of Ireland in rhetorical, sometimes histrionic speeches (see Broadbent's brilliant piece of

[7] Repetition in itself is a contextualization cue for irony (see Wilson and Sperber 1992: 53-76).

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oratory in Act IV), Keegan's covert patriotism can be interpreted as covert Irishness which manifests itself in showing affection for small creatures, mentioning them one by one and, though an outcast, living physically close to his home country. Because of this less obvious ethnic identity, he can be considered a personality out of place and out of time, a Saint Francis of Ireland (Morgan 1972: 125), brother of Shaw's other outstanding character, Saint Joan. His existence in the play is, however, justified as he counterbalances the two overt ethnically biased figures of the play. He preaches the gospel of the unity of life and consciousness, offering the image of a perfect world, a country "where the State is the Church and the Church the people" (Shaw 1904/ 1977: 161)

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have highlighted a series of conversational strategies in the discourse of the two main characters of *John Bull's Other Island*, which are typical of the English stereotype. While on the surface we are dealing with an English and an Irish character, after a thorough examination of Broadbent and Doyle's interactional manifestations in the play, it becomes obvious that in actual fact we are dealing with two faces of the same coin. On the one hand, Broadbent is the representative of the stiff, moralizing, but in fact cold and cynical English stereotype, who – also verbally – tries (and manages) to cheat on his conversational partners (the Irish); on the other hand, Doyle's discourse also possesses similar traits, but is strikingly dissimilar in its basic orientation, in the affective quality of his communication (see Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). While Broadbent's speech radiates a "standoffish", negative politeness culture, with high values of distance, power and rate of imposition, which gives it a "hierarchical, paternal ethos", Larry Doyle's utterances transmit low values of the same parameters, which gives them an "egalitarian, fraternal ethos" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 247).

The analysis of the third character, Father Keegan's utterances also showed that while the speech of the two burlesque characters is ethnically biased, the priest's verbal manifestations do not reveal such a hybrid identity. He is the representative of an alternative identity, of alterity, offering therefore a healthy counterbalance to the formers, though the lack of ethnic markers in his speech makes him less life-like.

Primary source

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