

## **Language, culture and social difference: Using linguistic ethnography to explore collective class identity in cultural texts.**

Beverley Hill

Swansea University, UK

[Beverley.Hill@Swansea.ac.uk](mailto:Beverley.Hill@Swansea.ac.uk)

This study explores cultural texts as an alternative source of data for the ethnographic study of language, culture and identity. Knowledge of collective identity derives in part from our consumption of media texts which reflect and shape our beliefs and are meaningful about their context of production (Sellnow 2014). As such films, as cultural artefacts, provide useful sites for the analysis of the relationship between language, culture and social difference (Perez-Milans 2015).

The aim of the study is to understand how representations of collective class identity at the micro level of public cultural products interact with contemporary understandings of social class. Social class no longer fits into the neat hierarchical layers (Savage 2015) used to categorise society throughout much of British history, yet traditional class imagery remains strong in British culture (see Rampton 2007). Drawing on Ortner's (2003, 2006) anthropological studies of social class and culture and using language as my starting point (Perez-Milans 2015), this study explores the reproduction and representation of British class identity in the 20th Century Fox film 'Kingsman: The Secret Service' (2014).

The analysis of collective identity shows that class is predictably marked linguistically and semiotically through in-jokes, accent, expressions, (in)politeness, clothing and behavioural choices, all of which become markers of cultural distinction. However class identities are not altogether homogenous and variations are evident within each social group. Ideologically, the film presents an alternative version of social mobility, while privileging the upper middle-classes (arguably reflecting its creators) and also perpetuating traditional class divisions. These findings are discussed in the light of recent sociological studies of class.

Social class remains salient in late modernity. This study suggests that the way in which cultural texts inform, shape, maintain or subvert class practices (both linguistic and behavioural) provides useful insights into the structuring of class in contemporary society.

### **References**

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