

# ***Peaky Blinders*: A Linguistic Analysis of Selected Features of the British TV Series**

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá morfosyntaktickou a lexikální analýzou britského televizního seriálu *Gangy z Birminghamu*. Cílem práce je především porovnat jazyk, používaný v seriálu, s nestandardní gramatikou a slovní zásobou, která je typická pro birminghamský dialekt, ale také prozkoumat urážlivý, metaforický a idiomatický jazyk, který je pro tento seriál příznačný. Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí. Teoretická část pojednává o standardní angličtině a jejích nestandardních variantách na území Anglie a dále se zaměřuje na birminghamský dialekt. Tato část také charakterizuje seriál *Gangy z Birminghamu* a popisuje urážlivý, metaforický a idiomatický jazyk. Praktická část v úvodu přibližuje cíle analýzy a následně analyzuje první sérii vybraného seriálu na základě předem definovaných lingvistických kritérií. Závěrem shrnuje a hodnotí dosažené výsledky.

Klíčová slova: standardní angličtina, nestandardní variace jazyka, birminghamský dialekt, *Gangy z Birminghamu*, gramatika, slovní zásoba, urážlivý jazyk, metafory, idiomy

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis deals with the morphosyntactic and lexical analysis of the British television series *Peaky Blinders*. The primary aim is to compare the language of the selected series with the non-standard grammar and vocabulary typical of Birmingham English, but also to examine the offensive, metaphorical, and idiomatic language that is characteristic of the series. The thesis is divided into two parts. The theoretical part focuses on Standard English and its non-standard variations within England and provides an overview of Birmingham English. This is followed by a characterization of the *Peaky Blinders* series and a description of offensive, metaphorical, and idiomatic language. The practical part introduces the aims of the analysis and then analyses the first season of the selected series on the basis of predefined linguistic criteria. Finally, it summarises and evaluates the results obtained.

Keywords: Standard English, non-standard language variations, Birmingham English, *Peaky Blinders*, grammar, vocabulary, offensive language, metaphors, idioms

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

The majority of non-native English speakers nowadays watch television programmes, especially TV series, from English-speaking countries in their original versions to enhance their English language proficiency. This includes listening, vocabulary and grammar, as well as a better understanding of how English functions in the real world. For these purposes, American series are usually preferred because they are easier for English learners to take in. However, there are also some who seek out British series, which are significantly more challenging to understand. The reason for this is that many of them contain regional dialects that are characterised by non-standard pronunciation, use of grammar, and vocabulary that a foreigner learning English is unlikely to encounter in a textbook.

The British television crime drama *Peaky Blinders*, which has gained immense popularity in recent years across various countries, is one of such series. The narrative centres around working-class life in the Small Heath district of Birmingham after World War I, which is ruled by a merciless gang called the Peaky Blinders. The protagonists in the series are well-known for speaking with the Birmingham accent, which, to an untrained ear, may sound incomprehensible and rather difficult to follow without subtitles. What is known less is that this regional variety of English is considerably more complex and can be more accurately described as a dialect. This inspired the topic of the present thesis, as I was intrigued to find out whether the series also employs the non-standard grammar and vocabulary that are typical of the Birmingham dialect.

The theoretical part begins by defining the concepts of Standard English and language variations, together with explaining the difference between the terms dialect, accent, slang and idiolect, and presenting selected linguistic features of dialects of England. The second chapter introduces Birmingham English, its location, history, as well as its non-standard linguistic features. The last chapter outlines the television series *Peaky Blinders*, followed by its historical inspiration and the description of offensive, metaphorical, and idiomatic language.

The practical part focuses on the linguistic analysis of the first season of *Peaky Blinders*, with an emphasis on comparing the non-standard morphosyntactic and lexical features of the series to those of the Birmingham dialect described in the theoretical part. Furthermore, the lexical analysis explores offensive language along with euphemisms, and hidden meanings of selected metaphorical and idiomatic expressions that are widely used in the analysed series.

## **I. THEORY**

## 1 STANDARD ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE VARIATIONS

There is no universally accepted definition of language, and throughout the years, many authors have attempted to describe what language is. Sapir (1921, 8) characterised language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols,” whereas years later, Hall (1968, 158) described language as “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other, conveying messages by means of systems of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.” Nowadays, language is perceived as a structured system of words that humans use for the purpose of communication (Waite 2013, 512). In general, each language is composed of specific grammatical structures, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and it is believed that the way individuals communicate is a direct reflection of their knowledge (Bruhn de Garavito and Schwieter 2021, 5). Nevertheless, the manner of communication is predominantly shaped by a person’s geographic origin and identity, encompassing factors such as gender, age, race, and social class, rather than just their knowledge (Nadasdi 2021, 327). As a result, there are multiple language variations within the same language that affect the use of grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation. English, being the mother tongue on several continents, exhibits language variations not only within England but also beyond its borders. The widely recognised variations are called *standard*, including Standard (British) English, Standard American English, or Standard Australian English (Yule 2020, 280). This chapter will provide a more detailed explanation of Standard English, explain the difference between the concepts of language variation, dialect, accent, slang, and idiolect, and introduce selected features of dialects of England.

### 1.1 Standard English

Standard British English, also known as Standard English, is a variety of the English language that is considered official and is strongly associated with written communication. This variety is taught in educational institutions, used in print, and in the mainstream media, and its grammatical rules and norms of spelling are widely described in numerous books and dictionaries (Yule 2020, 280). Moreover, since English has expanded to several countries, there are multiple standard variants around the world, including the aforementioned Standard American English. Yet, this thesis will only address the language variations within England.

This language variety is generally referred to as *standard* due to its connection to the process of standardisation, which results in the establishment of a standard language. The objective of standardisation is to promote consistency and reduce variability, which involves

a decrease in the number of grammatical and lexical options (Kerswill and Culpeper 2018, 168). The selection of one language variety for standardisation led to the automatic devaluation of other varieties. To this day, the majority of people still consider Standard English to be the one and only correct variation of the English language. However, it is important to acknowledge that while the standard variation holds a certain social standing and reputation, its linguistic structures are not necessarily superior or more complex than those of other language varieties. Quite the contrary, certain dialects include grammatical features that are absent in Standard English. For instance, Northern and Scottish dialects make a distinction between *this*, *that*, and *yon*, which allows speakers to distinguish between three levels of distance, whereas Standard English has only two – *this* and *that* (Cheshire and Milroy 1993, 6). Furthermore, Trudgill claims that Standard English can be classified more accurately as a dialect, than a language variation due to its grammatical differences from other varieties. He demonstrates this with the examples provided below, where Standard English uses grammatical structures such as (1) and (2), while non-standard dialects are more likely to use the structures given in (3) and (4), which clearly indicate the grammatical distinctions between them (2000a, 3).

**Standard English**

(1) *I did it.*

(2) *He doesn't want any.*

**Non-standard dialects**

(3) *I done it.*

(4) *He don't want none.*

According to Trudgill and Hannah, the process of standardisation excludes pronunciation; hence, there is no specific accent for Standard English, and it can be articulated with any accent (2008, 4). Yet, Standard English is often associated with Received Pronunciation (RP), a pronunciation variety that shows no signs of a regional character (Kerswill 2007, 47). The RP accent is now considered a social accent connected to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), English public schools, and the upper classes and comes from the southeast of England, much like Standard English (Trudgill and Hannah 2008, 6). Moreover, it is the English accent variety that is usually taught to foreigners; thus, its phonological features are extensively detailed in numerous textbooks. Some of the features include r-dropping, the usage of /ʌ/ as in *cup*, or the use of /ɑ:/ in *bath* (Kerswill 2007, 47). Despite the extensive promotion of RP in the public media, schools, or overseas, the predominant accent in England nowadays is Estuary English, which blends non-regional and south-eastern English pronunciation together and therefore can be described as a hybrid of RP and Cockey. Estuary English employs features such as broad diphthongs in *made* or

*boat*, but it also makes use of t-glottalization (as in *better* or *water*), which are both common features of Cockney. All in all, it appears that a lot more people in England are now using lower middle-class regional accents in public, especially in the media, which was not common in the past (Kerswill 2007, 50; Trudgill 2000a, 80–81).

## 1.2 Language Variations

Due to the natural variability of the human language, a particular language usually has multiple variations. As mentioned earlier, Standard English is the most recognised variety of British English; nonetheless, there are other, lesser-known varieties called *non-standard variations*. Unlike Standard English, these non-standard variations are primarily associated with spoken language rather than writing and are often perceived as flawed or unstructured (Van Herk 2017, 12–14; Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 119). Nevertheless, Standard English does not reflect the reality of the English language, and only a small percentage of people in England are native Standard English speakers (Trudgill 2000a, 3). This indicates that a significant portion of the population communicates with non-standard English variations or dialects, which are shaped by people's geographic origin and social background, leading to linguistic differences.

Geographic origin is one of the most studied factors affecting language variations. Since language is acquired via social contact, an individual born and living in a certain geographic area will be linguistically influenced by the surrounding community. These language variations are known as *regional dialects* and can sometimes be so distinct that others are able to recognise where a person was born just by listening (Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 119). Regional dialect boundaries correlate with natural obstacles like mountains or rivers, and dialects are more or less similar depending on their proximity. Consequently, dialects that are geographically close to one another tend to be more similar than those that are further apart. For instance, the regional variety in the northeast of Scotland differs significantly from that in London (Trudgill 2000b, 24). However, geographic origin is not the only factor impacting language variations, and even the speech of people living in the same geographic area may vary. That is due to the tendency of individuals to spend time or work with those who share similar social backgrounds (Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 120). Such language variations are referred to as *social-class dialects* or *sociolects* and are often associated with social stratification, which is any hierarchical organisation of groups within a society or community based on power, wealth, and position. In English-speaking countries, social classes are described as groups of people with comparable socioeconomic features

and unrestricted social mobility. In terms of speech, people belonging to the lower social class employ far more non-standard language in their speech than those from the upper social class, who prefer Standard English. This is due to the distance and obstacles that exist between these social groups, which cause the lowest social classes to be the last, if at all, to be affected by a linguistic innovation that begins among the highest social class (Trudgill 2000b, 23–26). It is also important to note that regional dialects and sociolects are not isolated groups but are intertwined and collectively contribute to an individual's identity.

In addition, people may even switch between language varieties, including lexical or grammatical choices, based on extralinguistic factors, one of which is the relationship between participants in the conversation, which can influence the level of formality or the intention of the communication (Biber and Conrad 2019, 4). Since non-standard varieties are connected with negative attitudes, speakers may choose to use the standard variety over their own in order to show their status or education level (Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 121).

### 1.2.1 Dialect

A distinction must be made between the concepts of *language variation* and *dialect*, as they are frequently used interchangeably. A language variation refers neutrally to any form of linguistic alternation that may occur in a language, namely changes in grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation, which can all vary independently (Trudgill 2000b, 5). A dialect, on the other hand, is the set of all these linguistic components taken together that are characteristic of a group of people belonging to the same geographic location and social class, which is different from the set used by people from other locations and social classes (Trudgill 2004, 2). As a result, labelling a dialect as a language variation would diminish its complexity.

### 1.2.2 Slang and Accent

It is of equal significance to distinguish *slang* and *accent* from a dialect. In contrast to dialect, slang solely describes words or expressions that have either recently entered the language or acquired new meanings over time (Van Herk 2017, 15). Slang is widely used in informal contexts, usually to demonstrate membership in a particular group, and is characterised by its temporary nature, with slang words and expressions often quickly becoming obsolete and disappearing. For instance, in the sixteenth century, the expression *pickthank* was widely used to denote someone who compliments or deceives to seek favour. But there are also cases where slang words survived for many years and even became part of the standard language. For example, the English word *phone*, a shortened version of *telephone*, was formerly considered a slang word. Nowadays, however, the use of this shorter form does not

seem inappropriate, even in a formal setting. Therefore, slang solely represents trendy informal words and expressions, whereas dialect is a whole language system. Slang is part of a dialect but not vice versa (Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 117–118).

In a similar manner, an *accent* is often interchanged with the notion of a dialect; however, an accent refers only to phonetics and phonology and its variations. Everyone has an accent of some sort, and it usually reflects an individual's social and regional background (Van Herk 2017, 16). Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, many people associate the accent used with a certain level of prestige and intellect. While there is no real connection between one's accent and their level of intelligence, it has been proven that individuals who employ the RP accent in their speech are perceived by English society as more knowledgeable and capable than those who speak with regional accents (Cheshire and Edwards 1993, 42).

### 1.2.3 Idiolect

The term *idiolect* denotes a language structure that is characteristic of a particular person and is ultimately linked to one's identity. Everyone naturally belongs to a speech community depending on the previously mentioned factors, such as region or social status; however, there are many other factors that influence the way a particular individual speaks. These include an individual's age, gender, upbringing, religion, sexual orientation, occupation, ethnicity, and interests, which all contribute to the uniqueness of their speech (Park-Johnson and Shin 2020, 122–123). Each individual has a unique idiolect, and no two speakers of any language express themselves the same way, nor do they possess the exact same collection of linguistic elements (Watson 2018, 273). Furthermore, a number of similar idiolects often give rise to different dialects, and the linguistic features of these dialects are a register of the diverse ways in which people communicate with each other (Swann et al. 2004, 141).

## 1.3 Dialects of England

Similar to any other language, the English language is continually changing and evolving. These changes; however, are not necessarily countrywide. As already discussed, English has been shaped by many factors, including social and natural obstacles, which have led to the diversity of dialects across England. According to Trudgill, there are no clear-cut boundaries marking the transition from one dialect to another; instead, dialects form a continuum. Still, they are often divided by geographical areas, where the differences are the most prominent. Based on differences and the time span, he attempted to divide the dialects of England into traditional and modern ones and exemplified the distinction between them with the sentence



*She is not coming* provided below. Traditional dialects, as seen in examples (5) and (6) below, may be difficult to understand nowadays and are spoken by a decreasing minority (2000a, 5–7). The data on these dialects comes from the Survey of English Dialects (SED), a survey conducted from 1950 to 1961 with the intention of recording dialects that were thought to be disappearing (Swann et al. 2004, 305). On the other hand, modern dialects, shown in examples (7) and (8), are spoken by the majority of today’s native English speakers and comprise both Standard English and modern non-standard dialects (Trudgill 2000a, 5–6). Since traditional dialects are no longer widespread, the following linguistic features will mainly refer to modern dialects.

#### **Traditional dialects**

(5) *She bain't a-comin.*

(6) *Hoo inno comin.*

#### **Modern dialects**

(7) *She's not coming.*

(8) *She ain't comin.*

### **1.3.1 Phonology**

In the past, dialectologists preferred to use phonological criteria to divide the country into dialect regions. The reason for this is that literate native speakers in England often hide their dialect, especially in formal settings, by employing grammatical and lexical elements of Standard English. However, the characteristics of regional accents tend to be preserved (Beal 2010, 10). Regarding modern dialects, there are multiple pronunciation groups they can be divided into. For instance, they vary depending on the pronunciation of the short vowel /u/ in words such as *but* and *up*. Northerners pronounce these words as /bʊt/ and /ʊp/, whereas southerners tend to pronounce them as /bʌt/ and /ʌp/. This is because northern accents retain the older vowel system, while southern accents have created an extra short vowel /ʌ/. Also, modern dialects vary in rhoticity, where the presence or absence of the rhotic consonant /r/ differs across England. Although there are areas where the older r-pronouncing is still prevalent, such as in parts of Lancashire and the southwest of England, the area is shrinking annually. The trend of r-dropping originated in the southeast of England and has extended to other regions, mostly because this feature made its way into the RP accent and started to be associated with high social status (Trudgill 2000a, 53–56). The pronunciation also varies in the occurrence or omission of *g* at the end of words such as *long* and *sing*. Despite the fact that the majority of the English dialects across the world no longer pronounce *g* at the end and rather pronounce *long* as /lɒŋ/, there is a relatively large area of England where the *g* can still be heard, such as in /lɒŋg/. This area includes Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham (2000a, 58). Based on these and further differences in pronunciation, Trudgill

divided the modern dialects into sixteen geographic areas, namely the Northeast, Central North, Central Lancashire, Humberside, Merseyside, Northwest Midlands, West Midlands, Central Midlands, Northeast Midlands, East Midlands, Upper Southwest, Central Southwest, Lower Southwest, South Midlands, East Anglia, and the Home Counties (2000a, 67). The West Midlands, in particular, will be covered in more detail in the next chapter, which focuses on Birmingham English, a dialect that is spoken in this area.

### 1.3.2 Morphosyntax

In terms of grammar, the disparities between Standard English and modern non-standard dialects can be more or less apparent. In some cases, modern non-standard dialects include grammatical changes that are absent in Standard English. One of these is the negative verb form *ain't*, which can be employed in two different ways. As demonstrated in the example (9), it serves as the negative form of the present tense of the verb *to be*. However, it may also substitute the negative present tense of the auxiliary verb *have* in the perfective aspect, as shown in (10). Examples (13) and (14) show that the verb negation *ain't* is not used in Standard English at all (Trudgill 2000a, 104). Negative concord is also no longer used in Standard English, as it has gradually fallen out of use, but it is still used in most of the non-standard dialects; see (11) and (15). There are also grammatical features that are present in both standard and non-standard English, albeit with slight variations in their usage. For instance, the use of the possessive adjective *me* instead of *my* in the first-person singular, as shown in examples (12) and (16), is a frequently observed trait among non-standard dialects. Even though *me* is also used in Standard English, it is only employed as a personal pronoun (2000a, 87–88).

#### Non-standard dialects

- (9) *I ain't going.*  
 (10) *I ain't done it.*  
 (11) *I don't want no trouble.*  
 (12) *This is me bike.*

#### Standard English

- (13) *I am going.*  
 (14) *I haven't done it.*  
 (15) *I don't want any trouble.*  
 (16) *This is my bike.*

Conversely, several non-standard dialects do not contain certain grammatical features found in Standard English. While Standard English distinguishes between adverbs ending in *-ly* and the adjectives that go with them, relatively few dialects follow this convention, as depicted in examples (17) and (19). Moreover, in some non-standard dialects, verbs in the present tense are completely regular, which means that, unlike

Standard English, there is no -s ending in the third-person singular, as can be seen in (18) in contrast with (20) (2000a, 86, 101–102).

**Non-standard dialects**

(17) *She sings nice.*

(18) *He like her. / She want some.*

**Standard English**

(19) *She sings nicely.*

(20) *He likes her. / She wants some.*

### 1.3.3 Lexis

Regional vocabulary has long been one of the least explored features of academic dialectology. A possible explanation for this is that it is considerably more challenging to draw general conclusions about regional influences on vocabulary compared to phonology or morphosyntax (Beal 2010, 53–54). The variation in lexis observed in modern dialects is closely linked to the migration of settlers to Britain, which resulted in the emergence of dialectal variations. For instance, many words of French origin were introduced to the English language after the Norman Conquest of 1066, including the word *autumn*, adding another lexical variation to the original Anglo-Saxon word *fall* (Trudgill 2000a, 118). As a result of such historical circumstances, the regional lexicon of England broadened to include not only French loanwords but also words of Scandinavian, Dutch, Low German, Celtic, or Romani origin. While these initial interactions produced terms that are considered traditional dialect vocabulary, words that have recently entered the language are perceived as slang and a threat to the traditional dialect lexicon (Beal 2010, 61, 70).

As far as modern dialects are concerned, certain words continue to vary significantly across each region of the country, such as the word *gymshoes*. In the Northeast area, they are called *sandshoes*; in Merseyside, they are commonly referred to as *gollies*; but in the Central and Northern Southwest, they are known as *daps* (Trudgill 2000a, 109). Nonetheless, this is not always the case, as the lexical diversity among modern dialects is decreasing and the number of regional variations is considerably lower in comparison to the traditional dialect vocabulary. The reason for this is that modern English vocabulary is gradually becoming more standardised, resulting in a dwindling number of people being familiar with traditional dialect vocabulary, and many words are disappearing (2000a, 121–122). To illustrate this, when modern dialects are compared to the data from SED, it becomes apparent that there are five terms for *girl* (21) in the traditional dialects, while modern dialects only have two, as demonstrated in (22) (2000a, 123).

(21) **Traditional dialects:** *girl, lass, mawther, maiden, wench*

(22) **Modern dialects:** *girl, lass*

However, the fact that some words have disappeared from the language may not necessarily be perceived negatively. The language is known for its ability to adapt to the needs of its users, undergoing continual modification and development. In addition, a decline in traditional dialect words does not indicate that there are no new words entering the language. Yet, according to Beal, these words are usually referred to as slang because it is unclear how long they will remain in use (2010, 70).

## 2 BIRMINGHAM ENGLISH

Birmingham is the second largest city in the United Kingdom with a population of over one million people, and along with the cities of Coventry and Wolverhampton, the metropolitan boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall, and the counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, it is a part of the West Midlands region. Birmingham was once a part of the West Midlands county, which existed from 1974 to 1985 as a result of the high population density in the industrial area of Birmingham and the Black Country, which stretched across the boundaries of the already established shire counties. Despite the fact that the county council was abolished, the West Midlands county remains a legal entity in the West Midlands region (Thorne 2017, 137–138; Clark and Asprey 2013, 1–2).

The language variety spoken in Birmingham and its surrounding areas is called Birmingham English, also known as the Birmingham or Brummie dialect. It was heavily influenced by the large waves of immigration during the Industrial Revolution, when people of different ethnic minorities moved to Birmingham for work while the formerly small village was becoming a large manufacturing town. As a result, Birmingham currently exhibits a higher concentration of ethnic minority residents than the national average (Clark and Asprey 2013, 15). Regarding its reputation, the distinctive features of Birmingham English are perceived rather negatively and are often the subject of jest. It is associated with many misconceptions, which are often fuelled by comedians and performers who rely on the dialect's stereotypical features that are rarely based on reality, supporting several myths and prejudices (Thorne 2003, 31, 55–58). Many people even doubt that Birmingham English is a dialect and instead refer to it as the Brummie accent, which is mostly a result of the scarcity of publications on this particular dialect. Dialects of other regions of England, such as Cockney or Glaswegian, are well represented in many dictionaries or phrasebooks, but the Brummie dialect is not included (2003, 59-60). Even traditional dialect studies have entirely overlooked urban working-class dialects, concentrating primarily on the speech of rural areas. Yet, the language variation spoken in Birmingham is much more complex as a result of its rich history and socioeconomic circumstances (2003, 31, 51).

### 2.1 History

Contrary to popular belief, Birmingham English did not emerge with the working class during the Industrial Revolution and has a much longer history dating back to the fifth century (Thorne 2003, 51). Around 450 AD, Germanic invaders started settling in the south

and east of England, eventually expanding to the Midlands, which significantly affected the place names and language of Birmingham. It is believed that the Angles, namely the small Anglian tribe led by Beorma, invaded the area in the middle of the sixth century. Beorma's people, known as *ingas*, established a settlement referred to as *ham*, which eventually evolved into the present-day city of Birmingham (Beorma + ignas + ham) (2003, 36).

The first written evidence of the West Midlands dialect comes from the period after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Despite French being the official language, many literary works were still written in many different dialects of Middle English. As there was no Standard English at the time, writers tried to replicate sounds by using orthography. Consequently, works written in the West Midland dialect, such as *Brut* (1200) or *St Katherine* (1230) today give a vivid picture of the type of language used in Birmingham in this era. For instance, in *St Katherine*, the feminine pronoun *ha* or *heo* is one of the distinctive traits of the West Midlands that Birmingham's locals still use today (Thorne 2003, 39).

By the middle of the fourteenth century, Middle English had transitioned into Early Modern English, and Birmingham had grown from a small farming village into a thriving market town. It all began in 1166, when Birmingham was given a Market Charter, which attracted people from the nearby villages, including blacksmiths, tailors, and gunsmiths, who were permitted to conduct their business there as usual. This culture of free business thus drew residents from all around the Midlands (Thorne 2003, 41–42). People started to gradually move to Birmingham for work, and with the new arrivals also came different dialects. With the majority of immigrants coming from the immediate area, the Brummie dialect evolved largely from the dialects of north Warwickshire, north-east Worcestershire, and south Staffordshire (Chinn and Thorne 2002, 5–6).

Birmingham later in the nineteenth century started attracting people from even further afield, mainly from Scotland, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, Italy, and the Jewish settlements in the Russian Empire. As Birmingham changed with the migration into the area, so did the accent, which eventually developed into a distinctive urban accent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Still, this distinct accent, along with the vocabulary and grammatical structures typical of the Brummie dialect, can be traced back to its origin in the wider West Midlands region (Chinn and Thorne 2002, 6).

## 2.2 Accent vs. Dialect

In contrast to the standard language, dialects are known to be primarily associated with the spoken language. As a consequence, dialects can be heard all around, yet they are not

frequently written down on paper, which is also the case with Birmingham English. As already mentioned, studies such as the SED or later Trudgill attempted to describe and divide the diverse dialects of England, mainly based on phonological criteria. Although Trudgill briefly introduced pronunciation in the area of Birmingham as being a part of the West Midlands, it is a much broader issue (2000a, 74). Birmingham English undeniably shares many similarities with other non-standard dialects, but there are also several morphosyntactic and lexical differences that are characteristic of Birmingham and/or the West Midlands. The lexical distinctions include bookmakers' jargon, Brummagem rhyming slang, as well as the market traders' back-slang, which are familiar to Birmingham residents but of which there is limited written documentation available (Thorne 2003, 59–60). The fact that there is relatively little evidence of the grammatical and lexical features of the Brummie dialect may be attributed to its unpopularity and lack of interest in urban dialects, but it may also be due to the difficulty for outside dialectologists to record genuine everyday speech. As with other speakers of regional dialects, speakers of the Brummie dialect tend to alternate between formal and informal speech styles, and in the company of visitors, they often choose to speak in a more formal style (2003, 12). In conclusion, although there is not much evidence of the Brummie dialect in books or dictionaries, it can be generally agreed that it is much more complex than just phonologically; therefore, it is more of a dialect than just an accent.

### 2.3 Phonology

Trudgill describes the accent of the Birmingham dialect as “the most southerly of all the northern accents,” meaning that as it is located in the English heartlands, it shares certain characteristics of northern accents, such as the articulation of *but* as /bʊt/ or *dance* as /dæns/, but also has features of accents from the south, including broad diphthongs in words like *made* and *boat* (2000a, 74). Thorne lists many other phonological features of the Birmingham dialect, including the pronunciation of the short vowel /ɪ/ which in this particular accent has a less centralised and much closer quality than any other accent in England. As shown in (23), the auditory proximity level of /ɪ/ remains stable and does not appear to be affected by word stress or intonation (2003, 91).

(23) *She always minded er own **business** /bɪznɪs/.*

Furthermore, while RP speakers pronounce the word *garden* as /gɑ:dən/, Birmingham speakers often pronounce /ɪ/ instead of schwa, therefore pronounce it rather as /gɑ:dɪn/ (2003, 91–92).

He also identifies a phenomenon called h-dropping, which is common among working-class dialects and can also be seen in (23), where the letter *h* in the personal pronoun *her* is deleted and pronounced as *er* (2003, 118). Diphthongized glide /ʒi/ is another feature that appears in words such as *need* or *me*, where the vowel sound in these words starts in the close-mid central area and proceeds to /i/. As a result, *need* is pronounced as /nɛɪd/ and *me* as /mɛɪ/, whereas in RP it is pronounced as /ni:d/ and /mi:/ (2003, 103–104). The list of distinctive phonological features that define the Birmingham dialect is extensive. However, as the present thesis does not delve deeper into the phonological dimension of the Brummie dialect, other characteristic features will not be addressed in this context.

## 2.4 Morphosyntax

The Birmingham dialect contains several grammatical features that deviate from Standard English, primarily due to the influence of historical circumstances. Yet, these features are not necessarily different from other non-standard dialects of England, and some of them have already been discussed in the previous chapter. Due to the limited availability of books dealing with grammatical aspects of the Birmingham dialect, this chapter will primarily draw upon the study conducted by Thorne (2003). His study deals in depth with various morphological and syntactic features, which he supported with examples and supplemented with explanations of their usage in Standard English.

### 2.4.1 Pronouns

The non-standard variations in the use of pronouns in the Birmingham dialect mainly concern certain personal, possessive, reflexive, and demonstrative pronouns, which will be covered in more detail below.

#### 2.4.1.1 Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns of the Birmingham dialect that differ from Standard English involve the pronoun *yous* which is used to replace the standard pronoun *you* in the second-person plural. Moreover, the third-person singular feminine pronoun *her*, which, due to the h-dropping, can be transcribed as *er* (24), is used in place of the standard pronoun *she* (25). Historically, the pronoun *er* derived from the Anglo-Saxon *heo*, implying that the Birmingham dialect, unlike Standard English, has retained its older form (Thorne 2003, 77–78).

#### **Birmingham English**

(24) ***Er*** was a little older than me.

#### **Standard English**

(25) ***She*** was a little older than me.



### 2.4.1.2 Possessive Pronouns

The distinct possessive pronouns in the Brummie dialect incorporate the second-person pronoun *yourn* (26), which in both the singular and plural is used as a variation of *yours* (28). This category also includes the third-person singular masculine and feminine pronouns *(h)isn'* and *'ern* (27) which are equivalents to *his and hers* (29), the first-person plural pronoun *ourn* used as a variation of *ours*, and the third-person plural pronoun *theirn* in place of *theirs* (Thorne 2003, 77).

#### Birmingham English

(26) *This knife is **yourn**.*

(27) *That book is **hisn'/'ern**.*

#### Standard English

(28) *This knife is **yours**.*

(29) *That book is **his/hers**.*

### 2.4.1.3 Reflexive Pronouns

Regarding reflexive pronouns, Birmingham variations contain the first-person singular pronoun *meself* in place of *myself* and the third-person singular pronoun *(h)isself* instead of *himself*. Examples of both are shown in (30) and (31). Moreover, the Birmingham dialect uses the third-person plural pronoun *theirselves* to substitute the standard form *themselves* (Thorne 2003, 79–80).

(30) *I was a quick worker an' a good worker, although I say it **meself**.*

(31) *The midwife stopped there an' she told 'im that 'e ought to be ashamed of '**isself** that 'e only give mom a pound.*

### 2.4.1.4 Demonstrative Pronouns

In this dialect, it is also common to employ *them* as the plural demonstrative pronoun for expressing distance (32), as opposed to Standard English, which uses *those* (34). This feature also appears in other dialects, such as Cockney. The Brummie dialect, however, additionally features demonstrative pronouns that are particular to this dialect only. These include the singular demonstrative pronoun expressing closeness *thisn* (33), meaning *this one* (35) and *thatn*, which is a singular demonstrative pronoun sometimes used to indicate distance as a replacement for *that one* (Thorne 2003, 67; Chinn and Thorne 2002, 22, 145).

#### Birmingham English

(32) ***Them** was good days.*

(33) *Which one yo' arter? **Thisn**.*

#### Standard English

(34) ***Those** were good days.*

(35) *Which one are you after? **This one**.*

### 2.4.2 Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives in Standard English are inflected to produce comparative or superlative forms. As a result, *cute* and *bad* become *cuter* and *worse* for the comparative (39), and *cutest* and *worst* for the superlative (40). Nevertheless, that is not the case for the Birmingham dialect, nor many other non-standard dialects, which tend to double both the comparative (36) and superlative (37) adjectives (Thorne 2003, 66–67). In addition, the pronominal system of the Birmingham dialect makes use of the first-person possessive adjective *me* or *ma* in place of *my*. Regarding adverbs, this dialect frequently omits the suffix *-ly* when using this particular part of speech, see examples (38) and (41) (2003, 64, 79).

#### Birmingham English

(36) *He was **more cuter** than me.*

(37) *Them was the **most baddest** rough houses in the street.*

(38) *[...] the gaffer come and pulled me away **quick**.*

#### Standard English

(39) *He was **cuter** than me.*

(40) *They were the **worst** hooligans in the street.*

(41) *[...] the gaffer came and pulled me away **quickly**.*

### 2.4.3 Verb Forms

The non-standard verb forms that the Birmingham dialect uses include the regularisation of irregular verbs, the non-standard use of the past participle and the present tense, the historic present, non-standard uses of *to be* forms, and also the phenomenon called a-prefixation. These features will be described in more detail in this section.

#### 2.4.3.1 Regularisation of Irregular Verbs

In Standard English, regular verbs are modified by the past tense and the past participle suffix *-ed*, as in *I cleaned the windows*, or *I have cleaned the windows*. On the other hand, irregular verbs are modified by past tense vowel alternations (44) or the past participle suffix *-en* (45) (Thorne 2003, 69; Brinton and Brinton 2010, 86). However, as examples (42) and (43) show, in the Brummie dialect, the suffix *-ed* is used with both regular and irregular verbs, regardless of whether the sentence is in the past tense or uses the perfective aspect (2003, 70; Chinn and Thorne 2002, 116).

#### Birmingham English

(42) *I **knowed** nothing till I was in the army.*

(43) *I've **knowed** 'er since 'er was a nipper.*

#### Standard English

(44) *I **knew** nothing till I was in the army.*

(45) *I've **known** her since she was a child.*

### 2.4.3.2 *Non-standard Past Participle, Present Tense, and Historic Present*

The speakers of the Birmingham dialect also use the past participle suffix *-en* (46) in contexts where Standard English would use verbs in the past tense (48). Similarly, it is common to use verbs in the present tense (47) in situations where the past participle suffix *-en* should be used (49), that is, in the perfective aspect (Thorne 2003, 69).

#### **Birmingham English**

(46) *Well, a chap **seen** me 'avin' a fight in the street.*

(47) *And if I'd 'ave **give** up my 'ome I couldn't take anything of my own with me.*

#### **Standard English**

(48) *Well, a man **saw** me having a fight in the street.*

(49) *And if I'd **given** up my home, I couldn't take anything of my own with me.*

Additionally, Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt mention a phenomenon typical for dialects of the West Midlands called the *historic present*. Here, the present tense suffix *-s* is used to describe events in the past, even in the first and second-person singular and in the third-person plural, see (50) (2013, 30, 100).

(50) *I **goes** down this street and I **sees** this man hiding behind a tree.*

### 2.4.3.3 *Non-standard TO BE Forms*

The Birmingham dialect also uses the verb *to be* differently in contrast to Standard English. In the past tense, it is common for this dialect to use the first and third-person singular form *was* (51) instead of the plural form *were* (54), and in the present tense, speakers of the dialect make use of *theym* (52) to replace *they are* (55) for the third-person plural. Moreover, the Birmingham dialect and the Black Country use *we'm*, which stands for *we are*, as the first-person plural in the present tense, see examples (53) and (56) (Thorne 2003, 69, 71).

#### **Birmingham English**

(51) *They **wasn't** allowed to stay.*

(52) ***Theym** born but not buried.*

(53) *[...] yer must think **we'm** fools above the shoulders.*

#### **Standard English**

(54) *They **weren't** allowed to stay.*

(55) ***They are** born but not buried.*

(56) *[...] you must think **we are** fools above the shoulders.*

### 2.4.3.4 *A-prefixation*

The last presented feature of non-standard verb forms characteristic of the Brummie dialect is the feature called the *a-prefixation*, which can function in two different ways. The first function is that it is used with verbs such as *go* or *play* in the past or present progressive, as

shown in examples (57) and (59). The second is that it functions as a contracted form of the auxiliary verb *have* in the present perfective, see (58) and (60). Nevertheless, this feature is nowadays falling out of use (Thorne 2003, 71–72).

#### Birmingham English

(57) *The two girls was a-playin' out there.*

(58) *Who'd a-thought it?*

#### Standard English

(59) *The two girls were playing out there.*

(60) *Who'd have thought?*

### 2.4.4 Prepositions

Among the non-standard uses of prepositions present in the Brummie dialect is the use of the preposition *up* (61), instead of the standard preposition *to*, or the non-standard use of the preposition *off* (62) in place of *from*. Other instances include the replacement of the standard preposition *of* with *on* (63), but also the substitution of *on*, *in* or *at* by *of a*, as shown in (64) and (65) (Thorne 2003, 68).

(61) *I'm a-gooin' up (to) town in a bit, d'yer want anythin'?*

(62) *I got a letter off (from) our brother this mornin'.*

(63) *Not one on (of) 'em knowed what they was a-doin', I swear.*

(64) *They used to come in of a (on) Christmas mornin', whoever woke first.*

(65) *Up early of a (in) mornin', do all er 'ousework, up the road, do er shoppin' before half past nine.*

### 2.4.5 Negation

The Birmingham dialect also employs different forms of non-standard negations, such as negative concord or the verb negation *ain't*, but also plenty of unique verb negations, such as *nare*, *dain't* or *worn't*, which are peculiar to this dialect.

#### 2.4.5.1 Negative Concord

Multiple negation, also called negative concord, is a significant syntactic variety in many non-standard dialects, including the Brummie dialect. This feature is derived from Old English, when the *ne* negative appeared before the verb, as in *ne waes* (was not) and was frequently combined with other negatives such as *naefre* (never) (Thorne 2003, 65, 202). The negative concord was still used in the Early Modern English period; however, it soon went out of use in Standard English and dialects that still use this feature today are considered inferior. Examples of this feature in today's Birmingham dialect in comparison with Standard English

can be observed in (66), (67), (68), and (69). If negative concord were used within one clause in contemporary Standard English, it would have the opposite effect, and the meaning of the sentence would change as two negatives make a positive. According to this, *I don't want to marry nobody* would mean *I want to marry somebody* (2003, 65–66, 203).

#### **Birmingham English**

(66) *I don't want to marry nobody.*

(67) *We couldn't never understand why.*

#### **Standard English**

(68) *I don't want to marry anybody.*

(69) *We could never understand why.*

#### **2.4.5.2 Verb Negations**

With regards to non-standard verb negations, the Birmingham dialect uses *don't* (70) instead of *doesn't* (74) in the third-person singular, which is shared by many other dialects of England. Besides this, it has its own unique set of verb negations. These include *nare* or *ne'er* (71) as a variant of *never* (75), *dain't*, also shortened to *dain* or *din* (72), instead of the negated past tense form of the verb *do* (76), and *worn't* (73) used as the variant of the negated past tense form of *to be* (77) (Thorne 2003, 72–74).

#### **Birmingham English**

(70) *It don't worry me.*

(71) *I told yous 'e'd nare do no good.*

(72) *We used ter play in the road, dain't  
/dain/din we?*

(73) *She worn't like the rest of 'em.*

#### **Standard English**

(74) *It doesn't worry me.*

(75) *I told you he'd never do any good.*

(76) *We used to play on the road,  
didn't we?*

(77) *She wasn't like the rest of them.*

In the case of *ain't*, which is the most widespread non-standard verb negation among English working-class dialects, the Birmingham dialect uses more variants along with it. In addition to the common *ain't*, it is used interchangeably with *in't* or *en't*, which have exactly the same role. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *ain't* can be used in two ways, and the Birmingham dialect uses both, i.e. *ain't* serves the same function as *haven't*, see (78) and (80), and also as the negated form of the verb *to be* in the present tense or present progressive, see (79) and (81) (2003, 74).

#### **Birmingham English**

(78) *I ain't/in't/en't done nothing wrong!*

(79) *I ain't/in't/en't doin' it.*

#### **Standard English**

(80) *I haven't done anything wrong!*

(81) *I am not doing it.*

## 2.5 Lexis

As stated earlier in this chapter, the lexicon of the Birmingham dialect encompasses various lexical distinctions that are unique to the city. These include the aforementioned jargon of bookmakers, Brummagem rhyming-slang and market traders' back-slang, but also street argot, many proverbs, nursery rhymes, or old agricultural provincialisms. However, they mostly survive in the spoken language, as there are only few books that capture the vocabulary of Birmingham (Thorne 2003, 59–60). Despite being the second largest city in England, Chinn and Thorne are one of the few authors who attempted to put down on paper the words and phrases that are specific to Birmingham. Yet, they claim that since dialects naturally overlap with each other, the terms used in their dictionary may be used in other regional dialect areas as well (2002, ix–xi). A few instances of the typical Birmingham dialect vocabulary can already be found in the previous section on the grammatical features of this dialect, namely *nipper* and *arter*. The noun *nipper* is used to refer to a child, and the preposition *arter* means after. Other local vocabulary includes *bab* or *babby*, which is a noun describing a baby or child but is also used to indicate younger or older women and sometimes even older men, e.g. *Thanks bab* or *Alright bab* (2002, 22–23, 116). Franks confirms that *bab* or *babby* are still widely used and further lists other distinct words and phrases, such as *tara-a-bit*, a common way in Birmingham to say *see you later*, the word phrase *council pop* used to refer to tap water, or the use of the noun *tea* to denote a dinner around six o'clock (2019).

Chinn and Thorne also provide some examples of Brummagem rhyming slang, back-slang, and betting terminology (2002). Rhyming slang is a form of language substitution where words are replaced by expressions that rhyme with them and is typically linked to the Cockney dialect (Swann et al. 2004, 266). However, it is also commonly found in the Birmingham dialect, such as *Cain and Abel*, a rhyming slang for *table*, *dolly mixtures* denoting *pictures* (meaning *cinema*) or *greengages* signifying wages (Chinn and Thorne 2002, 49, 67, 84). With regards to back-slang, it is a type of language used by market traders and involves the process of reversing word components, primarily on the basis of spelling but also on sound (Swann et al. 2004, 24). Instances that occur in the Brummie dialect include *feeb*, which is a back-slang for *beef*; *krop*, which refers to *pork*; and *yennup*, which is *one penny* (Chinn and Thorne 2002, 75, 100, 158). As for the betting terminology, *jacks alive* or *jacks* means five pounds; *dog-out* indicates an individual who keeps an eye on the police; and a horse that is not well-known and placed in a competition with the aim to win is called *springer* (2002, 67, 95, 138).

### 3 PEAKY BLINDERS

The Birmingham dialect, particularly the accent, has recently been popularised thanks to the British crime drama television series *Peaky Blinders*. Created by Stephen Knight, who comes from Birmingham himself, the series depicts a working-class world set in the Small Heath district of Birmingham shortly after the end of World War I, ruled by a vicious and feared gang known as the Peaky Blinders. The gang centres on the dreaded Shelby family of Irish-Romani origin, led by the second older brother Thomas Shelby, which earns most of their money from illegal bookmaking. Their members are notorious for sewing razor blades into the peaks of their hats, which they use in fights to blind their opponents, earning them their name. The series deals with different adventures and conflicts between this gang and the police, where Tommy is driven by the desire to get his beloved family out of the back streets of Birmingham and legitimate their business. On this arduous journey, the gang encounters Chief Inspector Campbell, who came to Birmingham to stop them, fights other gangsters such as Billy Kimber, Darby Sabini, or Alfie Solomons, or gets involved with both the IRA and Russian aristocrats over the course of several seasons (Chinn 2019, 2–3).

The *Peaky Blinders* television series first debuted on BBC Two in 2013 and immediately developed a devoted fanbase in the United Kingdom. Throughout the following three seasons, their popularity expanded, inspiring clothing, beverages, pubs, and tours, resulting in the last two seasons being moved from BBC Two to BBC One. Moreover, in 2014, Netflix acquired the rights to release the show in the United States and other countries, spreading the popularity of the series all around the world (Hough 2022; Chinn 2019, 1–3). The situation today is that although the Peaky Blinders series officially ended last year with its sixth and final season, it is still a global phenomenon and has won countless awards over the years, including the BAFTA for Best Drama Series in 2018 and the NTA for Best Drama in 2019 and 2020 (Peaky Blinders 2020). In addition, Stephen Knight confirmed that a spin-off movie connected to the Peaky Blinders is in production and will probably be released in 2024 at the earliest (Hubbard 2022).

#### 3.1 History

The TV series was inspired by real gangs that operated in Birmingham who also wore flat caps, yet the real Peaky Blinders were neither well-dressed nor admirable. In terms of historical accuracy, Peaky Blinders, and the gang battles, murders, or riots associated with them took place in the Birmingham area before World War I and not after, as depicted in the series (Chinn 2019, 4, 13).

It all began in the late 1850s when the young people from Birmingham's impoverished areas were engaging in gambling and rough sports, and despite the police's efforts, they eventually grew and formed into gangs known as *slogging gangs*. They were fighting the police and each other, but they also viciously attacked anyone who got in their way. In the 1890s, the slogging gangs started to be called Peaky Blinders, which soon became a general name for the city's ruthless thugs, whether they were in a gang or not. The rumour was they had stitched disposable razor blades into the peaks of their hats, which they used in a battle to cut the enemy's forehead, drawing blood into their eyes to blind them for the moment (Chinn 2019 4-5). Nonetheless, there is no real evidence of it, and it seems that they probably got their name from the habit of pulling the peak of their flat caps down onto one side, virtually blinding one eye. Still, during their prime, they were just as cruel and aggressive as their fictional characters, only instead of razor blades, they rather used knives, coshes, or rocks. Moreover, even though some of the gangs practised minor protection, most of them were poorly organised and prioritised fighting above illegal money-making (2019, 58–59).

The decline of the Peaky Blinders gangs before the First World War was largely due to the tough policing adopted by the chief constable, Charles Haughton Rafter, who closely resembles the fictional character of Chief Inspector Campbell. Even though the real Peaky Blinders had been suppressed, some of them joined the Birmingham Gang, led by the real Billy Kimber. In 1921, they battled against London gangs commanded by the actual Darby Sabini, also involving the real Alfie Solomon, for dominance over hand-pocket thievery on the racetracks in the south of England. However, Birmingham, which by this point had no longer a reputation for brutality, saw no action in that conflict. For the remaining Peaky Blinders, some of them went off to defend their country and came back as new and well-behaved individuals. With their disappearance, the Peaky Blinders became a part of Birmingham's legends. Gradually, as those who had known Peaky Blinders passed away, the story began to vanish. Nevertheless, that changed when the captivating drama *Peaky Blinders* brought it back to life for a modern and wider audience (Chinn 2019, 9–10, 59).

### 3.2 Selected Lexical Features of the TV Series

In addition to the non-standard grammar and vocabulary typical of the Birmingham dialect, which will be further discussed in the practical part, the *Peaky Blinders* series is also known for its extensive use of offensive language, including swear words or vulgarisms. Furthermore, the series is also rich in metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, which are used to give emphasis to the uttered expressions.



### 3.2.1 Offensive Language

Offensive language is defined as any term or group of words that, when directed at a person, may negatively affect, cause discomfort, offend, and/or harm them (O’Driscoll 2020, 16). It is a language that profoundly impacts people who encounter it and negatively influences their views of themselves (Stollznow 2020, 2). The offensive language is connected to a phenomenon called *taboo words*, which are words and phrases that people tend to avoid for reasons related to religion, etiquette, and banned behaviour and often refer to coitus, parts of the body, excretion, as well as the topic of death or dying (Yule 2020, 302; Jay 1992, 4). These are expressions that are often used as a source of offensive language and may be divided into several categories, including swear words, profanity, vulgarisms, and epithets (Crystal 2019, 185; Battistella 2005, 72).

*Swear words* are typically used as the consequence of an angry reaction that provides relief to the speaker who employs them (*fuck, shit*). They can be aimed at both animate and inanimate objects, and their purpose is not to convey meaning; rather, it is to communicate a wide spectrum of feelings, from moderate irritation to raging fury (Crystal 2019, 185). *Profanity* is very similar to swearing but is restricted to religion. It spans from moderate (*hell, damn*) to stronger profanity (*goddamn*) and is characterised by the abusive use of sacred words. *Vulgarity* refers to expressions that make use of taboo terms, meaning that they harshly characterise the mentioned taboo topics and, unlike swearwords, make sense in the context (*fuck, shit*). Lastly, *epithets* within offensive language refer to various derogatory insults, which most often refer to ethnicity, race, sexuality, or gender (*wop, fag, bitch*), but can also refer to physical features, handicaps, or other attributes (*midget, gimp, retard*) (Battistella 2005, 72).

All these terms are often used synonymously and are usually defined simply as *swear words* since they often overlap, such as in the expression *God fucking dammit*. As already mentioned, these terms may be considered hurtful and ruthless, and people try to find ways to avoid them. These include replacing taboo words with more technical terms (*anus, vagina*) or part-spelling (*f—k*). However, the most common way is to use *euphemisms*, which are figurative expressions that substitute taboo words with implicit and non-literal phrases. For instance, to avoid the taboo topic of death, speakers use euphemisms such as *push up the daisies* or *fall asleep*. There are euphemisms for all sorts of swear words, and the amount of these indirect expressions increases if the topic is a really major taboo for society (Crystal 2019, 184–185; Battistella 2005, 72).

### 3.2.2 Metaphorical and Idiomatic Language

Both metaphorical and idiomatic language contain expressions that deviate from the acknowledged literal meaning (Baldick 2008, 130). They are extensively used in everyday language and enrich daily conversations with interesting and colourful additional meanings that may express the speaker's personal opinions and sentiments or serve as a device to connect and clarify ideas that are difficult to describe using a literal language (Dieter 2014, 99; Colston 2015, 3).

#### 3.2.2.1 Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that refers to one thing in a literal sense is applied to another thing in a non-literal sense to imply that the two things share certain characteristics. For comparing, metaphors do not use comparatives *like* or *as*, which are characteristics of simile, but rather make the comparison more implicit (Abrams and Harpham 2015, 133). They come in many forms, such as verbs (*a talent blossoms*), adjectives (*a green novice*) or more lengthy idiomatic expressions (*to throw the baby out with the bath-water*). Metaphors are the most widespread among other figures of speech, and speakers use them daily without even noticing (Baldick 2008, 205). Those metaphors that go unnoticed are called dead metaphors and include expressions such as *the leg of a table* or *the heart of the matter*. Since they have been used for so long that they are no longer perceived as metaphors (Abrams and Harpham 2015, 134). Contrarily, mixed metaphors are statements in which the combination of attributes represented is absurd or irrational, typically as a consequence of attempting to apply two metaphors to one concept, e.g. *those vipers stabbed us in the back* (Baldick 2008, 205).

#### 3.2.2.2 Idioms

An idiom is a relatively fixed expression of two or more words with a non-literal meaning that is often unrecognisable from the individual words (Jackson and Amvela 2022, 46–47, 253). According to Griffiths, figurative language, such as metaphors, and idiomatic language are not identical concepts, as idioms usually have to be memorised, whereas figures of speech can be interpreted according to one's general knowledge (2006, 81). Idioms can be divided into full and partial idioms. These two types differ on the basis of predictability, and while full idioms cannot be deduced from the words they contain, e.g. *kick the bucket*, *don't beat the dead horse*, the meaning of partial idioms can be partially predicted. These include *red hair* or *white wine*, where the colours are partial idioms since they do not represent the true colours (Jackson and Amvela 2022, 47).

## **II. ANALYSIS**

## 4 AIM OF THE ANALYSIS

The primary objective of the analysis is to make a morphosyntactic and lexical comparison between the Birmingham dialect and the language used in the television series *Peaky Blinders*.

The morphosyntactic analysis will focus on comparing the non-standard use of grammar in the television series with the grammatical features of the Birmingham dialect described in the theoretical part to determine whether the analysed series differs from or coincides with the theory. In addition, the grammatical analysis will be supplemented with other non-standard grammatical elements that were not described in the theoretical part but appear in the analysed series. This will be supported with examples, and it will be specified whether the feature is recurrent or rare.

The lexical analysis will be divided into three parts. The first part will be concerned with the analysis of Birmingham words and phrases in order to find out whether they are present in the series or not. For the most part, the dictionary of Chinn and Thorne (2002) will be used for the comparison. This part will also cover selected examples of other informal expressions that occur in the analysed series. The second and third part will deal with linguistic features that are characteristic of the *Peaky Blinders* series rather than the Birmingham dialect as such, but given their frequent appearance in the analysed series, they are included in the present analysis as well. In particular, the second part will deal with the analysis of offensive language and euphemisms that are abundant in the series, and the third part will explore hidden meanings of selected metaphorical and idiomatic expressions that are also very common. All three parts of the lexical analysis will again be supported with examples.

### 4.1 Corpus

The analysis centres on the first season of *Peaky Blinders*, which originally aired on BBC Two in 2013 and is also currently streaming on Netflix. The season consists of six episodes, and each episode is approximately one hour long.

For this analysis, I drew specifically from the version provided by Netflix, both from the subtitles and the audio-visual source, to verify the accuracy of the spoken word. The present corpus thus corresponds to the individual episodes of the first season, which are available on this platform for further interpretation.

This analysis provides representative examples from the corpus and analyses them on the basis of established criteria. For the sake of clarity, the representative examples are numbered from one to six according to the episode in which they appear, and this number,

together with the abbreviation *E* for *episode*, is inserted in square brackets, e.g. [E1]. Due to the extensive number of examples, the exact timecode of subtitles in which the analysed linguistic elements occur is not included in the analysis.

## 4.2 Characters

In the first season of *Peaky Blinders*, there are numerous main and side characters. Since many of them will be mentioned in the analysis, it is necessary to introduce them at least briefly. The following description is based on my own observations from watching the series.

*Tommy Shelby*, the second-oldest sibling of the Shelby family, is the leader of the Peaky Blinders gang. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, and the horrors of the First World War still haunt him in his dreams. As a result, he is cruel and violent, yet he is also very intelligent and family oriented. His workers accidentally stole guns from the BSA (Birmingham Small Arms Company), and now the police are after them. Moreover, he finds himself falling in love with Grace Burgess, who is a secret agent.

*Chester Campbell* is an Inspector from Belfast who was sent to Birmingham by Winston Churchill to track down the BSA's stolen weapons. He earned a reputation for being ruthless and dedicated to his profession. He pretends to negotiate a deal with Tommy to stay out of the gang's affairs, but in reality, he assigns Grace Burgess to take the initiative as an undercover agent to gather the necessary information.

*Arthur Shelby*, despite being the oldest sibling, relies on his younger brother Tommy to operate the family business since he himself lacks the necessary management skills and cunning. He is impulsive and short-tempered, and he struggles with depression because of the war. This later leads him to attempt suicide after he steals money from the family fund to help his father, who is a renowned self-centred liar.

*John Shelby* is the third-oldest sibling who also contributes to the family business. Wartime experiences and the death of his wife have left him emotionally devastated and resulted in his severe drinking problem. He seeks to find a new wife, which he eventually does in the form of an arranged marriage to resolve the conflict between the gang and the Lee family.

*Ada Shelby*, later *Thorne*, is the fourth and only girl of the Shelby siblings. She refuses to be associated with the gang and is deeply in love with Freddie Thorne, with whom she becomes pregnant, and they later get married despite Tommy's objections.

*Finn Shelby* is the youngest sibling and member of the Shelby clan. He is mostly a side character in this season, as he is too young to be involved in business matters.

*Polly Gray*, or *Aunt Pol*, is the aunt of Tommy, Arthur, John, Ada, and Finn Shelby and the sister of Arthur Shelby Sr. She managed the family business during the war, and now she still has a prominent role in it alongside Tommy. She treats the Shelby siblings as her own children.

*Grace Burgess* is an agent of the Crown, who came to Birmingham disguised as a barmaid to assist Campbell in recovering the stolen guns. However, along the way, she develops romantic feelings for Tommy Shelby and wants to resign from her position as an operative.

*Billy Kimber* is a gangster and the leader of the Birmingham Boys. He grew up in Birmingham and now controls most of the legal racetracks outside London. Tommy's ambitions to take the Peaky Blinders beyond Birmingham and become legal cause conflicts between them.

*Freddie Thorne* is a communist who forms a communist group to go on strike against the BSA factory. This leads Campbell to believe communists are involved in the missing guns, and he begins investigating the group. Freddie has been in love with Ada since he was a little boy, and their love for each other leads to a pregnancy and eventual marriage.

*Arthur Shelby Sr.* is the father of the Shelby siblings, he abandoned his family for ten years, and now he shortly returns to Birmingham to ask for financial support. He is a selfish man who does not value his own family.

There are also plenty of side characters, some of whom make occasional appearances in the analysis, such as *Curly*, *Nipper*, *Scudboat*, or *Danny*, who all work for the Shelby family; *the Lees*, who are a Gypsy family engaged in criminal activities; *Lizzie Stark*, who works as a prostitute; and *Harry*, who is a barman in the Garrison pub where the Peaky Blinders and other people from the same part of Birmingham spend most of their time.

## 5 MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

As stated earlier, in this part, I will compare the grammar used in the first season of *Peaky Blinders* to the grammatical features of the Birmingham dialect introduced in the theoretical part. I will also address additional features that are not specified in the theory but appear in the TV series. Moreover, I will indicate the extent to which a particular grammatical feature appears in the corpus.

In terms of the representative examples chosen for this part, I decided to concentrate on characters who are likely to be using the Birmingham dialect. For this purpose, I chose the Shelby family, mainly Tommy, Arthur, Aunt Pol, John, Ada, and Finn. There will also be an occasional reference to other characters, such as Arthur Sr., Billy Kimber, Harry, and Curly, who sometimes use certain non-standard grammatical features as well.

### 5.1 Pronouns

The theoretical part described various grammatical features typical of the Birmingham dialect, including certain non-standard personal, possessive, reflexive, and demonstrative pronouns, and whether or not they occur in the series will be examined below.

#### 5.1.1 Personal Pronouns

Arthur Shelby Sr., a character who only appears in the fifth episode, once uses the second-person plural pronoun *yous*, as shown in example (1). Since no one else in the Shelby family employs this feature, it may be concluded that this grammatical feature is characteristic of the older generation and is falling out of use. For instance, in example (2), Tommy, the son of Arthur Shelby Sr., is talking to more people in this scene, yet he uses the standard form *you*. However, the origin of the character must also be considered, as Arthur Sr. is supposed to be originally from Ireland. Therefore, his origin may be the reason why he uses this non-standard grammatical feature.

(1) *Arthur Sr.: And he can fight any one of **yous** in here!* [E5]

(2) *Tommy: Alright, lads. Listen up. **You** have a pint and chaser, no more.* [E6]

This is confirmed by the fact that Inspector Campbell, who is from Belfast, also uses the same pronoun in the non-standard form; see (3). This means that the pronoun *yous* is not used by characters in the series who speak the Birmingham dialect.

(3) *Campbell: I don't trust any of **yous** until you earn my trust!* [E1]

Regarding the third-person singular feminine pronoun *(h)er*, which should also be characteristic of the Brummie dialect, it does not appear in the series at all, and the characters only employ its standard form; see examples (4) and (5).

(4) *Aunt Pol: **She** wants Freddie to know **she**'s having his baby.* [E2]

(5) *Tommy: **She**'ll have no life with a man on the run.* [E2]

### 5.1.2 Possessive Pronouns

None of the possessive pronouns described in the theory are used in the analysed season. In particular, the distinct third-person singular masculine and feminine pronouns *(h)isn'* and *(h)ern'* are not used in the corpus and appear only in the standard form, as shown in examples (6) and (7). Likewise, the plural possessives *ourn* and *theirn* do not appear in the corpus and are present only in the standard forms; see (8) and (9). In the case of the second-person pronoun *yourn* in place of *yours*, the family members do not use this pronoun in the sentence in this season; therefore, it could not be determined whether it is used in the series or not. Yet the use of other possessive pronouns in the series suggests that the characters do not use this non-standard possessive pronoun either.

(6) *Ada: He likes to take **his** fights onto the mud.* [E1]

(7) *Arthur: You should see the size of **her** dowry.* [E4]

(8) *Arthur: He knew all about **our** war records.* [E1]

(9) *Ada: They've already had **their** revolution.* [E3]

### 5.1.3 Reflexive Pronouns

As for reflexive pronouns, the characteristic non-standard first-person singular pronoun *meself* occurs in the corpus, as demonstrated in example (10).

(10) *Kimber: I thought to **meself**, so what?* [E2]

However, this feature is used only once in the analysed series, namely by Billy Kimber. The other characters use its standard form; see (11) and (12). This could be because Kimber was born in Birmingham and therefore utilises this feature, but still, he uses it only once throughout the season. As a result, it is not certain whether this feature is particular to the Birmingham dialect or the character Billy Kimber, who may be influenced by other dialects, such as Cockney, since he encounters other people from different parts of the country.

(11) *Ada: I was child **myself** then.* [E6]

(12) *Aunt Pol: And if you're not gone from the city by tomorrow, I'll kill you **myself**.* [E6]



The non-standard third-person singular pronoun (*h*)*isself* does not appear in the corpus and is only used in the standard form *himself* by all characters; see (13). I was unable to analyse the use of the non-standard third-person plural pronoun *theirselves* because this feature is not used in the corpus neither in the standard or non-standard form. Yet again, it can be assumed that the characters do not use it.

- (13) *Aunt Pol: Watch Arthur because he's likely to hurt **himself** as much as anyone else.*  
[E6]

#### 5.1.4 Demonstrative Pronouns

The distinctive demonstrative pronouns of the Birmingham dialect do not appear in the series. The plural demonstrative pronoun *them* is only used in the standard form *those* in the whole corpus; see (14). The same goes for *thisn*, as shown in (15), and probably also for *thatn*, despite the fact this feature is absent in the series completely.

- (14) *Aunt Pol: You sell **those** guns to anyone who has use to them, you will hang!* [E1]  
(15) *Tommy: Whore? That word. Or prostitute? How about **that one**?* [E4]

## 5.2 Adjectives and Adverbs

With regard to adjectives, there are no characters using the non-standard use of adjectives typical of the Birmingham dialect. All characters are using the standard forms of both comparatives and superlatives, as shown in (16) and (17).

- (16) *Aunt Pol: He settles **quicker** with me 'cause he can't smell the milk.* [E6]  
(17) *Arthur: Well, I'm **the oldest**.* [E2]

On the other hand, what characters make use of quite often is the non-standard possessive adjective *me* which occurs in the series 6 times in total. This possessive adjective constitutes the first-person singular adjective *my* and is shared by more members of the Shelby family; see examples (18), (19), and (20). Moreover, it was once used by the side character Harry, who is from Birmingham as well; see (21).

- (18) *John: It must've fell out of **me** pocket.* [E1]  
(19) *Arthur: Don't make me laugh, it hurts **me** face.* [E1]  
(20) *Tommy: All the better for getting the city smoke out of **me** lungs.* [E2]  
(21) *Harry: **Me** mother was from Galway.* [E1]

Still, this feature is used interchangeably, and one character may use both standard and non-standard forms, as shown in (22) compared to example (19).

(22) *Arthur: Nice dress, you can wear it in **my** pub.* [E3]

As for the non-standard omission of the suffix *-ly* in adverbs, Curly, who is a side character and works for the Peaky Blinders, once used this non-standard form with the adverb *quickly*, as shown in example (23). Yet, he is the only one to use this feature in this season, and other characters use the standardised form; see example (24). It could be therefore regarded as a part of Curly's idiolect, but he does not have enough screen time to confirm this.

(23) *Curly: Tom, you better come **quick**.* [E2]

(24) *Arthur: We want this done **quietly**.* [E3]

### 5.3 Verb Forms

It was described in the theoretical part that there are plenty of characteristic features in the Birmingham dialect, such as regularisation of irregular verbs, non-standard use of the past participle and the present tense, non-standard forms of *to be*, and also a-prefixation. While some of these elements do appear in the corpus, others do not, and there are even certain features in the series that were not even addressed in the theory.

#### 5.3.1 Regularisation of Irregular Verbs

The regularisation of irregular verbs described in the theoretical part seems to be omitted in the series as more characters use the standard form of irregular verbs in both the past tense and the past and present perfective, see examples (25) and (26).

(25) *Arthur: He **knew** all about our war records.* [E1]

(26) *Tommy: I've **brought** you all here today because this is the day, we replace Billy Kimber.* [E6]

However, the regularization of verbs does occur in the series, but it is expressed differently than described in the theory. As shown in example (27), Arthur once regularises the verb *dare*, which is normally inflected by the present tense suffix *-s* in the third-person singular. Furthermore, he also omits the preposition *to* which could also be alternated by adding the suffix *-ing* to the lexical verb *fight*. Either way, the way he expressed himself here is non-standard.

(27) *Arthur: Who **dare** fight me?!* [E5]

### 5.3.2 Non-standard Past Participle, Present Tense, Historic Present and Other

Regarding the use of the past participle suffix *-en* in situations where the past tense should be used, it appears one time in the corpus, as shown in (28). Nevertheless, Curly in this context rather seems to be reducing the function words, particularly the personal pronoun *I* and the auxiliary verb *have*, which together with the lexical verb *seen* function as the present perfective. Therefore, this particular feature which was described in the theory does not appear in the corpus at all.

(28) *Curly: **Seen** curses like this twice.* [E2]

The use of the present tense instead of the past participle is presented in the corpus once. As shown in (29), Aunt Pol in the scene used the present tense, whereas Standard English would use the present perfective. Nevertheless, she then uses the standard form in the same conversation; see (30).

(29) *Aunt Pol: I **hear** you didn't make it to France, Inspector Campbell.* [E2]

(30) *Aunt Pol: I've **heard** of you.* [E2]

As for the historic present, Tommy uses the present tense instead of the past tense 4 times to describe past events, using the lexical verb *tell*, as seen in examples (31), (32), (33), and (34). Nonetheless, in the example (34), he does not use the suffix *-s*, which is usual for the historic present. Since this feature is not used by other characters and Tommy uses it repeatedly, it could be said it is part of Tommy's idiolect, but even he sometimes uses the standard form; see (35).

(31) *Tommy: Arthur **tells** me you've been asking questions.* [E4]

(32) *Tommy: Arthur **tells** me you have ideas.* [E4]

(33) *Tommy: Polly **tells** me you fell in love for real.* [E6]

(34) *Tommy: Our men at the station **tell** me that copper is leaving town.* [E5]

(35) *Tommy: Someone **told** me she had the syph, I thought, what the hell?* [E3]

It could be said that this is due to the change of the environment, as dialect speakers tend to switch to Standard English when in the presence of outsiders; however, this is not the case here, as he, in examples (31), (32) and (33), speaks to Grace Burgess, who is an outsider, but Tommy's usage is not affected. Conversely, in example (35) he talks to Kimber, with whom he should not be forced to change his language as they both come from Birmingham, yet he does so. In conclusion, there is no apparent reason for the change, therefore this character seems to use this feature arbitrarily.

Furthermore, John and Arthur used more examples of non-standard language in two different situations. In particular, John used the lexical verb *fall* in the past tense vowel alternation *fell* in combination with the present perfective, as shown in (36). Yet, in Standard English, the present perfective is combined with verbs in the past participle; thus, it should be *fallen* and not *fall*. Considering Arthur, he later in the same episode used the past tense form of the auxiliary verb *do* (*did*), instead of the present tense, which would normally be used as he is directly reacting to Ada, right after she starts commanding people around; see (37). But both of these examples are unique to the corpus and are not used in other situations.

(36) *John: It must've **fell** out of me pocket.* [E1]

(37) *Arthur: Since when **did** you give orders?* [E1]

### 5.3.3 Non-standard *TO BE* Forms

The use of *to be* in Birmingham English varies in three different ways; however, there is only one of these features presented in the corpus. In the first episode, Arthur uses *you was*, instead of *you were* in the past tense which is typical of the Birmingham dialect; see (38). Still, it is used only once throughout the six episodes, and in other situations, he uses the standard form, as shown in the example (39).

(38) *Arthur: You **was** seen doing the powder trick down at Garrison Courts.* [E1]

(39) *Arthur: You **were** gonna tell me?* [E3]

Regarding *theym*, which is used as a non-standard reduced variation of *they are*, is not used in the corpus at all; see (40).

(40) *John: They sound like **they're** strangling cats out there.* [E2]

The other non-standard reduction *we'm* instead of *we are* also does not appear in the corpus, yet the protagonists use it in a non-standard form in which they completely leave out *to be* in conjunction with the first-person personal plural pronoun, as shown in (41) and (42). Nevertheless, the same characters sometimes use it in the standard form as well; see (43).

(41) *Tommy: **We** making a lot of money these days* [E3]

(42) *Arthur: **We** gonna show Kimber how it should be done.* [E3]

(43) *Arthur: I mean, thanks to you **we're** already down a bloody sister.* [E5]

### 5.3.4 A-prefixation

The a-prefixation not is used in the analysed season. Neither in the past nor present progressive (44) nor as the contracted form of the auxiliary verb *have* in the present perfective (45).

(44) *Aunt Pol: Finn was **playing** with this this afternoon by the cut.* [E1]

(45) *Tommy: The truth is you would **have** hit me with that thing if it weren't for the fact that you know I'm right.* [E2]

## 5.4 Prepositions

As already mentioned, Birmingham English features many prepositions which are used differently compared to Standard English, one of them being *off* instead of *from*, which appears 3 times in the corpus, twice by Arthur, as shown in (46) and (47) and once by Kimber; see (48).

(46) *Arthur: Right... I want a blow job **off** both of you before they let the ordinary people in.* [E1]

(47) *Arthur: The Lees are skimming money **off** the legal bookies.* [E3]

(48) *Kimber: You fucking Gypsy scum what live **off** the war pensions of these poor old Garrison Lane widows!* [E2]

Yet again, the use of the preposition *off* is occasional and the same characters also use the standard form *from*; see (49) and (50).

(49) *Arthur: They're on the take **from** the Lees to look the other way.* [E3]

(50) *Kimber: I'll wave at you **from** my box.* [E3]

With regards to other non-standard prepositional uses, they do not occur in the corpus, i.e. *up* is not used in the place of *to* (51), *on* does not occur instead of *of* (52), neither *of a* appears to be used instead of *on*, *in* or *at*; see (53), (54) and (55).

(51) *John: Bring it **to** Watery Lane.* [E2]

(52) *Arthur: You should see the size **of** her dowry.* [E4]

(53) *Tommy: Your name **on** a business card.* [E5]

(54) *Aunt Pol: You lay a hand on our Ada, and I'll put you **in** a wooden box myself.* [E4]

(55) *John: Tommy, what are you playing at? We're **at** shotgun range.* [E4]

On the other hand, Aunt Pol and Tommy showed two non-standard uses of prepositions in the corpus, namely in the second episode. Aunt Pol used the preposition *for* in place of *about*; see (56), and Tommy used the preposition *in* instead of *on*, as shown in (57).

(56) *Aunt Pol: I thought you didn't care **for** women's business.* [E2]

(57) *Tommy: That is my name **in** it.* [E2]

## 5.5 Negation

The theoretical part stated that speakers of the Brummie dialect employ negative concord and numerous non-standard verb negations, such as *dain't*, *worn't* or *ain't*. Once again, some of these features are present in the analysed season, while others are absent.

### 5.5.1 Negative Concord

The negative concord is present in the analysed season but is very scarce. Arthur only mentioned it once, as demonstrated in (58), but the other characters use one negation as in Standard English; see (59) and (60). There are no other instances in the examined season in which Arthur uses negative concord or one negation, so it is not possible to determine whether he employs this element on a regular basis or not.

(58) *Arthur: I **never** said **nothing** to that copper about smashing up bloody houses.* [E2]

(59) *Ada: He **didn't** say anything.* [E1]

(60) *Tommy: If you take that contract, I think you'll find it **doesn't** say anything about asking questions.* [E4]

### 5.5.2 Verb Negations

The range of non-standard verbal negations in the series is not as wide as described in the theory, and negations such as *don't* instead of *doesn't* or *nare*, *worn't* and *dain't* do not appear at all in the language of the characters. Instead, the characters use the standard form of these negations; see (61), (62), (63) and (64).

(61) *Tommy: He **doesn't** have a name.* [E2]

(62) *Arthur: I **never** said nothing to that copper about smashing up bloody houses.* [E2]

(63) *Tommy: It **wasn't** me who shopped Freddie Thorne.* [E5]

(64) *Aunt Pol: I hear you **didn't** make it to France, Inspector Campbell.* [E2]

On the other hand, the verb negation *ain't* occurs in the corpus repeatedly, in particular once by Ada and 3 times by John; see (65), (66), (67), and (68). From these examples, *ain't* is used 3 times as the negated form of the verb *to be* in either the present tense or the present progressive; see (65), (67), and (68), and once as a substitute to *hasn't*; see (66). Although John also uses the standard form of this verb negation, as shown in (69), *ain't* seems to be characteristic of him; therefore, I consider this feature to be part of his idiolect.

(65) *John: Yeah, but we ain't IRA.* [E1]

(66) *John: Ain't he heard nobody in Small Heath craps in a pot without the decree of Tommy Almighty?* [E5]

(67) *John: The head of the family ain't here.* [E5]

(68) *Ada: And fight if you want to but that baby ain't moving anywhere.* [E6]

(69) *John: We're not scared of coppers.* [E1]

## 5.6 Reductions and Omissions

There are also plenty of reductions and omissions of function words in the selected corpus. These features were not described as being part of Birmingham English; however, it is because these are features of the spoken language rather than of a dialect. Still, I included them, as they occur in the corpus frequently. In particular, I included the reductions *gonna* and *wanna* and selected omitted function words.

### 5.6.1 Gonna and Wanna

The reductions that appear many times in the series are *gonna* and *wanna*. *Gonna* is a non-standard reduction of *going to* and *wanna* is a non-standard reduction of *want to*. *Gonna* was used considerably more often, particularly over 40 times, as shown in (70), (71), and (72) in contrast to the standard usage which appears as well but only minimally, see (73). Tommy uses this feature the most across the season; however, it is mostly because he is the main character and takes most of the screen time.

(70) *Aunt Pol: So, this copper is gonna leave us alone, right?* [E1]

(71) *Ada: What are you gonna do, Freddie?* [E2]

(72) *Tommy: Now, you're gonna be in the back room. I'm gonna be sitting there. When I make a toast, you're gonna come out with that thing raised.* [E5]

(73) *Tommy: We're going to the races.* [E2]

In the case of the reduction *wanna*, it was used around 12 times, and most of the Shelby uses this reduction, as shown (74), (75), and (76) with occasional changes to the standard form. This occasional change may sometimes be influenced by the change of environment, as in (77), when Tommy talks to Campbell who is an outsider. However, that does not necessarily have to be the case, because Tommy used the standard form even when he talked to Aunt Pol; see (78).

(74) *John: **Wanna** take Lizzie for a ride in the country with the kids.* [E4]

(75) *Tommy: You **wanna** see him, Arthur? You **wanna** see him?* [E5]

(76) *Arthur: You don't **wanna** speak to me like that.* [E5]

(77) *Tommy: I **want to** make my business successful.* [E2]

(78) *Tommy: I **want to** send them flowers.* [E3]

On the other hand, Aunt Pol does not utilise the reduction *wanna* at all in this series and uses the standard form only; see (79).

(79) *Aunt Pol: He **wants to** meet you.* [E2]

### 5.6.2 Omission of Function Words

Function words are words that can be omitted from a sentence without affecting its meaning. In spoken language, this happens with many different function words, including pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, and many more. These three particular groups are those that are occasionally omitted in the selected series, and I will introduce a few examples of them below.

#### a) Personal Pronouns

Of all the pronouns, the personal pronouns are the most omitted in the series by several different characters. In example (80), the pronoun that is omitted is the first-person singular pronoun *I*; in example (81), it is the third-person singular *he* that is missing; and in example (82), Tommy drops the first-person plural *we*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it happens in every situation; see (83).

(80) *John: **Wanna** take Lizzie for a ride in the country with the kids.* [E4]

(81) *Ada: **Doesn't** like to stand and wait.* [E1]

(82) *Tommy: **Never** lost a fight yet, **did we**?* [E6]

(83) *Arthur: **He** knew all about our war records.* [E1]



### *b) Prepositions*

There are also occasional omissions of various prepositions; for instance, in both (84) and (85), the preposition *on* is repeatedly not pronounced when the characters are referring to the days of the week. Furthermore, in example (86), the preposition *to* is left out after the lexical verb *respond*, and in example (87), the two prepositions *at* and *past*, which should be used in this context when referring to the time are also absent.

(84) *Finn: I'm eleven Sunday.* [E1]

(85) *Arthur Sr.: A ship sails Friday.* [E5]

(86) *Tommy: Inspector, I responded your invitation, because I want us to understand each other.* [E2]

(87) *Tommy: Family meeting, half ten.* [E6]

### *c) Auxiliaries*

Among the auxiliary verbs, the series omits mainly the auxiliary verbs *do*; see (88) and (89), but also *are*; see (90) and (91), which usually appear in questions where they function as operators. Furthermore, as shown in example (89), not only *do* but also the personal second-person singular pronoun *you* is missing. Again, this does not mean that auxiliary verbs are excluded in all cases; see (92).

(88) *Tommy: You wanna see him, Arthur? You wanna see him?* [E5]

(89) *Aunt Pol: Recognise it?* [E1]

(90) *Aunt Pol: You okay?* [E2]

(91) *Arthur: You expecting trouble?* [E2]

(92) *Arthur: **Do you** have permission from Billy Kimber to be fixing races, hm?* [E1]

## 6 LEXICAL ANALYSIS

The lexical analysis is split into three parts. The first part focuses on Birmingham words and phrases and selected examples of non-standard expressions, the second part deals with the analysis of offensive language and euphemisms, and the third part examines selected metaphors and idioms. Regarding selected examples from the corpus, unlike the morphosyntactic analysis, the lexical analysis is not restricted to particular characters but analyses the vocabulary of the series as a whole.

### 6.1 Dialect and Informal Words and Phrases

The Birmingham dialect vocabulary is extensive and contains many different expressions that a visiting tourist might struggle to understand. Since the *Peaky Blinders* series is set in Birmingham, I aimed to determine whether or not the series makes use of the distinct vocabulary. I chose to mainly use Chinn and Thorne's dictionary (2002) for the comparison, as I could find no other more recent book that similarly explained such a large number of Birmingham-specific words and phrases. In addition, I also analyse selected non-standard expressions from the TV series that are not confirmed to be part of the Brummie dialect but still deviate from Standard English.

#### 6.1.1 Birmingham Words and Phrases

After analysing the six episodes, I observed that the number of expressions typical of Birmingham described by Chinn and Thorne (2002) is relatively small, and I managed to identify only six of them.

The first one is the phrase *alright*, which is used as a common form of saying *hello* in Birmingham (2002, 20). This phrase is used 8 times by various characters, including Tommy, Scudboat, Finn, Arthur, and other gang members in the background. This type of greeting occurred in two ways, either without a response, for instance, Tommy entered a room and said *alright* [E3] and Aunt Pol did not respond, or characters say it to each other, e.g. Scudboat says *alright, Finn lad* [E2], and Finn replies *alright, Scud* [E2]. Yet, this phrase is also commonly used as the equivalent of *okay* in the series, as in *it's alright* [E1], and is certainly more prevalent.

The second recognised word is the noun *cut*, e.g. *Finn was playing with this this afternoon by the cut* [E1], which in this context means a canal (2002, 62). This word with this meaning is used 5 times in the season, specifically by Aunt Pol, Ada, and Tommy.

Again, *cut* is also used in other contexts with different meanings, e.g. *cut in your wages* [E1], *cut him to pieces* [E2], moreover, characters also use the standard word *canal* [E6].

The third one is the noun *nipper*, which was already described in the theoretical part, is used in Birmingham to denote a small child (2002, 116). Nevertheless, regarding the use of this word in the series, it is only used as a name for one of the gang members who is an adult, e.g. *That'll be six pennies, Nipper* [E1], and is not used to denote a child at all.

The fourth Birmingham-specific word is *Bull Ring*, which Tommy mentions once in the sentence *You and the baby get into the Bull Ring, where there's lots of people* [E6]. The Bull Ring in Birmingham refers to a particular area in the centre of the city that is now a shopping mall, but at that time it was a marketplace that was once attached to the wall of a real bull ring where bullfighting took place; yet, by 1919, this sport had already been banned (2002, 46). The Bull Ring area is not explicitly depicted in the series, which may be somewhat perplexing for non-Birmingham viewers who are unfamiliar with the term.

The fifth and sixth identified words were also already addressed in the theoretical part and relate in particular to the words *pictures* and *tea*. The noun *pictures*, unlike its standard meaning, refers to cinema in the Birmingham dialect (2002, 67). It was used with this meaning twice in the series, the first time by Freddie and the second time by Grace. In the first situation, Ada bought tickets to the cinema, to which Freddie responded *I'm not in the mood for the pictures tonight, Ada* [E1], which clearly confirms that he denotes cinema using the word *pictures*. In the second situation, Grace is saying *He went to the pictures* [E2], meaning that he, Harry the barman in this context, went to the cinema. As for the last identified Birmingham word, the noun *tea*, according to Franks, is used to describe a dinner around 6 o'clock in the afternoon and not a hot beverage (2019). In the context of the series, it was used once in the sentence *Kid's teas* [E4]. This sentence was uttered by Lizzie Stark, who responds to Tommy's comment that her bag looks heavy, and it is obvious that it is full of food, especially vegetables. This means that she most likely does not have a lot of tea bags in her bag, but rather groceries for dinner. Although the meaning of this term may be highly unclear to non-Birmingham viewers, I believe that most people do not even notice it given that it is not very relevant in the context of that particular dialogue.

As for the other words and phrases stated by Chinn and Thorne (2002) in the theoretical part, such as *arter* for *after*, *bab* used as an endearment, or phrases presented by Franks (2019), including *tara-a-bit* for *see you later* are not included in the analysed season.

### 6.1.2 Other Non-standard Expressions

Although there is a limited number of instances featuring Birmingham's distinctive lexicon, the examined season of *Peaky Blinders* is still filled with non-standard English expressions. This includes the word *copper* [E1], which denotes a police officer and was used in the series 29 times. They also often shorten version the word *bookmakers* using a hypocorism *bookies* [E2], refer to undercover agents as *specials* [E1] or call horses *nags* [E3]. There are also several instances of non-standard vocabulary to address more people together, such as *lads* [E1], *folks* [E2], *fellas* [E5] or to denote one person, e.g. *mate* [E1], *bloke* [E3].

The characters also employ several informal phrases throughout the six episodes, most of which I was not familiar with. The phrase *to shop someone*, as in *It wasn't me who shopped Freddie Thorne* [E5], means to report someone to the police, which Tommy here claims he didn't do (Collins Dictionary 2023, s.v. "shop"). Other instances are phrases *to take someone out*, *to lamp someone* or *stick it to someone*. The first phrase was used by Tommy in the sentence *The black star day we take out Billy Kimber* [E5], by which he means they are about to kill Billy Kimber. The second phrase means to strike someone with force and was uttered by Arthur in the sentence *Man wants to set his stall up with fellas lamping each other, he needs himself a license* [E5], by which he is saying he wants to buy out a boxing ring, where men are fighting each other. The third phrase was used in the conversation between Arthur and John, as in *Johnny, what's our mission, boy? To stick it to the Lee family, Arthur!* [E3], and it is meant that they are about to punish the Lee family (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "take someone out", "lamp"; Collins Dictionary 2023, s.v. "stick it to someone").

## 6.2 Offensive Language

The *Peaky Blinders* series is well-known for using all sorts of offensive language. The frequent use of this language in the series can be attributed to an attempt to capture the mentality of the working class, which can be characterised by expressing their thoughts openly and without restraint, even if it means using derogatory terms. I managed to identify several types of offensive language in the corpus and divided them into swear words, profanity, vulgarisms, and epithets. In addition, although the series is full of examples of offensive language, there are also several instances of euphemisms, which are included in this section as well.

### 6.2.1 Swear Words

The most abundant subcategory of offensive language is swear words, notably the swearwords *fuck* and *bloody*, with occasional use of *shit*, which all have no meaning in the context but rather convey the emotional state of a character and are used by most of both main and side characters.

#### a) *Fuck*

The swear word *fuck* in the selected season was the most overused one. It occurs the corpus a total of 60 times and comes in several different forms. It is used to express various degrees of irritation as a stand-alone word, e.g. *fuck...* [E2], *ah, fuck!* [E4], it is used as part of phrasal verbs, e.g. *fuck off!* [E1], *you fuck me over* [E2], *fuck up my sister's life* [E3], *battle plans always change and get fucked up* [E6], but also as an expression of surprise in questions, e.g. *what the fuck d'you do that for?!* [E1], *who the fuck are you?!* [E1]. Moreover, it was also once used to signify a person using the suffix *-er*, as in *fucker, get him!* [E3]. However, most of the time the swear word *fuck* appears modified by the suffix *-ing*, and it functions in the context as an intensifier, intended to strengthen the emphasis on the uttered words. *Fucking* as an intensifier is placed on certain noun phrases, e.g. *fucking robbery* [E1], *fucking tea party* [E4], but also to stress particular verbs, e.g. *I'm not fucking lying* [E1], *we fucking volunteered* [E3]. It also occurs for the same purpose in the middle of one's name, as in *I'm Arthur fucking Shelby!* [E1], *for Ada fucking Shelby* [E2], *Freddie fucking Thorne!* [E2]. Furthermore, it appears as an additional intensifier to an epithet, usually alluding to one's ethnicity or character, e.g. *you fucking Gypsy scum* [E2], *you're a fucking bastard* [E3], *you thick fucking tinker* [E5]. Altogether, I counted about 46 instances in my corpus where the intensifier *fucking* was used within a sentence, sometimes several times in one utterance, e.g. *you bend over and fucking pick up the fucking glass* [E3]. Arthur Shelby is the character who used this intensifier the most in the corpus, employing it a total of 10 times. This is unsurprising, given the character's personality. On the other hand, I noticed that Aunt Pol does not use this swear word in any form. This is presumably because Aunt Pol is religious and thus avoids this harsh term, even though she is also part of the working class.

#### b) *Bloody*

As for the other widely used swear word, *bloody*, it is used in a sentence purely as an intensifier. Compared to *fucking*; however, *bloody* may be perceived as less offensive. In the same way as *fucking*, the intensifier *bloody* appears in characters' speech to intensify certain noun phrases, e.g. *bloody army* [E1], *bloody kids* [E3], and verbs, e.g. *we bloody fought* [E1],

*I'm not bloody choking* [E1]. Additionally, it once appeared next to the adverb *much*, e.g. *how do you know so bloody much?* [E1], and once in the middle of one's name, e.g. *Karl bloody Marx?* [E6]. It also appeared as the intensifier to an epithet, e.g. *you bloody idiot* [E2], and it occurred repeatedly in conjunction with the profanity term *hell*, e.g. *what bloody hell happened here?* [E4], *bloody hell, you do pick your times!* [E4]. All in all, the intensifier *bloody* appeared 48 times in the corpus and was again the most used by Arthur Shelby, who used it a total of 18 times. In this case, Aunt Pol also used this kind of intensifier, exactly 5 times in total. As for the other characters, they use both *fucking* and *bloody* at an optimal level, 6 or 7 times at most.

### c) *Shit*

The corpus also occasionally contains the swear word *shit* [E4], which is perceived as a milder equivalent of *fuck*. As a swear word, *shit* appeared twice as a stand-alone word and 3 times in conjunction with a profanity term *holy shit* [E6]. As this swear word appears from time to time, it cannot be regarded as particular to a certain character, despite the fact that the expression *holy shit* was twice pronounced by the side character Harry.

## 6.2.2 Profanity

Religiously-oriented swear words, known as profanities, are also extensively used in the selected season, from stand-alone profanities such as *oh, hell* [E1], *oh, God* [E1], *Jesus* [E2], *my gosh* [E3], *oh, Christ* [E4], through two-word phrases *Jesus Christ* [E2], *holy shit* [E2], *holy Jesus* [E4], *bloody hell* [E4], to the whole phrase *holy sweet baby of Mary!* [E1]. These profanities vary according to various degrees of exasperation, e.g. *my gosh you're serious* [E3], *Jesus, Tommy!* [E1], and they even use damnation to express anger, e.g. *God damn you for soiling your uniforms!* [E1], *damn them for what they did to you in France!* [E2]. These phrases also appear to express surprise in questions, e.g. *Ada, what the hell?* [E3] *who the hell do you think you are?* [E4], *what the hell is going on?* [E5], *what the bloody hell is that?* [E6], in the form of an intensifier *damn right, Harry* [E1], or as a simile *Arthur's mad as hell* [E1]. In total, profanities occurred in the corpus around 40 times by many different characters, out of which Aunt Pol and Freddie Thorne used profanity the most. In particular, Aunt Pol used it 8 times and Freddie 7 times in the six episodes.

### 6.2.3 Vulgarisms

There are also many vulgarisms that range from body parts, such as *arse* [E1], *tits* [E1], *balls* [E1], *cocks* [E4], *dicks* [E6], through bodily functions *craps in a pot* [E5], to sexual acts *I want a blow job* [E1], *I'll have her fucked in one* [E3]. As for the act of ending someone's life, they commonly use the verbs *kill* [E1] or *murder* [E1], which are not so much vulgarisms as they are taboo words. In addition, they denote a prostitute as a *whore* [E1], a house of prostitution as a *whorehouse* [E2] or refer to an illegitimate child as a *bastard* [E2]. These vulgarisms are not particular to anyone and are used across the series by various characters.

### 6.2.4 Epithets

The majority of the derogatory epithets in my corpus were directed at the Shelby family, who are of Irish-Romani origin. These included ethnic slurs such as *pikey* [E2] and *tinker* [E5], but also adjectives *Didicoy*, e.g. *Didicoy whore* [E2], *little Didicoy razor gang* [E2], and *half-arsed*, e.g. *half-arsed tinker* [E5], indicating that they are not of pure Romani descent. Billy Kimber and Inspector Campbell also referred to the Shelby family as *scum*, e.g. *fucking Gypsy scum* [E2], *scum family* [E1], *scum brothers* [E4], indicating that they belong to the lowest level of society. Moreover, Inspector Campbell demonstrates his superiority by calling the Peaky Blinders and other gangs *beasts* [E5], *hoodlums* [E4], *dogs* [E6], or *animals* [E1]. Other ethnic slurs include *wops* [E5], which refers to Italians; *gadze* [E4], denoting non-Romani people; and *paddy* [E3], for those of Irish descent. There are also various insults aimed at a specific person, ranging from the generic *idiot* [E2] or *bastard* [E1] to more personal insults alluding to characteristics, including *you mumping pig* [E1], referring to John; *you little slag* [E3], which is a slang term for *slut*, referring in this context to Grace; or *fucking mushroom picker* [E4], used to describe a gypsy girl who lives and works in an open field; and many more. There are also examples of insulting expressions, such as *shut up* [E2], by which the speaker wants the other person to stop talking, or *away and shite* [E3], and *get out* [E5], by which the speaker wants the other person to go away.

### 6.2.5 Euphemisms

Although the series uses countless offensive words and phrases, the characters also employ plenty of euphemisms to express taboo topics. However, they use them mostly to give emphasis to the situation or as a source of humour rather than out of concern for taboo terms. The selected season is particularly rich in euphemisms related to the topic of ending someone's life, such as *clean up the city* [E1], *disappear in the night* [E1], *have you and the rest of your scum family face down in the canal* [E1], *broke a few Fenian hearts* [E1], *put a*

*bullet in his head* [E2], *have your heads stoved in with mallets and spades* [E4], *I'll put you in a wooden box myself* [E4], *drive our swords through his black heart* [E5], *rid this city of his kind* [E5], *do the dirty work* [E6], etc. All the enlisted examples are, in their own distinct ways, essentially expressing the same idea. Euphemisms are also used to express sexual activity, particularly in connection with the act of rape, such as *they'd have you up against a wall* [E1], *interfering with our women* [E2], *the adult prison where men have the most appetite for boys like him* [E4], also in relation to prostitution, e.g. *she provides a fine service for her customers* [E4], *Lizzie Stark never did a day's work vertical* [E4], *men come here for...a certain purpose* [E6] but also to express consensual intercourse, e.g. *he's doing me today* [E6], *give her a good seeing* [E6]. Other euphemisms used in the series also substitute taboo words for body parts, e.g. *your manhood* [E1], bodily functions, e.g. *go for a wee* [E2] or sexually transmitted diseases, e.g. *she has the clap* [E3].

### 6.3 Metaphorical and Idiomatic Language

Metaphorical and idiomatic expressions are common in spoken language and make the dialogue much more expressive and vivid, which the *Peaky Blinders* series demonstrates very well. In my analysis, I came across countless examples of both metaphorical and idiomatic language; however, due to the limitations of this paper, I will only discuss selected examples from each category, although the series contains more than will be discussed.

#### 6.3.1 Metaphors

Metaphors are used to implicitly compare two things according to their common characteristics. The metaphors in the series are various and use different ways to convey complex ideas and emotions in a memorable way. For this analysis, I created a selection of these metaphors and grouped them into three groups according to their similar theme or relationship. These metaphors will be further depicted below, along with unveiling their hidden meanings.

##### *a) Metaphors about War*

Due to the fact that the first season is set in 1919, shortly after World War I, the characters often use metaphors to talk about wartime events. For instance, Tommy is using a metaphorical expression to describe the experience, such as *We walked through the flames of war* [E2] where he is comparing the war to walking through flames, which implies that it was horrifying, incredibly challenging, and dangerous, as the flames can be. There are also many metaphors connected to the aftermath of the war, i.e. the trauma, e.g. *I left my fucking*



*brains in the mud*. [E1], *Try and get all that smoke and mud out of your head* [E1], or *The war is cutting us all up* [E4]. In the first example, Danny compares *mud* to the war and *brains* to his common sense, saying that he left his common sense in the war, meaning that the war traumas drove him insane. In the second example, Tommy compares the war traumas to *smoke and mud*, saying to Danny that he should try to leave his trauma behind so that he can live a normal life. The third example, Tommy uses the word *cutting* to represent the suffering, emotional pain, and harm that the war had caused the people involved. Furthermore, Tommy used a metaphor in the sentence *I think there's a shell about to land and go bang* [E4], where he uses a reference to war and bombing to say that something bad is about to come, and in this context, that John is about to tell them some bad news.

### **b) Metaphors about One's Characteristics**

There are also metaphors that in some way refer to characters' traits. Metaphors related to Tommy Shelby specifically are, e.g. *Maybe he's got half a heart after all* [E2], which means here that Tommy is not such a bad person as he may seem, and he has kindness and generosity inside of him as well. In a similar manner, the way Aunt Pol said, *You have your mother's common sense, but your father's devilment. I see them fighting. Let your mother win* [E1], is metaphorical and says about Tommy that he is not a bad person all the way, because he is a mix of both of his parents, who were very different from each other. Aunt Pol uses his father as a metaphor for Tommy's bad traits and his mother for his good ones, and by saying that she sees *them* fighting, she means that it is visible that Tommy is fighting with the good and evil inside of him, and she gives him the advice to let the good in him win and do the right thing by again using the metaphor of his mother as the good side of him.

There are also metaphors that pertain to the traits of other characters. For instance, Ada Shelby is described by Mrs. Donovan, a side character, as *the sister of those Peaky Blinder devils...* [E2], to which Freddie responds, *and yet she is an angel* [E2]. Mrs. Donovan is drawing a comparison between the Peaky Blinders and devils, implying that they are evil and repugnant. By doing so, she also assumes that Ada shares similar traits with them because they are related by blood. However, Freddie contrasts this statement by saying that she embodies the qualities of an angel, indicating that she is the complete opposite of her brothers. Moreover, in a different scenario, Ada utters to Freddie the phrase *You're blind* [E4], by which she compares the condition of blindness to Freddie's lack of insight or understanding.

### c) *Metaphors Related to Inanimate Objects*

Metaphors that in some way relate to an inanimate object vary greatly in the analysed series. For instance, the metaphors used in the two different sentences: *Look, I know having four kids without a woman is hard. But my boot's harder* [E1] and *The crown of a prince. Soon to be King, I'd bet* [E1], are both using inanimate objects to represent or convey abstract ideas. In the first example, Aunt Pol is comparing the hardness of life with four kids without a wife to her boots, implying that if John continues behaving this way, she will use her footwear to physically hurt him. The second statement is used in reference to Tommy's flat cap with razors worn by the Peaky Blinders gang. The crown is a symbol of royalty, power, and authority, and by comparing it to Tommy's headwear, Freddie is here saying that he has a lot of power and reputation within his community. In addition, the statement that Tommy is a prince who is likely to ascend to the throne suggests that he possesses ambition and that his influence is on the rise.

Among other metaphors relating to this category are also the expressions: *I'm an old man, and my heart's a battered vessel* [E5], *Whisky's good proofing water. Tells you who's real and who isn't* [E3], and the statement *We will drive our sword through his black heart* [E5]. The first metaphor is said by Arthur Sr., and this metaphorical comparison implies that he has undergone a significant amount of life experiences and conveys a sense of exhaustion resulting from the lengthy and eventful life he has led. The second metaphorical comparison is pronounced by Tommy, and by this he compares whisky to purified water, suggesting that whisky has the ability to expose the truth and distinguish between individuals who are telling the truth from those who are lying. The third and last metaphor from this category was said by Campbell, who is using the sword that is going to be driven through Tommy's heart as a metaphor to say that they are going to defeat and possibly kill him. The depiction of a black heart in this context also creates the image that Tommy is the evil that must be stopped. Campbell's statement also demonstrates his determination to defeat his enemy.

### 6.3.2 Idioms

Idioms are often employed without native speakers even realising it, and if people participating in the conversation are unfamiliar with them, they may lead to misunderstandings. Over the course of the six episodes, I encountered a lot of idioms, many of which were known and widely used and some that were not. From the idioms used in the analysed season, I again made a selection and divided them into three groups based on their relatedness or similar references. To determine the precise meaning of these idiomatic

phrases that were unknown to me, I occasionally sought assistance from online dictionaries. Subsequently, I analysed the meaning of selected idioms according to the context in which they are used.

**a) Idioms Related to Action**

The first group includes idioms that describe a particular action or activity. For example, *We will leave no stone unturned* [E2] or *Turn the place upside down* [E2] both refer to thorough and exhaustive action of examination. In the context of the series, Inspector Campbell uses both expressions in two different scenes as he commands the police officers to conduct a careful inspection of the city for the stolen weapons from the BSA factory.

There are also recurrent activity-connected idioms alluding to eyes, ears, or both. For instance, when Arthur says *He wants us to be his eyes and ears* [E1], he means that Campbell wants to be notified by the gang if they discover anything about the guns, or when Tommy says *You will turn a blind eye to all my gambling operations* [E2], he demands Campbell and his officers to overlook the criminal activity of the Peaky Blinders gang. Also, the idiom *to keep one's ears open*, which also makes a reference to a body part, means to maintain vigilance for the purpose of listening (The Free Dictionary 2023, s.v. “keep one’s ears open”). In the context of the series, Arthur utters *Danny Whizz Bang, hangs around the pubs in Camden Town Wharf for us. He keeps his ears open for business* [E5], which means he goes around pubs and stays alert just in case he hears something business-related.

Other idioms associated with activity occurring in the series range from widely used and familiar ones, e.g. *And know this, the clock is ticking* [E4], to the less familiar ones because they are limited to a particular circumstance, e.g. *Let's wet the baby's head* [E4]. The first one implies that a person is running out of time and should act quickly and in the context of the series, Campbell used this idiom as an indirect threat to Tommy, saying that he should hurry up. The second one is only used on the occasion of a baby's birth, signifying a celebration and extensive alcohol consumption (The Free Dictionary 2023, s.v. “wet the baby’s head”). In the context of the series, Tommy said this idiomatic phrase to the gang members because Ada was giving birth, saying that it is time to celebrate.

**b) Idioms Related to Emotions or Behaviour**

The second group contains idioms that convey a particular emotion or behaviour. These include instances such as *going soft* or *having a rush of blood*, both of which relate to a sudden change in emotions and behaviour. In the first example, Tommy wants to cheer Arthur up by buying him the Garrison pub, to which Arthur responds *Now you've gone soft*.

*You've gone soft Tommy* [E3], which means that Tommy showed him affection with this gesture, which is something unusual for him. In the second example, Freddie confronts Tommy about tickets and money Aunt Pol gave him to leave Birmingham involuntarily, and Tommy utters *Well, Polly must have had a rush of blood. Or port wine.* [E3], implying that she did something unwise out of a sudden decision that she would not usually do and even suggesting that she may have been drunk (Collins Dictionary 2023, s.v. "a rush of blood"). A similar example is the idiom *to be all heart*, which was used in response to a situation where Tommy allowed Freddie to be present at Ada's labour even though he dislikes him, saying *That's right, I'm all heart tonight* [E4], meaning that he is being benevolent and good-hearted due to the special occasion of the arrival of a newborn baby, which also indicates a sudden change in the character's behaviour (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "be all heart").

Another idiom associated with one's emotions is *Your face is a picture* [E4], which means to look shocked or annoyed (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "someone's face is a picture"). This idiom was pronounced by Inspector Campbell as a reaction to one of the officers' astonishment at his behaviour. This idiom could also be seen as a metaphor since he is comparing one's face to a picture; however, this phrase has become common in everyday speech and is now more perceived as an idiom. The last presented idiom in this category is *to take a shine to someone*, used by Tommy in the sentence *When you took a shine to her, I thought I'd use her* [E3]. This informal idiom typically conveys an immediate attraction for someone, and in this scenario, Tommy observed Kimber's fondness for Grace upon their initial encounter, so he decided to take her to the racetracks so he could spend more time with her (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "take a shine to someone").

### **c) Idioms with Animal References**

The last group focuses on idioms that are tied to various animal species, which appeared three times in the analysed season, namely in connection with a wolf, a cock (rooster), and a dog. The idiom referring to a wolf occurred in the sentence *To keep the wolf from the door, she still sees a couple of regulars* [E4], which in general means to possess a sufficient amount of money to meet one's basic needs (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "keep the wolf from the door"). In the context of the sentence, Lizzie Stark, who claimed to have stopped working as a prostitute, still occasionally provides services to her regular customers to support herself. The second idiom, *to be the cock of the walk*, referring to a rooster, is an old-fashioned way to denote an overconfident person who believes to be superior to others (Cambridge Dictionary 2023, s.v. "cock of the walk"). However, regarding the use of this idiom in the

series, *You'd better show people you are still the cocks of the walk* [E2], the meaning here is to show people that the Peaky Blinders are still the leaders, the ones who rule the city of Birmingham. The third and final idiom is *to throw someone a bone*, which means to reward someone by giving them something of little value or doing some small favour for them (The Free Dictionary 2023, s.v. "throw a bone"). In the series, it was used with a connection to a dog, *So we throw the dog a bone* [E4], which does not seem to be that often in general use. Still, the meaning in this context remains the same, as Kimber says this sentence in response to Peaky Blinders providing them with quality service. Altogether, these idioms could also be included in the action-related group, but since they have a common reference to animals, I created an extra subcategory.

## 7 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Both morphosyntactic and lexical analysis of the practical part yielded many interesting results, which will be discussed in more detail below.

### 7.1 Morphosyntactic Analysis

The first part of the analysis, which was concerned with the examination of non-standard morphosyntactic features, revealed a number of findings. The foremost among them is that the first season of the television series *Peaky Blinders*, which was selected for the analysis, indeed incorporates grammatical features that are characteristic of the Birmingham dialect. These are namely the reflexive pronoun *meself*, the possessive adjective *me*, the non-standard use of an adverb without *-ly*, the non-standard use of the present tense, the historic present, the use of *was* instead of *were*, the preposition *off* in place of *from*, the negative concord, and the use of the verb negation *ain't* in both of its functions.

However, it was also uncovered that many of the grammatical features that were described as part of the Brummie dialect in the theoretical part are omitted in the analysed season. This applies to the rest of the distinct pronouns, namely *(h)er*, *(h)isn'*, *(h)ern'*, *ourn*, *theirn*, *yourn*, *(h)isself*, *theirselves*, *them*, *thisn*, and *thatn*. The same goes for the double comparatives and superlatives, the regularisation of the irregular verbs (*knowed*), the non-standard use of the past participle, the use of *theym* and *we'm*, the a-prefixation, all the other non-standard uses of prepositions apart from *off*, but also most of the unique verb negations, namely *nare*, *worn't*, *dain't*, and also *don't* instead of *doesn't*. There was also one exception, where the plural personal pronoun *yous*, which is believed to be a feature of the Birmingham dialect as well, was only used by characters who originated from Ireland. Therefore, despite its presence in the series, it cannot be considered a characteristic feature of the Birmingham dialect here.

Moreover, the grammatical analysis helped to identify various occurrences of non-standard grammatical usage in the series that are not deemed characteristic of the Birmingham dialect. These are namely the distinct regularisation of irregular verbs impacting the omission of the present tense suffix *-s*, the non-standard use of a verb in past tense vowel alternation with the present perfective, the non-standard use of the past tense, the omission of *to be* in conjunction with *we*, and the non-standard prepositions *for* in place of *about* and *in* instead of *on*. The characters also use reductions, namely as *gonna* and *wanna* and frequently omit function words. Yet, these features are more characteristic of a spoken language than of a dialect.

Regarding the frequency of these non-standard grammatical features, the characters, for the most part, use them only rarely. The most repeated features were the possessive adjective *me*, used 6 times in total by various characters, the historic present, which was used exclusively by Tommy, 4 times in total, and *ain't*, which was also used 4 times, once by Ada and three times by John. However, the characters still mostly alternate non-standard features with their standard variations, as in the case of *me* and *my*. These alternations do not seem to be dependent on environmental changes, and the characters freely interchange between standard and non-standard grammatical variants without apparent explanation. The reason for this may be external, where the creator, Stephen Knight, could decide to omit or limit the amount of these non-standard grammatical elements in order to keep the series comprehensible to non-Birmingham audiences. Furthermore, the fact that certain features do not occur in the first season does not mean that they are not present in the five seasons that follow.

## 7.2 Lexical Analysis

The second part of the analysis, which was focused on the lexicon of the series, also made several discoveries. The first section shows that the first season is not rich in Birmingham dialect words and phrases, and throughout the six episodes, only six distinct words or phrases were observed, namely *alright*, *cut*, *nipper*, *Bull Ring*, *pictures*, and *tea*. Nevertheless, the series still includes plenty of informal words and phrases that could be regarded as typical of the United Kingdom. These include words such as *copper* or *lads*, but also phrases such as *to shop someone* or *to lamp someone*. Once again, the reason why there is only a small number of typical Birmingham words and phrases in the series may be for the sake of clarity for the audiences outside Birmingham, but this does not necessarily mean that more of these expressions do not appear in the following seasons.

The second section of the lexical analysis showed the different uses of offensive language in the series, which are so broad that they were divided into different groups, namely swear words, profanity, vulgarisms, and epithets. The swear words used in the series are particularly the swear words *fuck*, *bloody* and *shit*. *Fuck* is the most used of these three swear words, appearing a total of 60 times throughout the six episodes, and it is used in several different forms, such as a stand-alone word (*ah, fuck!*), as a part of phrasal verbs (*fuck off*), in surprised questions (*who the fuck are you?!*), or to refer to a particular person (*fucker*). However, the most frequent use of this swear word is as the intensifier *fucking*, a total of 46 times. Another commonly used swear word is the intensifier *bloody*, which occurs

a total of 48 times in the corpus. Lastly, the swear word *shit* is used 5 times. The character that uses swear words the most, particularly *fuck* and *bloody*, is Arthur Shelby. On the other hand, Aunt Pol does not use the word *fuck* at all, and the word *bloody* only occasionally, which is probably due to her strong religious nature, which led her to avoid them. *Shit* is mostly used by side characters, such as Harry the barman. There is also an extensive use of profanity terms, around 40 times in particular. They occur on their own (*God, Jesus*), as a part of multi-word phrases (*holy sweet baby of Mary*), in various degrees of annoyance (*God damn you for soiling your uniforms!*), in surprised questions (*what the hell?*), as an intensifier (*damn right*), or as similes (*mad as hell*). In this case, profanity is used the most by Aunt Pol, confirming her religious character. Vulgarisms of the series include body parts (*dicks*), bodily functions (*craps in a pot*), sexual acts (*blow job*), and are also used to refer to a prostitute (*whore*), a house of prostitution (*whorehouse*), and an illegitimate child (*bastard*). They are not specific to any character and are used by many different ones throughout the season. Epithets include ethnic slurs directed at the Peaky Blinders gang (*pikey*) but also at other ethnic groups (*wops, paddy*). They also contain derogatory terms expressing superiority over the designated group (*scum family, beasts*), more personal insults alluding to one's characteristics (*you mumping pig, fucking mushroom picker*), and insulting expressions (*away and shite, shut up*). On the other hand, there are also countless instances of euphemisms in the selected series, but they are not used because the characters are afraid to directly express these controversial topics; but rather, they use them to increase the drama of the words spoken or for humorous effect. The euphemisms in the analysed season relate primarily to the theme of ending someone's life (*put a bullet in his head, do the dirty work*), but also to express the act of rape (*have you up against a wall*), in relation to prostitution (*Lizzie Stark never did a day's work vertical*), and to express consensual sexual intercourse (*he's doing me today*). They also appear to replace taboo terms for body parts (*your manhood*), bodily functions (*go for a wee*), and sexually transmitted diseases (*she has the clap*).

All in all, the reason for the frequent use of offensive language in the series is probably Stephen Knight's attempt to reflect the nature of the working class, who do not spare their surroundings with such language. Nevertheless, in doing so, he may also be promoting the stereotype that this class is characterised by the frequent use of bad language. Moreover, given the popularity of the series, many people may have watched it without expecting this coarse language and may have been put off from watching it again. Still, it can be assumed that most people who watch the series already expect this kind of language, and therefore it is not perceived negatively. This can be supported by my own observation



that many fans enjoy imitating the offensive language of the series in real life, especially by using the intensifier *bloody* along with the distinct Brummie accent, suggesting that these expressions have acquired a certain symbolism in the context of the *Peaky Blinders* series.

As for the last section, which focused on exploring the meanings behind the metaphorical and idiomatic language of the series, it was found out that both of these non-literal terms are used extensively in the corpus. However, due to the limitations of this paper, only some of them were selected for the analysis. In the case of metaphorical expressions, characters in the series often use them when talking about war (*we walked through the flames of war*), when talking about the qualities of another person (*he's got half a heart after all*), and also to express a certain idea using inanimate objects (*the crown of a prince*). On the other hand, idiomatic expressions are often used when talking about certain actions (*turn the place upside down*), particular emotions or behaviours (*your face is a picture*), but there are also three idioms in the corpus that make animal references (*keep the wolf from the door*, *the cocks of the walk* and *throw the dog a bone*). Metaphorical words and phrases are not unusual for the spoken language, and many people will go on watching the series without giving them more thought. Yet, the more I watched the episodes, the more I realised how the metaphorical expressions served to both illustrate and give a deeper meaning to the words spoken. Consequently, I had a much better grasp of the personalities of the characters. Idiomatic phrases are also common in ordinary speech, but they may be bewildering to a non-native speaker of English like myself, particularly if they are not widely used. This may apply to idioms, such as *to take shine to someone* or *wet the baby's head*, the meanings of which were initially unclear to me. Still, these less common idioms can be very enriching for non-native speakers who choose to watch this series, as they can enhance their English vocabulary.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was devoted to the linguistic analysis of the renowned British television series *Peaky Blinders*, with a particular emphasis on its morphosyntactic and lexical features. The primary objective was to ascertain whether the series uses the non-standard grammar and vocabulary that are characteristic of Birmingham English. Subsequently, the lexical analysis aimed to explore the use of offensive language and euphemisms, along with the hidden meanings of metaphorical and idiomatic language that are frequently observed in the series under analysis.

The analysis proved that the *Peaky Blinders* series does indeed use certain non-standard grammatical features of the Birmingham dialect together with its typical vocabulary. In terms of frequency, both dialectal features manifest rather infrequently and incidentally. The concrete reason for this remains unknown, yet it may lie within the limits of maintaining the intelligibility of the series for non-Birmingham audiences. Although many grammatical and lexical features of the Birmingham dialect are absent in the series, the analysis revealed that the characters make extensive use of other non-standard features, from non-standard use of tenses to informal phrases that are not considered part of the Birmingham dialect but are not part of Standard English either.

The subsequent part of the lexical analysis demonstrated the different ways in which the TV series uses offensive language, euphemisms, metaphors, and idioms in the characters' speech. The analysis of offensive language unveiled a diversity of swear words, profanity, vulgarisms, and epithets, with swear words constituting the most prevalent group. This was accompanied by the analysis of euphemisms, which characters mostly employ to add dramatization or humour to the uttered words and were primarily used to refer to the topic of ending someone's life. Lastly, the analysis of metaphorical and idiomatic language categorised the spoken expressions according to their use and uncovered the different meanings behind them. While viewers could have easily overlooked the series' frequent use of metaphors, some of the less common idioms may have caused perplexity, particularly for foreigners learning English as a second language.

To sum up, even though the non-native English audience may find the language of *Peaky Blinders* quite challenging to understand, it provides a valuable opportunity to observe how English is used in context outside of the classroom. As a result, I hope this analysis will help in developing a deeper comprehension of the language used in the series and that the reader will find it as enjoyable and interesting as I did while doing so.

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