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Ghost riders in the text

Lyrics and language profiles through time

This presentation has two main aims: one is to highlight how song lyrics appear to have contributed to the definition of identities through an accurate selection of features that encompass idiosyncratic language use; the other is to trace the roots of this phenomenon through a discussion of texts dating from different decades and indeed from different centuries. While it is well known that folk songs and ballads recount the stories of prototypical bonnie lasses and fair maids, wild rovers and valiant heroes, it may be of interest to see how songs appear to adopt the same discourse patterns when featuring in other contexts where they may function as short-hand representations of their subjects. Examples will be given from the lyrics of songs associated with Western movies (Dossena 2021), in addition to protest and political songs (Dossena 2013). Phenomena dating from Late Modern times will be discussed in the context of their re-discovery in the pop culture of the 1960s and beyond, paying special attention to the ways in which ideology appears to inform linguistic choices. The linguistic strategies through which identities in lyrics are stylized to the point of their reduction to stereotypes (Dossena forthcoming) may be shown to have the paradoxical outcome of making such identities all the more memorable and replicable across time and space, in a constant interplay of anachronism and recognisability.

References

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