

“Frozen” in Time: Dialect and Language Ideology in Disney Films

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the appearance of linguistic ideologies and stereotypes in four recent Disney films (*Frozen* 2013, *Moana* 2016, *Coco* 2017, and *The Lion King* 2019) as they compare to those studied in older animated films in the Disney canon. Utilizing a research framework based on previous work by Lippi Green (2012), as well as more recent work by Azad (2009), Sønnestyn (2011), Ellis (2012), and Soares (2017), I analyze the patterns and trends in these films, observing how different dialects and languages are used and which characters are speaking them. First analyzing the data collected according to the original studies' methods, I then execute a broader, more nuanced analysis as I question the applicability of the original methods to the current study. Additionally, I consider the recent increase in discussion of media representation of minority racial and ethnic groups to contextualize the meaning and importance of linguistic representation and the harms of linguistic discrimination, especially considering Disney's young and impressionable audiences. Collecting data from the above four films including film settings, characters' dialects and/or languages spoken, and characters' motivation, I conclude that though Disney has made positive strides in their representation of marginalized dialects and languages, there is much work to be done to undo the damage of their past films and to be more inclusive in their future films. I conclude additionally that their current films are more similar than different to older ones when considering how dialect, language, and culture are used and tokenized, and that this reality is largely rooted not only in the company's history but its primary interests in profit as a corporation.

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1. Introduction

If you are reading this, chances are you have heard of Disney. One of the most popular production companies with some of the highest grossing animated films in history, Disney is understandably beloved by many. Disney films have touched the lives of millions, adults and children alike, inspiring joy and excitement. However, it must be said that Disney is not an altruistic entity, or a nonprofit organization. No, they are a corporation, and one with a particularly questionable history at that. While Disney is known to some as pure magic, others consider it steeped in the murky waters of its sexism and racism, transmitted through the stories it tells and the products it sells. This history is made more concerning when you consider that their customer base is largely made up of young, impressionable children. When considering Disney's past, there are many viewpoints through which we can examine these harms, but in this thesis I have chosen to focus on language--specifically, on the ways in which Disney disseminates harmful language ideologies to its young viewers. These ideologies, which I will define and examine in the next section, may seem harmless or even natural to some, but in fact they have the potential to create real damage to many people, and this potential is exponentially higher precisely when we treat them as the natural order of the world. In order to understand and question them, we must first recognize the existence of an alternative.

I do not wish to attack Disney, nor its audiences and loving fans. Nor do I wish to suggest we cannot enjoy Disney movies and products. Rather, I propose that we must not simply watch and absorb; instead we must critically examine the messages sent our way. No one is immune to the influences of the media we consume, but with some effort we are all capable of questioning them.

In this thesis, I will investigate the specific language ideologies perpetuated by Disney. Considering the context of increasing importance placed on visibility and representation of minority characters in films, I will question whether or not dialect and language has been given a similar degree of importance by producers. Using previous research on this subject and performing my own original research, I will examine past linguistic trends in Disney's films and compare these to newer films to observe similarities and differences. After analyzing 4 newer Disney films in detail, I will then summarize the linguistic patterns made visible in these films and question what they may mean for Disney's future.

2. Defining Language Ideology

What is a language ideology? Simply put, it is any kind of belief about language as used in a social world or context. This fairly broad term encompasses just about any kind of belief you might hold about a language or dialect, whether positive, negative, or neutral, and it often incorporates societal values and beliefs in complex ways. Language ideology is all around us. Ideologies are encoded in the ways we speak about language, the choices we make in when and where to use different languages and dialects, governmental language policies, the way language is taught and used in schools, and even language use in media. The constant stream of information surrounding language and dialect choice greatly influences the public's biases and beliefs about language, and when a dominant ideology is presented exclusively to people for their whole lives, it can easily go unchallenged.

Many linguists have focused on language ideologies more specifically in the context of their potential harms to speakers of marginalized languages or dialects. As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) note, "Linguistic ideology is not a predictable, automatic reflex of the social experience of multilingualism in which it is rooted; it makes its own contribution as an

interpretive filter in the relationship of language and society”. In other words, ideologies about language do not just arise out of nowhere--rather, they are shaped specifically by a society’s values and how language use at a given point in time or place is tied into those values. Thus, in a society where class, race, and other power imbalances exist and are accompanied by linguistic diversity between different groups, language ideologies tend to follow within the lines of these power structures.

This is not to say that language ideology is exactly like any other kind of societal ideology. Take the example of Ebonics, otherwise known as African American Vernacular English, henceforth referred to as AAVE. AAVE is a dialect of English spoken by many Black Americans, primarily those in the middle and working class. AAVE, and many of its lexical and syntactic features such as negative concord (“I didn’t go nowhere”) or habitual be (“He be working”), have traditionally been maligned both by white Americans and some Black Americans of higher socioeconomic status. While negative views of AAVE may relate to white supremacist ideology, they are not exactly one and the same. If they were, the categories of white supremacists and those who negatively evaluate AAVE would overlap completely, yet this is not the case--clearly, Black people who hold these views are not white supremacists, and many white people who hold these views would claim not to be racist. In fact, many white people who participate directly in activism and other antiracist activities may hold these views. However, this linguistic belief *is* directly reflective of white supremacy, antiblack racism, and classism, and in and of itself has the ability to directly uphold inequality at the intersection of race and class, whether or not the believer is cognizant of this fact. As Hill (2008) notes in her discussion of the “folk theory” of racism, while many white Americans feel that conscious belief in racist ideology is the primary or even the only source of racism, critical race theorists recognize that racism can

also be upheld collectively, culturally, and structurally, and therefore individuals taking part in a culture in which racism is built into its basic ideas and structures can easily uphold it without doing so intentionally. According to Hill, language ideologies are often adopted because they afford the holder certain privileges and allocate resources to them, but this is frequently done by ignoring or erasing any alternative worldviews that may interfere with the ideology, having the consequence of making it appear neutral when it is most definitely not.

Unfortunately, this means that while most of the population is influenced by the ideologies upheld in these mediums, and many are directly harmed by them, few who are not directly negatively affected even know how to recognize them or realize their potential to inflict harm. Crucially, many people who would claim to be against racism may still freely admit their judgements of grammatical constructions in AAVE. Research shows that those training to become teachers often hold negative attitudes towards AAVE, and white teacher-trainees are more likely to view AAVE negatively than Black or Hispanic teacher-trainees (Champion, Cobb-Roberts, & Bland-Steward, 2012). These teachers may well encounter student speakers of AAVE in their future teaching careers--will these judgements result in differential treatment of students? Despite benefiting from the power dichotomy they produce, people who hold these views rarely realize the potential harms of their linguistic beliefs, nor do they necessarily recognize them as racist. However, these kinds of ideologies still have the potential to create real harm, especially if they are not recognized as harmful by the perpetrators.

In fact, harmful language ideologies are often particularly insidious as compared to other forms of ideology precisely because of this lack of recognition. For example, in a job interview, an interviewee speaking AAVE might be considered less highly qualified than a white candidate due to their so-called "bad grammar", which represents, in actuality, the regular syntactic and

lexical features of their dialect. An interviewer who claims to evaluate candidates equally regardless of race could easily form biases against this candidate without ever consciously realizing that the candidate's race played a role in the interviewer's evaluation of their dialect.

One common category of ideologies involving language is that of a *standard language ideology*--a form of ideology concerning a dialect, or variety of features, that are commonly associated with a dominant group in a given society. The term "standard" as used here is somewhat misleading. In purely quantitative terms, there is not necessarily a "standard" dialect in a given community or locale, and what is considered standard is not necessarily the variety used by the majority of speakers. Rather, there may be a certain speech variety associated with those of a higher socioeconomic class or a majority race or ethnic group, or a variety containing other features that would be considered unmarked. Typically, standard language varieties are associated with a higher level of education, and may be used in widely distributed media or by governments. Thus, a standard dialect affords prestige and power to its speakers. Notably, the features that make up a standard dialect are entirely linguistically arbitrary. For example, rhoticity (pronunciation of the consonant "r" after a vowel) is considered standard in the US, but in England, the opposite is true. In the US, Standard American English (SAE) is a term often used to describe the variety of English most commonly spoken by white, upper-middle class Americans.

Throughout this thesis, I will use SAE to describe dialects of English that most closely approximate this idea. However, I urge the reader to remember that "standard" dialects are arbitrary and hold no more value or worth than any other dialect. The concept of a standard dialect is "real" in a sense that it is a construct recognized by most people and therefore does have real consequences on speakers of all dialects, but it is important to remember its socially

constructed and linguistically arbitrary nature. Additionally, variance from the standard is exceedingly common for speakers in their everyday lives, even for those who may occasionally use the standard dialect of their language in certain contexts, and what is considered standard does not necessarily represent the dialect most commonly used by speakers of a language across all contexts. Here, I use the term simply to represent the concept of features of speech considered most prestigious in American society.

The present study aims to reveal the various ideologies presented to American children through one major source: Disney's animated movies. As you will see, Disney's history is one marred by their discrimination, ethnic stereotypes, and general mishandling of multiculturalism in their films, and these unfortunate truths are quite commonly enacted specifically through the choices they make with the languages and dialects spoken by their films' characters. In fact, while earlier films such as *Song of the South* (1946) and *Dumbo* (1941) may seem to be much more blatant in their racism, linguistic analysis of Disney films reveal that their stereotypes have remained even in much more modern films. However, because this is done through dialect choice rather than overt features such as characters' appearance, explicit dialogue, and scenarios, many viewers tend not to notice them as consciously. Throughout this thesis, I will reveal the realities of these linguistic stereotypes and the potential harms they can create.

3. Disney's History and Impact

After the publication of Rosina Lippi-Green's landmark book, *English With an Accent: Language Discrimination in the United States* in 1997 and the revised version in 2012, many scholars of Disney and linguistics finally had evidence to support their long term hypothesis: Not only was Disney occasionally inserting harmful stereotypes and jokes into their films, they were doing it systematically, and in what was perhaps the most sinister way possible--by manipulating

the subtle (and, sometimes, not-so-subtle) ins and outs of language and marketing these stereotypes to children (Lippi-Green 2012).

By the late 1990s, Disney scholarship had already become a fairly well-established field. Folklorists, historians, and scholars in other related fields had widely discussed the far-reaching impacts and implications of Disney's colonization of the oral tradition of fairy tales and storytelling. Jack Zipes (1995) argues that written folk tales, which were co-opted and significantly altered from their original oral storytelling traditions by the wealthy literate in Europe, apply moral prescriptivism through the telling of stories with supposed lessons to be learned. Within this concept lies the understanding that messages transmitted through stories reserved for the wealthy contain an underlying bias towards preserving the power structures keeping them in place. Looking at recorded fairytales through this lens, it is entirely unsurprising that Walt Disney, a wealthy man who believed in the strongly dominant "American ideals" of capitalism, ambition, and whiteness, would want to preserve his own power through any means possible in his cartoons. As Zipes cautions, Disney's own hand was ultimately the central character in his films, and as such his own beliefs and values of American individualism, racial purity, and masculinity became the pivotal themes.

Critical here is the transformation of these "fairy tales". Original oral fairytales were nuanced moralistic stories, intended to urge the importance of social harmony in the highly collectivist societies in which they were distributed. However, Disney altered his fairytales into what ultimately became the opposite of their original intentions: a group of stories centering the individual and obscuring nuance, favoring a narrative intended to be consumed at face value rather than critically analyzed. While Walt Disney himself is no longer alive today, his legacy remains through his original films, and the company's policies and practices are still heavily

influenced by his personal views, opinions, and beliefs. As such, it is not ancient oral tales or even entirely modern stories that our children hear today--rather, Disney's homogenized, simplified, and whitewashed stories have become the backbone of modern American popular culture.

However, times are changing. Much of the discourse surrounding media, particularly childrens' media, has shifted towards that of promoting equality and minority racial and gender representation. Backlash from viewers and critics has resulted in a massive shift in Disney's practices towards the production of more inclusive films and repentance for racism in their past. Disney now displays a disclaimer on their Disney+ platform which warns viewers of racist stereotypes in some of their most criticized films (Anderson 2019). A particularly egregious example is that of *Dumbo*, in which a crow named "Jim Crow", voiced by a white actor, performs what is essentially a minstrel show. In fact, this scene was deemed so flagrantly racist that Disney made the decision to remove it altogether before making the film available to stream, though the disclaimer was still included on the website. In addition to its recent streaming platform changes, Disney has released several new films in the past few years, such as *Moana* (2016) and *Coco* (2017), as well as remakes of original films, such as *The Lion King* (2019), *Mulan* (2020), *Aladdin* (2019), and *Peter Pan* (not yet released), which have cast more BIPOC actors and attempt to be more sensitive in their portrayals of non-American, non-white people and cultures. These films have often gathered mixed receptions, with some praising Disney's efforts and others feeling warier of Disney's intentions. However, it is clear that this is a topic on the minds of both Disney producers and Disney viewers.

Despite their many mistakes and imperfections, Disney's shift to a more inclusive model is certainly commendable, and shows signs that the company is working harder to move away

from their racist past. However, while improved casting choices and disclaimers have shaped the Disney landscape during the latter half of the 2010s, it is currently unclear if Disney's practices regarding language and dialect choice have improved as much as these other categories. Much of the conversation surrounding Disney, particularly in news media, since 2016 has focused on casting and their overall sensitivity in portrayal of individual cultures (Desta 2016, Cerón 2017, Portalatin 2017, Davis 2020), whereas dialect and language have been less frequently discussed in mainstream news and social media. Language is a pervasive element of storytelling--one that is chosen deliberately and present in every scene--and yet, characters' dialects frequently slip under media consumers' conscious radars. While viewers may notice characters' dialects and use them to make value judgments about the characters' motivations, they do not necessarily do so consciously. Thus, it follows that language would be the perfect means through which to enact a continuing control of power while sailing below audiences' radars. By creating a heroic protagonist for viewers to look up to, Disney designates that character's dialect as a positive one, and with another stroke of the pen they are able to denigrate the dialects spoken by villains or otherwise negatively portrayed characters. In this way, Disney as a corporation is able to carefully insert ideological beliefs about dialect into their films without necessarily being noticed.

Of course, a crucial point--one which Lippi-Green and Disney scholars emphasize--is that Disney's huge impact on today's society greatly increases their potential for harm. Many American children grow up watching Disney movies, buying Disney-branded products, and consuming other forms of media produced by Disney. Most of the highest-grossing English language childrens' animated films are produced by Disney (now officially Disney-Pixar after the companies completed a merger in 2006 (Monica 2006)). Many American children attend, or

dream of attending, family trips to Disneyworld and Disneyland, where they are promised that their dreams will come true. It is clear that a huge number of American children are raised on the ideals of Disney, but what message is the company transmitting to these children, and is it responsible for its impact? If, in fact, Disney's media and messages impart negative stereotypes and linguistic ideologies onto the developing minds of children, will these ideologies have harmful impacts on children and the adults they will grow up to become? Lippi-Green and other scholars would say yes, and I would undoubtedly have to agree. With their wide-reaching impact, Disney's cultural norms *become* the dominant culture, and their effect on vulnerable and impressionable children is especially insidious.

Media has the power to directly influence how children view the world and what kinds of categories and stereotypes they form (Huessman & Laramie 2006). Research has shown that children internalize the stereotypes presented to them through dialect choice in popular media and use these categorizations to make tangible judgements on characters (Stamou, Maroniti & Griva 2015). Stereotypes surrounding topics such as gender in childrens' media have also been shown to have longitudinal effects on their self image and views of the world (Coyne et al. 2016), impacting everything from their childhood play to their perception of gender roles. If this is true of gender stereotypes, it is easy to see how childrens' language stereotypes could also be built and shaped by their media consumption. Children learn from what they observe, and language is no different. If they grow up watching movies where mocking and stereotyping certain dialects of their language is seen as the normal thing to do, they will absolutely take note, and many of them will likely incorporate these ideas into their own ideological worldviews.

In this paper, I aim to take another look at the messages Disney is transmitting through their most recent films, particularly in the context of their recent efforts to improve diversity in

their films. In doing so, I hope not only to discover what dialect stereotypes Disney has continued to uphold and discontinued, but also to question whether or not these changes can truly make a significant impact on Disney's harms to BIPOC in their total historical context. Comparing my own data to older studies, I hope to contrast past and current usage of dialect choice in Disney's films, highlighting any changes and lack thereof in these practices. Has Disney changed their dialect practices, and if so how have they changed? Does Disney's increased focus on diversity include linguistic diversity? If linguistic diversity in Disney films has increased or improved, are the speakers represented in their films actually impacted positively? I have attempted to answer these questions and more in this paper. Additionally, comparing my own research to that of previous studies, I have addressed some of the methodological issues with older studies, specifically relating to how dialect is categorized.

4. Rosina Lippi-Green and the Language Discrimination of Disney

No discussion of dialects in Disney would be complete without a mention of Rosina Lippi-Green. The influence of her study's findings can be seen in every subsequent investigation of this subject. For my own analysis, Lippi-Green's methodology and data will provide an important basis of comparison. Therefore, I will summarize her findings here.

In her study, Lippi-Green analyzed a total of 38 animated Disney films, released between 1937 and 2009, with the purpose of identifying systematic patterns of stereotyping and transmission of language ideology across these films. Tabulating data according to character dialect and motivation, as well as film setting and several other variables like character gender and type (for example, romantic partner), Lippi-Green drew several conclusions from her data. First of all, about 43.1% of characters in the films she viewed spoke SAE, and 90% overall spoke

native dialects of English. However, only about 60% of characters were present in films set in English-speaking countries or regions, and many of the SAE speakers appeared in films set in locations where another dialect of English would logically be spoken. Villains were most likely to speak U.S. varieties of English, with British English coming in second; however, foreign-accented English was disproportionately spoken by villains (40% of total speakers of foreign-accented English were villains, as opposed to 20% of U.S. English speakers of all dialects). Furthermore, speakers of social and regional dialects (AAVE is a particularly noteworthy example) were rarely spoken by protagonists, and rather more frequently used by minor characters.

The results of Lippi-Green's study may lead us to draw a number of conclusions. First of all, Disney seems to frequently use dialect to represent a character's personality and motivations rather than to actually cue the viewer into the film's location. Many of Disney's dialect choices simply do not make sense in the context of location, such as Scar, a villain in *The Lion King* (1994) who speaks British English despite being in Africa, or Aladdin, the protagonist of *Aladdin* (1992) who speaks SAE despite being in a (fictional) middle eastern/south asian country. On the other side of the coin, many films contain only a few characters who speak the dialect that would actually be spoken in their location, while the rest speak SAE or other unexpected dialects--for example, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), which is set in France, only three minor characters speak French-accented English, yet all the protagonists speak SAE.

Interestingly, romantically involved characters, as well as mother figures (both of whom tend to be portrayed positively and heavily romanticized or idolized) also disproportionately speak SAE over other dialects, and those few who speak other varieties of English or foreign-accented dialects often represent exceptions made for particularly famous actors, such as

in the case of Eva Gabor, a Hungarian actress who voiced romantic roles in *The Rescuers* (1977) and *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990). Social and regional US Englishes are frequently relegated to secondary positions, even if they are portrayed in a more positive light--for example, in *The Princess and The Frog* (2009), protagonist Tiana's father, who is by far the strongest speaker of AAVE in the film, passes away right at the beginning of the story, receiving very little screen time or character development.

Overall, it is clear from Lippi-Green's work that, in their older films, Disney had the tendency to elevate SAE and to deprecate other dialects, whether through overt racism or more subtle stereotypical uses of dialects which appeared as trends over time. However, since this study's data collection period ended in 2009, I will next turn to some other studies that investigated more recent films, as well as other older films not analyzed by Lippi-Green, using a similar framework.

5. Previous Research: Other Disney Dialect Studies

Since the publication of Lippi-Green's original book, numerous scholars have continued her work, examining newer films and attempting to replicate her findings (Azad 2009, Sønnensyn 2011, Ellis 2012, Soares 2017). Research according to this general framework has been done as recently as 2017, and many major animated Disney-Pixar films produced before 2017 have been thoroughly studied and analyzed through this lens of dialect and accent. While Lippi-Green's original study was quite broad and examined a wide range of films, most subsequent research has been done on a much smaller scale. Interestingly, however, while some of Lippi-Green's findings have been largely replicated, many of these studies did observe small but powerful changes occurring in Disney's dialect choices. Azad (2009) notes that many of the villains in the films

she examined (including *Mulan* (1998), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Happy Feet* (2006), *Over the Hedge* (2006), *Madagascar* (2005), *Cars* (2006), and others) spoke SAE. This stands in stark contrast to previous films, in which many villains spoke British English or a variety of other foreign-accented Englishes and social or regional dialects of English. Azad notes that this clear shift may be due to a change in the association of SAE with villainous, power-and-money-hungry characters, who come from wealthy, prestigious backgrounds but are clearly lacking in their morality. This linguistic swap could signal a dramatic change in the way Disney-Pixar filmmakers are portraying the concept of morality. While previous villains may have held power in the form of magic, strength, or other forms of control over characters, they rarely had the societal prestige held by many of our new villains (such as Gladys, the rude, rich homeowners' association president in *Over the Hedge*).

Another important trend in Azad's analysis is the concept of the "nerd" character speaking SAE. While these themes are somewhat less overt than the "prestigious villain" theme, Azad still notes several characters (for example, Melman in *Madagascar* and a minor "ancestor" character in *Mulan*) whose use of SAE is used to signal nerdiness and social ineptitude. As in Bucholtz's 1999 analysis of language practices in communities of nerd girls, these characters' "randomness", assertions of intelligence, and differentiation from "cool" characters are emphasized through their use of words that indicate a formal, educated register, such as Melman's discussion of medical tests he will receive (e.g., MRI and CAT scan) and the ancestor's nasally voice. While "nerd language" often exhibits the features of SAE, it is marked due to its increased formality and excessive use of "standardized" features. According to Bucholtz (2001), "nerd language" is a form of "superstandard" language which is highly formalized and precisely phonologically articulated which often marks the speaker as white.

Therefore, the use of “nerd language” may signal a willingness by Disney to poke fun at hyper-whiteness and hyper-standard English, yet another subversion of the standard language ideology.

While neither of these findings were true across every film in Azad’s analysis, the patterns she found were definitely worth noting, as these changes in the way SAE was portrayed may reflect new ideologies concerning SAE and an openness to more fluid attitudes towards the dialect. Unfortunately, she also reported that many linguistic stereotypes were upheld, as characters speaking AAVE, Hispanic English, and New York English were still frequently portrayed as villains, sidekicks, and “spiritual guide”-type characters. For example, Mushu in *Mulan*, voiced by Eddie Murphy, speaks AAVE despite being in China and is frequently treated as socially inept, lazy, and irresponsible.

Ellis (2012), in her analysis of films such as *Home on the Range* (2004), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001), and others, had similar findings. She emphasized that while more nuanced portrayals of SAE had increased in her sample, the number of foreign-accented English speakers continued to stay low, and the few who existed still tended to be portrayed negatively or as minor characters and sidekicks rather than main protagonists. For example, she mentions Dr. Jumba Jookiba from *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), a character of mixed motivation who proclaims himself to be an “evil genius” and speaks Russian-accented English despite the film’s setting in Hawaii. Sønnesynd (2011) and Soares (2017) also had very similar accounts--while they perceived trends towards a more nuanced portrayal of SAE, they still found issues with other dialects, and despite similar progress as the other studies, similar setbacks still remained. For example, Soares compares protagonist Judy Hops and supporting character Gideon Grey. Though both of these characters come from rural areas of Zootopia, Soares notes

that Judy speaks SAE while Gideon speaks Southern English. Gideon possesses mixed motivations, being portrayed as a bully in his childhood and much kinder in adulthood, but it is notable that he is shown to be somewhat unintelligent through his pronunciation of certain words, such as when he pronounces “DNA” as “dunnah” ([dʌNə]). If both characters hail from the same region, why is it that the supposedly less intelligent (and less important) character is the only one to speak this stigmatized language variety? If so many of these films take place outside of the US, in regions of the US where nonstandard dialects are commonly spoken, or in mythical worlds, why do their characters still continue to speak dialects that are unrelated to the region or the character’s birthplace? Though these trends may signal some small changes, the continued marginalization of some non-standard dialects still show that Disney has a long way to go.

As much as these studies illuminate the continued harms of Disney’s dialect practices, they also make it clear that small changes are beginning to occur which seem to possess the potential for long term growth. If true, these changes could signal the start of a larger change in societal conceptions of dialect and language ideology, including standard language ideology. Disney is, after all, still one of the most popular and successful media companies in the US, and their messaging has the potential to reach and impact huge numbers of children. However, no studies have been conducted since 2017, and as of yet it is currently unclear if Disney’s most recent films show signs of a continuation of this shift. As such, I next analyze a number of recent Disney films not yet included in previous analyses in order to investigate whether or not Disney is portraying linguistic diversity more positively as they continue their attempts to emphasize cultural sensitivity in their production practices and expand minority representation on screen.

6. Methodology

In order to investigate the question of whether or not Disney is truly making positive changes in their portrayals of different dialects, I have analyzed several more recent Disney-Pixar films--*Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), *Coco* (2017), and *The Lion King* (2019). I have chosen these films for several reasons. First of all, they have been heavily advertised and are some of the highest-grossing animated films produced by Disney in the past 3 years, excluding various sequels. Additionally, *Moana* and *Coco* are notable for their inclusion of non-American POC protagonists, which represents a considerable change from past films and may be particularly helpful and indicative in my analysis in terms of the treatment of dialect in these non-US settings with non-white characters. Finally, *The Lion King*, a remake of the original, provides some particularly noteworthy points for analysis as it can be directly compared to its original version, which was included in the original Lippi-Green study.

I have modeled my methods of data collection and analysis on Lippi-Green's as closely as possible in order to gather a more easily comparable data set. Lippi-Green's original study utilized 3 key variables in order to analyze the distribution of language. First, each film is grouped by its setting, either in the actual country or region it is located in or as a "mythical" or unknown location. Next, the characters' dialects are coded into one of several categories. Lippi-Green's study used the following categories: SAE, socially peripheral US Englishes, regionally peripheral US Englishes, standard British, other British Englishes, other Englishes (non-US or British English dialects), and non-native or foreign-accented English.

It is important to note that Lippi-Green's original dialect categories did not always reflect the diversity of dialects I analyzed in my own research, which is particularly problematic considering that I have conducted this research on a much smaller scale and therefore have a

smaller sample size. For example, the category of “US Englishes” is quite broad and did not entirely reflect the nuance I observed within each individual film. As such, I have analyzed my data in several different ways. Initially, I coded the data according to Lippi-Green’s own categories and compared results from both. Then, I further subdivided the categories and drew additional conclusions based on the results from these. Finally, I completed a further, in-depth analysis of specific and noteworthy data points. These analyses will be presented in detail in the next section. I used a combination of phonological, syntactic, and lexical data to perform these categorizations. This involved identification of syntactic structures, phonological patterns, lexical items associated with a certain dialect, and lexical items from other languages in certain cases.

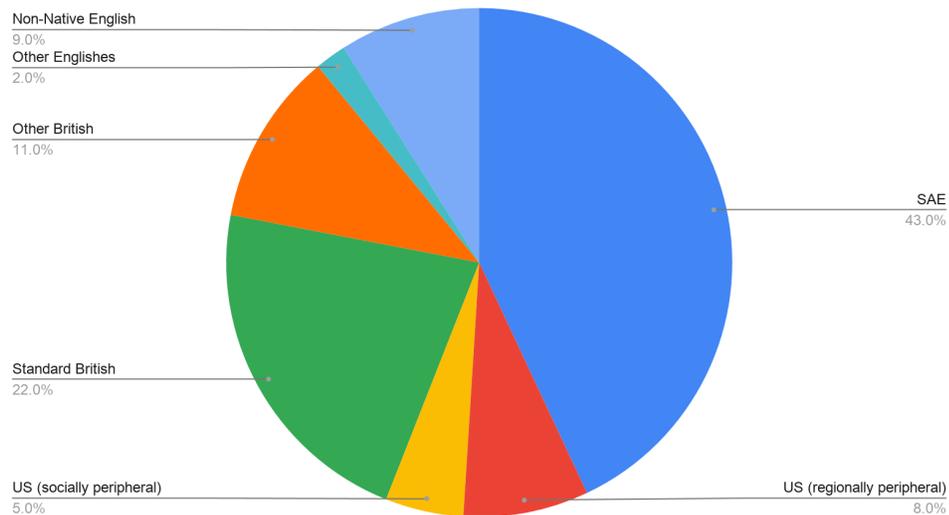
Lastly, characters’ motivations were coded as either positive, negative, or mixed. Coding for motivation permits character type to be analyzed systematically alongside dialect choice, as it provides clearer boundaries for separating character type than the fluid categories of “protagonists”, “villains”, “side-kicks”, and other character archetypes. This allows us to understand how dialect may or may not be used for positive or negative characterization. Lippi-Green unfortunately does not provide information on how these motivations were coded in her own study. As such, I used Azad’s (2009) method of encoding motivation, based on the character’s intentions as juxtaposed with the main protagonist’s. Furthermore, following the suggestion of Ellis (2012), I also used sites such as Disney wiki pages to gain a better understanding of how fans see the character. Deciding how to code a character’s intentions will always be somewhat biased, but I believe that these tools gave me a slightly more reliable understanding of how the characters I analyzed fell into these categories.

7. Data

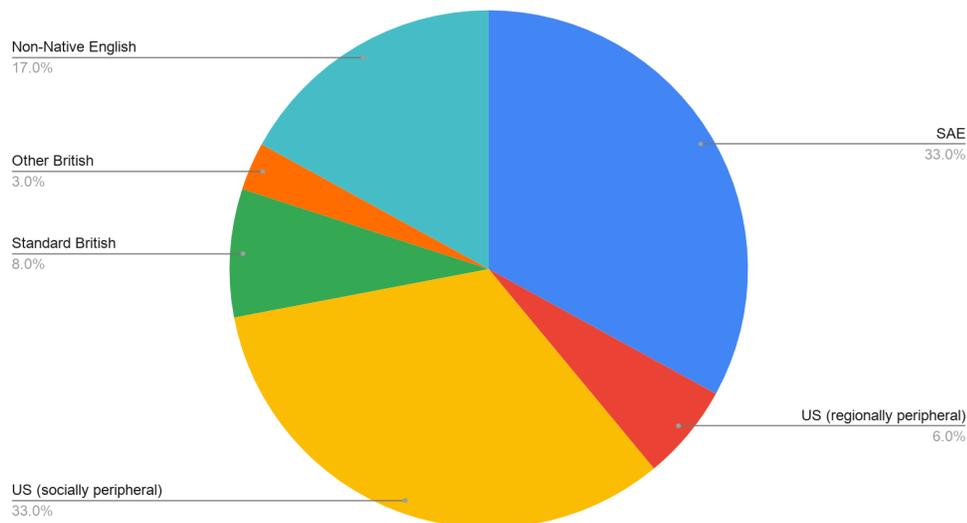
Original data was collected from a set of four different Disney-Pixar animated films: *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), *Coco* (2017), and *The Lion King* (2019). Each film was viewed twice. Film names, years of production, and locations were noted, and each character's name, dialect, and character motivation was coded. Qualitative notes were taken on particular scenes, dialogues, and other details of importance for each movie, and any particularly important elements of a character's speech, such as noteworthy idiolect features and use of non-English language lexical items, were also noted. Characters were excluded from the data set if they lacked dialogue or if they spoke only one line.

Comparing the novel and original data, several interesting patterns emerged. First, observe the following two graphs to compare the overall distribution of dialects in the current study and Lippi Green 2012:

Overall Dialect Distribution (Lippi-Green 2012)



Overall Dialect Distribution (current study)

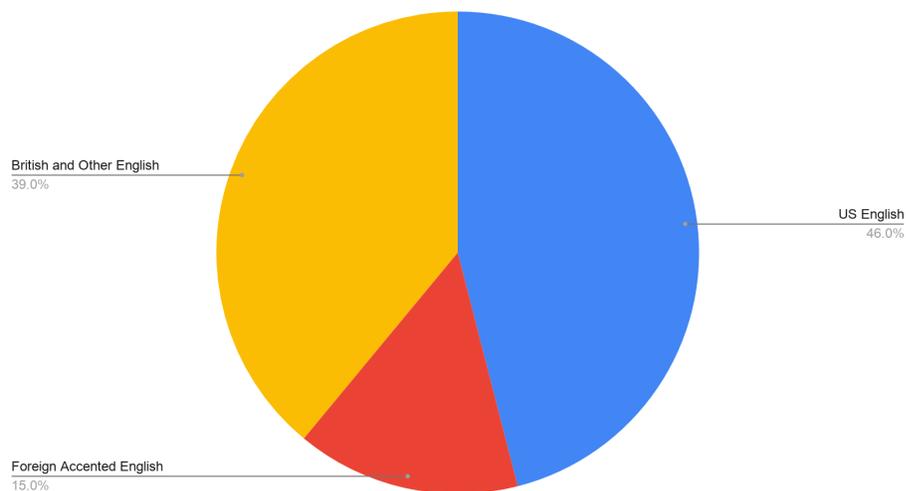


One notable detail is that SAE no longer comprised the largest dialect category--in this data set, it was equivalent in size to socially peripheral US English, with both comprising 33% each of the total characters. This detail is likely attributed largely to *Coco*, as none of its characters speak SAE and the majority speak Chicano English or foreign-accented English.

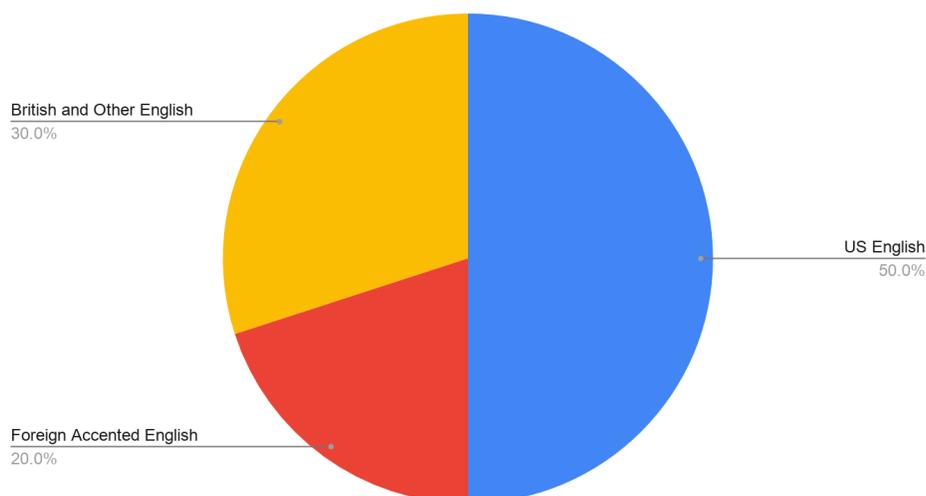
However, many characters in *Moana* and *The Lion King* are also speakers of socially peripheral US English dialects, and may also account for a portion of this category--a major shift from the original study, in which socially peripheral US Englishes accounted for only 5% of the sample. Additionally, nonnative English speakers approximately doubled (now 17%), while Standard British English speakers approximately halved (now 8%) and regionally/socially peripheral British English speakers dropped by approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ (now 3%).

Next, see the following charts for a comparison of dialect distribution within negatively motivated characters:

Negative Characters by Variety of English (Lippi-Green 2012)

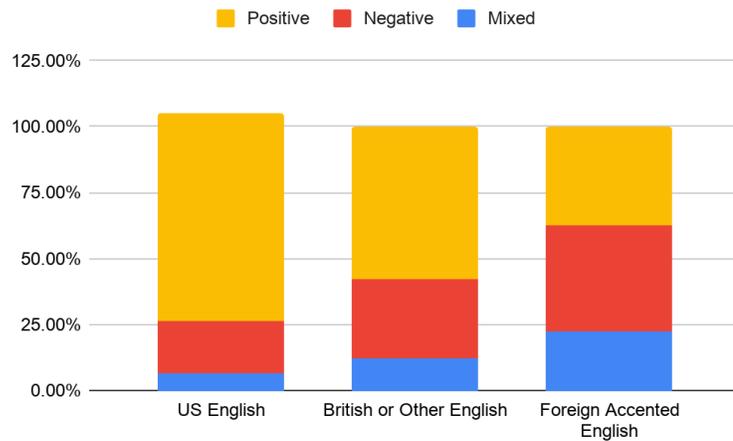


Negative Characters by Variety of English (current study)

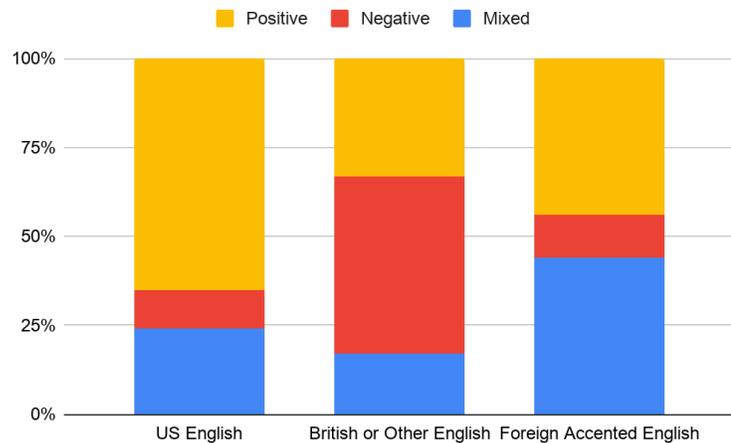


Distribution of negatively motivated characters remained approximately the same, with a slight increase in SAE-speaking, negatively motivated characters by percentage. However, as the sample contained a total of only 8 negatively motivated characters, this result by itself is of fairly little significance. Perhaps more interesting are the differences between the following two charts:

Distribution of Character Motivation by Variety of English (Lippi-Green 2012)



Distribution of Character Motivation by Variety of English (current study)



When examining the distribution of all 3 character motivations, the percentage of positively motivated foreign-accented English speakers increased from 37-44%, while negatively motivated foreign-accented English speakers decreased significantly from 40.7% to only 12%.

It is important to note that, due to the small size of the sample, the data as presented in this manner may not be representative of Disney's practices as a whole, nor of the unique elements of each film analyzed. Therefore, I will now present a more detailed analysis and thorough questioning of the results. I will first analyze each film individually, then move to a broader discussion of these analyses and their implications.

8. Analysis

8.1. Frozen

Frozen is the oldest movie on this list, and this is fairly evident in how its choices in dialect, casting, and general scene-setting and characterization methods largely reflect those of the films analyzed in past studies. The movie is set in the fictional kingdom of Arendelle, modeled loosely off of historical Norway. While the basis for the film's location is not explicitly referred to, it is fairly clear that we are somewhere in Scandinavia. The movie opens with a song, *Vuelie*, that combines the traditional Saami *yoik* style of music with the Danish Christian hymn *Deilig er Jorden* (Noyen 2014). After this opening song, however, the Saami culture is largely ignored for the rest of the movie, referenced only through the similarities of the characters' clothes to Saami traditional clothes.

Most characters speak SAE, protagonists and villains included. However, there are some notable exceptions that are worth mentioning. One prominent example is Oaken, a minor

character featured in one scene as a shopkeeper. Oaken, voiced by American actor Chris Williams, is the only character in the film to speak “Norwegian-accented English”. However, the character’s dialect is extremely contrived and unrealistic sounding, characterized by the use of lexical items such as “ja” and “hoo-hoo” and a variety of nonstandard pronunciations including an elongated [u] and an enunciated “I” in [sʌnbælm]:

(1) *Oaken*: [hu hu!]

Anna: hm?

Oaken: [big sʌmʌ blowʌt. hæf ʌf swimiŋ su:ts, klɔgz, æn ʌ sʌnbælm ʌv mai oun
mʌvʒnʃm. **Ja?**] (Big summer blowout. Half off swimming suits, clogs, and a sunbalm of
my own invention.)

While the character is friendly and positively aligned with the protagonist, Anna, his dialect is a clearly stereotypical representation of Norwegians, and in fact could be seen more as a mocking portrayal than a positive one. It is clear that Disney chose to portray Oaken in this way to provoke audience laughs rather than to set the scene, as in a landscape fairly devoid of cultural references to the region, Oaken stands out more than he blends in.

The trolls, a group of creatures based (very) loosely on Norse mythology, provide clear examples of characterization through dialect choice. Two trolls in particular stand out: Pabbie, the “head troll”, who speaks British English, and Bulda, an AAVE-speaking troll who takes the lead in the song “Fixer-Upper”, in which the trolls urge protagonists Anna and Kristoff to marry. An example of Pabbie’s speech can be found here. Note the lack of rhoticity in the word [hɪə]:

(2) *Pabbie*: [ðeɪ ɪz stɹeɪndʒ mədʒɪk hɪə.] (There is strange magic here.)

While both of these characters are positively motivated, these dialect choices are still odd ones in the context of location, especially considering that most other characters in the film speak SAE. It seems as if Disney chose these dialects to distinguish the trolls even further from other characters, particularly because they are non-human characters. Like Oaken, these characters' dialects do not tell us anything about where we are; rather, they are chosen only to designate the trolls as different from the humans.

Notably, however, several human characters also speak British English. Near the beginning of the film, the palace in which the protagonists live is opened to the public for the first time in many years for protagonist Elsa's coronation. This event attracts visitors from other kingdoms in the region. In the scene where the visitors arrive, many characters can be heard chatting in British English, as well as French-accented English, in the background. These characters' dialects are an example of scene setting in the film, though in a far more general sense. Because they are not formally introduced and their personalities are not made clear to us, it seems the "foreignness" of their dialects is used simply to denote the fact that they have come from outside of the kingdom.

We are then introduced to the film's main villains. The first of these is the Duke of Weselton, a duke from a neighboring kingdom who speaks British English. From his first appearance in the film, it is made immediately clear that the Duke is a villain, with his rude behavior and conniving attitude. The second is Hans, an SAE-speaking prince with whom Anna immediately falls in love. Hans is only revealed to be a villain near the end of the film, when it is discovered that he plotted to kill Elsa. Why is it that the Duke speaks British English and Hans

SAE? There are many possible reasons, but I will propose two here. First of all, it is possible that Hans' initial appearance as a protagonist plays a role in this decision. As a romantic figure for the majority of the movie, Hans's use of SAE follows with the pattern observed in previous studies. In fact, it seems that Disney may have reasoned that audiences were so used to hearing British English-speaking villains and SAE-speaking protagonists that they may have been thrown off after hearing a main protagonist speak British English. However, another possible reason for this choice echoes Azad's finding of an increase in SAE-speaking villains. Like the villains in Azad's analysis, Hans's dialect may be another symbol of Disney's slow shift towards portraying a more nuanced picture of SAE as a dialect spoken just as much by elitist, power-hungry characters as by heroic ones.

8.2. Coco

Coco represents a significant moment in Disney-Pixar history in many ways. First of all, its protagonist, Miguel, is one of the first POC protagonists in an animated Disney-Pixar film to speak a non-SAE dialect, preceded only by Moana. *Coco* is also notable for its portrayal of Mexican culture, which is deeply rooted in the film's storyline. Linguistically, *Coco* is extremely striking, as not a single character in the film speaks SAE--a first for any Disney-Pixar animated feature film.

While it could be said that all characters' dialects are recognizably distinct from SAE, categorizing the individual dialects of each character proved much more complicated, if not impossible, within the parameters of this study. While some characters' dialects were closer to Chicano English, others sounded more distinctly like foreign-accented English. Many of the film's actors are known for their use of either Chicano English or foreign-accented English, but

others still are SAE speakers who “put on an accent” for the film. As non-native speakers, these varieties were indistinct and harder to classify. In fact, even in real life, it can often be difficult to distinguish between the native English speaker variety of Chicano English and foreign-accented second language English, and the lines may be blurred in bilingual families, recent immigrant families, and families who spend time both in Mexico/Latin America and the US. As such, categorization coding choices for the characters in this film were somewhat less structured than preferable, and may have somewhat skewed the data in terms of the nonnative English and socially peripheral English categories. Of course, the struggle to code these dialects may represent a more significant methodological flaw in Lippi-Green’s original study. While assigning dialects to categories makes data analysis simpler, it also has the potential to obscure the nuances between different dialects and to oversimplify the possible analyses which emerge from the dataset. Crucially, in this film, whether or not the characters spoke Chicano English or foreign-accented English did not matter--what mattered was that their voices were simply used to set the scene for the film, and their actions were used to convey their personalities rather than their voices. The choice to include an entirely Latino cast, as well as the choice to portray each and every character with a nonstandard dialect of English, represents a very significant step for Disney-Pixar. The effect of this choice is that Chicano English and Mexican/Latin American foreign-accented English becomes the norm rather than being othered, and characters’ traits and personalities are explained to the audience not by the way they speak but by the way they act. The decision to do this represents a significant move away from reliance on linguistic stereotypes, instead portraying characters in a humanizing, realistic way and utilizing characters’ actions--not dialects or accents--to show the audience who they are.

Equally powerful is the inclusion of Spanish language throughout the film. While the other films included in the study often use non-English languages spoken in the region more peripherally, utilizing them in music and very occasionally in speech, *Coco* is peppered with Spanish language use, and most characters will use Spanish words very frequently in their sentences. For example, observe the dialogue in this scene:

(3) *Neighbor*: **Hola** Miguel!

Miguel: **Hola!**

(4) *Mama Coco*: Papa is home!

Abuelita: **Calmase, calmase.**

(5) *Miguel*: Ernesto de la Cruz's sunrise spectacular? **¡Qué padre!**

Though this could be interpreted as a tokenization of Spanish language on the part of Disney, it does represent a huge difference from older Disney films that included Spanish in their dialogue. For example, in *The Lion King* (1994), evil hyena Banzai is inexplicably a speaker of Chicano English despite being in the middle of Africa, and his frequent use of random Spanish words is seemingly used to portray him as threatening. However, in *Coco*, use of Spanish is entirely normalized, and like the characters' dialects, Spanish is used not for characterization but simply to make the characters appear more realistic within the film's setting.

For all its accomplishments, *Coco* also has some problems. The film has been criticized by some viewers for its erasure of indigenous people, especially pertaining to the film's portrayal

of *dia de los muertos* (Cervantes-Altamirano 2017). Mexico is extremely diverse both ethnically and linguistically, and over 50 distinct indigenous languages are spoken across the country, most of which have multiple varieties or dialects. However, the film does not feature any use of indigenous languages, and it has not been officially released in any indigenous languages spoken in Mexico, although it was endearingly dubbed into Quechua by a father and son pair of fans in Peru. While the film is cherished by many as an overall positive representation of Mexican people and culture, it is still important to recognize that it does not necessarily represent all Mexican people, and it could easily be viewed as an oversimplification of Mexican culture.

8.3. Moana

Just as *Coco*, *Moana* is radical for its portrayal of a non-SAE speaking POC protagonist. While Moana is not the first BIPOC Disney princess, she is notable for many reasons, not the least of which is the casting of a Hawai’ian actress, Auli’i Cravalho, to play the role. However, across the movie, the characters’ dialects are somewhat less cohesive than in *Coco*, and this is generally reflective of the movie’s broad approach to “Polynesian culture”, a reality which also earned some audiences’ contempt (Herman 2016, Chinen 2016). Rather than adopting elements of a specific Polynesian culture, the film reaches far and wide in all areas--characters speak a mix of Hawai’ian English, New Zealand English, and even SAE; details of the story are taken from multiple cultures, including Hawai’ian, Samoan, Māori, and more. For example, the character Maui, a demigod, is a prominent figure across a wide range of Polynesian cultures, with the exact details of his personality and backstory varying between different cultures (Caldwell 2017). Multiple different Polynesian languages were used in the film’s music, such as

Samoa and Tokelauan. In one pivotal scene, Maui performs a traditional Māori *haka*, chanting in Māori as he performs a war dance.

(6) *Maui*: Ka tū te Ihiihi, Ka tū te Wanawana, E tū iho nei, tū iho nei, hī ha! (transliteration from Disney wiki)

While the use of non-English languages by the film's characters is noteworthy, representing a departure from other films such as *Frozen* in which the native languages of the region are generally relegated to the sidelines, the *Moana* filmmakers' choice to include multiple Polynesian languages, as well as multiple Polynesian cultural influences in general, has its setbacks as well. Though Polynesian cultural groups and languages are historically related, the diversity of Polynesian cultures in modern times does not come across in the film. To many unfamiliar audiences, these cultures and languages may blend together, when in fact they represent unique sources of pride and heritage for over 3 dozen distinct cultural groups today and speak at least 37 different languages under the Polynesian language family (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig 2020). The film does not reference this diversity of culture and language directly; it would be incredibly easy for a viewer to leave the theater believing that *Moana* is representative of one concrete "Polynesian culture" when in fact it is much more diverse. Part of the problem is that Disney is attempting to tell a story that takes place in the very distant past, when in fact cultural boundaries, as well as the distribution of people and their physical locations, were very different from today. Even Moana's own island, Motunui, is a fictional location created by the filmmakers themselves. By taking this approach to storytelling, *Moana* succeeds in representing Polynesian cultures as sources of pride, but fails to represent them as currently existing, unique

cultures in the present day. Much like museum dioramas showing “ancient” scenes of indigenous peoples, this common tactic of depicting indigenous cultures as things of the past ultimately serves to erase the continued existence, perseverance, and struggles that indigenous people face today.

Non-English languages aside, one unique aspect of *Moana*'s dialect choices is its subversion of the past stereotype of the “British villain”. While Lippi-Green’s analysis noted a plethora of British English-speaking villains, many completely out of place in their respective settings, *Moana* takes a slightly more interesting approach. While the film contains a number of characters who could be considered “villains”, many of them not speaking, the most traditionally villain-like character is Tamatoa, a shiny object-loving crab visited by Moana and Maui. Instead of assigning a standard British dialect to the character, Disney opts for New Zealand English. While New Zealand English is obviously not a variety of British English, it is descended from British English and has some phonological similarities. Though certainly not a flawless comparison, this variety somewhat parallels the relationship between Standard British English and American varieties of English in a Polynesian context, as New Zealand, with its indigenous Māori inhabitants, was colonized by the British. However, this is complicated by the fact that many if not most Māori people themselves speak New Zealand English. In fact, Jermaine Clement, the actor playing Tamatoa, is himself part Māori. Thus, this character simultaneously represents a subversion of previous villain dialect tropes and more inclusive casting representation while embodying Disney’s fairly broad portrayal of Polynesian cultures.

8.4. The Lion King

The Lion King (2019) is the most recent film on this list, and it is also the only film that was remade from its original version. This movie sports many comparisons to the original, though many elements were also changed, some of which are absolutely relevant to the topic of language and dialect. Like the original, despite being set in an ambiguous location in Africa, *The Lion King* features a cast speaking a diverse group of dialects, many of which are out of place in the savannah. The film's main villain, Scar, retains his British English dialect, though he no longer speaks in an exaggerated, effeminate tone as in the original film. Many characters also speak SAE, including supporting characters Timon and Pumbaa. One major difference from the original, however, is the introduction of AAVE (albeit with few of the dialect's syntactic or lexical features--mainly phonological ones) for many characters, including the protagonist, Simba. Simba, played by Donald Glover (also known as rapper Childish Gambino), speaks AAVE, a clear leap from the original film in which Simba is portrayed by a white actor and speaks SAE. The casting of Glover, and the choice to cast a majority Black cast in general, has been met with praise for its highly visible representation of Black actors and characters (Judge 2017, Terrell 2019). While AAVE is not necessarily a more realistic choice for an African setting than SAE, it is still significant that a lead protagonist in a Disney film is voiced by a Black, AAVE-speaking actor. The portrayal of AAVE by the heroic Simba is overall a positive representation for the dialect and its speakers.

The use of African languages throughout the movie is noticeable, though they are only heard in the speech of selective characters and musical numbers. Several examples of this can be seen in both the original and the current version. For example, the films are famous for their opening song, "Circle of Life", which is sung partially in Zulu. Additionally, many characters'

names come from Swahili words--Simba, for example, is the Swahili word for lion. Another famous song from the film, “Hakuna Matata”, revolves around its namesake Swahili phrase. However, aside from the occasional use of different African languages in characters’ names and music, very few characters speak non-native English dialects. In fact, in the current version, only two characters speak foreign-accented English: Shenzi and Rafiki. Shenzi, a villainous hyena voiced by Florence Kasumba, stands out amongst her two partners, Azizi and Kamari, both SAE speakers. While the other hyenas tell jokes and goof off, Shenzi is the leader of the pack, coming off as much more sinister than the other two. Shenzi’s speech has a number of nonstandard features, such as an absence of rhoticity and slight vowel shifts. For example, observe the following line of dialogue, noting the ending of “here” [hiə] and the word “war” [wɔ]

(7) *Shenzi*: [hainəz ən laɪnz əv baɪnɚ **wɔ** sɪns ðə bɪɡɪnɪŋ əv taɪm. bʌt mʊfəsəz blʌdlaɪn wɪl
 ɛnd **hiə!**] (Hyenas and lions have been at war since the beginning of time. But Mufasa’s
 bloodline will end here!)

Shenzi’s foreign accented English is not the character’s only difference from the other hyenas, but it clearly provides another method of differentiating her from the others.

Interestingly, however, all three hyena characters underwent quite significant changes from the last film. The original film’s hyenas were criticized in the original film for their seemingly racist portrayals of minorities, particularly Chicano English speaker Banzai (now Kamari) and AAVE speaker Shenzi. The characters’ dialects were utilized for comic effect, with Banzai often including Spanish words in his speech, and all 3 were depicted as erratic and frightening. As such, these changes to the characters’ names and dialects may reflect Disney’s

attempts to sweep this element of the original under the rug, as the company has never outright acknowledged the racism of these original characters (Visram 2019).

Rafiki, a wise, elderly mandrill monkey, is the only other speaker of foreign-accented English in this film. Played by actor John Kani, he is also the only character to speak a non-English language--Xhosa--in the film (outside of the use of characters' names or specific phrases like "hakuna matata"). For example, see the following exchange between Rafiki and Simba:

(8) *Simba*: I don't see anything.

Rafiki: **Xwala selaman.** Look closer.

The inclusion of Xhosa into the character's dialogue is certainly noteworthy, and the language is clearly being represented in a positive light--in fact, Rafiki's wisdom and guidance are essential for Simba's growth. However, it seems that, at least to some extent, Rafiki's use of Xhosa serves more to make the character seem "mysterious" and "mystical" than to set the scene, especially given that Simba himself does not appear to speak the language (and therefore may not even understand what Rafiki says to him). It is also telling that the film's only non-English speaking character is simply a means to facilitate another character's storyline, possessing no arc of his own. While the stereotypes Disney plays on with Rafiki are not necessarily overtly negative, the character is clearly one of many in a long line of examples in which non-English languages are relegated to the sidelines and used to fast-track audiences' minds to associate characters' dialects with common tropes rather than relying on the character's actual actions to understand them.

8.5. Trends and Comparisons

While all 4 of these movies had significant differences, there were also many patterns and commonalities between them. One striking similarity is the films' use of non-English languages in scene setting. For example, *Moana*, *Coco*, and *The Lion King* each contain music and dialogue in non-English languages relevant to the region of their settings. However, the execution of this use is different for each movie. In *Moana* and *The Lion King*, particularly in the latter, non-English languages serve as a backdrop for the film's expressions of culture. While the inclusion of Zulu or Tokelauan is certainly not an inherently bad thing, these movies' approaches to language are far too vague, painting entire cultures with a broad brush and making the films' settings seem more like distant fantasy worlds than real places with real people. By doing so, Disney erases the unique elements of the cultures they portray in favor of providing a whitewashed version of their history, palatable to white American audiences but harmful to members of the communities they attempt to represent. Additionally, this broad approach results in the othering of the cultures portrayed, creating a dichotomy between "foreign" and "non-foreign" rather than recognizing the possibilities of diversity and fluidity. Meanwhile, *Coco*'s approach to non-English language is much more natural and fluid, incorporated into every scene, song, and dialogue exchange. Instead of othering and separating English and non-English languages from each other, this has the effect of immersing audiences in a world where bilingualism is normal, expected, and barely even consciously noticed.

Over the years, there seems to be a general pattern of progression in Disney's increasingly positive portrayals of nonstandard dialects and non-English languages. Across all four films, there are increases in the use of non-SAE dialects, especially socially peripheral ones such as Chicano English and AAVE. This difference is also noticeable in the

most prominent roles in the films--for example, *Coco* protagonist Miguel, *Moana* protagonist Moana, and *The Lion King* protagonist Simba all speak socially or regionally peripheral varieties of English. *Moana* and *Coco* in particular make an effort to center the cultures of their characters, and *Coco* especially centers the language its characters speak in a way that depicts speakers as fully-fledged, 3-dimensional people rather than stereotypes or caricatures. While *The Lion King* still contains some problematic portrayals of dialect and language, it is clear that the producers and directors put some effort into resolving the film's earlier problems, changing the hyena characters and casting Black actors to play important roles throughout the film.

As for *Frozen*, it is definitely more reflective of the films analyzed in previous studies as well, which is unsurprising as it is several years older than the other films analyzed in this study. It seems prescient that the only movie on the list taking place in what would be a predominantly white, though non-English speaking, setting is the one that centers SAE the most and includes the most egregious dialect tropes. However, it is promising that the other films in the study have since improved. As pressure from audiences mounts to give positive representation of BIPOC and to portray non-Western cultures more accurately, Disney will hopefully continue in this direction in years to come. While it is unfortunate that it took years of questioning from many voices to make any significant changes, these films certainly represent steps in the right direction.

9. Conclusion

From the data collected in this study, it is clear that Disney has made improvements in their practices surrounding dialect and representation, but they still have a long way to go before their films become more consistent in their attempts to be equitable and representative. Clear

changes in the company's more recent films can be seen, especially in the case of *Coco*, and the breakdown of dialects represented shows that Disney is moving away from centering SAE and moving towards representing nonstandard dialects and non-English languages, as well as the cultures in which those languages are spoken, in their films.

However, none of the films analyzed in this study were perfect, and most performed mixed at best in terms of creating a representation of their languages and cultures that was positive, educational, and accurate. For example, while *Moana* does an excellent job of normalizing Polynesian languages and Hawai'ian English, the film ultimately fails to accurately portray Polynesian culture to children who have likely had little exposure to it before watching. While the story is fictional and not meant to be entirely historically accurate or realistic, it is a shame that this potential opportunity for education has not been utilized to its fullest extent. To make matters worse, Disney has since been embroiled in several controversies related to the film, including the sale of a skin-suit zip up Maui costume accused of using brownface and cultural appropriation of traditional Polynesian tattoos (Yee 2016) and the construction of a resort in Hawaii, Aulani, touted by Disney as an "authentic Hawaiian experience" costing upwards of \$500 a night and suspiciously lacking in the presence of actual Hawaiian people. (Caroll, McDougall & Nordstrom 2014). As Ngati Porou scholar Tina Ngata notes, while Disney is certainly creating representation with their films, these endeavors ultimately serve to commodify indigenous cultures while ignoring the more salient problems facing their members and often actively harming communities in other ways, such as through displacement, pollution, and gentrification (Ngata 2016). Disney is a corporation whose financial interests always come first, and this means that their actions will always be at odds with the mission of decolonization.

What can we take away from this information? There is no one concrete answer to this question. Disney's foray into diverse linguistic and cultural representation may benefit minority youth through seeing characters like them on screen, and majority youth by teaching them to appreciate other languages and cultures, but at the same time they can still impose harm through oversimplification and commodification of the cultures they seek to portray. Ultimately, while the changes that can be seen in their practices show growth, they also show significant room for improvement. It remains to be seen whether or not this growth will happen, or if Disney is even capable of such tasks due to their existence as a corporation. Hopefully in the future, Disney will increase the involvement of members of the cultural groups they wish to tell the stories of, as doing so will likely make a difference in the accuracy and appropriateness of their films' plot and linguistic details. However, the company must be cautious not to tokenize individual members and to involve those with multiple perspectives at every level of production. Without this, it would be far too easy for members of the production team to exert bias or ignorance they are unaware of without others catching and correcting it. Disney attempted a similar tactic during the production of *Moana*, creating a team of "Polynesian cultural consultants" later dubbed the Oceanic Story Trust. However, many criticized Disney for expecting a small team of cultural advisors--certainly not representative of all Polynesian cultures, or even all voices within their own communities--to make up for the lack of Polynesian voices involved in producing, directing, writing, and editing the film. In the words of Tina Ngata, "Having brown advisers doesn't make it a brown story. It's still very much a white person's story" (Herman 2016). In short, Disney must do far more than possess good intentions--they must actively include nonwhite, non-English speaking voices on a much deeper level if they truly want to make a difference.

Future linguistics research should seek to continually monitor the trends observed here and in past studies, as well as to continue questioning the methods used for such research and searching for alternative ways of understanding language ideology in Disney. Additionally, linguists and researchers in other related fields should also continue to interrogate Disney's very core as a capitalist enterprise. The more we question the messages Disney feeds us, the more we can fight against the messaging that harms our communities and neighbors.

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