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The Sound of Disney

A sociolinguistic analysis of the use of English accents in four animated films from the 2010s

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
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Abstract

Accent can function as a cue for social categorization and stereotyping and the media is one of the main agents for this distribution. This study is a sociolinguistic analysis of the use of accents in four recent Disney films and how these accents are represented through different character roles. There is also a focus on how the setting is reflected through these accents. Films studied are *Frozen* (2013) and *Vaiana* (2016) from Walt Disney Animation Studios and *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) from Pixar Animation Studios. Results show authenticity to setting in the use of accents to various degrees. Pixar films show this to a great extent while the Disney films do so less and have a higher use of the General American accent. Overall results show that English with a foreign accent is spoken by almost half of the characters. An important finding is the high number of non-speaking evil and negative characters suggesting a new tendency of avoiding the use of accent stereotypes for these characters. Lastly, an awareness of the use of accent and language-based stereotypes in films is to be sought after by holding film companies accountable to a greater extent than before. This can be done through channels such as social media.

Keywords

Sociolinguistics, language attitudes, language ideologies, accents, language in media, animated film, Disney, Pixar.

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1 Introduction

Animated films are a hugely popular genre listing 19 films amongst the top 100 for the worldwide all-time grossing films at the box office (Box Office Mojo, 2019). As these are often children's films, the stories tend to show a more ideal world than reality, touching lightly on difficult topics if at all and give an impression of everything working out in the end. Conveying this message of a more optimistic world with few issues where some characters have certain roles can also bring its own problems. In recent times big film production companies have been accused of using language for characters portrayals in a way that promotes racism, discrimination and stereotyping of certain groups of people (Di Giovanni, 2003; Giroux, 1995; Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012; Rosa, 2006). As one of the largest distributors of children's films, the Walt Disney Company and its sub-division Walt Disney Studios, hold great power, influence and responsibility in how they choose to portray their stories. Zipes (1995) criticizes Disney for their appropriation and reinterpretation of traditional stories and retelling them in their own way, isolating and excluding other storytellers and cultures. He calls this the *Disney spell*. Disney's international reach and films produced over a longer period of time together with the changing expectations and interests of their audience makes them an ideal candidate to study. A sociolinguistic approach to this subject, focusing on how language is used to characterize characters and portray setting in children's films, can be relevant because of its potential influence on a large number of people. Often the films' view on a culture and its people is the only one the children are exposed to and thus their impression of and attitudes on that culture and its people will be flawed and incomplete. It is worth mentioning that even though the films by Walt Disney Studios often are fairy tales and fiction, real-life linguistic tools are used to convey their story and characters which makes them, to some degree, subject to comparison.

The phenomenon of accent use in Disney animated films, both how it pertains to character traits and how it deals with linguistic attitudes and stereotypes, has already been researched to some extent giving a good view of change over time (see section 2.4.). As the Disney films from 1937-2009 were part of a large study by Lippi-Green (2012, pp. 110-126) and in subsequent years smaller studies on more recent films have taken place, data on the most recent Disney films seemed the most useful to further the research on this topic. In films, accents can be used as a shortcut to quickly convey character or as a signal of place and context (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 84) and it is the signal of place and context that is the most preferable if stigma and offense to specific groups of people is to be avoided. Based on previous research it is still the former way that is the most used (Azad, 2009; Ellis, 2012; Lierop, 2014; Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012; Soares, 2017; Sønnesyn, 2011). Many of these studies also show that accent is rarely used as a cue for place and in the cases where it is used it is a stereotypical shortcut to create a character. With this in mind, I decide to study recent animated films by Walt Disney Studios that are set in a real country or region, i.e. not a mythical kingdom or place, where 'standard' English¹ is not the native language and see to what extent an accent is used to show that the action is not taking place in an English-speaking country but conveys the setting of the country instead. In addition to this I will also study the way in which accent used in these animated films

¹ The notion of a 'standard' language is discussed in section 2.1.

correlates with certain character traits. Lastly, I will compare these films from the two subsidiaries by Walt Disney Studios: Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios. The overarching thesis statement is thus to study how accents in Disney films are represented in both character traits and setting.

As mentioned above, Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios are both part of Walt Disney Studios (which is again owned by The Walt Disney Company).² Pixar produce a lower amount of feature films than Disney Animation does and has a reputation for taking longer to make and produce a film. The films by Pixar are also often more active in portraying issues that for some hold more controversy.³ The films by Disney Animation are called the Disney Classics and have a greater focus on the more traditional fairy tale with princesses/princes/heroines/heroes on a quest to save themselves or others from a dooming fate. It is often because these fairy tales are light-minded and almost care-free, that they are so easily enjoyed and hugely popular. Because of the differences in how the two studios make films, two films from each studio will be analyzed and compared. The films selected from Disney Animation are *Frozen* (2013) and *Vaiana* (2016)⁴ while *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) are from Pixar.⁵ A short note on the story in each film follows while further details will be presented in chapter three. *Frozen* (2013) is set in a small village by a fjord somewhere in Scandinavia, most likely in Norway as many small details point to that in the film. Two orphaned princesses are tasked with fixing their wrongdoings to their village whilst foreign official visitors are plotting to take over their kingdom. *Vaiana* (2016) is set in Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean and tells the tale of a chief's daughter who ventures out to sea to find a demigod responsible for the decay of all plant life on her island and make him undo his wrongs against 'mother nature'. *Brave* (2012) is set somewhere in the Scottish Highlands; the clan chief's daughter is to be married away to a suitor of another clan, something she refuses and runs away to change her fate only it brings dire consequences. Lastly, in Mexico, a young boy wanting to be a musician grows up in a family forbidding any contact with music and tries to find a way to sidestep this family rule only to find himself in the Land of the Dead with very little time to solve his problem and get back to the living side in *Coco* (2017). These films are compared and analyzed for correlation between accent and character role, gender, setting-specific ethnicity, intentions and non-English/setting-specific utterances. Lastly, these variables are discussed together with the Disney Classics/Pixar comparison before some concluding remarks are made at the end.

As a final remark before going further it is necessary to clarify the difference between dialect and accent. The terms are closely connected and therefore it is important to note what this thesis focuses on and not. Trudgill (2003, p. 35) defines the term *dialect* as "a variety of language which differs grammatically, phonologically and lexically from other varieties". This means that dialects refer to differences between kinds of language which are different in any or all these aspects. This is a rather broad definition considering several sub-varieties of a single language. *Accent*, on the other hand, differs solely on the level of pronunciation (Trudgill, 2000, p. 5) and this thesis primarily focuses on the use of various

² For more information on the Walt Disney Company and its sub-divisions see their web site <https://www.thewaltdisneycompany.com/about/#our-businesses>

³ Examples: *Up* (2009) on coping with loneliness and loss of loved ones, *Inside Out* (2015) on mental health, *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Finding Dory* (2016) on living with disabilities, *The Incredibles* (2004) and *The Incredibles 2* (2018) on acceptance of yourself and others that are different from yourself.

⁴ This title is different in different parts of the world due to trademark issues. *Vaiana* is the European title while *Moana* is the American title.

⁵ As more and more of the recent films are set in mythical places there is a longer period of time between the chosen Pixar films.

accents by differentiating between these accents' phonological features. Meyerhoff (2011, p. 31) states that accent can index a speaker's regional/geographic origin and social factors such as level and type of education which factors in underlying attitudes towards accents and which will be commented on in the next chapter.

2 Theoretical Perspectives

[M]any individuals who consider themselves democratic, even-handed, rational and free of prejudice, hold on tenaciously to a standard [language] ideology which attempts to justify rejection of the other because of race, ethnicity, or other facet of identity that would otherwise be called racism. [...] In fact, such behavior is so commonly accepted, so widely perceived as appropriate, that it must be seen as the last back door to discrimination. (Lippi-Green, 2012, pp. 73-74)

2.1 Language ideologies and the notion of a 'standard' form

The sentiment behind this quote is the hypocrisy of even stricter anti-discrimination laws at the same time as language and accent still are acceptable excuses to turn away people in the job market, refuse to recognize them as equals or even acknowledge their rights (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 67). This ideology that there are some languages and accents that are not 'correct' enough for some purposes is a construct and, sadly, exists in all language communities. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, p. 7) state that there is a "commonly held assumption that some dialects aren't as good as others". A study conducted by Souza, Pereira, Camino, Lima, and Torres (2016) found that when looking for a candidate for a job accent is used to decide who is more qualified and a standard/native accent is judged to be more competent. Similar results were found by Munro (2003) showing discrimination in employment in Canada on the grounds of accent, accent stereotypes and harassment because of accent. Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, and Li (2011) found in their study on US Chinese American adolescents that being stereotyped as foreigners and discriminated against based on accent could increase the risk of depressive symptoms. Lippi-Green (2012, p. 67) defines ideology as "the promotion of needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups, by means of disinformation and misrepresentation of those non-dominant groups", which closely resemble how Garrett (2010, p. 229) defines a standard language ideology; "a pervasive set of beliefs about the superiority of an idealized language variety imposed by dominant social groups" and that these beliefs are built on the 'overlapping principles of correctness, authority, prestige and legitimacy' (p. 34). Milroy (2007) further elaborates on these principles. He argues that standardized 'correctness' can only pertain to spelling and not pronunciation and authorities on standardization are the educational system, dictionaries and grammars. In addition, he argues that prestige is a non-linguistic property of speakers some of whom are accorded higher social prestige than others and is clearly related to social class or social status,⁶ and lastly, that legitimacy ultimately leads to the devaluing of other varieties rendering them, in the popular mind, illegitimate and known as non-standard (pp. 135-138).

As mentioned above, it is now unacceptable to discriminate against someone on the basis of ethnicity, social class or gender but discrimination on linguistic grounds is still acceptable even though it functions as a proxy for the other social categories (Milroy, 2007, p. 135;

⁶ Speakers tend to confer prestige on usage by speakers of the higher social classes such as business people, lawyers and the royals. Some of these groups have more authority which can have an effect on what is to be considered standard. The converse of prestige is stigma and linguistic forms in the lower social classes tend to be stigmatized on a wider scale (Milroy, 2007, p. 137).

Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 2). But how is it that this ideology comes to be? The notion of one standard language or accent being better than others has existed for a long time and what is considered the 'standard' changes depending on who you ask and is therefore completely arbitrary (Trudgill, 2000, p. 10). Milroy and Milroy (2012, pp. 1-2) argue that these prescriptive requirements that we hold to be the 'standard' are imposed from 'above' by society and authorities. They then argue that it is only in the spelling system that full standardization has been achieved because deviations from the norm is not tolerated. This will never happen for spoken language because of constant change and variation and acceptance of those variations to a greater extent. Therefore, standardization and its suppression of optional variability in language can be thought of more abstractly as an ideology (pp. 18-19). This notion of a 'correct' form of speech that is the standard is the language of the educated, Lippi-Green (2012, p. 57) argues. She points to several dictionaries defining Standard American English as 'based on the educated speech', 'speech and writing of the educated' and 'the language considered acceptable and correct by most educated users'. And based on this she states that "[S]tandard language ideology is introduced by the schools, vigorously promoted by the media and entertainment industries and further institutionalized by the corporate sector" (p. 73). This means that the notion is here to stay if only as an ideology even though no language can be shown to be better or worse than another on linguistic grounds alone (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 10) and that a standard language is an idealization – an idea in the mind rather than a fully achieved reality (Milroy, 2007, p. 134). Lippi-Green (2012, p. 61) sums all this up very neatly:

The myth of standard language persists because it is carefully tended and propagated, with huge, almost universal success, so that language, the most fundamental of human socialization tools, becomes a commodity. This is the core of an ideology of standardization which empowers certain individuals and institutions to make these decisions and impose them on others.

2.2 Language attitudes and stereotypes

Deeply connected with language ideology is our expectations of and attitudes towards language. Same as there are opinions on what is 'standard' and not there are also attitudes connected with certain varieties of accents. Attitude is not an easily defined construct but Irvin Sarnoff in Garrett (2007, p. 116) defines attitude as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects"; a social construct rather than a linguistic one. Trudgill (2000, p. 9) states that "attitudes towards nonstandard dialects are attitudes which reflect the social structure of society" and since our accent and speech show where we come from that accent will, as mentioned above, stand as a proxy for attitudes towards social class, race and ethnicity, gender and age. These societal values and judgements are reflected in for example that some rural British accents⁷ are considered pleasant, charming and amusing while some urban accents⁸ are thought to be ugly, careless and unpleasant (Trudgill, 2000, p. 9).

In a large study of U.K. residents Coupland and Bishop (2007) found similar tendencies in that the informants ranked standard English varieties⁹ high on prestige and social attractiveness and several regional U.K. accents¹⁰ were ranked lower on those same

⁷ Examples are accents of Devonshire, Northumberland or the Scottish Highlands.

⁸ Examples are accents of Birmingham, Newcastle and London.

⁹ RP-type accents, Southern Irish English, Scottish English and Edinburgh English.

¹⁰ Accents from Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow as well as the two ethnically linked accents Asian and Afro-Caribbean.

categories. They did however find that younger respondents are less negative about 'stigmatized' variants which could indicate an ideological value shift over time (Coupland & Bishop, 2007, p. 85). But as Stephen Fry points out in Garrett (2010, p. 14) and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, p. 13) state is that Americans assign positive value to British dialects oblivious of negative attitudes that the British people themselves assign to certain varieties in their own language. As British people have attitudes towards their own accents so do Americans. A study by Preston (1998) revealed that Americans themselves thought people from New York City and the southern states spoke the most 'incorrect' English, but also, that people from the south had the most 'pleasant' speech. As pointed out above, people in an accent group such as the British in the U.K. or Americans in the US, they have their own opinions and attitudes towards the different accent varieties, but when Alford and Strother (1990) tested attitudes by students who were L2 speakers against L1 speakers on regional American accents, the results between those two speaker groups differed. As standard dialects are usually defined by the absence of socially disfavored structures, the vernacular varieties seem to be characterized by the presence of these (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 15) and not growing up in the American society with a certain language ideology the L2 speakers were not familiar with the attitudes towards the regional accent varieties. As these language attitudes are social in origin, they can be both positive and negative and manifested in subjective judgements about 'correctness', worth and prestige as well as personal qualities of the speaker (Trudgill, 2003, p. 73) laying the foundation for these attitudes to grow into stereotypes.

A stereotype is "a cognitive representation or impression of a social group that stems from the association of particular characteristics with that group" (Garrett, 2010, p. 229). These characteristics tend to exaggerate similarities among members of that group and differences between groups. Stereotypes can include many features such as 'how trustworthy, skillful or lazy groups members are, their typical interests and occupations, their emotional state and even physical appearance' (Garrett, 2010, p. 32) and thus: "At its most brutal, this turns into personal attacks on whole groups of people" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 71). These stereotypes against a speaker or a group are often triggered by language ideology and play a role in maintaining inequalities between and discrimination against groups of people (Garrett, 2010, p. 33). In a study on accent portrayals in American primetime television Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles, and Sink (2016) found a biased portrayal of different accents and an exploiting of stereotypes where the foreign accent is associated with an incomprehensible 'other' (p. 76) reflecting the American speakers' association towards foreign accents. In a study on Australian student's attitudes towards English accents Gallois and Callan (1981) also saw that these attitudes affected their judgement on speaker personality, especially based on gender.

2.3 The power of the media

As opposed to real life, films and tv-series need to convey their story so that the viewer forms an opinion about characters almost instantly. One way they do this is through linguistic cues. From these cues the viewer makes inferences about the characters' social group membership and from that attribute the traits associated with that group to the character. Sometimes these cues are used for authenticity with no other ulterior motive, but sometimes the traits can unconsciously be negative, narrowing, discriminative and racist against that group and it is the latter case that can lead to an incomplete and wrong presentation of groups. Children develop language attitudes at an early age and as screen

time takes up larger parts of the day these films and shows potentially hold massive power in how they chose to influence children's views. "Repeated exposure to portrayals of different social groups on television can contribute to the formation and maintenance of language-based stereotypes", and by this Dragojevic et al. (2016, p. 64) state that media can shape the beliefs and language attitudes of viewers how they see fit. Sui and Paul (2017) looked at Latin@¹¹ representation in TV and found they are overrepresented in crime and often used a heavy accent showing that media can influence people to generalize linguistic traits of a racial group.

Another media outlet that has risen in the recent years is social media. As previously mentioned, language rules are often made by the 'educated' and enforced by the government (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 57 & 61) which for the majority of people is hard to rally against as a unified group for several reasons. But as larger parts of people are present on social platforms, especially the younger generation, it has become easier to stand together for people from all parts of a country and all over the world¹² showing the power of the social media and how it can hold people and institutions accountable to a much larger extent than before. An ongoing debate on whether media is affecting language change is presented in the Journal of Sociolinguistics where it gives an overview of the supportive and opposing views on Sayers (2014) mediated innovation model for researching media influence on language change. This debate will not be commented on further in this thesis as it is not my aim to study whether accents in the films affect the viewers' language use.

2.4 Previous studies on accent use in children's films

Rosina Lippi-Green was the first to call attention to the use of various English accents in Disney movies. Her 1997 study of full-length feature animated Disney films from 1938 to 1994 looked at how 'Disney films employ accent and dialect to draw character and stereotypes' (Lippi-Green, 1997, pp. 85-86). By analyzing accent use in the 24 films with 371 characters in total she found that 43% spoke a variety of US English that is not stigmatized in social or regional terms called mainstream American English (MUSE) and 22% spoke mainstream British English. About 90% of the characters spoke mainstream American or British English or a variety of either one leaving 9% to speak non-native English, that is, English with a foreign accent. What she found is that non-native English is used to convey the setting of the story and to show that the native language of that place is not originally English. However, this is not done consistently because for all 91 characters that would not speak English natively only 34 speak English with a foreign accent. In terms of character roles, the study showed that the good characters in general speak a mainstream English while the evil or bad characters speak either with a foreign accent or variety of English linked to a geographical area or a stigmatized group (Lippi-Green, 1997). Amongst the evil characters 41% speak with a foreign accent while only 20% speak American English. She concludes: "The animated films provide material which links language varieties associated with specific national origins, ethnicities, and races with social norms and characteristics in non-factual and sometimes overtly discriminatory ways" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 101). In her second edition of *English with an Accent* (2012) Lippi-

¹¹ Latin@ is a common and gender-neutral form of someone of Latin American descent since Latina is feminine and Latino is masculine form. It is sometimes also written Latinx, Latina/o, Latino/a.

¹² See for example the #metoo and #climatestrike campaigns on Twitter, cancelation and revival of TV shows (Levin, 2018), Taylor Swift urging people to vote (Snapes, 2018) and people actively affecting how a film is made (Thier, 2019).

Green includes an extension to her 1997 study with Disney films from 1995 to 2009 and the results are similar to what is previously found with only a few exceptions (*Lilo & Stitch* and *The Princess and the Frog*) (Lippi-Green, 2012). In this 2010 study she is also more critical of Disney's use of accent to convey stereotypes and her hypothesis states that "animated films entertain, but they are also a vehicle by which children learn to associate specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups, and to accept a narrow and exclusionary world view" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 111). According to her, Disney still exploits stereotypes and cultures in a discriminatory and exclusionary way giving children a warped view of geographic, social and ethnical groups.

In 2011, Sønnesyn published her master thesis on the use of accents in Disney's animated feature films from 1995 to 2009. Analyzing 18 films by linking character roles with an English accent variety she continued on the same path as Lippi-Green (1997) started. Her main findings are similar to what Lippi-Green found in her 2010 study, that General American is the most spoken English variety amongst characters (60%) and that the evil characters tend to use an English variety instead of the standard American or British English (Sønnesyn, 2011). She also gives a more nuanced look at the correlation between accent and gender, ethnicity and the character's level of sophistication and concludes that political correctness is a larger influence in film making than before, but for the films to properly reflect accent and ethnicity of the modern society we live in there is still some way to go. Both Azad (2009) and Ellis (2012) also support the findings of Sønnesyn (2011) and Lippi-Green (2012) showing an increase in the use of a General American accent and a decrease in British accents. Ellis (2012) includes a study on Pixar films where she finds that they are better at representing other cultures and using a foreign accent in a more positive light than the Disney films. Together with Azad (2009) they all identify a trend in using a foreign accent when the setting is not in a English-speaking country and characters are not originally speakers of English. Even so, Azad (2009), Ellis (2012), Lippi-Green (1997, 2012) Soares (2017) and Sønnesyn (2011) all found instances to varying degrees where accents were used as a shortcut for characterization. Lastly, Lierop (2014) did a study on all feature films by Pixar from 1995-2013 where she concluded that setting is a notable factor in the character speaking with a foreign accent but also that a foreign accent and surprisingly regional American accents are used more by villains than good characters. She did however support what the others found that main characters tended to speak with a GA accent which also is consistent with the findings of Dobrow and Gidney (1998) where they emphasize the impact television has on children and how children may internalize what stereotypes they see as a reality (p. 118).

3 Method

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology and data for the thesis. First, the data-collecting process is presented followed by the material used in the study. The last part will focus on the challenges encountered following that method.

3.1 The process of collecting data

The films presented in chapter 1 were bought in Blu-ray format and watched at home under calm conditions with the availability of pausing and rewinding when needed. The original playtime for the films were around one and a half hour. The films were watched three times each, the first two times with subtitles and without the last time. For the first viewing, I used a table Sønnesyn (2011) created along with her criteria of the different variables. In addition, I used a category from Lippi-Green (1997) on character motivation taking time to pause and rewind as much as I needed. Before starting the second round of watching I modified both the table and the criteria for the categories to fit my own film selection (Table 3.1) where all the varieties I wanted to study were present. Some additional notes such as setting, plot, main theme, number of songs in both an English and a foreign accent and other observations that might affect the data and findings were added to the bottom of the list to keep track of the films and their content. The second time there was less rewinds, mostly to check and confirm with my notes from the first viewing and to fill in the answer to boxes that were difficult to place the first time. The last viewing had to be done because the data collected at this point showed some major differences in number of characters in each film that would affect the results. Thus, with no subtitles the viewing experience the third time would be the same as for a non-linguist watching for the first time. In this viewing some characters were cut because they would not be noticed or heard if not listened for.

Table 3.1 Matrix used for the analyzation of the films

Name of character	Character role	Accent	Gender	Setting-specific ethnicity	Intention	Non-English/Setting-specific utterances

On the issue of how many characters to include in the analysis they had to have enough speech time so that it was possible to determine their accents. In the cases where the viewer would not have caught the utterance of the character if subtitles are not on or if the minor utterance is supposed to function as 'background noise' to add to the scene, the

character is cut. Also, in the cases where the character grows up during the film and the accent is portrayed by different actors the character is only counted once (given that the accents are the same). When deciding on an accent for a character this is done by listening for features of a specific accent and judge based on my own experience with accents and by conferring with the accent traits I have available. As for assigning the non-linguistic traits, they are assigned in the same fashion. When a character role or intention was unclear or difficult to pinpoint, I used an extensive wiki from Fandom (2019a) as a helpful guide. In the cases where the accent is not clear or there are linguistic features from two different accents, I will judge the accent based on context as to what is the most likely accent to be portrayed. When deciding between two accents for a character, maybe because the voice actor put on an accent and slipped up sometimes, Lippi-Green (1997) also decided on the accent it was most likely to be portrayed based on the context provided by outer external factors in the scene. For the purpose of this thesis the listening technique was judged to be adequate since an accent analysis on a deeper and more specific level was not needed.

After collecting the data, it is categorized and systemized so that possible patterns can be found. Firstly, all the different accents are counted to get an overall occurrence of the accents. Then the non-linguistic variables are counted separately for an overview of the distribution of variables in the films before they are mapped with the various accents. The results are visualized using Microsoft Office 365 Excel. Lastly, the two Disney Classics films are contrasted and compared with the two Pixar films to look for differences in usage of all the variables above.

3.2 Film selection

This study analyzes four Disney animated feature films released between 2012 and 2017. Two are from the Disney Classics collection which are full-length animated feature films produced by the Walt Disney Animation Studios and two are from Pixar Animation Studios. These are also full-length fully animated feature films. A list of the movies is included in table 3.2 below. An analysis of a group of other Disney films could well result in different findings than here since other films have a different plots, characters and other variables. The reason for choosing these four films was because they all had settings in real world countries or regions (Norway/Scandinavia, Polynesian Islands, Scotland and Mexico) and not mythical kingdoms making it possible to compare the accents to the setting. They all had to have been released later than 2010 to avoid a crossover with Sønnesyn (2011), Lippi-Green (1997, 2012), Ellis (2012), Lierop (2014) and Soares (2017) and to look for possible changes in how accents are used. By choosing two films from two different sections of Walt Disney Studios there is also the possibility of comparing findings between the two as they have different reputations as to what they choose to portray in the films.

Table 3.2 Overview of the Disney films used in the study

Disney Classics	Disney-Pixar
Frozen (2013)	Brave (2012)
Vaiana (2016)	Coco (2017)

3.3 Challenges

In cases where it was difficult to determine the accent I would watch videos of the voice actor in different settings to determine if the accent used in the film was the same as their 'normal everyday' accent or if it was put on in the movie and then not an accent from the country the voice actor was from. The risk with this is that even though a voice actor is from a certain country it does not mean that is where they have lived most of their time and the accent will reflect that, but by doing research on these voice-actors I factored that information into my final assessment of the accent. I would also watch videos or listen to sound clips of people with accents from certain parts of a country and compare them so that I would have a fuller picture of the range of an accent and thus being able to link it to one of the characters in the films.

The aspect of assigning an accent to a character was in some cases harder than others because, as a European, my exposure to English has mostly been American and British English as these are the main accents used in films and TV series. Southern hemisphere Englishes such as Australian and New Zealand English (NZE) mixed with influences from different indigenous communities and other small southern pacific countries are rarely showed and if they are it is often the most characteristic traits of that accent neglecting to show the vast variation it inhibits. Therefore, assigning accents in *Vaiana* (2016) proved to be much more difficult than first anticipated because not all accents bore the 'typical' traits of NZE revealing that traits of the Maori and other indigenous languages in the pacific sometimes would blend into the accent.

With regards to assigning character roles this proved to be a more strenuous ordeal than first assumed. The characters in the films are not very 'black or white'/'either or', they have nuances that might link to more than one category and they change over the course of the story. By going over the criteria for character roles after the first viewing and making some amendments to the criteria to fit more closely my films made it a bit easier to assign a role. Even so, some characters were still hard to place. One problem was assignment of a villain when the villain's intention was wrongfully perceived as bad by all the others but was revealed to be good in the end. The reason they were categorized as villain still were the means they used to reach their goal; by harm and destruction to others. Another difficulty was when Maui, the aide to the heroine in *Vaiana* (2016) was unknowingly the reason for the troubles in the film but nonetheless helped the heroine on her quest to fix his mistake and thus was assigned the aide role as this was the major role of the character. Another surprising problem was the amount of non-speaking animals and entities that had major roles in the films. These were categorized as best I could without both accent, gender and ethnicity but still having a role and motivation.

The major problem I faced was that some characters had traits for several roles throughout the film having some bad traits for a period but ending up being good in the end or vice versa. For example, Miguel in *Coco* (2017) can be characterized as selfish, but he amends and fixes those problems that occur because of that. The same can be said of Merida in *Brave* (2012), but the common excuse or perception is that they are children and children are known to throw tantrums if they feel they are being treated unfairly as is the case with these films and they were both given the heroine/hero role. Elsa in *Frozen* (2013) was also a difficult character to place as she makes some bad decisions (unintentionally) and leaves others to deal with the mess literally running away from her problems, but in the end, she does come back to fix her mistake. She could be both heroine, aide to heroine, villain and

authority figure but since her intentions were always good trying to protect others, she is assigned the role of a (tragic) heroine.

Lastly, defining the intentions of the main characters and drawing the line as to when someone was either negative or positive proved hard in some cases. Authority figures have a tendency to be strict, demanding and in some cases restrictive of the heroine/hero but even so, they were still classified as positive since they wanted to protect the heroine/hero from harm showing good and positive intentions.

4 Variables analyzed

This chapter gives an overview of the different variables analyzed in the thesis. The first subsection presents the linguistic aspect of the thesis, namely the various accents used in the films and the second subsection presents the non-linguistic variables that deal with socially related aspects.

4.1 The linguistic variables – various accents

One of the main aims for this thesis is to establish what kind of accents are used by the characters in the films. The goal is to categorize the various accents, not conduct a thorough phonetic analyses of the various accents. Even so, it is necessary to have an awareness of the accents' different linguistic features in order to assign the character a correct accent and that is why these characteristics are presented here. As a L2 speaker of English labeling an accent right away is more difficult than it can be for L1 speakers and thus it is necessary to have an overview of the main characteristics of each accent. The various accents have been classified into five sub-categories; General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), Commonwealth Englishes, English with foreign accent and non-speaking. When describing the various accents, the concept of standard lexical sets will be used to refer to large groups of words that share the same vowel sound and the vowel sound itself as J. C. Wells does in his collection *Accents of English* (1982). As this collection will not have the most recent developments in languages and accents works by Trudgill and Hannah (2002) and Allan and Starks (1999) are also a main sources on accent characteristics.

4.1.1 General American

General American (GA) will be used as the 'standard' variety of American English. As previously discussed, the term *standard* is a loaded notion that is difficult to apply to spoken language and considering the complexity of the United States defining a 'standard' American English is difficult. Nevertheless, General American¹³ is a commonly used term for accents that lack regional or social features and it can be thought of as the type of standard American English that is taught to learners of English as a foreign language (Wells, 1982a, p. 118). According to Wells (1982a, p. 118) GA spans from Ohio through the Middle West to the Pacific Coast, excluding the eastern and southern part of the US. The accent is often referred to as General American because of the conception that it has no marked regional characteristics and that it is the accent often used on television networks all over the US (Wells, 1982c, p. 470). Milroy and Milroy (2012, p. 151) add that Americans' perception of a standard spoken language as 'neutral' and 'accentless' is associated with levelled dialects of the Northern Midwest where locally marked features have been eradicated. In recent years, immigrants from Mexico and Latin America have increased greatly and Hispanics¹⁴ are now the largest minority group in the US, and in

¹³ Lippi-Green (2012, p. 57) calls it Standard American English and refers to it as *SAE rendering it inauthentic.

¹⁴ People from Caribbean, Central America and South America are labeled as Hispanics (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 256) even though it is a debated term the most common characteristics among them is the Spanish language.

some cities in the southern states they are the majority ethnic group and there are now recognized varieties of Hispanic English¹⁵ (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 125). It can be debated whether this is (or is starting to become) a regional variety of American English – Carmen Fought, a prominent researcher of Chicano English,¹⁶ says it is (Appenzeller & Brennan, 2015), but for the time being I will not include it as an American English variety here as the accent in *Coco* (2017) is linked to Mexico, not the US. Thus, it will be categorized as English with foreign accent and not Chicano English even though the two are similar.¹⁷

The most striking feature that sets GA apart from some other American regional accents and RP is rhoticity. GA is a rhotic accent, meaning that the phoneme /r/ is pronounced in every phonological context, including preconsonantal and absolute-final environments such as *farm* [farm] and *far* [far] (Wells, 1982a, pp. 75-76). Another consonant that separates GA from RP is the dark /l/ which is more velarized in GA and used in all positions as opposed to RP which have both a 'clear' and a 'dark' /l/ depending on whether it occurs before a vowel or not (Tottie, 2002, p. 17). Wells (1982c, p. 490) adds that preconsonantly and final it is velarized as [ɫ] as *jelly*: ['dʒɛɫi] vs. ['dʒɛli]. T-voicing is another prominent feature of GA. The intervocalic variant alveolar tap [ɾ] for /t/ make /t/ in words such as *letter* and *waiting* sound like /d/ rather than /t/. The feature of yod-dropping where /tu, du, nu/ in *tune, duke, new* is used as opposed to /tju, dju, nju/ has evolved in GA so that /j/ is absent after all coronal consonants. It remains after labials and velars such as *beauty, few, music* and *cute*. However, this is not universal for all of GA and some easterners and southerners still use /ju/ or the diphthong /ɪu/ (Tottie, 2002, p. 18; Wells, 1982a, p. 247; 1982c, p. 489).

Regarding the vowels, the most striking difference in feature is the lexical set BATH with words like *staff, ask, dance* and *laugh* pronounced with /æ/ in GA while in RP they are pronounced with /ɑ:/ (Tottie, 2002, p. 17). Other vowels that stand out belong to the THOUGHT (RP /ɔ:/, GA /ɔ/) and LOT (RP /ɒ/, GA /ɑ/) category merging in many parts of the US to be pronounced /ɑ/, except for before [r] where they are distinct (Tottie, 2002, p. 17). GA also lacks the schwa phoneme /ɪə, ə, ʊə/ in NEAR, SQUARE and CURE categories and KIT, DRESS and FOOT categories which are found in RP (Wells, 1982a, p. 124).

4.1.2 Received Pronunciation

As General American is the 'standard' English in the United States, the 'standard' English form in Britain is Received Pronunciation (RP).¹⁸ RP is spoken by very few people in England (3-5%) and is a social accent associated with the BBC and members of the upper-middle and upper classes (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 2). This is also the accent which is most often taught to foreign students and it is also a regionless accent within England making it

¹⁵ Also known as Latino English and its variation "ranges from the speech of long-term, regionally established English monolinguals of Latin American descent to that of first-generation speakers of limited English proficiency, with a full range of bilingualism in between" and Chicano English is the largest variety (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, pp. 195 & 196-197).

¹⁶ Chicano English is often used to emphasize that the speaker is born in the US and it is used for people living in the southwest (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 196).

¹⁷ For further reading on Latino English see Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, pp. 194-202) and Lippi-Green (2012, pp. 255-280).

¹⁸ It might be problematic that RP is a social dialect when choosing it as a standard British English, but for the purpose of this part of the thesis as a general phonetic overview and that Disney is an American company with a majority of American viewers with little knowledge about the different English accents, I hold this to be acceptable.

understood throughout the country (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 9). Unlike GA, RP is marked for class and élite and is not an accent used by many, letting 'standard' to mean something different in Britain as opposed to the US (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 151). While Americans react strongest to stereotypes related to race and ethnicity, the British react to social class-related stereotypes (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 151). An accent that is supposed to be 'classless' having people in the UK from all social classes speak it is Estuary English (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 153), but as it is not considered the 'standard' no further comments will be made on this issue.¹⁹

In contrast to General American RP is a non-rhotic accent, meaning /r/ is excluded from preconsonantal and absolute-final environments so that *farm* is [fɑ:m] and *far* [fɑ:] (Wells, 1982a, p. 76). In the case where the *r* precedes a vowel in the following word such as *It's far away* the *r* is pronounced, known as linking /r/ (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 14). Another factor concerning *r* is when /r/ is inserted before a following vowel even though there is no *r* in the spelling like *idea of* /aidiərvɒv/. This is known as intrusive /r/. It can also occur word-internally as in *drawing* /drɔ:ɪŋ/ (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, pp. 14-15). Another feature of RP is the consonant *l*. Syllable-initial /l/ is 'clear' pronounced with the tongue raised towards the hard palate while syllable-final /l/ is 'dark' like in GA and the tongue is raised towards the soft palate (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 13). Finally, in RP, the glottal stop [ʔ] can only occur in a syllable-final /t/ before a following consonant and before /tʃ/ (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 13).

With regards to the vowels, RP is most recognizable with the pronunciation of LOT, BATH and CLOTH words as mentions above with General American. LOT words such as *stop*, *sock* and *dodge* are pronounced [ɒ] in RP and [ɑ] in GA, BATH words such as *staff*, *ask* and *dance* are pronounced [ɑ:] in RP and [æ] in GA and CLOTH words such as *cough*, *broth* and *cross* are pronounced [ɒ] in RP and [ɔ] in GA (Wells, 1982a, p. 123). Another vowel feature of RP is the diphthongs /ɪə/, /ɛə/ and /ʊə/ which appear in *beer*, *care* and *poor* respectively (Wells, 1982a, p. 123).

4.1.3 Varieties within British English

All Englishes derived from British English could potentially be in this category but as the films did not show much variation the three varieties included are those who had characters speak it, namely Scottish English, Irish English and New Zealand English. This category will be referred to as Commonwealth Englishes.

4.1.3.1 Scottish English

Scottish English (ScotEng) is the main language spoken in Scotland with Scots and Scottish Gaelic as minority languages. Scotland, like England, has a variety of English accents. According to Aitken (1979, p. 116) there is still a great amount of Scots material in today's Scottish English. Even though there is a large variation in accents of ScotEng ranging from Highland to Lowland all will be put in this category for the analysis. Words and phrases uttered in the films that are of Gaelic or Scots origin have been labeled as non-Standard English words for the sake of comparability to findings in the other films. Examples of such features could be *bairn*, *lass*, *ken*, *aye*, *wee*, *kerfuffle* and *nocht*.

¹⁹ See Mompean (2007) for a discussion on RP vs. Estuary English.

Like General American, ScotEng is a rhotic language. The most frequent realization of /r/ is a flap [ɾ], but the frictionless continuant [ɹ], the uvular [ʁ] and the voiced alveolar roll known as trill [r] are also used. The latter is only found in the northern parts of Scotland today (Wells, 1982b, p. 411). ScotEng does not alternate between 'dark' and 'clear' /l/ as in RP but rather uses the velarized 'dark' variety [ɫ] in all phonetic contexts (Wells, 1982b, p. 411). Other distinct features of ScotEng is the velar fricative /x/ in a number of words, e.g. loch [lɔx] 'lake', the glottal stop [ʔ] for non-initial /t/, initial /p, t, k/ are often unaspirated in ScotEng compared to [p^h, t^h, k^h] in RP and the distinction between /m/ and /w/: which /mɪtʃ/ and witch /wɪtʃ/ (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 93). However, in the Gaelic-influenced speech in the Highlands and Islands strong aspiration of initial /p, t, k/ is used and final voiceless plosives in a stressed syllable are also pre-aspirated; [luhk] *look*, [k^haht] *cat* and [mɪll^hk] *milk* (Wells, 1982b, p. 409).

ScotEng has fewer vowels than most other English varieties. Contrary to RP, ScotEng does not distinguish between certain vowels; /æ/ and /ɑ:/ are merged in ScotEng to /a/ for *bad*, *bard*, *calm* etc., /ɔ/ and /u:/ are merged to /u/ as in *pool*, *put*, *boot*, etc. and /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/ are merged to /ɔ/ as in *cot*, *caught*, *long* etc. (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, pp. 92-93). ScotEng only has three diphthongs; /ai/ = [ɛɪ]~[eɪ] for *buy*, /au/ = [ɔɯ] in *bout* and /ɔi/ in *boy*, but all vowels are of approximately the same length so that /ɛ/ sounds longer than in RP while /i/ sounds shorter than RP /i:/. In addition, all vowels except /ɪ/ and /ʌ/ are subject to the Scottish Vowel Length Rule making them longer before /v/, /ð/, /z/, /r/ and morpheme boundaries than normally (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 93).

4.1.3.2 Irish English

Irish English can be found both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland and is influenced by different accents of English leading to two different types of an Irish English accent. The English in Northern Ireland (NIrEng) has its roots in Scotland and can be known as Ulster-Scots and Mid-Ulster English while English spoken in southern Ireland (SIrEng) was influenced by the west and west Midlands of England (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, pp. 98-99). Looking at intonation Northern Irish is clearly different from Southern Irish in that the latter is stereotyped by Michael McIntyre as more 'jolly' and 'happy' while the former is more 'mellow' and 'depressing' (YouTube, 2016).

Northern Irish English is fairly similar to ScotEng but differs in the following aspects. The vowel /e/ in *bay* may be diphthongized to [ei] but word-finally it is often [ɛː], /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/ may contrast before /p, t, k/ as opposed to ScotEng, /au/ may range from [ɔɯ], [ɛɯ], [æɯ] to [ɛə] and [ɜː], /r/ is not a flap but a frictionless continuant [ɹ], the l is a 'clear' /l/ and intervocalic /t/ is not infrequently a voiced flap [d] (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 99).

As mentioned, Southern Irish English is a rhotic accent with /r/ realized in general as a retroflex approximant [ɻ] as in [fa:ɹm] *farm* (Wells, 1982b, p. 432). As with ScotEng, SIrEng contrasts between /m/ and /w/ and the final voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ are released, aspirated and without glottalization. In addition, /l/ is 'clear' [l] in all positions (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 102) The last consonants portraying a striking characteristic of Irish English are the dentals /θ/ and /ð/. They are for most Irish people realized as dental plosives [t̪] and [d̪] respectively. This also holds for the use of /t, d/ instead of /θ, ð/ and/or vice versa with words like 'tink' and 'tirty' and conversely 'afther' and 'dhrink' (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 102; Wells, 1982b, pp. 428-429).

Since SIrEng is a rhotic accent, the RP vowels /ɜ:/, ɪə, ɛə, ʊə/ do not occur and there is a rounded vowel [ɔɪ] for /ʌ/ (Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, p. 101). Further, they emphasize features like the use of /æ/ rather than /ɑ:/ in *path, dance*, /ɔ:/ rather than /ou/ in *hoarse, mourning*, /u:/ rather than /ʊ/ in *book, cook* and the use of /ɔ:/ for words that have /ɒ/ in RP (LOT and CLOTH).

4.1.3.3 New Zealand English

New Zealand English (NZE) together with Australian English are both very similar to RP because of the colonization by the British. But in the 200 years since the development of an own local accent has emerged. As Allan and Starks (1999) show, the main phonological differences that sets NZE apart from RP and other southern hemisphere Englishes are the vowel sounds. The main findings from their comparison will be presented here but for a complete and detailed overview of NZE phonological components I refer the reader to their paper. By looking at the consonant sounds we find the accent is non-rhotic, with both linking and intrusive /r/ as variable features and has a dark /l/ in all contexts (Allan & Starks, 1999, pp. 55-56).

What sets NZE apart from RP amongst the long vowels is the development of the BATH/PALM/START vowel with a central to front realization (RP [ɑ:] to NZE [e:] [a:]) (Allan & Starks, 1999, p. 65). For the diphthongs, the NEAR and SQUARE vowels appear to be merging (referred to as the ear/air merger) and CURE ranges from [ɥe] to [oə] to [oe], different from both Australian English and South African English (Allan & Starks, 1999, p. 69). The rest of the diphthongs appear to be undergoing a diphthong shift (Allan & Starks, 1999, pp. 70-72). The most striking short vowel feature that sets New Zealand English apart from Australian English is the KIT vowel, /ɪ/. While Australian English uses a high and front articulation, [i], New Zealanders use a centralized variant [ə] (Woods, 1999, p. 89). The TRAP and DRESS short vowel are closer than in RP and even closer than in Australian English where in NZE the /æ/ in TRAP is [ɛ] and /e/ in DRESS can range from [e] all the way to [ɪ] making *neck* sound like RP/General American *knick*. (Wells, 1982c, p. 607). Another feature of New Zealand English is the rising intonation at the end of non-interrogative sentences known as high-rising terminal intonation (HRT).²⁰

4.1.4 English with a foreign accent

This linguistic category covers all English with a foreign accent. That means English spoken in countries that do not have English as their native or primary language giving the character a non-English-native sound. English spoken by indigenous groups from the settings in the films is also included in this category. Keep in mind that the accent spoken in *Coco* (2017) is categorized as English with a foreign accent since the film is set in Mexico where they originally speak Spanish, a language different than English and thus their English accent would be foreign. All foreign words and phrases uttered were written down for comparison.

²⁰ Warren and Britain (1999, p. 169) found that this feature has a higher level of incidence in NZE of Maori speakers than of Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent) speakers.

4.1.5 Non-speaking relevant characters

This last category contains all characters that typically are animals or some other entity such as spirits, gods or some sort of magical creatures that do not speak during the film. The character has to be an active part of the story, typically hindering or helping the heroine/hero.

4.2 Non-linguistic variables

In addition to looking at the linguistic variables in the films it is an aim in this thesis to link these accents to character roles and to look for patterns in regard to how they were used to portray the characters. To form this overall picture of the character, the accent is correlated to various features the character inhibits such as role, gender, setting-specific ethnicity, intentions and non-English utterances. This will be presented in this subsection.

4.2.1 Character roles

As opposed to the linguistic variables, deciding on what character roles to focus on and what role to assign to a character is a highly subjective matter. Lippi-Green (1997, 2012) did not specify her criteria for character roles or which roles she focused on and Sønnesyn (2011) made her own subjective overview of the number of roles she focused on and the criteria for their assignment. I will use the same character roles as Sønnesyn (2011) in this thesis for consistency to better compare findings but the criteria I chose for the roles might differ somewhat from hers as to what these films pertains. The roles are heroine/hero, villain, aide to heroine/hero, aide to villain, authority figure, unsympathetic character and character with a peripheral role. In a study of 26 animated Disney films from 1937 to 2000 Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner (2004) presented findings indicating that gender, racial and cultural stereotypes were still used in character portrayal, motivating the below categories to consider some form of these stereotypical traits in later discussions.

The heroine/hero is the most important character in the film and the plot usually revolves around her/him. In some cases, there might be two heroines/heroes. Traditionally, the traits of the heroine/hero are being kind and wanting to do good, the courage and persistence to go their own way and overcome great obstacles to reach their goal, great strength helping them on their journey, and a moral compass urging them to do the right thing. This is the character role the viewer is to identify with because it portrays the desire to be good and do right and that is what our society calls for. When it is not clear who the heroine/hero is and if there is more than one the initial definition that it is the central character(s) and the plot revolves around her/him/them will be used.

All Disney stories contain some form or degree of the battle between good and evil and thus an evil character is necessary – a villain. As with the heroine/hero role above, there can be more than one villain in the story. The purpose of the villain is often to hinder the heroine/hero to reach their goal in any way possible. The role often stands in contrast to that of the heroine/hero as the villain is often cunning and deceitful, mean, unsympathetic and immoral, and causing harm and/or problems for the heroine/hero. If a character causes problems/works against the heroine/hero unintentionally or its intention is mistakenly perceived as wrong by other characters it will not be characterized as the villain, but if it is perceived by a first-time viewer to be a villain for most of the movie and revealed

as good at the end it will be characterized as a villain still for the simple reason that there then might not be any other villain(s) in the film.

Both the aide to the heroine/hero and the aide to the villain have the same characteristics beside from the person they aide. To aide means to assist and help a more important person than oneself and can in this setting also be called the sidekick to the heroine/hero and villain. Their purpose is to stand by their leader through the trying times and this is often the character role that brings the comical aspect to the story with witty statements and humor. The amount of speaking time of the aide will not affect the role assignment.

The role of authority figure is a broad term that reaches from leaders, bosses, advisors, and officers to parents, caretakers, teachers and adult family members. Depending on the setting of the story the authority figure can be smart, wise, dependable, and trustworthy, or commanding, assertive and imposing. The authority figure is someone that the heroine/hero trusts and respects but at times have disagreements with so that it causes a temporarily rift or tension in the relationship. This is often true of the heroine/hero's parents or caretakers as they often hinder the heroine/hero in fulfilling their wish and thus unintentionally cause the heroine/hero to start their quest of some sort.

Lastly, the final central character role is that of the unsympathetic character. The unsympathetic character is a neutral-to-negative character but not a villain as it is not partial to either side. It is not a friendly or pleasant person to be with and does not particularly care for the outcome of the story. The role can bear similarities with both an aide or a peripheral character but is in general a non-likable character that the viewers does not sympathize with in any way. It will also be someone that somewhat unknowingly takes part in changing the story or hinders the heroine/hero in some way but will not do anything that does not benefit themselves to right their wrongdoings.

Moving on to the last character role, the roundup of the remaining characters, as one could say. A character with a peripheral role is not significant to the story in any way, it just adds some context without affecting it, a typical bystander-role. These minor role characters are often only present in one scene or just utters a couple of sentences throughout the film. The minimum for these characters is that they have enough speech time so that their accent can be determined.

4.2.2 Gender

This variable is split three ways, the character being either female, male or 'animal or other entity'. This category is useful to get an overview of the distribution of female and male characters as well as see if there are correlations in the use of accents and gender. It can also be useful to see the human to animal/entity ratio to see if there are any interesting correlations there.

4.2.3 Setting-specific ethnicity

In a society with more focus on and awareness of speech and the power of words the notion of categorizing ethnicity can prove a challenge. While race is "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits" (Merriam-Webster, 2019) often referring to skin color and by some societies deemed to be socially significant, ethnicity refers to the more cultural aspect that sets people apart. Some of these distinctions are

ancestry, a sense of history, language and religion. Even so, there is still a social construct that tend to map skin color into that mix as well. For this variable to best work with in the analysis it operates best as a binary variable and thus characters will be categorized as either yes or no meaning the character share the ethnicity of the majority of the people living in the place or not. As all the film settings are not in places where migration from many other parts of the world have affected the population it will be assumed that the population is fairly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity. Ethnicity is a human characteristic and is obviously not assigned to any of the animal or other entity characters, even though certain animals can only be found in certain places – such as for example reindeers.

4.2.4 Intentions

According to Lippi-Green (1997, p. 90) she grouped the characters according to how they behaved. A character could either have a positive, negative or mixed intention. Characters with clear good or bad intentions were characterized as positive or negative respectively, while the remainder were characters who changed significantly during the story (mixed). Character development (going from bad to good or vice versa) belongs to the mixed category together with characters that are more complex in their intentions (going back and forth from bad and good) but their main motivation is a change of intention from one to the other during the course of the story. Good and bad in this situation simply follows the common themes of good and evil that are the basis of all fairy tales and stories. This category is only applied to the major characters since the peripheral characters are not a vital part of the story and their intention often is neutral.

4.2.5 Non-English utterances spoken in the language specific to the setting/location of the film

One of the main goals with this thesis is to see if there is any usage of non-English utterances in the films. To be more specific, to look for utterances made in the language/accent specific to where the story in the film is set. The purpose for this is to see if this can be used as an indicator that the setting of the movie is not in an English-speaking country. These non-English utterances can be everything from one-word exclamations to whole sections of speech (or song) in a foreign language. Since the films are all set in non-native-English-speaking countries there is potential for some occurrence. The only film that is somewhat in the gray area is *Brave* (2012) as they speak English in Scotland but there are also two other languages spoken there and Scots especially has a strong presence in Scottish English. This specific accent version can include words and phrases native speakers of other Englishes may not understand. Apart from the time-consuming task of counting words spoken in both languages there is no good objective way to collect the data. Therefore, I will divide the usage into groups based on the impression the viewer would have had. If a character uses words and phrases to such an extent that it is noticeable by the viewer it is classified as a natural occurrence. If the character only says one word or phrase it will be classified as a single occurrence. The rest will be classified as non-occurrence. Whenever a non-English word or phrase was uttered it was noted down in the matrix.

5 Results and discussion

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the distribution of accents in the films by Disney Animation and Pixar. First, a closer look at the overall distribution of accents in the films will be presented before moving on to the different variables and their correlations with the distributed accents in each case. After the presentation of each of the results, their findings will be discussed in further detail. In the sections where a comparison of the Classics and Pixar films is appropriate this will be done.

5.1 General distribution of accents

The first thing to be mentioned here is the very unequal distribution of characters between the films ranging from 16 characters in total in one film to 50 in another where peripheral characters are the tipping factor. This will affect how the accent distribution will look compared to previous research, but nonetheless, they will be presented in this section with all characters. Where it is worth noting that the inequality in number of characters in each film is a deciding factor I will do so. Table 5.1 shows the overall results from the distribution of accents in the four films while Figure 5.1 displays the results graphically.

Table 5.1 The overall distribution of accents in the data material

Accents	No. of characters	%
GA	29	25%
RP	3	2%
Commonwealth Englishes	18	15%
English w/foreign accent	55	47%
Non-speaking	13	11%
Total	118	100%

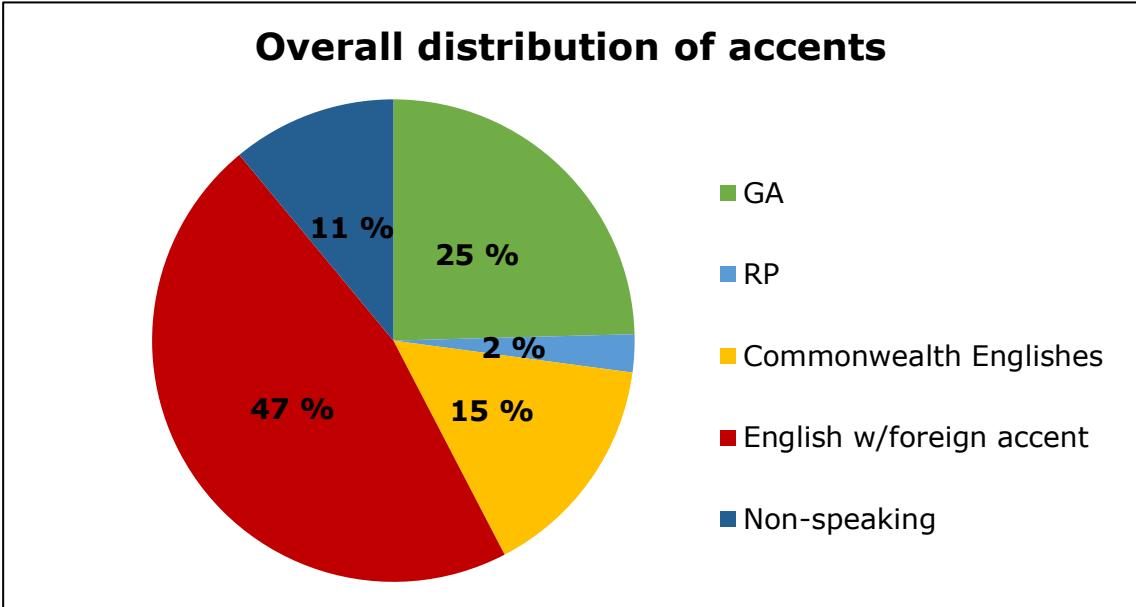


Figure 5.1 The overall distribution of accents in the films

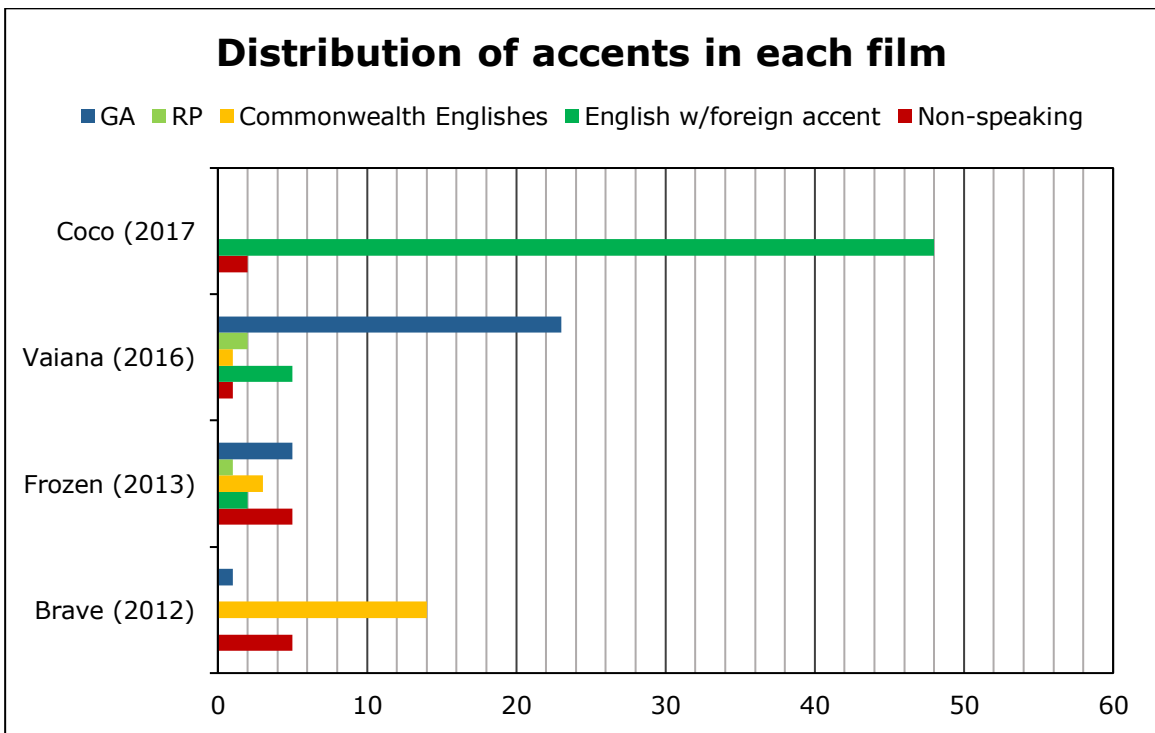


Figure 5.2 The overall distribution of accents in each film by number of characters

From figure 5.1 it is clear that English with a foreign accent is the most used accent in the films with almost half the characters speaking it. General American comes second with one fourth classified as using that accent. The number of characters speaking a Commonwealth English variety or are not speaking at all are almost the same, 15% and 11% respectively. Lastly, there were only three characters categorized as using Received Pronunciation

making out only 2% of the accents used. Figure 5.2 shows the distributions of accents among characters in each film for the purpose of showing the difference between them.

In this study, almost half of the characters use a foreign accent showing a clear opposition to what has been found previously by Lippi-Green (1997, p. 88; 2012, p. 115), Lierop (2014, p. 35)²¹ and Sønnesyn (2011, p. 51). The visible decrease in use of standardized accents such as GA and RP and the absence of a GA variety presents a clear deviation from the other findings as well. The main reason for this is most likely my sample size. Selecting just four films together with the request that their setting was to be in a real country or region were bound to present some differing results. As fewer films are set in the real world in recent Disney Animation and Pixar productions there was not much to be done to improve the sample size. Since three of the films were set in places where English is not the native language an increase in the use of English with a foreign accent was expected. The reason for the increase in the Commonwealth Englishes is because one film was set in Scotland and another in the 'near vicinity' of New Zealand, both utilizing the local accent to various extents. The absence of regional American English accents and the decrease in the use of GA in the films might be due to none of the films being set in the US and thus it would not be logical to have a character speak that accent. As many of the accents can be explained by their relation to location and the films being set in specific countries or regions explaining the high number of non-speaking characters is more difficult. The non-speaking characters have not been categorized in previous studies making change over time difficult to detect. The 13 non-speaking characters 10 (77%) were categorized as major characters, i.e. all characters excluding the peripheral characters. These 10 non-speaking characters represent exactly one fourth of the major characters in the films. One reason why the number is so high could be the film selection and thus just a coincidence. Another reason might be which characters are assigned the non-speaking role, and I will get back to this in the character roles section (5.6). Beyond this, one can only speculate as to why non-speaking roles have such major parts in the films and I will not venture onto that path here.

In addition to these results, it is possible to analyze the distribution of setting-specific accents in each of the films. With the films set in Scotland, Norway, Polynesia and Mexico, 73 of the 105 speaking characters (70%) in the films spoke in an accent appropriate to the setting showing a substantial increase to what has been done previously. Looking at a previous study on Disney films, only 15% of the characters in non-English speaking settings spoke with a foreign accent (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 89) misrepresenting to a larger extent the actual language and accent of that setting. The reason for this more accurate representation of accents may have different reasons. In a society with increasing awareness of misrepresentation the importance of the authentic experience is more present. In previous years, the Walt Disney Company has been accused of discrimination against race, ethnicity, gender and gender roles both with and without the use of accents (Giroux, 1995; Lippi-Green, 1997, pp. 87-100). A way of showing awareness of accents would be to show the diversity needed in the specific setting and not include socially marked accents that do not belong there for the benefit of building a character through stereotyping. Still, the amount of characters speaking GA when there should be none based on the setting of the films (28%), can be due to the fact that Disney is an American corporation. Americans are its majority audience and it is important that they want to watch the films, buy them and the merchandise that comes with it maximizing the profit

²¹ She did however find that among the characters in films set in non-English-speaking setting, 50% spoke with a foreign accent, which is an increase from both Lippi-Green (1997, 2012) and Sønnesyn (2011).

for Disney. Other times, typecasting might be the reason characters speak with an accent not suitable to the setting. Typecasting is when an actress or actor is cast based on their voice traits and recognizability and the associations that voice and actress/actor brings to the character. Either way, in today's society where social media allows us to hold other people, corporations, institutions and countries accountable for their actions and choices in a way than was not possible before, it can be argued that corporations such as the Walt Disney Company is more considerate of how they portray their characters to avoid major backlash and boycotts from different communities feeling offended by their portrayal.

5.2 Gender

Gender and gender roles have become more and more problematized and actualized in today's society and to see whether Disney has managed to create a reflection of this society or if it holds a more traditional view is an interesting inquiry. Figure 5.3 gives an overview of the distribution between male, female and animal or other entity characters.

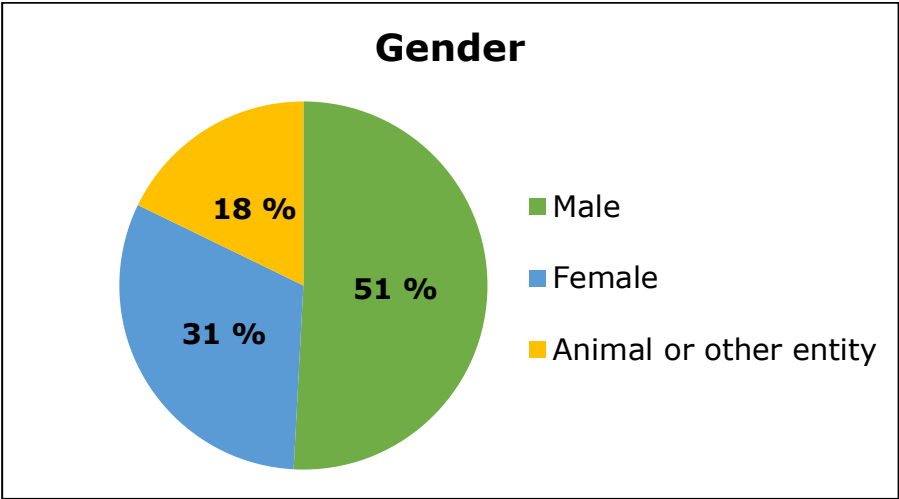


Figure 5.3 The distribution of characters in terms of gender

It is clear from the figure that the male characters are in majority confirming what both Lippi-Green (1997, p. 87), Lierop (2014, p. 41) and Sønnesyn (2011, p. 57) found in their data, but as in their data the male characters made up 70%, 78% and 66% respectively, this data show a decrease from those findings to 51%. Lastly, the animal or other entity category makes up almost one fifth of the characters. To be clear, the skeletons in *Coco* (2017) were assigned gender because they had once been human, and one could still tell if they were male or female. The trolls in *Frozen* (2013) on the other hand were categorized as other entity because they are not humans and have never been.

Moving on to the distribution of accents within these three groups, figure 5.4 shows the distribution.

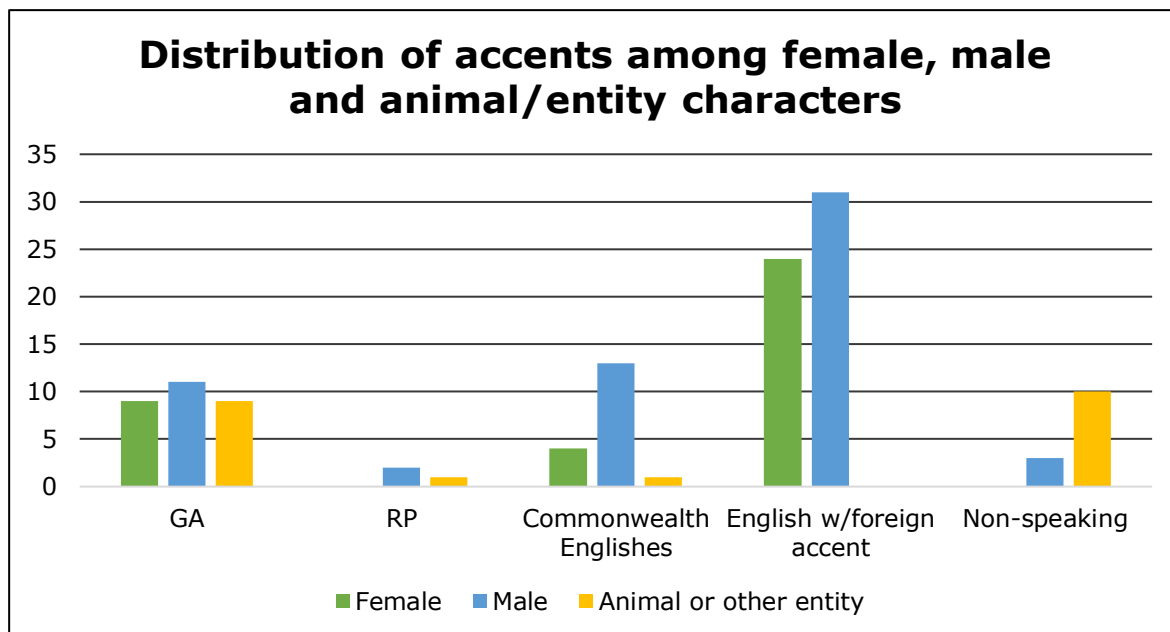


Figure 5.4 The distribution of accents among female, male and animal/entity characters

This figure shows that if the character is an animal or entity it will most likely not speak or speak GA. It does make sense that if an animal or entity would speak it would most likely use a standardized variant to avoid associating it with the group of people using that accent.²² But on the other hand, if that animal or entity is native to the setting of the film it would again sound more logical that it spoke in the accent of the rest of the characters. Moving on to the female and male characters, it appears that the dominating accent for both is English with a foreign accent, much due to *Coco* (2017) having many more characters than the other three films. The number of speakers speaking GA is almost the same for female and male while Commonwealth Englishes shows a larger difference between the two and finally there are no female characters using RP.

According to Chambers (2003, pp. 116-117) women tend to speak with a more standardized accent while men will have a more regionally marked accent and looking at the figure there is a small correlation showing that since one male character spoke in a RP accent and a greater part spoke in a Commonwealth English. Lierop (2014, p. 43) also found that women speak with the standardized GA accent while men used more regional accents. Since the film sample is small and very specific there is not enough data to say if there is an actual correlation between female and male characters and their accent use to see if one uses a more standardized speech than the other.

5.3 Setting-specific ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity and whether the characters did naturally occur in the film setting there was only one that stood out. The character named Oaken in *Frozen* (2013), the store owner high in the mountains has characteristics from several different regions both by appearance and accent. I have a difficult time, as a Scandinavian, saying that his accent is Scandinavian when it really sounds more like Dutch. Even though Oaken uses the word

²² Previously, the AAVE accent was only used by characters in animal form (Lippi-Green, 1997).

'lutefisk' which is a Norwegian traditional dish he also uses the word 'clogs' which can refer to both the Swedish and Dutch culture. As he utters the word 'clogs' though, he does point to two dresses possibly trying to say clothes even though the /g/ is quite prominent. In addition, Oaken offers a sauna, which originally is a Finnish concept giving some mixed signals as to Oaken's nationality. It is clear that he speaks English with a foreign accent and is a part of the village of Arendelle, thus it is very strange that the rest does not speak the same accent or vice versa. It does create an inconsistency where I as the viewer question why he does not speak like the other villagers. It is speculated that he is Disney's first openly gay character (his partner and four kids are shown sitting in the sauna), something Disney refuses to comment on, and that is why he has another accent than the rest. As for the rest of the characters in *Frozen* (2013), apart from the dignitaries and Duke visiting, one villager and Granpabbie the Troll, all speak with a GA accent. This might have something to do with the voice-actors all being well known actresses and actors as well and are lending their distinct voice-traits to the characters. Since the film is Disney's first all winter and snow film, a very different scene than what they usually make, the popularity of the actresses and actors would help draw the crowd to the film if necessary.

In *Coco* (2017), all the characters speak in the accent appropriate for the setting, English with a foreign Spanish accent. In *Brave* (2012), Scottish English with its own variation of both lowland and highland Scottish was used by almost all speaking characters. One character, a suiter, even speaks a properly incomprehensible form of Doric, a Scots dialect spoken in North-East Scotland (Fandom, 2019b) that most native speakers of Scottish would have trouble understanding. The accent might be included for the purpose of comic relief but it may also give the impression that vernaculars can be laughed at. The character is also not a stereotypical skilled fighter, none of the suiters are, and adding other traits such as appearance and personality he could very well be perceived and stereotyped by the viewer as dumb and simple. The Crow, a crow that can talk and is an aide to the witch, is the only character speaking with a GA accent which can be probable since it is a magical creature and its origin unknown. *Vaiana* (2016) on the other hand, encounters the same problems as *Frozen* (2013), some characters speak GA, some NZE, and some with a foreign accent even though GA is not a naturally occurring accent in that setting. The reason for this might be the same as for *Frozen* (2013), boosting popularity with typecasting because Disney tried something new and was afraid how it would be received. This time because *Vaiana* is the first Disney Princess with a 'realistic' body shape. From this, it is clear that there are still some characters that are still assigned accents that are not setting-specific and the accent go-to is GA.

5.4 Intentions

Only the major characters had their intention classified since they are the ones the viewer establishes a relationship with and an intention is possible to assess. Figure 5.5 shows the distribution of the 40 major characters in the films in terms of their intention and we can see that the majority are positive and the negative only consist of 10% of the characters.

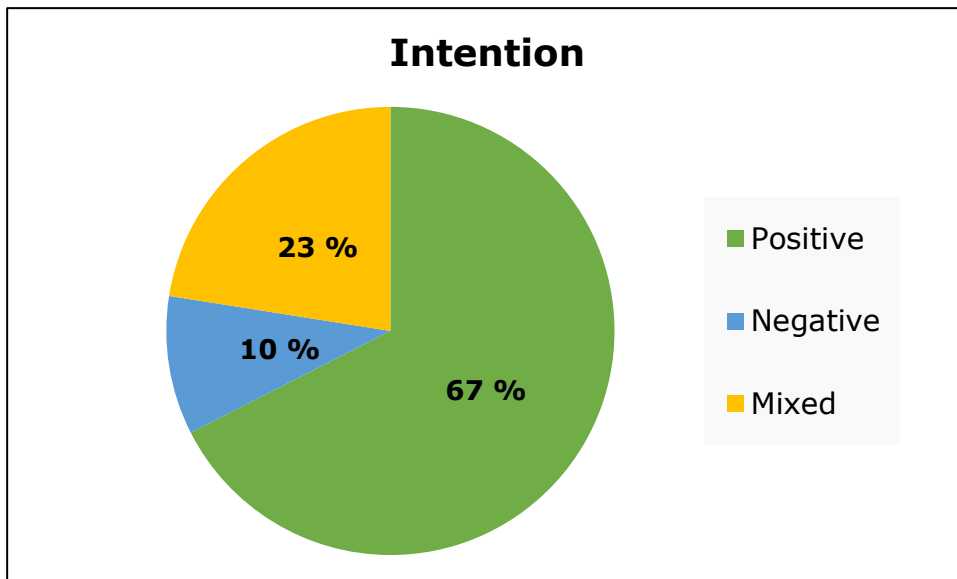


Figure 5.5 The distribution of characters in terms of intention

Lippi-Green also looks at this aspect of the characters but calls it motivation (Lippi-Green, 1997, pp. 90-92; 2012, pp. 117-119). She found that of all characters speaking foreign-accented English 40% had negative motivations. For RP and regional British varieties this number is 30% and for GA it is only 20% that have negative motivations. She also found that positive characters are more likely to be female, but they also show no character development, i.e. belong to the mixed motivations group (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 90). As figure 5.6 shows this is not shown in my data material.

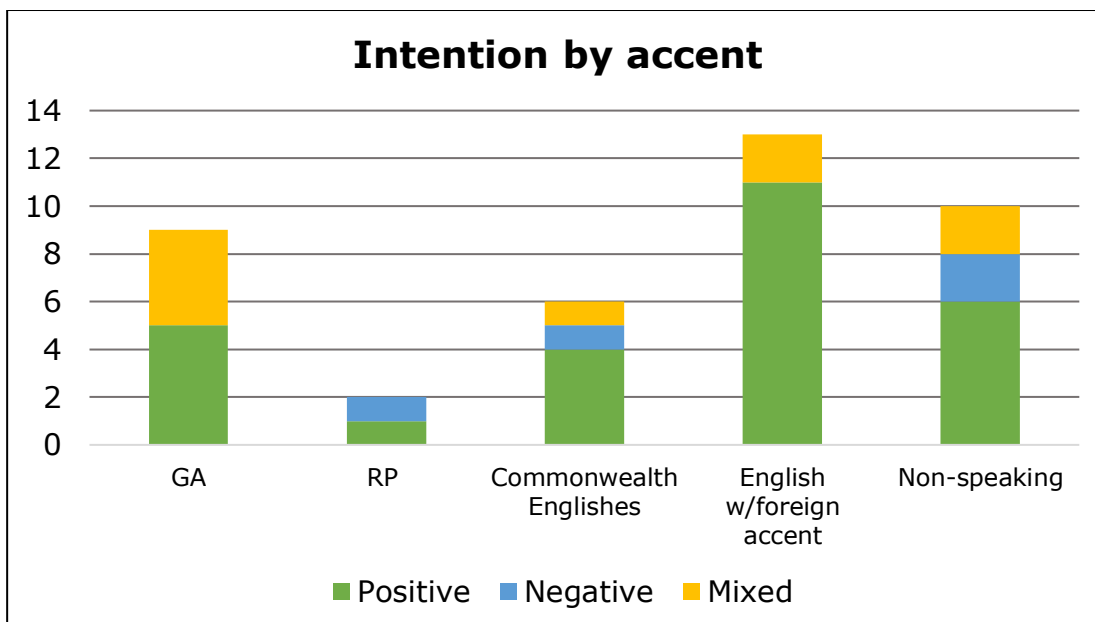


Figure 5.6 The distribution of characters according to their intention and accent

The figure shows that characters with negative intentions do not speak GA nor foreign-accented English and the only two negative speaking characters speak RP and a Commonwealth English. Something else worth noting is the number of negative/mixed characters that are non-speaking and that the GA accent has the most character development. Speaking of gender, there are more male than female positive characters, also differing from Lippi-Green's findings. The negative characters consist of one male and three (male) animals/entities. For the mixed characters, seven of them shift back and forth in their intentions but are mostly on the good side while the last two are the villains in *Coco* (2017) and *Frozen* (2013); Ernesto de la Cruz and Hans. They both go from good to bad, only revealing their true intention towards the end of the film.

Standard accents as opposed to vernacular ones have certain associations and attitudes connected to them that affect what we think of a character. The fact that in previous studies, characters with a foreign accent have been portrayed more negatively than characters with other more standard accents, might have to do with already underlying attitudes and stereotypes towards people with foreign accents in real life by the audience. As Americans make up a large part of the audience and including their fear of the foreign, Disney can use these attitudes as a shortcut to quickly convey character furthering the practice. A foreign accent is a vernacular accent and is more often stereotypically used for characters with mixed, hidden or negative intentions and by furthering these implications, such discriminations continues to grow and the fear of the foreign and unknown magnifies separating different groups of people even more. In *Brave* (2012), Pixar avoids this issue by simply muting the character with negative intention and in *Coco* (2017), all the characters used the same accent so that the negative character is not singled out because of his accent. The Classics also follows this pattern by muting the villains in *Vaiana* (2016) and having the villain Hans speak the same accent as the rest in *Frozen* (2013). One interesting finding is the unsympathetic character, the Crow, in *Brave* (2012) speaking GA while all the rest speak Scottish English corroborating Ellis' (2012, pp. 43-44) finding that more negative characters are represented with GA. The factor that tips the scales in favor of Pixar using the foreign accent in a more positive way, altogether avoiding the singling out of a character by accent use, is Disney Classics doing this with both the Duke in *Frozen* (2013) who is the only one speaking RP (can be explained by him being a visitor to the town and a person of importance) and the shiny crab Tamatoa in *Vaiana* (2016) speaking NZE in opposition to the two main characters speaking GA.

5.5 Non-English/setting-specific utterances

One of the main focuses in this thesis is to see to how extent the use of the language specific to the film setting is shown. In *Brave* (2012) there are five speaking main characters whereas three of them have a natural occurrence of setting-specific utterances throughout the film. Amongst the peripheral characters one Lord also has a natural use, the father of the character speaking Doric, while the rest have little-to-no occurrence. In *Frozen* (2013) there is just one non-English word, 'lutefisk', uttered by Oaken. 'Troll' and 'fjord' are also uttered once by Anna, Hans and Olaf, but even though they originate from the old Norse/Norwegian language they have been present in English dictionaries as English words for a long time. *Vaiana* (2016) follows in the footsteps of *Frozen* (2013) as there are no foreign utterances except by Maui when he performs something similar to a Haka dance and is singing/shouting in another language to open the doors to the realm of monsters. *Coco* (2017), on the other hand, is more similar to *Brave* (2012) in the way that

many of the characters insert words and phrases of Latin American Spanish into their utterances.²³ Miguel and Hector, the two characters that have the most speech time, have a heavy natural flow of Spanish words in their speech. There are seven other characters, both major and peripheral characters, with a natural occurrence of Mexican words throughout the film. The difference from *Brave* (2012) is that only ten of the fifty characters do not speak any Spanish words, which is a small amount considering that all but one are peripheral characters.

Most of the utterances in all films can be relatively easily understood based on the setting/scenario it was uttered, either the exact translation or the general meaning of the utterance. This can of course differ from viewer to viewer depending on how much exposure they have had to other languages and English accents by different groups of people. How the foreign words are integrated into the speech of the characters is done in two ways. Either it is a single non-English word uttered in combination with the rest of the sentence/phrase spoken in English known as code-switching (Trudgill, 2003, p. 23) or a whole phrase, often an exclamation, is spoken in the foreign language. The reasons for the differing use of non-English/setting-specific words in the films can be many and why Disney decided it to be like this will be hard to find out as they are tight-lipped on subjects that can cause some controversy. One can speculate that for the American audience, the *Frozen* (2013) and *Vaiana* (2016) story and culture is fairly new and unknown to most and thus Disney did not want to overwhelm them with too much new impressions toning down the accent use of the characters as well as minimizing foreign words. As the American audience are the majority of the viewers and consumers of Disney films their opinion is important and thus the film might be tailored more towards them than others. Since *Brave* (2012) is already set in an English-speaking country with what associations that brings there might be easier to insert more Scots words and phrases in the speech.²⁴ Cutler (2016, p. 91) analyzed YouTube comments made on scenes from *Brave* (2012) and *How to train your dragon* (2010), the latter also set in the Scottish Highlands, and she found Scottish English to be an attractive accent and it scored high on both prestige and social attractiveness by commentators. This positive attitude towards Scottish English might help overcome the fact that there are no GA speaking characters except for the Crow which potentially could have alienated some of the American audience. As the Mexican culture becomes more and more prominent in the US due to immigration, *Coco* (2017) also has the possibility to include more setting-specific words and phrases since there is a larger group of people that will understand.²⁵ The increased use of foreign words can also be a way to show that the action is not taking place in an English-speaking country using it as a signal of place and context as Lippi-Green (1997, p. 84) found with the use of a foreign accent.

This is one of the cases where the Classics and Pixar films differ. The Classics have little-to-no use of foreign words while Pixar has it as natural occurrence throughout the films. In addition, the border debate between the US and Mexico and Mexican immigrants in the US is currently an extremely tense subject creating a divide within the American people. By choosing to make a film with a Mexican setting and culture including Spanish words and phrases can be seen as both a long-awaited film showing the culture of the Latino population living the US, and as an opposition to the current government and its policies.

²³ Some examples are *sí, no, gracias, abuelita, ofrenda, hijo, hola, muchacho, chamaco, amigo*.

²⁴ Some examples are *dreadful collywobblers, a giant having a jigger in the bluebells, jiggery pokery, bunch of galoots, crivens!, lass, lad, wee, dancing tatty boogie, jiggs crivens help ma boab!*

²⁵ Even if you do not speak Spanish, most of the comments are made in such a specific context such as the viewer often will understand the meaning. One example is when *alebrijes* (spirit animals) are flying over the characters and one shouts out: "Watch out! They make *caquitas* everywhere!" which can be understood as they poop everywhere.

Previously, Disney has been criticized for creating films reflecting and building on the American fear of the other/foreign and presenting stories in a way that is compatible with their own views, as with *Aladdin*, set in Arabia right after the Gulf War where the hero and princess spoke GA and the villain and other Arab characters spoke with a heavy foreign accent (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 80). *Coco* (2017) and *Brave* (2012) are not made that way because all the characters have the same accents regardless of character role. These films and their extensive use of both accent and foreign words may be a desire to show more diversity and to better reflect the modern society than have been done before – a form of awareness including and representing everyone more than just the majority. The Classics’ linguistic way of showing that the action is happening in a non-English speaking culture is more subtle. In *Vaiana* (2016) half of the songs are sung in a non-English language, while *Frozen* (2012), which is a musical with most songs sung by the characters (with a GA accent), has the introduction and the ending scene song performed as a yoik in Sami – the group of languages of the indigenous peoples of Scandinavia. *Coco* (2017) and *Brave* (2012) also uses this literary tool of using non-English language in songs, *Brave* (2012) has one song and *Coco* (2017) has four.

5.6 Character roles

This subsection will focus on the relationship between character roles and their accents. Accent can be a great literary tool and Lippi-Green (1997, p. 84) stated that “Accent is used as a shortcut for those roles where stereotype serves as a shortcut to characterization”. As we have seen, using the accent as a shortcut can both discriminate against and stigmatize people associated with that accent invoking greater stereotyping against that group. The distribution of character roles in the films is shown in figure 5.7 and figure 5.8 shows the distribution of accents among the character roles. There were no aides to villains in the stories so this category will not be included in the results and discussion.

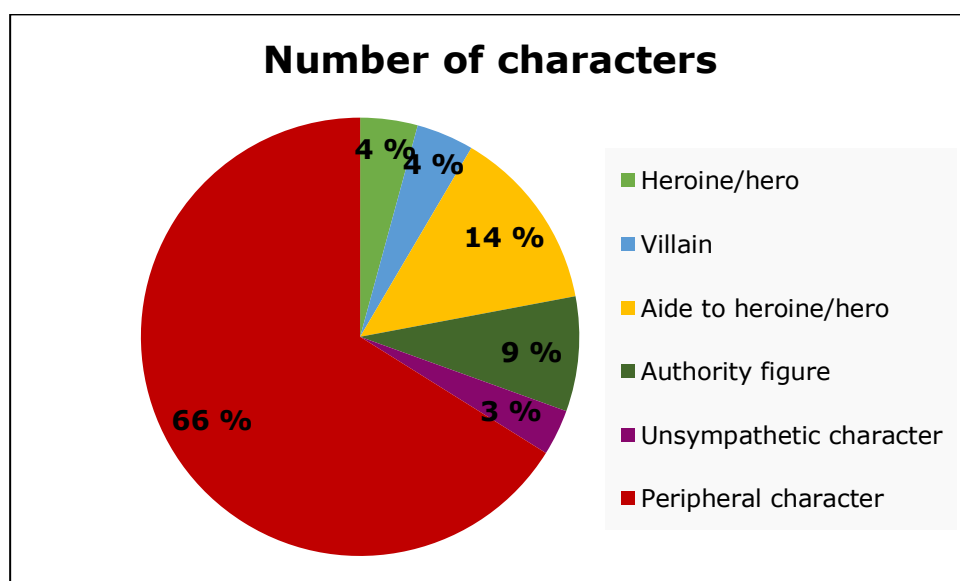


Figure 5.7 The distribution of character roles in the films

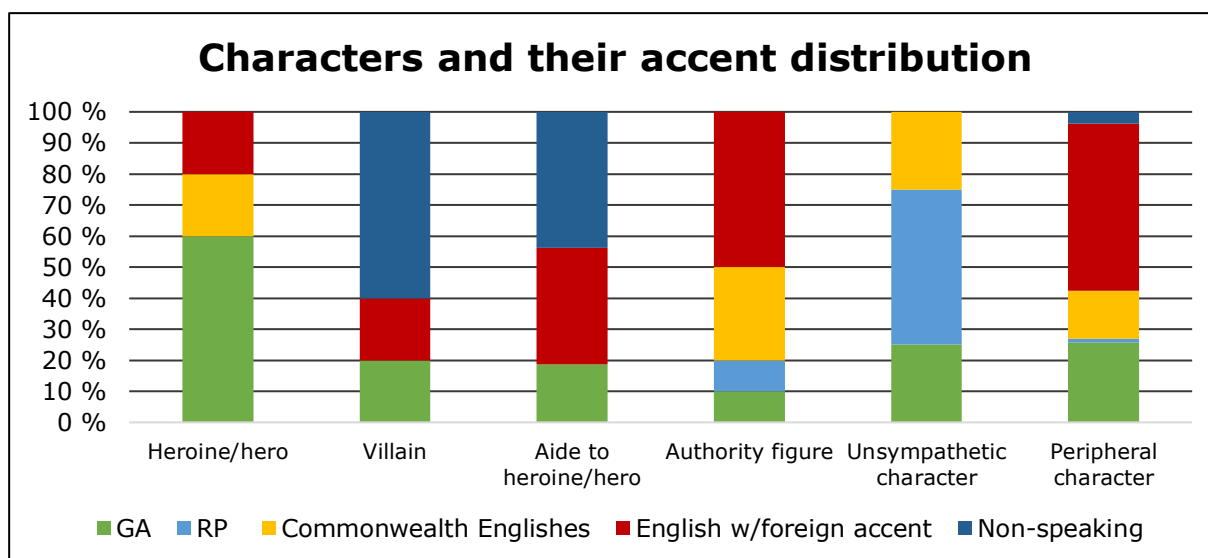


Figure 5.8 The distribution of accents in percentage among the character roles

From figure 5.7 it is clear that peripheral character is the largest character group and the group with greatest accent variation which is not surprising since a story often requires more 'bystanders' to give it more substance. In both *Coco* (2017) and *Frozen* (2013) this is done to a great extent causing the large percentage of foreign accented English and GA. As the peripheral character is not directly affecting and progressing the story they will be omitted from the further discussion. Moving on to the accent distribution in figure 5.8 we can see that there is variation in all character roles, both with regards to what accents are present and to what extent they are used.

First, looking at the heroine/hero category there is a majority of GA use. What is interesting to note here is that the Classics heroines use a GA accent while the Pixar heroine/hero uses a foreign and Scottish accent respectively. Sønnesyn (2011, p. 78) found that the majority of heroines/heroes spoke with a GA accent which she argued could be because Disney is an American company and that many films were set in the US or in mythical kingdoms where a GA accent will be accepted by the audience. In this case only the first part of the argument holds. When choosing films not set in the US or mythical kingdoms it was for the purpose of checking to what extent the GA accent was used. Vaiana is the character that stands out the most since many of the other major characters speak with other accents making her accent stand out even more. The heroines in *Frozen* (2013), Elsa and Anna, along with the rest of the villagers and visitors to Arendelle speak with an GA accent not standing out as much. In these two cases there is just a lack of correspondence between the heroine/hero's origin and the accent they have while in *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) this correlation is present. Anna, Elsa and Vaiana speaking with a 'standardized' accent such as GA will match with the audience's expectation and attitudes towards GA approving it for use by a heroine. On the one hand, deciding on a less stigmatized accent Disney avoids alienating the audience but on the other they risk creating a noticeable unrealistic accent for the character causing dismay among the audience. Choosing the former, Disney still chooses to present a utopian society that does not exist in real life. By letting their heroine and hero use the same accent as the rest of the characters, Pixar gives a more realistic sound picture of modern society.

The most striking feature among the villains and aides is the high percentage of non-speaking characters. As noted before, the number of major non-speaking characters is surprisingly high, and it is among the villain and aide role this is most apparent. Both character roles are similar apart from the aides presenting a higher number of foreign accented characters. This is mostly due to *Coco* (2017) and its seven aides in contrast to the other films' two to four aides. Focusing on the non-speaking villains, both *Vaiana* (2016) and *Brave* (2012) have together three and by not letting the villain have a voice it also avoids any attitudes and stereotypes any accent would have contributed to the role as well as reducing further stigma any accent would have received if connected to a villain role. Whether this was a conscious choice made by the producers one can only speculate. Like all other characters in *Coco* (2017), the villain also speaks with a Spanish-English accent thus avoiding both revealing his true intentions (he is not revealed as evil until the end) and singling out any one accent to bear the characteristics that the villain inhibits. The same goes for the villain in *Frozen* (2013), Hans, speaking GA, also only revealed as evil at the end and thus it would be very suspicious for him to have another accent while the rest of the main characters also use GA. What is somewhat weird is that Hans, same as the Duke and four dignitaries, is a guest visiting from 'The Southern Isles' which very well would have allowed him to use another accent than GA since the rest of the visitors speak with different accents than GA. Why Hans does not speak with something other than a GA accent could also simply be because he is a major character and conforms to the other characters' use of GA.

As for the use of aides, the GA accented aides are in the Disney Classics, Kristoff and Olaf in *Frozen* (2013) and Maui in *Vaiana* (2016). In addition, the ocean spirit in *Vaiana* (2016) and Sven in *Frozen* (2013) are non-speaking aides, even though Kristoff often speaks for Sven in a mock voice, also GA. In *Coco* (2017), the non-speaking street dog Dante follows the hero Miguel everywhere, but the rest of the aides speaks with a Spanish-accented English. In *Brave* (2012) all four aides are non-speaking leaving the heroine Merida with most of the speaking lines in the film. What we see is that the speaking aides take the same accent as the heroine/hero which is in line with the setting and the relation between the two groups. In *Frozen* (2013), *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) they are all from the same village justifying the use of the same accent. In *Vaiana* (2016) Maui is a demigod and can use GA or any other accent since his ancestry is unknown. There is no good answer as to why there are so many non-speaking aides because it is not the case that the story calls for spirits or such non-speaking entities. It also might be the film selection that creates the peak in that character group.

The main finding amongst the few unsympathetic characters were that they were assigned a different accent from that of the rest of the main characters, perhaps to create audible distinction between them as well as fronting the character as the 'outsider' not fitting into the culture. This is clear in *Brave* (2012) where the witch speaks with an accent that has some lowland Scottish traits but not very distinctly so in contrast to the extensive use of highland Scottish by all the other characters, and her companion crow speaks with a GA accent clearly showing they are not from those parts. Both the unsympathetic character in *Vaiana* (2016), the thieving unscrupulous crab living in 'the realm of monsters', technically a mythical place allowing the use of any accent, and the visiting Duke in *Frozen* (2013) speaks NZE and RP respectively, evoking attitudes and associations among viewers of cold, distant and posh character traits that previously was connected to the villains (Trudgill, 2002, p. 176). What we also see is that the authority figures in both *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) share the same accent as the rest of the characters, namely Scottish English and Spanish-accented English adding to Pixar's consistency of correlating character accent

with setting. The authority figure in *Frozen* (2013), the troll leader speaks with RP which is consistent with the stereotype of wisdom and positivity that is attributed to RP by Americans (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 13) and the authority figures in *Vaiana* (2016) show a variety of accents showing an inconsistency in the accent use by Vaiana's parents and grandmother.

6 Summary and conclusions

6.1 Summary

The main aim for this thesis was to investigate the use of English accents in recent Disney's animated feature films where the story was set in real countries or regions where a 'standardized' English accent would not be the official language and to see if it would reveal any patterns as to how various accents were used. A sub-aim was to compare the Disney Classics films against Disney-Pixar films to see if there were any differences in the way they assign accent to the characters.

The overall results showed that almost half of the characters in the films spoke English with a foreign accent (i.e. non-native English), a result largely affected by the unequal number of characters in each film and to a smaller extent the location of the stories. The correlation between gender and accent showed an even distribution among the three groups with regards to GA, but a greater difference between male and female for a regional variety and a foreign-accented variety with the male more represented in each category. It also showed an uneven distribution of men and women in the films which have been corroborated by both Lippi-Green (1997, p. 87) and Sønnesyn (2011, p. 57). Moving on to setting-specific ethnicity, all characters were categorized as appropriate and giving authenticity to the story based on appearance (Oaken in *Frozen* (2013) is the debated exception). The problem arose when linking accent to the characters and a noticeable amount did not speak with an accent native to the setting. When viewing the intentions of the characters it became clear that the group of characters with mixed intentions was greater than the negative one and that the speaking villains, all in the mixed group, went from good to bad showing declining character development rather than the opposite way that tends to be more normal. A major part of the study was to analyze the use of non-English or setting-specific utterances. This use was done to varying degrees in the films both with single-word utterances, whole phrases or by the use of songs. The Pixar films *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017) utilized all these tools giving no uncertainty as to what language the characters would originally be speaking while the Disney Classics *Frozen* (2013) and *Vaiana* (2016) utilized these tools to a much lesser extent. Finally, moving on to the character roles, the most striking results were that the most used accent among these characters was a foreign English accent (again; affected by the high number of characters in *Coco* (2017)), and the high number of non-speaking characters in main roles and the heroines and their aides in the Classics speaking GA even though the accent would not naturally occur in those settings. All these findings show that there is a difference in the way the Classics and Pixar films use accent to build character and align it with its environment.

6.2 Arriving at a conclusion

This sociolinguistic study set out to analyze Disney Classics and Pixar animated films with regards to what accents the different characters are assigned and also to compare this accent assignment between the Disney Classics films *Frozen* (2013) and *Vaiana* (2016) and the Pixar films *Brave* (2012) and *Coco* (2017). Since the films were chosen based on

the location of the story, it was expected to find a diversity of accents and a more authentic voice casting than what has been done previously. This proved to be done to varying degrees where the Pixar films showed consistency and all characters spoke the same accent specific to the setting of the story while the Classics had a greater use of GA as a fallback accent when it would not be the accent originally spoken in that setting. The Pixar films also have a high occurrence of foreign words and phrases uttered by characters whereas the Classics were almost non-existent in that part. The most surprising finding was the high number of non-speaking major characters, especially the evil and negative characters, perhaps revealing a new tendency to avoid giving a specific accent to those avoiding possible discrimination and backlash and the usage of language attitudes and stereotypes. This can very well be due to the effect of increased awareness of language use and the power of social media that has the potential to create massive groups in support for or opposition against anything they care about which can be both positive and negative for Disney's reputation and profit.

In relation to this increased awareness we can see that the films are products of their time to various degrees insofar as they also to a varying degree reflect the modern society. As the Walt Disney Company has taken part in portraying societal issues in a more negative way previously (Giroux, 1995), the Pixar films are now showing more diversity and authenticity in a positive way. With the current tense issues of immigration and the US southern border to Mexico dividing the American people, Mexicans are not looked too kindly upon by many Americans. As they are foreign and attitudes towards them are negative, the story in *Coco* (2017) could have been portrayed in a way capitalizing on that fear and mistrust as have been done by Disney in for example *Aladdin* (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 80) and this shows a shift in how the Walt Disney Company wishes to present their stories to their audience. The tendency is that Pixar dears to go 'all in' when it comes to creating authenticity to the stories and also taking a stand when it comes to political or societal issues that arises in the modern society while the Disney Classics tend to be more careful in what they choose to include to make the story authentic and diverse. By omitting to use the regional vernacular accents native to the setting of the story shows little acceptance towards the various accents and culture.

For a tolerant and open society to exist there are many factors contributing and one is the film industry. The Walt Disney Company has faced much scrutiny in their portrayal of stories and this thesis set out in search for a change in their portrayal of new stories. With Disney's vastly international reach they hold a major influence in how children think, learn and create attitudes towards other people and communities. By actively giving stereotypical accents to certain characters Disney partakes in furthering these inaccurate, limiting, discriminating and narrowing attitudes to groups of people and giving an unrealistic image of the modern society and culture. Even though there has been a decrease in the use of stereotypic accents the road to an authentic and realistic portrayal of cultures has some way to go. Even though fairy tales are allowed some free reins it does not allow for discrimination and racism and the fact that there is an improvement shows that it is moving in a positive direction. The question is just, does it move too slow and why is Pixar leading when both the Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios are owned by the same company, namely Walt Disney Company? Hopefully, the ever-presence of people through social media can help guide the directors and producers in the right direction by holding them accountable every step of the way. By promoting awareness of all different language accents and acceptance of the 'non-standard' as an equal to 'standard' varieties we are leading the change for a more inclusive society, including on the basis of language.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Relevancy for the teaching profession

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As our modern society becomes more and more interconnected, blurring out the lines that separates countries from another, the input the younger generations get through social platforms enables them to create their own opinion and understanding of how people outside of their social circle and outside their country are like. Films and tv series are also major influencers in how new cultures and people are portrayed to a large group of people and it is important for children to be able to separate fiction from reality. One way to do that is to teach awareness of the use of stereotypical accents in films and reflect around why and how they are used and the consequences of its usage.

On the curriculum for the English subject in Norwegian schools students are, amongst other aims, to be familiar with different English speaking groups around the world, how different cultures are portrayed in media and obtain knowledge of how English as a world language can be used for many different purposes (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013). Students are to “develop a knowledge about, understanding of and respect for the lives and cultures of other people.” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013, p. 4). The Walt Disney Company, being a world-wide film distributor with a large international audience, has great power with regards to how many they affect with their portrayal of a story. One way the students can create awareness of this is to reflect on and discuss how the story was told and research how

[D]ominant cultures reaffirms its control over subordinate cultures and nations by re-establishing [...] their preferred view of the world as right, proper and primary. [...] Animated films entertain, but they are also a vehicle by which children learn to associate specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups, and to accept a narrow and exclusionary world view. (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 111)

They can also look at correlations between language-specific social differences and character roles and they can get a better understanding of how stereotypes and language accents are used in films to create a character and how this can lead to a distorted view of different groups of people of both race and ethnicity. In a society where it is easier to hold people, groups and corporations accountable through the use of for example social media, the students should strive to obtain an awareness of the use of accent stereotyping in films and what it brings and try to call for a more realistic and inclusive portrayal of other cultures in films in the future.

