

# "I Love Accents"

## The use of accents in American sitcoms



Turid Lie Vilkenen



Department of foreign languages  
University of Bergen  
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## Summary in Norwegian

Målet med denne oppgaven har vært å se på bruken av ulike engelske dialekter ("accents") i amerikanske komiserier. Seriene representerer to forskjellige tidsperioder, nærmere bestemt 1950- og 60-tallet, og 1990- og 2000-tallet. Seriene ble valgt basert på deres popularitet, og tre serier fra hver periode er inkludert. De tre eldre seriene er *I Love Lucy*, *The Danny Thomas Show*, og *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. De nyere seriene er *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, og *Frasier*. Oppgaven er inspirert av Rosina Lippi-Green sin studie om språkbruk i Disney-filmer (1997). Til tross for at komiserier er en meget populær form for underholdning, er det gjort lite forskning på dette mediet i forhold til språkbruk. Denne oppgaven vil bidra til å belyse et delvis mørklagt felt, og forhåpentligvis inspirere til videre forskning.

Hovedmålet til oppgaven er å undersøke om det finnes en systematisk sammenheng mellom dialekttype og karaktertype i amerikanske komiserier. I tillegg har oppgaven som mål å avdekke potensielle diakroniske endringer ved å sammenligne resultatene fra de to tidsperiodene, samtidig som den undersøker om resultatene gjenspeiler tidligere studier av språkholdninger. Forventingene er at visse stereotypeholdninger til dialekter vil komme til syne gjennom fremstillingene av karakterer, og at disse reflekterer holdninger som eksisterer i samfunnet.

221 karakterer fordelt over 60 episoder er inkludert. Disse blir klassifisert i henhold til et utvalg av sosiale variabler, inkludert kjønn, karakterrolle, samt personlighetstrekk. Alle voksne karakterer som snakker en gjenkjennbar form for engelsk, er klassifisert.

I tillegg til studien av komiserier, er det utført en mindre spørreundersøkelse. Amerikanske respondenter ble spurt om å rangere et utvalg av engelske dialekter med det formål å undersøke vanlige folks holdninger til disse dialektene. Resultatet fra spørreundersøkelsen er sammenlignet med tidligere forskning, i tillegg til hovedstudien.

Funnene i mine studier av komiserier viser at språk blir i stor grad brukt som et virkemiddel i framstillingen av stereotype karakterer. Til tross for at majoriteten av karakterene snakker General American, ble det funnet at dialekter assosiert med negative holdninger er overrepresentert blant usofistikerte og usympatiske karakterer. Et annet hovedfunn er at en større andel av mannlige karakterer enn kvinnelige snakker en annen dialekt enn General American.

Resultatene fra spørreundersøkelsen korresponderte med resultater fra både tidligere forskning og hovedstudien. Dette tilsier at holdninger som framstilles i komiserier eksisterer også i det amerikanske samfunnet.

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## **Abbreviations**

GA: General American

RP: Received Pronunciation

AAVE: African-American Vernacular English

NYE: New York English

SAE: Southern American English

FAE: Foreign-accented English

MUSE: Mainstream US English



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The first part of this chapter outlines the aim and scope of the present thesis, as well as describes the thought and reasons for the study. The secondary portion of the chapter describes the variables that are included in the study. Subsequently, the hypotheses are introduced and explained. The final part of the chapter is devoted to the structure of the present thesis.

### 1.1 Aim and scope

The present thesis is concerned with the use of language varieties, or *accents*, in American sitcoms. The study can be described as a diachronic study as it includes and compares sitcoms from different time periods. The first period focuses on sitcoms from 1950–1960, and the second focuses on the years spanning 1990–2000.

The present thesis has several aims. The primary aim is to see if there is a systematic correlation between character type and accent type. Different variables such as gender, character role, as well as character traits such as sophistication and likability are investigated in relation to various English varieties. The study is part of the field of sociolinguistics; specifically, it is a linguistic attitudinal study, and it is an example of a societal treatment study. The societal treatment method entails analyses of content from public sources, such as films, books, or public documents. As attitudes are not explicitly stated, the researcher thus gains the results through observations and inferences. The results produced from societal treatment studies imply how language varieties are treated by and in society.

The next aim of the present thesis is to compare the results from the present study with results from previous attitudinal studies, and to see if they cohere. Societal treatment studies of Disney films have concluded that language is used as a “quick way to build characters and reaffirm stereotype” (Lippi-Green 1997: 85). The present study is interested to see whether this applies to sitcoms as well. Hopefully, the investigation of sitcoms will contribute to the field of attitudinal studies, and bring attention and awareness to language use in American sitcoms.

As stated above, the present thesis includes sitcoms from different time periods. One of the aims of the study is to investigate whether the two time periods will produce different

results. Differences between the two time periods may reflect that a change has occurred, both in attitudes, as well as the status of varieties of English.

### 1.1.1. Questionnaire

As a supplement to the main study, a small-scale survey of attitudes towards English varieties was conducted. The first aim of the survey is to compare the results with previous attitudinal research. Additionally, the results from the questionnaire are compared to the results found in the main study. The expectation is that the findings from both studies will complement each other. It is reasonable to assume that American sitcoms are targeted towards an adult American audience. If the results from the questionnaire parallel the results found in the main study, the implication would be that the same attitudes that exist in society are also portrayed in the media.

The survey was executed in the form of an online questionnaire using a direct approach. This entails that respondents were presented with various labels describing the language varieties, and asked to rate them on various traits, such as pleasantness and correctness.

## 1.2 Why study sitcoms?

Previous attitudinal research has revealed that certain attitudes are linked with certain language varieties, and that these attitudes have been perpetuated in the media. Societal treatment investigations have shown that this is especially prevalent in children's animation (see 2.1.4). Similar societal treatment studies of other genres are few, if non-existent, including studies on situational comedies, or *sitcoms*.

The sitcom is a popular genre of television. The weekly episodes attract large audiences, both in the United States, and the rest of the world. As sitcoms are comedies, they often contain comical and facetious characters. Lippi-Green claims that sitcoms are infamous when it comes to perpetuating stereotypes through language. She also suggests that the genre should be "examined more closely" (Lippi-Green 1997: 101).

Stereotypes are frequently used in entertainment, and often in an exaggerated way. For example, regional varieties of British English are often associated with comedy and comedic

characters (Quirk 1982: 6), and it is reasonable to assume that a similar correlation exists with American varieties as well. Since the shows included are comedies, they may provide insight to see if certain language varieties are systematically associated with comedic characters.

Six sitcoms are included in the present study, three from each time period. The sitcoms are *I Love Lucy*, *The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Seinfeld*, *Frasier*, and *Friends*. The shows were selected based on their popularity; all of them were among the top ten shows viewed during their original broadcast.

The reason this genre in particular was selected was due both to its availability and its structural stability. The primary structure of the sitcom has remained fairly stable since its inception. This makes results from different shows, and even different time periods, comparable.

### **1.3 The variables studied**

Both linguistic and non-linguistic variables are investigated in the present thesis. The language varieties included in the thesis represent the United States, as well as the British Isles. There are also instances where characters speak a foreign-accented variety of English. The American varieties included are General American, New York English, Southern American English, and African-American Vernacular English. The varieties from the British Isles are Received Pronunciation, London English, Irish English, and Northern British English.

Several non-linguistic variables are included in the present study. These are *gender*, *character role*, *sophistication*, and *likability*. The present study will compare male and female characters to see if any systematic correlations between gender and language variety occurs, most notably, if female characters speak standard varieties more frequently than male characters. All characters are classified in regard to character role. The various character roles are *main characters*, *supporting characters*, *guest characters*, and *minor characters*. Furthermore, characters are classified based on various personality traits. These are traits associated with sophistication and likability. The majority of the characters are classified as *sophisticated* or *unsophisticated*, as well as *sympathetic* or *unsympathetic*. In this way the variables may reveal, after investigation, whether language varieties are systematically linked to the various non-linguistic variables.

## 1. 4 Hypotheses

The hypotheses for the present thesis are largely based on results found in previous language attitudinal research.

The hypotheses for the study of sitcoms are as follows:

1. Standard varieties will be the used more frequently than non-standard varieties
  - The majority of characters will speak General American
  - The majority of British characters will speak Received Pronunciation
  
2. A systematic correlation between accent type and character type will be found:
  - Female characters will mainly speak a standard variety
  - Non-standard varieties will be spoken more frequently by male characters
  - The majority of non-standard varieties will be spoken by peripheral characters
  - Non-standard varieties will be overrepresented with unsophisticated characters
  
3. There will be a marked difference between old and new sitcoms
  - The ratio between male and female characters will be smaller in newer sitcoms
  - There will be an increased use of non-standard varieties in newer sitcoms
  - There will be an increased use of non-standard varieties among female characters in newer sitcoms
  
4. The results found in the present study will mirror the results from previous research.

The hypotheses for the questionnaire are as follows:

1. Standard varieties will enjoy higher ratings than non-standard varieties
  - Urban varieties will receive the lowest ratings in both dimensions
  - Regional varieties, such as Southern American English will be rated more poorly in the status dimension, but receive a more positive rating in the social attractiveness dimension

2. The findings will mirror the results from previous research
  - The results from the questionnaire will be parallel to the results found in Coupland and Bishop's BBC Voices study 2007
  
3. The results will complement the findings of the main study
  - The varieties associated with unsophisticated and unsympathetic characters will receive more negative ratings
  - The respondents will exhibit similar attitudes towards English varieties as the ones observed in the sitcoms

### **1. 5 The structure of the thesis**

The present thesis is divided into five chapters, each covering different aspects of the present thesis. Chapter 1 contains the introduction of the thesis. This chapter presents and explains the outline of the study as well as the hypotheses of the study. Chapter 2 discusses relevant theoretical background. Theories regarding attitudes, stereotypes, and language ideology are examined, and a brief introduction to the sitcom, as well as a look into the use of stereotypes in sitcoms, is presented. The third chapter describes various methods used in language attitudinal research, as well as the methods used for the present thesis. This chapter also discusses the linguistic and non-linguistic variables in more detail. Chapter 4 contains the findings and discussions resulted from both studies. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the results. This chapter also discusses the limitations and contributions of the present thesis.

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part discusses language attitudes, while also examining the idea of standard language ideology, including stereotypes, before it goes on to present some general results of previous research. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the sitcom and the use of stereotypes in sitcoms.

### 2.1 Language attitudes

Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society. Researchers in this field focus on language variation and change. One aspect of sociolinguistics is concerned with attitudes, and how attitudes towards languages can provide “a backdrop for explaining linguistic variation and change” (Garrett 2010: 15).

Sociolinguistics is a fairly young field of study. Not until Labov’s 1966 study of social stratification in New York English did researchers succeed in “coming fully to grips with the social dimension of accent variation”, and by extension, increasing linguists’ “knowledge about the social setting of linguistic change” (Wells 1982: 16, Trudgill 1983: 52).

An important part of sociolinguistics is language attitudes research, and studies of this nature may broadly be described as:

An attempt to understand people’s processing of, and dispositions towards, various situated language and communicative behaviours and the subsequent treatment extended to the users of such forms  
(Cargile et al. 1994: 211)

This implies that one does not only study language itself, but the treatment of language as well as the treatment of people: “Our view of others – their supposed capabilities, beliefs and attributes – are determined, in part, by inferences we make from the language features they adopt” (Cargile et al. 1994: 211). Attitudes towards languages, whether they are positive or negative, have existed since “time immemorial” (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 10). Perhaps one of the earliest mentions of attitudes regarding language is found in *The Rhetoric*. Aristotle believed that the language choices one made had an effect on their credibility (Cargile et al. 1994: 212), and this belief is still present today.



Attitudes are an abstract concept and, as with all abstract concepts, it can be difficult to get a grasp of them. How does one study attitudes, or even measure them? Baker claims that attitudes can be analyzed and examined, and that attitudes are “central to the understanding of human behaviour” (Baker 1992: 20). First, it is important to define what attitudes are. Allport defines attitudes as “a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way” (Allport 1954 in Garrett 2010:19.). Attitudes, then, are something we learn. This definition also focuses on thought, feelings and behaviour. Similarly, Baker claims that attitudes may be perceived as a process, divided into three components: cognition, affect, and behaviour (Baker 1992: 13). Attitudes are cognitive in that they contain “beliefs about the world, and the relationships between objects of social significance” (Garrett 2010: 23). Some believe that a ‘standard’ language variety such as Received Pronunciation (RP) is ‘better’ than a non-standard variety, for instance Cockney English.<sup>1</sup> Attitudes are affective in that feelings towards a certain object, an accent variety, for example, are included. These feelings are graded; one might strongly approve or disapprove of a certain variety. As feelings are not always rational, a discrepancy between the cognition part and the affect part may occur. The last part, the behavioural component, is the only element that can be observed directly; the component “concerns a readiness for action” (Baker 1992: 13). A person’s attitude towards a variety can be seen through the choice to use a variety; if the person approves of RP, and believes that RP is a better variety, he or she might choose to speak RP in a given situation.

Cargile et al. argue for a similar process but adds another factor into the equation, the extra-linguistic aspect: “language is not the only speaker feature to which a hearer may react” (Cargile et al. 1994: 215). Features such as gestures and other physical features may play a role in how attitudes are formed. However, it is impossible to include all potential factors into this process, so there will not be any further discussion of this topic.

There have been some arguments opposing equating these three components to attitudes themselves, and that they may instead be seen more as causes and triggers of attitudes. For instance “an emotional reaction (affect) might bring to mind an attitude object and its associations. Or the activation of an attitude might trigger a set of emotions” (Garrett 2010: 23). The present thesis is mainly concerned with the behavioural component. By investigating sitcoms, attitudes are observed and reflected on. In addition to the behavioural component, the cognitive aspect will also be investigated. Attitudes expressed by respondents

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<sup>1</sup> Received Pronunciation is considered the standard accent in British English, and is the variety normally taught

in the questionnaire may be interpreted as a display of the respondents' thoughts of the varieties in question.

### 2.1.1 Language ideology

Where do attitudes toward language originate? Allport specifies that attitude is something that people are taught and, according to Garrett, there are two main ways of learning attitudes: observational learning and instrumental learning. The former method is defined as “noticing the behaviour of other people and the consequences of that behaviour” (Garrett 2010: 22). We observe other people's attitudes through their behaviour as well as the outcome of their behaviour, and then form our own opinion regarding the matter. Instrumental learning occurs when the consequences we experience will either bring us rewards or detriments, and by dealing with either, we acquire attitudes from the experience.

There is a distinction between standardized written language and standardized spoken language: *Standard English* and *standard English*. The first is related to written language, the latter to spoken language. For the present thesis, when using the term *standard variety/accents* it is in the meaning of spoken varieties that are generally considered to be more prestigious and ‘correct’. In spoken English, the two varieties that are considered to be standard are Received Pronunciation and General American (Milroy 2001: 150).

How, then, have certain varieties gained the status of being the standard spoken variety, and by extension, enjoying a higher status than others? Why are some linguistic differences essentially “assigned social values” in what appears to be in a random manner (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 16)? Standard versus non-standard speech has been a controversial topic for a long time. One long-lasting argument for the promotion of standard linguistic varieties suggests that certain linguistic varieties are simply better than others; they are more beautiful, more correct; people prefer them because they are inherently better. Studies have shown, however, that this is not the case. Giles et al. discuss the battle between the *inherent value hypothesis* and the *imposed norm hypothesis* (Giles et al. 1979). The idea of inherent value was that non-standard varieties, such as Cockney English, were flawed and underdeveloped. The varieties were not sophisticated enough to cope with complex and advanced subjects in the same way as RP could. Consequently, some varieties were adopted as standard because they were inherently better and aesthetically more pleasing. The fact that they became the standard variety was not random (Giles et al. 1979: 591). It is, however,

more likely that attitudes are the results of an established view that comes from society, i.e. we are socialized into different attitudes and society tells us which varieties we should prefer. One aspect of society is the world of academia. It was once common opinion that speakers of non-standard varieties should be taught to speak standard varieties in schools. To some extent, this practice may have been successful as studies show that some of the more basic language attitudes are established “as we enter the school system as children” (Garrett 2010: 22).

The counter-argument is embodied within the imposed norm hypothesis. The argument of the hypothesis claims that standard varieties receive their status and prestige from the prestige of their users, not their inherent value (Giles et al. 1979: 591). The studies done by Giles et al. found that respondents with no knowledge of a language did not rate standard varieties of that language any higher than non-standard ones. The implication these studies bring is that there is no inherent value to the standard varieties, and that there is another explanation to why some language varieties have the status that they have (ibid: 594). The prestige of standard varieties is the result of external factors; if an area is considered prestigious, the residents will be as well, and therefore their speech will be considered more prestigious. Varieties are chosen as standards because of their “acceptability amongst the most powerful and influential sectors of society” (Milroy & Milroy 1993: 5).

Trudgill expands on this with what he calls *the social connotation hypothesis*. He claims that the aesthetic evaluations are not just a matter of norms but also the “result of a complex of *social connotations*” that varieties have (Trudgill 1983: 217, original emphasis). In Britain, for example, urban varieties have different connotations than rural varieties, as do urban areas compared to rural areas. These connotations conjure different images and feelings, and as discussed earlier, feelings are a part of the process that result in attitudes. Trudgill argues that outsiders are in a better position to rate a language variety on an aesthetic level, as cultural aspects would not influence them, and they would only react to the sounds (Trudgill 1983: 220–ff), and the study conducted by Giles et al. supports this claim (Giles et al. 1979: 594). This implies that the ways in which certain varieties are considered to be standard, and therefore more correct than others, are “socially conditioned and never purely linguistic” (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 6), i.e. the social connotations that different language varieties have dictate people’s “aesthetic (and other) judgments about the language variety” (Bauer & Trudgill 1998: 89).

Attitudes towards language have consequences. People may be discriminated against based on their speech alone; the way a person speaks is held to be “the most important single factor one uses to determine a person’s class affiliation” (Wells 1982: 29).

### 2.1.2 Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a natural consequence of the way the human brain works. Stereotyping is a technique through which information is processed, and efficiently categorized, so that the information is “more easily identified, recalled, predicted, and reacted to” (Real Clear Science). People like to categorize and simplify things, to exaggerate differences between social categories, as well as exaggerate similarities within social categories. By linking these steps together, people form stereotypes. Kristiansen argues that these social and psychological phenomena can also be applied to language and accent features, meaning that through these processes people quickly establish links between linguistic features and social identities (Kristiansen 2001: 136).

Stereotyping functions on several levels. On an individual level, stereotyping unifies the complex social world (McKenzie 2010: 22). At an inter-group level, stereotypes can produce and perpetuate group ideologies as well as create and maintain the distinction between the social group in which one is a member and the contrasting group where one is not (ibid). McKenzie calls the two inter-group levels as *social-explanatory* and *social-differentiation* functions (ibid). These functions are different methods through which people categorize and process the information given to them.

A stereotype can also function as a metonym, i.e. where one part represents a whole, and popular media make use of this idea. If a character speaks with a southern accent, he or she represents the South. In this way a certain set of linguistic features, presented by one speaker, become diagnostic of the entire social or geographical group. In film, especially animated film, accents and dialects are one of the ways to establish and introduce a character; accent becomes a shortcut for personality (Lippi-Green 1997: 84). Animated film is different from live film in many ways, one of which is that they often take place in a fictional, or unknown world, so the choices of accent are even more prominent. If, however, a story takes place in the real world, New York City, for example, occurrence of a New York accent is to be expected. What researchers look for in these instances then, is if certain character traits, such as lack of sympathy or sophistication, systematically occur with speakers of certain varieties.

The question is then, why are certain stereotypes associated with certain language varieties? Part of the answer may stem from history; “[b]ehind each stereotype lies a history

that relates both to commonsense [*sic*] understandings of society and to economic determinants” (Seiter 1986: 24). One of the most stigmatized varieties of English is African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). The variety originated in a time of “bitter economic, political and social cleavages created by slavery and subsequently the Civil War”, and the effects from this era are still felt today (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 159). This may also be why the southern part of the United States is still considered to be separate from the rest of the country: “The South has continually battled this issue in trying to place itself within the image of mainstream ‘America’[...] The South became the ‘Other’, the inexplicable” (Slade et al. 2012: 114). Speakers of Southern American are often considered to be simple and slow, and this is often reflected in the media (ibid 2012: 5).

Another typical stereotype is related to the British, especially speakers of Received Pronunciation (RP). In American entertainment, British characters have been a reliable source when it comes to portraying villains and the reason for this may be over 230 years old. The need to make a clear distinction between American and British has existed since the War of Independence, and in the style of Adams and Webster, the separation is still present (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 158).

### 2.1.3 Previous research in language attitudes

Compared to other fields, sociolinguistics is a young discipline. Although language attitude is something that concerns all of us, it is only in recent times that researchers have been interested in language in relation to society. As attitudes cannot be directly observed, researches have to infer attitudes through different methods and approaches.

Presently, there are three main approaches in language attitudinal studies. *The direct approach* is conducted by asking respondents directly about their attitudes, either through interviews or questionnaires. *The indirect approach* contains an element of deceit in which the respondents are not aware that their attitudes are being studied, either through *the matched guise technique* or *the verbal guise technique*. In both approaches, respondents listen to recordings of people speaking different varieties. The respondents rate the speakers on traits that belong in two main dimensions: the status dimension and the social attractiveness dimension. Traits belonging in the status dimension are related to correctness, education, and sophistication, whereas the social attractiveness dimension contains traits such as sympathy, pleasantness, and hospitality. The third main approach is what is known as *societal treatment*

*studies*, where language attitudes are studied through the use of public sources. Another direct approach in language attitudinal studies is often used within the field of folklinguistics. Researchers of *perceptual dialectology* are interested in lay people's own perceptions, terminology, and definitions, which might then reveal their language attitudes (McKenzie 2010: 44). All these methods have their strengths as well as their weaknesses, and one way of solving the possible problems that may occur is to combine methods when conducting a study. The methods of attitudinal studies will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

A high number of attitudinal studies have been conducted in Britain, particularly in the 1970s and '80s (cf. Cheyne 1970, Giles 1970, Giles 1971, Milroy & McClenaghan, Giles & Sassoon 1983, Giles et al. 1981, Giles & Coupland 1991). Early on, a clear pattern emerged from the results. Studies conducted in Britain from the 1970s and onward showed that RP was always rated on top, especially in the status dimension, and urban varieties, such as Cockney and the Birmingham accent were rated the lowest. Rural and regional varieties such as West Country and Scottish English were usually rated low in the status dimension, but tended to score highly on traits categorized in the social attractiveness dimension. In short, speakers of rural varieties were deemed to be uneducated, but friendly, while RP speakers were regarded as sophisticated, but unsympathetic. Contemporary American studies show similar results, although without the clear division between rural and urban varieties. The standard American variety, General American (GA) is normally rated the highest in both dimensions, whereas the urban New York accent and the rural Southern accent are singled out as the most negatively evaluated (cf. e.g. Hewitt 1971, Labov 2001). The systematic distinction between standard and non-standard varieties of English has appeared in studies conducted in multiple regions (McKenzie 2010: 54). Hiraga's study showed that RP and GA were rated the highest, the rural varieties in the middle, and the urban varieties at the bottom (Hiraga 2005: 298). Coupland and Bishop's BBC Voices online study followed the same pattern, with standard varieties rated higher than non-standard ones, as did a study conducted by Ladegaard (Coupland & Bishop 2007: 79, Ladegaard 1998: 258).

Although most language attitudinal studies have been concerned with native speaker attitudes of language, the insights of non-native speakers are also of importance in sociolinguistics (McKenzie 2010: 37). Ladegaard's study is one example where the respondents were non-native speakers of the language varieties in question; they were Danish students. Despite this, the Danish respondents reproduced native stereotypes, even when they were not able to recognize the variety they were describing; Australian English, for example, was labelled as laid-back and easy-going (Ladegaard 1998: 261). As the Danish respondents

are not part of the same English language community, the stereotypical views of the varieties must have come from somewhere else, most likely the media (ibid: 265). Although there is no real evidence that the media influence the increase or decline of the usage of certain varieties, the media, among others, do promote attitudes regarding certain varieties by advocating “a consciousness of the standard” (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 25). By portraying characters as stereotypes the media teach the audience “to associate specific characters and life styles with specific social groups, by means of language variation” (Lippi-Green 1997: 85).

One change that has emerged in newer studies is the rise of General American. Although the results from Ladegaard’s study showed otherwise (Ladegaard 1998: 265), a study conducted by Bayard et al. in 2001 found that GA seems to be replacing RP as the most prestigious, or preferred variety. (Bayard et al. 2001: 22). An explanation for this might be the globalization of the media, wherein American media are in the forefront.

Much of the language attitude research has been criticized because of its tendency to “assume a homogeneity in attitudes within the observed speech community” (McKenzie 2010: 58). Studies have not taken into account that various factors such as sex, ethnicity, age, or class might have had an influence on the attitudes towards the objects studied. Other sociolinguistic studies have shown that societal determinants play a role in language variation and change. For instance, younger speakers are in the forefront when using new features, and female speakers tend to use variables that are regarded as more standard and prestigious and/or less stigmatized (cf. Labov 1990, Milroy et al. 1994, Watt 2002, Gordon 2006, Irwin & Nagy 2007, Fridland 2003). This latter pattern often referred to as *the sex/prestige pattern* (Hudson 1996: 193), means that women “produce on average linguistic forms which more closely approach those of the standard language or have higher prestige than those produced by men” (Trudgill 1983: 161). The pattern has also been found in societal treatment studies (Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011).

#### 2.1.4 Previous societal treatment studies

The societal treatment approach is a method in linguistic attitudinal studies that according to Garrett has tended to be ignored (Garrett 2010: 51). These studies are, however, very useful when it comes to gaining insight into how linguistic varieties are treated by and in society, and to “the social meanings and stereotypical associations of language varieties and languages” (ibid).

One of the more famous societal treatment studies is Lippi-Green's 1997 discussion of the use of accents in Disney films. Her study revealed, amongst other things, that the majority of positive characters spoke American English, and that there was an overrepresentation of foreign-accented characters in the negative character category (Lippi-Green 1997: 90). Another interesting finding was the use of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the films; there were no 'humanoid' characters speaking this variety. Lippi-Green argues that these correlations contribute to strengthening the existing stereotypes in the US of people with an African-American background (ibid: 95). Sønnesyn's 2011 master thesis, a continuation of Lippi-Green's study, aimed to see if there had been any changes in the use of accent in the more recent Disney films. Sønnesyn believed that because of the increase of political correctness over the last decade, one might expect to find a greater variety of accents (Sønnesyn 2011: 19). This, however, was not the case. Sønnesyn's research showed what proved to be an increased use of General American (ibid: 53). Both studies showed more diversity in accent use among male speakers, and a great majority of male characters overall (Lippi-Green 1997: 87, Sønnesyn 2011: 57).

Similar results were found in the 1998 study conducted by Dobrow and Gidney. They analyzed the speech in children's animated television shows. Their findings showed that the majority of the characters were male, British speakers were either "the epitome of refinement and elegance" or "the embodiment of effete evil", as well as an underrepresentation of non-standard varieties among "the good guys" (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 116-117).

O'Cassidy's study of film characters from West Virginia showed that regionally accented characters were more likely to be portrayed in a stereotypic manner (O'Cassidy 2005: 85). These stereotypes were both negative and positive; the West-Virginians were often poor and uneducated, with low paying jobs, yet they were often portrayed as people with good, decent, and wholesome qualities (ibid: 81-86).

The results of societal treatment studies reflect the findings from other, more traditional, attitudinal studies. The studies indicate that a hierarchy exists among language varieties, from which some varieties benefit.

## **2.2 Changes in society**

One of the hypotheses of the present thesis is that there will be a marked difference between the older and the newer sitcoms. One expected difference is how the varieties are distributed,



in that a larger display of varieties will be found in newer sitcoms. This will also be reflected with female characters in newer sitcoms. One of the reasons for this assumption is based on an increased awareness of *political correctness*. It is reasonable to assume that as a result of democratization, sitcoms have become more concerned with being political correct, especially in terms of gender and ethnicity, as well as language. This entails that an increased acceptance of non-standard varieties will occur in the newer sitcoms, and a decrease of stereotypical use of these accents, may have taken place.

It is evident that sitcoms have changed and developed over the years. In older sitcoms, certain words and topics were either only hinted at, or they were consistently steered clear of. For example, when the character Lucy, from *I Love Lucy*, became pregnant, the creators of the show made sure that this was announced as discreetly as possible. The word “pregnant” was never said out loud, and to avoid focus of any sexual behaviour, Ricky and Lucy’s beds were pushed apart (Edwards 2011: 11). A pregnancy would not have been an issue in newer sitcoms. Today, most topics are openly discussed and portrayed on the television screen, and in a relatively short period of time “it has become possible in American culture [...] to see or hear [formerly regarded] obscene words in films, television, radio, and literature” (Andrews 1996: 396). However, despite an increased accept of unconventional topics, political correctness is a phenomenon that affects the media. Films and television shows may be accused of “rewrite[ing] history” so that the content will not offend anyone (Monaco 2000: 560). However, if the fixation on political correctness is exaggerated, a loss of “a sense of balance [...] or a sense of humor [*sic*]” may occur (Monaco 2000: 560). If sitcoms are too concerned with appearing politically correct, their goal to be entertaining may be lost.

### **2.3 The media**

The media, or more specifically the television and film industries have become “a major avenue of contact to the world outside our homes and communities” (Lippi-Green 1997: 81). This entails that TV programs, perhaps more than film, are the main source of information regarding the outside world. For some, these means of communication may even provide the “main cultural format for the discovery and *description* of our national identity (Monaco 2000: 262, my emphasis). As language and identity are closely related, this implies that the media provide information on not only the world, but on the audience’s own identities, they are “linguistic mirrors” (Bauer & Trudgill 1998: 18).

### 2.3.1 The sitcom

Situational comedies, or *sitcoms* were introduced to the TV-screen in the 1940s and early 1950s. A sitcom is a genre of television whose origins lie in theatre, music halls, vaudeville, and radio. Older sitcoms often contain scenes where the actors, often, former stage performers themselves, act out a musical number in the middle of an episode.

The standard structure of the sitcom was well established in the medium of radio, and with the spread of the home television set, there was an opportunity to continue the success on the television screen. Several attempts were made, with little or no success, and it was not until 1951 with the appearance of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in *I Love Lucy* that great success was achieved: “*Lucy* seemed to have achieved what all prior programs had only been groping toward” (Jones 1993: 69).

One of the advantages of studying sitcoms is that the established format has changed little over the years; sitcoms are “remarkably stable” (Mills 2004: 63). Traditionally, sitcoms are produced in a rather fixed format. The episode is filmed on a stage in front of a live studio audience, which provide a laugh track. Sitcoms usually have half-hour episodes that are broadcast weekly, although because of the increased use of infomercials, the episodes of today’s sitcoms are usually cut down to 22 minutes (How Stuff Works: 3). In spite of this, many modern sitcoms follow the same traditional structure. Because of this, different shows of this genre are suitable for comparison, even over time.

Sitcoms have little or no series memory. That is to say that the episodes usually do not have an overlapping plot line. Instead, the story for each episode is concluded when the episode ends. This tradition format has changed slightly over the years, as newer sitcoms will often have an overlying story arch that goes over a whole season, even over the entire run of the show. An example of this is the so-called *Ross and Rachel* story from *Friends*. Already in the very first episode a hint of a romantic plot is established. Throughout the series the couple go back and forth on the issue of whether or not they are together, often in a humorous way. In the series finale, the two do end up together, neatly concluding the question of “will-they-or-won’t-they”.

One of the main staples of sitcoms is the “three-headed monster”, that is the use of the multiple-camera technique. This way of filming allows the cameras to focus on different actors simultaneously, as well as record and establish the larger picture, and although the technique had been used before, *I Love Lucy* became known as the first sitcom with the classic sitcom structure. There are, however, sitcoms that are not made using these techniques

and formats. *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Scrubs*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *The Office* are all examples of sitcoms that have disregarded the audience, the sets, and the multi-camera technique. Instead, these sitcoms are made more in the style of a feature film, often filmed on different locations, using a single-camera technique. Some might argue that shows like these do not belong in the sitcom genre, that the sitcom form is so “rigid and easily identifiable that any deviation from it results in a text that then asks to be understood as something else” (Mills 2004: 66). However, shows like these aim to do the same. They are comical, entertaining shows that are aired once a week in half hour slots. Additionally, these sitcoms have been broadcast on television for just as long. *How I Met Your Mother* is an example of a sitcom that combines methods. This show is filmed using the multi-camera technique on a stage, but not in front of an audience. Instead, the edited version of the episode is shown to an audience, thus providing it with a laugh track. The present thesis however, will discuss sitcoms that follow the more classic sitcom structure.

### 2.3.2 Use of stereotypes in sitcoms

As mentioned before, accents are one of the ways of establishing a character. Instead of wasting time and money in explaining the backstory of a character, having them speak in a certain variety will efficiently provide the audience with the information needed. And with language comes attitudes that evoke an “emotional response on stereotypical views” (Slade et al. 2012: 8). The sitcom genre has been criticized for its “simplistic use of stereotypes” (Mills 2004: 63). However, this critique is unjust. Stereotypes are found in all genres of entertainment, cartoons, action films and soap operas. Even more serious genres such as “the socialist realist film” are condemned for their use of stereotyped characters (Seiter 1986: 22).

Sitcoms have also been criticized for its goals to be nothing more than mere entertainment (Mills 2004: 68). But that is what sitcoms are; they are entertainment; “the sitcom’s primary aim is to be funny” (Mills 2009: 5). And in order to be entertaining during their short time slot sitcoms need to “adhere to stereotypes and behave in line with commonly held preconceptions” (Gill 2011: 748). Attitudes found in television are reflections of attitudes found in society: “The portrayal of Southerners as slow and dumb due to accent and dialect [...] is historically grounded in the assumption this stereotype is accurate and acceptable” (Slade et al. 2012: 5).

Traditionally, the main characters of American sitcoms speak with a standard accent.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule; perhaps most notably in the show that started it all, *I Love Lucy*. The character Ricky, Lucy's husband and head of their household, has a distinct Latino accent. But for the most part, non-standard accents are reserved for supporting or guest characters, often with non-standard personality traits to go with them. Well known examples are Maggie Wheeler's character Janice from *Friends*, whose nasal voice qualities only adds to her 'unpleasant New York accent combined with her irritating personality, Edward Hibbert's 'snotty' RP-accented Chesterton from *Frasier*, even the Soup Nazi, portrayed by Larry Thomas in *Seinfeld*. Having a character speak with a distinct variety marks them as "as outsiders" (Gill 2011: 744), and since the media reflect the attitudes of society, one might think assume that society regards speakers of variants other than our own are also regarded as outsiders. Winzenburg, on the other hand, states: "reality is never seen on television comedies" (Winzenburg 2004: 10). Amongst other things, he claims that 90% of TV-marriages experience affairs, versus 10% in the actual married population. Winzenburg also claims that the South is vastly underrepresented in television, whereas in actuality, this region is the most populous of all American regions (Mackun & Wilson 2011: 2). According to Gill, however, the inclusion of language varieties in American television has gone through a change in the last decade (Gill 2011: 753). That even though RP still represents an "old-world snobbishness, arrogance and general snootiness", new ways of incorporating "global English" (ibid: 746) are introduced. Perhaps there will be a change in attitudes as a result of this.

## CHAPTER 3 DATA AND METHOD

The first part of this chapter presents the phonological features of the varieties encountered in the research done for the present study, and describes various approaches in language attitude studies. The next part of the chapter includes discussions of the non-linguistic variables chosen for the study, such as sophistication and gender, before it goes on to describe the sitcoms included. The last part is devoted to the method used in the present study.

### 3.1 Presentation of varieties

Although an in-depth phonological study of the English language is not a part of the present thesis, a clear knowledge of the salient linguistic features of certain varieties is necessary. The varieties included are the ones that are relevant to the study, and the features included are diagnostic for each variety. The various accent categories have intentionally been made quite broad, as being too detailed would not add anything to the analysis. Consequently, there is variation within each category, and this is especially evident with regard to the New York accent. The New York English category includes characters that speak in a very broad and marked accent, as well as characters with a less distinct and marked New York accent. There is also considerable variation found with General American. Some characters speak a more sophisticated, or cultivated variety of General American. Despite the fact that some characters are found to speak in a more distinct manner than others, they may still be classified as speaking same variety.

Even though the present study categorizes characters based on their pronunciations of vowels and consonants, I have at times included certain non-segmental features as well. The goal of the present thesis is to see which variety the actor is attempting to represent, although this attempt may not always be authentic. What is interesting, however, is to investigate the way sitcoms *attempt* to manipulate language as a tool in the construction of characters” (Lippi-Green 1997: 83, original emphasis). Whether the characters are completely successful in their portrayal is less interesting. Unless the audience consists of native speakers of said variety, “they will be satisfied with something that is not authentic in every detail, providing only that it conforms to the mental stereotype which they have already formed about the accent in question” (Wells 1982: 33). In instances where an accent is not authentic, non-

segmental features such as lexical items and syntactic structures are sometimes included in order to conclude which variety is being portrayed.

Before conducting the study, I was prepared to encounter all possible varieties of English, but in practice, the number of varieties did not turn out to be great. In total, I came across nine varieties, four of which were American. These are General American, New York English, Southern American English, and African-American Vernacular English. With the exception of foreign accented speakers of English, the only other region represented in the present study was the British Isles.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the characters with a British English accent spoke Received Pronunciation, but there were also characters that spoke Irish English, Northern British English, and London English. The linguistic features included are based on the descriptions found in Wells 1982, Trudgill and Hannah 2008, and Thomas 2007. The varieties are represented in detail in the section below.

### 3.1.1 General American

General American (GA) is the label given to the standard variety of American English pronunciation. According to Wells, GA does not show any “marked eastern or southern characteristics”, in other words, it does not have any regional, or social for that matter, traits (Wells 1982: 470). GA is the most spoken variety of English in North America, and as it is non-regional, it is spoken throughout the continent (ibid: 118). There are some controversies regarding the name *General American*, as in practice, it is not a “single unified accent” (ibid: 470). There are regional differences within GA, which, considering the extensive region it does cover is “hardly surprising” (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 47). For the present thesis, however, GA will be considered as a one category, as it would be too extensive to go into the details of these variations.

As GA is considered to be the standard variety of American English, it is, next to RP, one of the varieties taught to non-native learners of English. Perhaps the most salient feature of GA is its rhoticity. Unlike non-rhotic<sup>3</sup> varieties, the phoneme /r/ is produced in all phonological environments, including in non-prevocalic settings. The quality of /t/ is another diagnostic feature of GA. In intervocalic position, /t/ is realized as voiced tapped [ɾ], making

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<sup>2</sup> For the present study, I decided to classify Irish English as a regional British variety.

<sup>3</sup> Non-rhotic varieties do not produce /r/ in non-prevocalic environments.

/t/ and /d/ sound very similar, if not identical. For instance, words such as *ladder* and *latter* become homophones: [læɾər] (Wells 1982: 249). Another salient feature of GA is the realization of /l/, which generally tends to be produced as ‘dark’ velarized [ɫ] in all positions. The vowel in the lexical set<sup>4</sup> BATH is a front open vowel /æ/: *dance* /dæns/. The vowel in LOT is a long, back, open, unrounded /ɑ:/: *hot* /hɑ:t/. The GOAT diphthong /oʊ/ has a close-mid, back rounded starting point: *moat* /moʊt/.

As discussed earlier, variation within GA does occur. This entails that the use of non-prevocalic /r/, and voiced /t/, may vary, as well as an overall increased use of phonemic reduction. Characters who have these features, but do not display any regional features as well, will be classified as having a GA accent.

### 3.1.2 New York English

With over 8 million citizens, the city of New York is one of the largest cities in the western hemisphere. It also comes with a distinct accent, which “differs from others more sharply than does any other North American regional accent” (Wells 1982:501).

One of the things that separate the New York accent from other American regional accents is the sharp social stratification of its pronunciation patterns. Unlike in Britain, social-class differences in accents are “relatively unimportant” in North America (ibid: 502). In New York, however, there is a clear correlation between phonetic realization and social status. No other city in America “evokes such disapproval” in regard to speech (ibid). This condemnation comes from outsiders, but is also expressed by native speakers of the New York accent. Historically, the New York accent was non-rhotic, a feature, which in the US is highly stigmatized. Under the influence from GA, however, the restoration of /r/ is “well under way”, especially among higher social class groups (ibid: 506). In general, upper social class speakers have “fewer local features” than lower social class speakers (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 52).

The absence of non-prevocalic /r/ is only one out of several features present in the New York accent that are stigmatized. Another feature is TH-stopping, a feature not commonly found in “educated speech” (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 53). The fricatives /θ/ and

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<sup>4</sup>See Wells (1982: 127–ff)

/ð/ are produced as dental stops, which makes words such as *thin* and *that* be pronounced as [t̪ɪn] and [d̪æt]. Also a highly stigmatized feature is the use of the front-closing diphthong [ɜɪ] in NURSE words: *bird*, *thirst* [bɜɪd], [θɜɪst]. This feature is today only associated with the lower class.

Another salient vowel feature of the New York variety is the extensive use of centring diphthongs in the lexical sets NEAR [ɪə], SQUARE [eə], CURE [ʊə], PALM and START [ɑə], and THOUGHT, CLOTH, NORTH, and FORCE [ɔə]. The centring diphthongs occur in rhotic as well as non-rhotic speech: *square*, *north* [skweə], [nɔəθ].

The last characteristic vowel feature is the raising of the BATH and TRAP vowel. In certain phonetic environments the vowel /æ/ is raised and diphthongized to: [eə], *cab*, *lamp* [keəb], [leəmp].

### 3.1.3 Southern American English

The South is perhaps the most distinct speech region of the United States. Studies conducted by folklinguists show that the majority of respondents are able to distinguish the South as linguistically different (Garrett 2010: 180–ff). Although there is a wide selection of regional variation within the South, only the major features will be presented here.

Traditionally, southern speech is non-rhotic, but, as with the New York accent, it has become variably rhotic. The vowel system of the southern variety has many differences compared to GA. One is the monophthongization of the PRICE vowel, in words such as *time* and *pie*: [ta:m] and [pa:]. In certain phonetic contexts, the phenomenon known as “southern breaking” occurs. The vowels /ɪ/, /e/, and /æ/ take a schwa offglide, turning the monophthongs of KIT, DRESS and TRAP in words such as *kid*, *bed* and *step* into: [kiəd], [bæəd] and [stɛəp] (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 47). Another characteristic vowel feature is the diphthongization in BATH and TRAP words. In certain phonetic environments, /æ/ in words such as *dance* and *half* is produced as the front closing [æɪ]: [dæɪns] and [hæɪf].

Before nasals, the vowel in DRESS is raised, which means that /e/ is realized as the more close [ɪ], and *pen* is pronounced as *pin*: [pɪn]. STRUT raising entails the same principle; the open central /ʌ/ is realized as a mid central [ɜ], resulting in the word *love* being



pronounced as ‘luv’: [lʌv]

### 3.1.4 African-American Vernacular English

African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a social, rather than a regional language variety. As the name AAVE implies, this variety is spoken by African-Americans, and it is found all over the country, not only in one speech region. Its origins lie in the rural South, where the majority of the African-American population resided. During the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Great Migration occurred, which entailed that large groups of AAVE speakers moved to urban areas across the US, thereby spreading the variety (Thomas 2007: 451–452).

AAVE is perhaps the most stigmatized language variety in the United States (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 159). Whether AAVE could be regarded as an English variety of its own, or merely a variation of Southern American English has been a heated discussion for some time (Wells 1982: 554–556).

The vowel system of AAVE can be described as similar to the system found in Southern American English, so it will not be discussed in detail here. Regarding consonants, AAVE is categorized by frequent use of phonological reduction. For instance, AAVE is a non-rhotic variety, even sometimes omitting intervocalic /r/ in some extreme cases. Vocalisation of non-prevocalic /l/ occurs, creating pronunciations such as /fi:ʊ/ or /fi:ə/ for *feel*. Another consonant feature of AAVE is the stopping or fronting of /θ/ and /ð/; making *brother* and *nothing* be realized as /brʌvə/ and /nʌtɪn/. Perhaps the most unique consonant feature of AAVE is what is known as *consonant cluster reduction*. Words such as *fifty* and *past*, are realized as *fiddy*, and *pas*’.

Although the present study is primarily concerned with segmental features, I feel it is important to mention some non-segmental features of AAVE, as they are some of the more distinct features of the variety. Some features diagnostic of AAVE are multiple negation: *I didn’t do nothing*, the invariant *be*: *We be hungry all the time*, copula deletion: *We hungry right now*, and the use of *ain’t* instead of *didn’t*: *He ain’t do it* (Thomas 2007:450).

### 3.1.5 Received Pronunciation

Received Pronunciation (RP) is the variety that “enjoys the highest overt prestige in England” (Wells 1982: 117). Even though its origins can be traced to London, RP is today not associated with any regional area, but is spoken throughout the country (Hughes et al.: 2012: 3). Despite the fact that only three to five per cent of the English population speak RP, it has, alongside GA, become the main variety taught to foreign learners of English (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 5). While RP is not a regional linguistic variety, it is a social variety, belonging to “those at the upper reaches of the social scale” (Hughes et al. 2012: 3).

RP is non-rhotic, that is, /r/ is not realized in words such as *car* or *park*: /kɑ:/ and /pɑ:k/. Another feature of RP is the realization of /l/. Before vowels, /l/ is realized as a “clear” [l], whereas in all other contexts it is a “dark” velarized [ɫ]. The BATH vowel of RP is produced as an open back unrounded /ɑ:/: *dance* /dɑ:ns/. In LOT words, the vowel is a short open back rounded /ɒ/: *not* /nɒt/. The GOAT vowel in RP differs from GA, with its central unrounded starting point /əʊ/: [gəʊt].

### 3.1.6 London English

Since London is the capital of Great Britain, as well as the largest city, it has become regarded as the “linguistic centre of gravity” of the country (Wells 1982: 301). Various levels of society, both the higher and lower classes, have contributed in forming the language history of London. The educated classes of London, including the royal family, helped build the foundation of Standard English, including RP. In more recent times, the working-class accent of London, more specifically Cockney, is “the most influential source of phonological innovation in England”, and an increased use of features that stem from London English are now found in other varieties (ibid).

One of the salient features of London English is T-glottalling, where intervocalic /t/ is replaced with the glottal stop [ʔ]: *butter* [bʌʔə]. H-dropping entails the loss of /h/, so that words such as *hammer* and *behave* are pronounced [æmə] and [biæv]. Another consonant feature of London English is the vocalisation of non-prevocalic /l/, turning the consonant into a vowel, so that *milk* is realized as [mɪʊk]. Another feature of London English is TH-fronting.

This means that the dental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ are fronted and realized as /v/ and /f/: *Three, breathe* [fri:] and [bri:v] (Wells 1982: 328). Consistent to other British varieties, London English is non-rhotic.

The vowel system of London English differs from RP mainly in two ways. The first is a shift in the starting points of the vowel of FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, GOAT, and MOUTH. Instead of /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, and /aʊ/, these vowels are realized as /æɪ/, /aɪ/, /oɪ/, /ʌʊ/, and /æʊ/. The second is a diphthonging in FLEECE and GOOSE vowels. While in RP the vowels are monophthongs, /i:/ and /u:/, in London English, the vowels are realized as [əi] and [əu]: *Be, do* [bəi], [dəu].

### 3.1.7 Irish English

Ireland's language history has been influenced from three different sources: England, Scotland, as well as the "indigenous Irish language itself" (Wells 1982: 417). Today, the majority of the population speak English as their main language, and the present thesis is concerned with the variety that is Irish English.

The vowels in FACE and GOAT are monophthongs, pronounced as a long close-mid front /e:/ and a long close-mid back /o:/, respectively: *trace, smoke* /tre:s/, /smo:k/.

The BATH vowel is usually a long, front /a:/: *grass* [gra:s] This also applies to the vowel in PALM and START words, so that words such as *father* and *bath* are pronounced as /fa:ðər/ and /ba:θ/. One of the most characteristic vowel features of Irish English is vowel in the lexical set PRICE. Typically, it is realized with a rounded starting point [ɔɪ]: *right* [rɔɪt].

Another vowel feature of Irish English is variation in the NURSE vowel. Depending on the spelling, the vowel can be pronounced with a back or central starting-point [ʌ] in words such as *first* and *hurt*: [fʌrst] and [hʌrt], or with a front starting-point [ɛ] in words like *perch*: [pɛrtʃ] (Wells 1982: 421). The final diagnostic vowel feature of Irish English is the quality of the vowel in LOT, CLOTH, THOUGHT, and NORTH words, which is often unrounded: /a:/: *hot* [hɑ:t].

The Irish variety is rhotic, i.e. /r/ is produced in all phonetic environments. As found in New York English, the two dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ can be realized as dental stops, [t̪]

and [d], which makes words such as *thought* realized as [tɑ:t] (Wells 1982:428). In Irish English /l/ is generally realized as a “clear” [l̥] in all contexts.

### 3.1.8 Northern British English

England can linguistically be divided into two equal parts, the south and the north. There are several marked differences between varieties belonging to the northern part, and the differences become sharper “the further north one goes” (Wells 1982: 351). For the present thesis, however, the North will be regarded as one speech region, as these variations are likely not very important in American sitcoms; if a character has a Northern accent, it is probably safe to assume that whether they are from Liverpool or Newcastle is irrelevant.

The northern varieties are, for the most part, non-rhotic, and it is in the vowel system we find the more distinct differences that set the northern varieties apart from the southern ones. One is the absence of the split between the STRUT vowel /ʌ/ and the FOOT vowel /ʊ/. Typically, these two merge together, and /ʊ/ is used in both sets, which entails that *bus* is pronounced as /bʊs/ (Wells 1982: 351). As with Irish English, the vowels in FACE and GOAT are realized as monophthongs: /e:/ and /o:/. Another similarity with Irish English is the fronting of the vowel in BATH words, although in Northern British English, the vowel is short instead of long.

### 3.1.9 English with a foreign accent

This category covers all English varieties that are foreign-accented. It would be difficult, if not impossible to establish a set vowel and consonant system for foreign-accented English as this could include varieties spanning from Hispanic accented English to Chinese accented English. All characters with identifiable foreign pronunciations of English are classified as foreign-accented.

### 3.2 Methods in language attitudes studies

There are three main approaches in language attitudes studies: the direct approach, the indirect approach, and societal treatment studies. The various approaches use different methods when investigating attitudes of language varieties, and they all have their advantages as well as drawbacks. The various approaches and methods are presented and discussed in detail below.

#### 3.2.1 The direct approach

The direct approach is traditionally conducted either through interviews or questionnaires. The respondents are asked directly about their thoughts and feelings towards various linguistic varieties, and are encouraged to explicitly verbalize their attitudes. The respondents usually answer without hearing the various accents, in other words, they only relate to labels, e.g. *Australian English*, *General American*, and *Oxford English*. This approach is straightforward and very efficient. However, there are several weaknesses that one must be aware of. One is the social desirability bias; the respondents may not answer truthfully in order to appear more politically correct. Also, respondents may interpret the questions as a “test of their knowledge of the ‘correct’ pronunciation”, and alter their answers to seem more intelligent (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 16). Another weakness is the acquiescence bias, where based on how the questions are formulated, the respondents’ answers may vary in relation to what they believe the interviewer is looking for. The results may also be affected by what is known as the *interviewer’s paradox* (McKenzie 2010: 43). The mere presence of the interviewer may skew the results; some participants will never be completely honest while there is someone interviewing them face-to-face (Garrett 2010: 37–46). Another factor is the risk of slanted or loaded questions and labels. The researcher must take great care when choosing and formulating the questions as to best avoid certain labels that contain certain connotations. One way of reducing the risk of these weaknesses is to ensure the respondents complete anonymity. Despite this, however, the validity of the data collected from these kinds of studies, might always be questioned (McKenzie 2010: 43).

Another kind of direct approach comes from the field of folklinguistics. The approach, known as *perceptual dialectology*, has an aim to “broaden the scope of language attitude research by studying anecdotal accounts” (ibid: 44). The idea was that this approach would

offer a more “contextualised explanation of language attitudes” (ibid) than other structured and rigid tools used in both direct and indirect approaches (Garrett 2010: 179). Different techniques are used by folklinguists; some studies focus on discourse, while others use different types of map tasks where respondents are given blank maps in which they are asked to fill in and label various speech regions using their own words (McKenzie 2010: 180). The results from these kinds of studies provide insight into “what and where dialect regions actually exist in people’s minds”, as well as how these perceptions differ from the maps of dialectologists (ibid: 183). Additionally, the names and labels given by the respondents, both in map tasks as well as open-ended questionnaires, provide insight to lay people’s attitudes towards language varieties, the areas where these varieties are spoken, as well as the people who live there.

Initially, the direct approach seems simple when it comes to gaining insight into overt language attitudes, but as discussed, there are obvious downsides to this method. Nevertheless, the results produced in these studies are interesting, whether the respondents answer truthfully or not.

### 3.2.2 The indirect approach

The indirect approach is called “indirect” because the respondents are not made explicitly aware of what is actually being measured (Garrett 2010: 41). There are two main techniques when it comes to the indirect approach in attitudinal language studies, and the techniques used can be described as “subtle, even deceptive” (ibid). Unlike the direct approach, these techniques are less vulnerable to social desirability bias, and are used to gain access to more “private attitudes” (ibid: 57).

One of the techniques used is *the matched guise technique*, which has been very popular since its introduction. This has led to a large number of studies, and by extension contributed greatly to an increased understanding of language attitudes. Additionally, the rigorous design of the matched guise techniques allows for a “fair degree of comparability of findings” (Garrett 2010: 57). In a matched guise study, respondents listen to a recording of a person, often a trained actor, or a bi-, or tri-accentual speaker, who reads a neutral text multiple times. The speaker reads the text using different accents, and takes great care to use the same rate, voice, pitch, and intonation patterns. This way, the only difference is the accents, and the respondents will (hopefully) react to the varieties themselves, and not the

person speaking. Perhaps the biggest objection to this method is the issue of authenticity, whether one speaker is able to produce several varieties in a believable way. Moreover, certain varieties co-vary with non-segmental features; they may have different intonation patterns than others, and the recordings may come off as sounding fake if the same intonation is used for each accent (Garrett 2010:5).

The other main indirect approach is *the verbal guise technique*. Instead of one reader imitating several varieties, there are multiple native speaking readers, who either read the same text, or talk shortly about a set topic. Here, the authenticity issue is non-existent, as the speakers use their native variety. The recordings may also be considered to be more natural, as the speakers may talk freely using spontaneous speech. The downside to this approach, however, is that respondents' ratings may be coloured by differences in the speakers' voice qualities.

In both methods the respondents are presented with rating scales and are asked to evaluate the speakers according to a number of features and characteristics, such as pleasantness, correctness and intelligence. These traits can be further categorized into dimensions, two of which seem to have emerged as the most salient ones, namely *the status dimension* and *the social attractiveness dimension*. The status, or prestige dimension includes traits associated with overt prestige. For example, qualities such as politeness, intelligence, wealth, and correctness belong in the status dimension. The social attractiveness dimension, on the other hand, consists of more overtly prestigious qualities. Traits included are sympathy, honesty, and generosity.

### 3.2.3 Societal treatment study

The most indirect and subtle approach in language attitudes studies is the societal treatment study. This approach looks at how linguistic varieties are treated by and in society, and involves analyses of the content of public sources like films, advertisements, TV shows, etiquette books, and other public documents such as government or educational policy documents with their views of "languages in school systems" (Garrett 2010: 142). Even studies of the linguistic landscape, i.e. road signs, street and place names, billboards etc., can provide insights into "the values and stereotypical associations" of linguistic varieties (ibid). For example, studies of television commercials have shown that foreign languages were strategically selected because of the positive connotations associated with the varieties (ibid:

143). Studies of signs in countries with multiple official languages, such as Belgium and Canada, revealed an uneven distribution of the varieties, as well as systematic differences in placement and material quality (ibid: 155), which reflect differences in the status of the languages.

One major drawback of the societal treatment approach is that the researcher has to make assumptions. As researchers do not have access to the thoughts or feelings of the creators of the data studied, they observe and register how the language varieties are “treated”. There has not been a lot of research in this field, as societal treatment studies have to some degree been overlooked, as well as viewed as “somewhat informal” (Garrett 2010: 51). Some may argue that these types of studies are more “preliminary to more rigorously designed surveys” (ibid). However, research does show that the work done in this field is “of immense importance in its own right” (ibid). Studies of this kind have revealed that there are systematic uses of stereotypes in society, as well as determined that the media have reflected, perpetuated, and perhaps even created language attitudes. Even though this is difficult to measure, societal treatment studies provide us with facts, quantifiable data, and contribute to creating awareness around the issue. By doing so, one might assume that increased awareness could lead to changes in behaviour, which in turn, could lead to a change in attitudes.

Although she does not explicitly refer to her study as a societal treatment study, Lippi-Green’s research on Disney films can be categorized as such. Her research used public sources, more specifically Disney films, and the discussions are concerned with the use of English varieties in the films. Lippi-Green’s research shows that there is a systematic correlation between accent type and social categories, such as gender, ethnicity, and national origin (Lippi-Green 1997: 101). In her discussion, Lippi-Green claims that children “learn from the entertainment industry [...] to be comfortable with *same* and to be wary about *other*” (Lippi-Green 1997: 103, original emphasis). There is no way of documenting that children actually learn, and by extension gain certain attitudes from the media. However, by watching these films, children are certainly exposed to these attitudes.

Researching language attitudes is always challenging, and every method has its limitations. Combining methods is one way of solving this. Researchers might choose to combine methods in order to see how the methods might “complement each other in order to provide more certainty” (McKenzie 2010: 52). Although studies in this field will always be “partially convincing” (Garrett 2010: 59), they do provide insight, facts, and create awareness around language attitudes.



### 3.3 The selection of sitcoms

In the present study six sitcoms were chosen based on their format and popularity. All the shows were at some point among the top 10 viewed shows on the Nielsen ratings (TV Ratings). The sitcoms were made using the multiple-camera technique, and were filmed on stage in front of an audience. Two time periods were represented, in which both periods covered two decades. Three sitcoms were broadcast during the 1950s and '60s. These are *I Love Lucy*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *The Danny Thomas Show*. The remaining three sitcoms were broadcast during the 1990s into the 2000s. These include *Friends*, *Frasier*, and *Seinfeld*.

All of the shows selected are so-called “white” sitcoms, i.e. the series consist of an “overwhelmingly White cast” (Lotz 2005: 140). This, however, is somewhat of a coincidence as the shows were chosen based on their popularity. The present study focuses on a small selection of episodes from each show. Ten episodes were chosen, more or less randomly, from approximately one of the “middle” seasons, as it often takes some time for the sitcoms and the cast to become established and known to the audience.

All of the sitcoms included are built around similar themes. The older sitcoms centre on a married couple, as well as some of their close friends. The majority of the episodes are divided between the couple’s home and the workplace of the husband (all of the married women are homemakers). The plots are filled with comical incidents, as well as arguments and intrigues. The main themes found in newer sitcoms differ slightly from the older ones. The main difference is found in the main cast. The majority of the main characters are single, although a large part of the stories revolve around the search for the ideal partner. Similarly to the older sitcoms, the stories are often set in the homes and workplace of the characters. However, an additional element has been added; the characters favourite place to hangout is heavily featured in every episode. For the newer sitcoms included, this place is either a diner or a coffee shop.

*I Love Lucy* was an immensely popular CBS television sitcom. For four out of six seasons, the sitcom was the highest rated show in the United States, and it was the first ever sitcom to be number one on the Nielsen ratings (Museum of Broadcast Communications). The original show was broadcast from 1951 to 1957, with several “specials” airing for three more years. The main cast consisted of Lucille Ball, playing the title character, *Lucy*, her real-life husband Desi Arnaz, who played her TV-husband and nightclub entertainer *Ricky*, as well as

Vivian Vance and William Frawley, who portrayed their neighbours and friends *Ethel* and *Fred Mertz*.

*The Danny Thomas Show*, known as *Make Room for Daddy* during the first three seasons, is a television sitcom that ran from 1953 to 1957 on ABC and from 1957 to 1964 on CBS. The show revolves around nightclub entertainer *Danny Williams*, played by Danny Thomas, and his wife *Kathy*, who was portrayed by Marjorie Lord, as well as their three children: *Terry*, *Rusty*, and *Linda*, played by Sherry Jackson, Rusty Hamer, and Angela Cartwright.

Another hit CBS show was *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. It aired from 1961 to 1966, starring Dick Van Dyke, who played comedy show writer *Rob*, and Mary Tyler Moore, who portrayed his wife *Laura*, and Rose Marie and Morey Amsterdam, who played the parts of Rob's co-workers *Sally* and *Buddy*.

The NBS show *Seinfeld* is one of the most popular sitcoms of all time (TV Ratings). The show was broadcast from 1989–1998, and focuses on stand-up comedian *Jerry* (Jerry Seinfeld), and his friends *George*, *Elaine*, and *Kramer*, played by Jason Alexander, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Michael Richards, respectively.

Another NBC sitcom is *Frasier*. The show, renowned for being one of the most popular spin-offs of all time, was broadcast for 11 years, from 1993 to 2004. The show revolves around psychiatrist *Frasier Crane*, played by Kelsey Grammer, his brother and father *Niles* and *Martin*, who were portrayed by David Hyde Pierce and John Mahoney, respectively, as well as Martin's live-in healthcare worker *Daphne*, played by Jane Leeves, and Frasier's producer *Roz*, portrayed by Peri Gilpin.

The final sitcom included is *Friends*. This show was broadcast on NBC between 1994 and 2004. The main plot revolves around six friends in their struggles to find love, their careers, and their friendships. The main characters are the siblings *Monica* and *Ross*, played by Courteney Cox and David Schwimmer, Monica's childhood friend *Rachel* and Ross' college roommate *Chandler*, portrayed by Jennifer Aniston and Matthew Perry, and finally Lisa Kudrow's characters *Phoebe*, Monica's former roommate, and *Joey*, Chandler's current roommate, portrayed by Matt LeBlanc.

### **3.4 Non-linguistic variables**

The aim of the study is not only to measure the distribution of English varieties in American

sitcoms, but also to investigate whether there is a systematic correlation between certain character traits and certain language varieties. In order to see if such a pattern exists, certain non-linguistic variables needed to be established.

### 3.4.1 Character roles

Every character included was labelled based on their role and importance to the plot of each episode. Initially, characters were classified into three groups; *main characters*, *guest characters*, and *minor characters*. However, while collecting the data, I realized that the category guest character would become too extensive, and would incorporate various characters that did not belong together in the same group. Another character role was added, namely *supporting characters*. Traditionally there are fewer main characters compared to peripheral characters. This is expected to occur in the present study, as well.

In order to be classified as a main character, the person has to be present in every episode. The one exception to this rule is the character Terry in *The Danny Thomas Show*. Although, she was not present in every episode, her role was still deemed important enough to be classified as a main character. Examples of main characters are Chandler and Rachel from *Friends*, Rob and Sally from *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and Jerry and Elaine from *Seinfeld*.

Supporting characters appear on the show on a regular basis, either in multiple episodes in one season, or in multiple episodes spanning over several seasons. These characters are often relatives, friends, or co-workers of the main characters. Examples of supporting characters include Estelle, Joey's agent from *Friends*, Lucy's mother Mrs. McGillicuddy, from *I Love Lucy*, and Chesterton, Frasier's British colleague from *Frasier*.

Guest characters are people who appear, mainly, in only one episode, but play an important role to the plot of the episode. Guest characters can be everything from a distant relative who has come to visit, or a complete stranger that the main characters meet for the first time. Characters such as Larry, Phoebe's love interest in *Friends*, or Derek Campbell, the British Shakespearian actor from *The Danny Thomas Show* are both examples of guest characters.

The most peripheral character role is the minor characters group. Characters belonging to this category are relatively unimportant to the storyline, but they speak enough so that their accents can be identified. Often they appear in only one scene, not even always interacting with one of the main characters, and many of them are not mentioned by name. Examples of

minor characters are the policewoman who gives Roz a citation for jaywalking in *Frasier*, and the lifeguard in *I Love Lucy*.

### 3.4.2 Gender

The present study is also concerned with gender, as previous studies have shown that differences between males and females are very common. First, the present thesis aim to test the formerly discussed *sex/prestige pattern*, i.e. to see if female characters “use high-prestige standard variants more often” than male characters (Hudson 1996: 193). Second, I intend to see if there is a balanced distribution of character roles, as well as a balanced distribution of gender in regard to sophistication and likability.

### 3.4.3 Sophistication

A part of the present study is to see if certain language varieties correlate with certain personality traits, the first of which is *sophistication*. All the characters, with the exception of some minor characters, were labelled as either sophisticated or unsophisticated. In order to be classified as sophisticated, characters would have to appear as educated, polite, intelligent, refined, snobbish, and generous. Several characters did not have any traits that made them stand out in reference to the abovementioned traits; in other words, they appeared to be “normal”. Characters like these were also classified as sophisticated, as it was clear that they were not unsophisticated. In order to be classified as unsophisticated, the characters would have traits opposite to the ones mentioned, i.e. unintelligence, selfishness, clumsiness, lack of education, rudeness, and crudity.

Both categories are broad and include characters who in other situations would perhaps not been regarded as similar. For instance, Niles from *Frasier* is a rather posh person compared to Monica from *Friends*, but they are both classified as sophisticated. The same goes for George from *Seinfeld* and Lucy from *I Love Lucy*. Both are classified as unsophisticated, yet they are not similar types of characters. George is classified as unsophisticated based on his selfishness, rudeness, and his tendency to fail in his professional

as well as love life, whereas Lucy is unsophisticated in the more classical slapstick sense;<sup>5</sup> she is clumsy, and her elaborate schemes to make it in show business always fail.

As sitcoms are designed to make people laugh, most of the characters will at some point appear comical and unsophisticated. Even Frasier ends up in ridiculous situations. For instance, in the episode *The Zoo Story*, he is attacked and chased by a bird, much to the amusement of the people around him. Even with incidents like these, however, it is clear that Frasier is supposed to be a more sophisticated person than say, his co-worker Bulldog.

#### 3.4.4 Likability

The other personality trait according to which characters are classified is *likability*; all the characters included are labelled as either sympathetic or unsympathetic. As with sophistication, some minor characters could not be labelled either way, and were therefore unclassified. Unlike sophistication, classifying characters in regard to likability was less challenging. In order to be categorized as unsympathetic the characters must be portrayed as selfish, aggravated, evil, mean, or in other ways unlikeable. Characters who did not exhibit any of these traits, or were depicted as overly sympathetic, such as Kenny from *Frasier*, were then labelled as sympathetic.

Compared to what one might find in children's animation, characters in sitcoms are not always clearly good or bad. Although classifying characters according to likability was less difficult than with sophistication, there were some characters whose personalities were mixed. For instance, Mr Dany from *The Danny Thomas Show* was initially portrayed as an aggressive and hostile man. Throughout the episode, however, his behaviour gradually changed towards the positive, and he was subsequently classified as sympathetic.

### 3.5 Collecting and analyzing the data

Before the present study could be started, several guidelines were set in place. Firstly, the selection of sitcoms needed to be established. One of the first decisions pertained to the time periods. It was quickly decided that different time periods should be represented in the study,

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<sup>5</sup> Slapstick is a physical form of comedy, often involving practical jokes, pratfalls, and stunts (Filmsite.org).

as a diachronic element might produce interesting results. The decision fell within two different time periods, namely 1950–1960–, and 1990–2000s. As sitcoms were fairly young in the 1950s, a comparison to more modern sitcoms might provide an insight into how language use in sitcoms differed in different time periods.

As discussed in 3.4, different social variables were also established. As the present study is primarily concerned see if certain accent varieties systematically corresponded with certain non-linguistic variables, each distinct variable was based on previous research (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011).

The next step was to decide on which sitcoms to include. As the study must be as objective as possible, it was important to avoid biased choices. The shows, therefore, were not chosen based on preference or in consideration of previous knowledge available to the author, but rather on the merits and measurable success of the shows themselves. From each time period, three of the most prominently viewed sitcoms were included. The ratings found on TV Ratings functioned as a basis on the selection of the shows.

It was decided that ten episodes from each show should be included in the study, all belonging to the approximate ‘middle’ season. The assumption of this method of choice was that by the time the middle seasons were broadcast, the sitcoms would have had some time to establish themselves, and were therefore currently produced at the height of their popularity. The specific episodes contributing were chosen more or less randomly, the exception being that episodes containing the same characters were excluded.

Initially, the study aimed to include all characters speaking a variety of English, including foreign-accented English. However, as that scope of character and accent was inappropriately vast for a study of this proportion, a few more restrictions were set. Firstly, only adult characters were included. This decision was made as children’s accents may not be fully developed, and would therefore be more difficult to place. Secondly, characters that spoke an unidentifiable variety of English were excluded. Thirdly, characters that played themselves were not included. All the characters included were classified in regard to the established variables.<sup>6</sup>

Copies of the sitcoms were obtained using different methods. The three older sitcoms were ordered through the online bookstore *Amazon.com*. The three newer sitcoms were borrowed from libraries and from personal acquaintances.

It is important to keep in mind that the present study entails a certain amount of

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<sup>6</sup> A full overview of seasons, episodes, and characters included can be found in appendix I.

subjectivity. The choices and classifications made are based on my impressions, and other researchers may disagree with these choices. As a way to secure that the decisions made by myself are as accurate as possible, a second party watched a small selection of episodes as a control. Both parties agreed on the choices and classifications.

Another point is that the sample included is fairly small. However, for the present study it was decided that the selections would be considered sufficient.

### **3.6 Questionnaire**

In addition to the societal treatment study, a small online survey was carried out in order to obtain attitudes regarding English varieties from American respondents. An online questionnaire was created using *surveymonkey.com*, and subsequently shared on the social platform *Facebook*.

The questionnaire included seven English variants, namely GA, RP, Irish English, AAVE, London English, Southern American English, and the New York accent. Northern English was not included, as the variety is less commonly known or distinguishable to Americans. Although the respondents may be aware of this speech region, it is reasonable to assume that their knowledge would be limited, and they would therefore not associate the variety with any particular traits. Some of the labels used for the questionnaire differ slightly to the labels found in the main study. Certain varieties have names that can be considered to be more technical and unfamiliar to the general public, and these labels were subsequently changed.

The respondents were asked to rate the varieties using a scale, going from 1 to 5, 5 indicating the best possible score, and 1 the worst. Each variety was rated on a number of traits, such as intelligence, beauty, pleasantness, and sophistication – all belonging in either the prestige or the social attractiveness dimension.<sup>7</sup>

As previously discussed, the first aim of the study was to retrieve attitudes towards various English varieties from American respondents. The second aim was to compare the results with the results of the main study. The expectation was that the results would correspond to the results found in the main study, which implies that certain attitudes towards certain language varieties is present in American sitcoms and with potential viewers of the sitcoms. After the survey was concluded, the results were measured and quantified, before

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<sup>7</sup> A sample page of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix II.

they were compared to the results found in the main study.



## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the results and the discussion of the results from the present study of language attitudes and how they are used in sitcoms. The findings are compared to previous societal treatment studies, especially Lippi-Green's 1997 study of Disney films, as they both largely cover the same time span. The majority of chapter 4 is concerned with presenting and discussion the results from the sitcom study. The results from the questionnaire are also examined and discussed.

### 4.1 Overall distribution of varieties

For the present study the speech of 221 characters were analyzed and categorized. In total, nine varieties of English were encountered. Table 4.1 below represents the overall distribution of the varieties included.

**Table 4.1** Overall distribution of varieties

Varieties	Characters	%
GA	158	71.5%
NYE	25	11.3%
SAE	6	2.7%
AAVE	3	1.4%
RP	8	3.6%
London	2	0.9%
Irish	2	0.9%
Northern	1	0.5%
FAE	16	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>

As all of the sitcoms included in the study are American, the expectation was that the majority of the characters would speak GA, and as seen in table 4.1 more than 70% of the characters speak GA. The New York accent is the second most common variety, and considering that five out of the six sitcoms take place in New York,<sup>8</sup> this was unsurprising. However, because of the location of the series, one might have anticipated to find a larger percentage of NYE speakers than what proved to be only little over 11%. The third largest variety is FAE, with

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<sup>8</sup> *Frasier* is set in Seattle in the Pacific Northwest, and about half of the *I Love Lucy* episodes take place in Los Angeles

16 characters. Their nationalities range from Indian to Russian, and will be discussed in more detail in section 4.6.

Only six characters were categorized as Southern Americans, two less than speakers of RP, which, as expected, is the most common British variety encountered. That the unmarked varieties, RP and GA, are the varieties most frequently spoken in regard to their nationality was expected, but perhaps the most surprising find is the variation of British varieties, with four different varieties represented. Two characters speak Irish English, two characters speak in a London accent, and one character speaks in a northern British accent. Since the TV shows included in the study are considered to be “white” sitcoms, the majority of characters turned out to be Caucasian. There are, however, some African-American characters, three of which speak AAVE.

When comparing the general distribution to Lippi-Green’s Disney study, there are many similarities as well as contrasts. In both of the studies, GA, or as Lippi-Green labels it, Mainstream US English (MUSE), is the dominating variety. In the present study over 70% speak GA, whereas in Lippi-Green’s study, this percentage is noticeably lower with 43% (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). In regard to other American varieties, results from both studies are similar: about 14–15%, although the percentage of AAVE speakers in Lippi-Green’s study is about 5% compared to approximately 1.5% found in the present study (ibid: 88). In Lippi-Green’s study, about 8% of the characters speak a regional US variety,<sup>9</sup> i.e. NYE or SAE, whereas in the present study the percentage is higher; roughly 14%, (ibid).

Another similarity is the percentage of foreign-accented characters. In the Lippi-Green study, 9% speak a foreign-accented variety of English. As many of the Disney films take place in non-English countries, Lippi-Green considered this to be a low percentage. However, she did find a higher occurrence of foreign-accented characters in films set in non-English speaking countries (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). In the present study, all episodes included take place in an English-speaking country;<sup>10</sup> yet, a little more than 7% of the characters speak FAE. This could be explained with the fact that most of the shows take place in large, multicultural cities. International communities such as Little Italy and Chinatown are named after the people who inhabit them, and these people contribute to the increased level of linguistic diversity. Disney films, on the other hand are often set in mythical areas, where linguistic realism is less important.

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<sup>9</sup> Lippi-Green does not specify which varieties are included.

<sup>10</sup> One episode from *Friends* is set, for the most part, in London.

One of the main differences between the results of the present study and Lippi-Green's Disney study is found with British characters. Out of the 371 characters in Lippi-Green's study, almost 22% speak what she has labelled mainstream varieties of British English (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). Although Lippi-Green does not specify what mainstream British English entails, one might assume that she means RP, or an RP-like variety. In addition to this, 11% speak another variety of British English, which means that the British characters represent almost a third of all the characters (ibid: 88). In the present study, the percentage is considerably lower. Less than 6% of the characters speak a British variety of any kind; 3.6% speak RP, 0.9% speak Irish English and London English, and finally, 0.5% of all characters speak in a Northern British accent. Perhaps one of the reasons for this difference is the status of RP. Disney films largely depend on the struggle between good and evil. British characters, especially speakers of RP, have been "eternally reliable when it comes to providing villainy" (Empire). In sitcoms, a clear dichotomy between good and evil does not exist; no characters are portrayed as 100% evil. Since the number of evil characters is lower than what is found in Disney films, fewer RP speakers are encountered as well. Based on the number of foreign characters, including British characters, one may assume that sitcoms paint a more realistic picture of the language culture in the United States.

The main observation from the general distribution is that GA is by far, the dominating variety, with NYE being the second largest, although the gap between them is substantial. Most surprising is the higher usage of GA in sitcoms compared to Disney films.

#### 4.1.1 Comparing the two time periods

A part of the present study is to compare the older and newer sitcoms with each other to see if any marked differences occur. The expectation was that several differences between the two time periods would emerge. Most notably, a higher percentage of GA would be found with older sitcoms, and an increased use of non-standard varieties would occur with newer sitcoms. Table 4.2 illustrates the general distribution of varieties for both time periods.

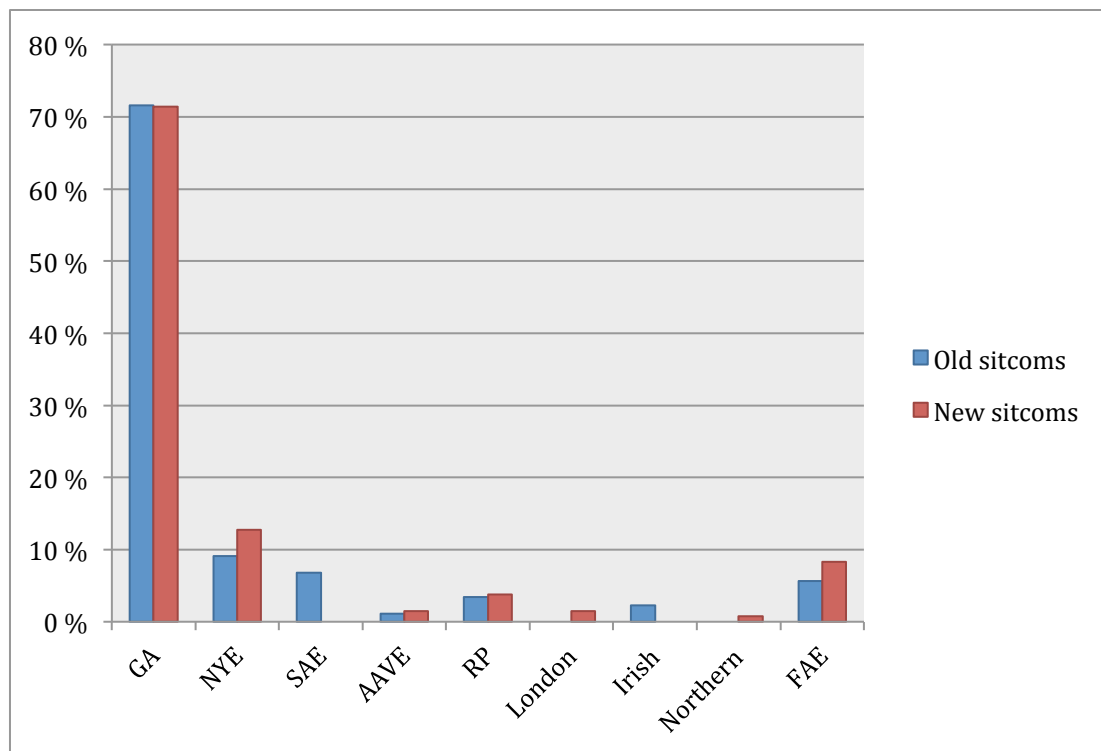
The main observation when comparing the two time periods is that the findings turned out to be strikingly similar. For instance, the percentage of GA characters is virtually the same in both time periods.

**Table 4.2** Overall distribution of varieties in old and new sitcoms

Old sitcoms			New sitcoms		
Varieties	Characters	%	Varieties	Characters	%
<b>GA</b>	63	71.6%	<b>GA</b>	95	71.4%
<b>NYE</b>	8	9.1%	<b>NYE</b>	17	12.8%
<b>SAE</b>	6	6.8%	<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%
<b>AAVE</b>	1	1.1%	<b>AAVE</b>	2	1.5%
<b>RP</b>	3	3.4%	<b>RP</b>	5	3.8%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	<b>London</b>	2	1.5%
<b>Irish</b>	2	2.3%	<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	<b>Northern</b>	1	0.8%
<b>FAE</b>	5	5.7%	<b>FAE</b>	11	8.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

This differs from what Sønnesyn found in her study, where the use of GA is more frequent in newer Disney films (Sønnesyn 2011: 53). Her reasoning for the increased use of GA was that this was a result of societal changes, namely the rise of political correctness. Instead of displaying a greater diversity of language varieties in order to show an increased tolerance, Disney chose to use “standardised accents rather than accents that are in some way regionally and socially marked” (ibid: 54). The results from the present study might have been different if it had included more recent sitcoms; none of the shows in the present study were on the air longer than 2004. Still, the expectation was that there would be a difference between the two time periods. However, there proved to be almost the same amount of variation with the older sitcoms, which implies that sitcoms are stable, not only in how they are made, but also linguistically.

As can be seen in figure 4.1 the second largest accent group for both time periods is NYE. Unlike GA, however, a slightly larger percentage is found in the newer sitcoms, partially because of the high number of NYE speakers in *Seinfeld*. Although the difference is not great, about 4%, it is worth noting that the one show which does not take place in New York, namely *Frasier*, has two characters with a NYE accent, whereas *I Love Lucy*, which is mainly set in New York, does not have any characters with a NYE accent.



**Figure 4.1** Overall distribution of varieties in old and new sitcoms

One of the more surprising results is the complete absence of Southern American characters in the newer sitcoms. Considering that the South is the fastest growing region in the United States, and is inhabited by over a third of the country's population, approximately 37% (Mackun & Wilson 2011: 2), it was reasonable to assume that the area would be represented. Not one speaker could be classified as Southern American, yet in the older sitcoms, SAE is the third largest speech group with almost 7%. The lack of southern characters may go unnoticed by the audience, and might not be even considered to be of any importance. However, as discussed earlier, the South has always been considered an outsider from the rest of mainstream America, and by excluding them from the popular media, the region's attempts to create a bond between themselves and outsiders (Slade *et al.* 2012: 109), i.e. the rest of the nation, might be prolonged, or in worst case, fail. On the other hand, the absence of SAE might have been a conscious choice. In line with the rise of political correctness, the genre has decided to move away from the stereotypical associations of Southerners with simple, stupid, and comical characters, by simply leaving them out. It is important to note that, with the exception of one character, the characters speaking SAE are encountered in episodes set in the South. This may be the reason for the lack of SAE in newer sitcoms, as none of the episodes are situated in this region. However, the fact that numerous episodes in the old sitcoms are

located in different parts of the United States may indicate that the shows were more geographically inclusive.

Another contrast between the two time periods is found with the regional British varieties. While Irish English is only found in older sitcoms, London and Northern English are spoken in newer sitcoms. However, the two time periods are similar in that they both contain regional British varieties, and the percentage of these varieties is almost identical when combined. This implies that the status of the British has not changed over the years; they are still a part, albeit a minor part, of American television. As with RP, Irish English is well-known variety in the United States, and has been for a long time. A substantial amount of Irishmen immigrated to the United States, at times representing more than half of all immigrants (ThinkQuest). Because of globalization, however, new varieties such as Northern British and London English have been introduced to the audience: “[t]he past decade has [...] given us a taste of an entirely new and much more interesting way of representing global English on television” (Gill 2011: 753).

When comparing the two time periods, the main observation is the stable distribution of varieties. Unlike Sønnesyn, who found a clear increase of GA, as well as a clear decrease of RP when comparing her research to Lippi-Green (Sønnesyn 2011: 53), the results from the present study indicate a linguistic stability in the sitcom genre. This might suggest that sitcoms are not concerned with political correctness, or, perhaps they were more concerned with appearing politically correct from the start, as the level of GA was already at 70% with the older sitcoms. All of the shows included in the present study were broadcast on mainstream television networks, i.e. they were accessible to anyone who had a TV. Because of this, the programmes needed to be appealing to as many people as possible, and that meant avoiding possible offences. The very fact that the entertainment business may have “*amplified* certain aspects of our culture and *attenuated* others” (Monaco 2000: 262, my emphasis), is nothing new. Whether the picture painted by the shows is accurate or not in regard to how the language situation in America actually is, might have been deemed less important.

## 4.2 Gender

One of the expectations for the present study was that the majority of the characters would be male. Unsurprisingly, this turned out to be the case, although the difference between the two genders is not as substantial as the ones found in previous research. Studies conducted by

Lippi-Green and Sønnesyn revealed that the ratio between male and female characters is approximately 70% to 30% (Lippi-Green 1997: 87, Sønnesyn 2011: 57). Other studies of children’s animation have produced similar results. Dobrow and Gidney’s study of children’s cartoons found that 27% of the characters are female (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 112), as did a study of gender roles in cartoons conducted by Thompson and Zerbinos where only 20% of all characters are female (Thompson & Zerbinos 1995: 659). The result from the present study shows that the ratio between the two genders is more balanced, roughly 56% to 43%.

Perhaps the most surprising find is the high number of accents spoken by female characters, seeing as studies have shown that female characters tend to speak a standard accent (Sønnesyn 2011: 59). Although one male character speaks Irish English, London English and Northern English are only found with female characters, all three appearing in *Frasier*. Two female characters speak AAVE, whereas only one male could be classified as speaking with this accent. As can be seen in table 4.3, the dominating variety which both genders is GA, although the variety is more prevailing with female characters.

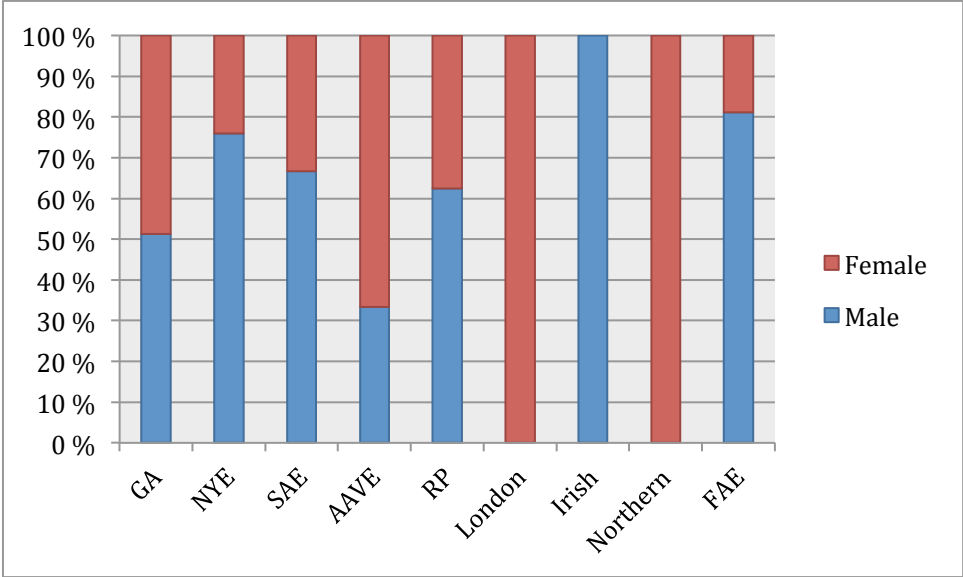
**Table 4.3** Distribution of varieties with regard to gender

Male			Female		
Varieties	Characters	%	Varieties	Characters	%
GA	81	64.8%	GA	77	80.2%
NYE	19	15.2%	NYE	6	6.3%
SAE	4	3.2%	SAE	2	2.1%
AAVE	1	0.8%	AAVE	2	2.1%
RP	5	4.0%	RP	3	3.1%
London	0	0.0%	London	2	2.1%
Irish	2	1.6%	Irish	0	0.0%
Northern	0	0.0%	Northern	1	1.0%
FAE	13	10.4%	FAE	3	3.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>

As table 4.3 shows, GA is the dominating variety both genders, although the percentage is noticeably higher with female characters. More than 80% of female speakers speak GA, whereas 65% of the male speakers have a GA accent. The results from the present study are largely in accordance with previous research where a correlation between gender and variety, namely the sex/prestige pattern, occurs; i.e. “women tend to use more standard speech than men” (Garrett 2010: 175).

The NYE accent is the second most spoken variety with both genders. However, the gap between GA and the NYE accent is considerable, especially with the female characters, where approximately 6% have a NYE accent. More than three times as many male characters have a NYE accent, and of the six Southern American characters, only a third are female.

The main difference between the two genders is found with speakers of FAE. Out of 16 characters, only three are female, in other words, more than 80% of all foreign-accented characters are male. When looking at the distribution for this variety, more than 10% of all male characters speak FAE, compared to 3% of the female characters. Overall, the distribution of varieties with regard to gender is somewhat uneven. However, as figure 4.2 illustrates, the percentage of GA is roughly the same with both genders.



**Figure 4.2** Distribution of varieties with regard to gender

The most uneven distribution occurs with regional British varieties. 100% of Irish characters are male, whereas 100% of London and Northern English characters are female. 66% of all southern characters are male, but in regard to AAVE, 66% of characters speaking this variety are female. The most uneven variety that is spoken by both genders is FAE, where more than 80% of the characters speaking this variety are male.

When comparing the two time periods one of the main differences found is that the ratio between male and female speakers is more substantial in the older sitcoms. Table 4.4 shows that the newer sitcoms have approximately 10% more male than female speakers, whereas in the older sitcoms the difference is close to 20%. This implies that although sitcoms



are stable in terms of accent use and design, they have changed and evolved in line with society.

**Table 4.4** Distribution of gender in old and new sitcoms

Old sitcoms			New sitcoms		
<b>Male</b>	52	59.1%	<b>Male</b>	73	54.9%
<b>Female</b>	36	40.9%	<b>Female</b>	60	45.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results from the present study show a more balanced gender distribution than previous studies, and compared to Sønnesyn’s continuation of Lippi-Green’s Disney study, the results differ. Although the research conducted by Sønnesyn shows that there is a difference, albeit a very small difference, between older and newer Disney films, the trend has moved in the opposite direction. Where Lippi-Green’s study has a ratio of 70% male to 30% female characters, Sønnesyn’s research shows that the distribution has shifted slightly to 66% male and 23% female characters (Sønnesyn 2011: 57). It is interesting that entertainment created for children display such an uneven distribution of genders, as they function as a way to show, and perhaps teach children to associate “specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups” (Lippi-Green 1997: 85). The world is not divided into 70% men and 30% women, and it appears that the sitcom represents a more realistic description of the world’s gender distribution.

When looking more closely at the older sitcoms the most noticeable finding is the previously discussed sex/prestige pattern; a clear majority of all female characters in the old sitcoms speak a standard variety, i.e. GA. There were some exceptions to this pattern, however. The only AAVE speaker in the older sitcoms is female, namely the maid Louise in *The Danny Thomas Show*. There is also one female character that speaks NYE, as well as two characters with a SAE accent. Despite this, linguistic variation is more frequent with male characters, including higher percentages of speakers of RP, SAE, as well as the only two speakers of Irish English encountered in the study. As illustrated in table 4.5 more than 13% of the male characters speak NYE, where only 3% of the female characters have this variety; 10% of the male characters speak FAE, whereas no female characters have a FAE accent.

**Table 4.5** Distribution of varieties with regard to gender in old sitcoms

<b>Old sitcoms</b>					
<b>Male</b>			<b>Female</b>		
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	32	61.5%	<b>GA</b>	31	86.1%
<b>NYE</b>	7	13.5%	<b>NYE</b>	1	2.8%
<b>SAE</b>	4	7.7%	<b>SAE</b>	2	5.6%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	<b>AAVE</b>	1	2.8%
<b>RP</b>	2	3.8%	<b>RP</b>	1	2.8%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	<b>London</b>	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	2	3.8%	<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	5	9.6%	<b>FAE</b>	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results in table 4.6 represent the distribution of varieties in newer sitcoms, and the results are similar to the ones found with the older sitcoms; linguistic variation is more extensive among male characters than female. The dominating variety with both genders is GA, with the percentage being about 10% higher among female characters. About 8% of the female characters speak NYE, whereas with male characters, the percentage is more than 16%. This is also the case with FAE; 5% of female characters speak a FAE variety, whereas with male characters, 11% are foreign-accented.

**Table 4.6** Distribution of varieties with regard to gender in new sitcoms

<b>New sitcoms</b>					
<b>Male</b>			<b>Female</b>		
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	49	67.1%	<b>GA</b>	46	76.7%
<b>NYE</b>	12	16.4%	<b>NYE</b>	5	8.3%
<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%	<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%
<b>AAVE</b>	1	1.4%	<b>AAVE</b>	1	1.7%
<b>RP</b>	3	4.1%	<b>RP</b>	2	3.3%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	<b>London</b>	2	3.3%
<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%	<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	<b>Northern</b>	1	1.7%
<b>FAE</b>	8	11.0%	<b>FAE</b>	3	5.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Although the correspondence between the genders is similar in both time periods, there are some differences as well. Most notable is the increased use of non-standard varieties among

female characters in newer sitcoms. Even though the only female characters that speak SAE are found in older sitcoms, a decreased use of GA, has taken place in newer sitcoms. In older sitcoms, 86% of the female characters speak GA and approximately 3% have a New York accent, whereas in the newer sitcoms, the percentages for female speakers of GA and NYE are about 77% and to 8%, respectively. In addition to this, all female characters that speak a non-standard variety of British appear on *Frasier*, i.e. a new sitcom.

Another difference between the two time periods is the percentage of male GA speakers. In the older sitcoms more than 61% of male characters speak GA, whereas in newer sitcoms, the percentage has increased to 67%. This difference is opposite with the one found with female GA speakers, where a declined use of GA has taken place in the newer sitcoms. This increased use of GA among male characters can be explained by the fact the SAE and Irish English are spoken mostly by male characters in older sitcoms. As SAE and Irish English are not encountered in the newer sitcoms, the percentage of other varieties spoken by male characters in newer sitcoms increased.

The reduced discrepancy between male and female GA characters found in newer sitcoms implies that sitcoms are adjusting to the more modern world. The gender changes are also reflected in the roles of the female characters. In the older sitcoms, most of the female characters are housewives, housekeepers, secretaries, or actresses, whereas the male characters are usually businessmen, accountants, writers, or entertainers. From the sample of older shows selected, the only female main character with a professional career is the character Sally from *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Sally is a successful writer for a television comedy-variety show alongside with Rob and Buddy. Although she is just as vital to the comedic trio as the other two members, she is in charge of typing, much like a secretary would be, though, of course, this could simply be because she is better at typing. Another noticeable element is that despite being a successful comedienne and writer, it is made very clear that Sally is single, and “self-consciously desperate” to get a husband (Marc & Thompson 1995: 63). The rest of the female main characters are all housewives, often depicted as naïve and ‘ditsy’, and as very dependant on their husbands. They are often scorned by their husbands for spending too much money, with threats of beatings or divorce. When the female characters have done something worthy of praise, however, they might be rewarded, similarly to how a child might be treated.

The gender roles are not as traditional and old-fashioned in the newer sitcoms. Here, most of the female characters have careers, (some more successful than others), and although they are often searching for romance, the same applies for most of the male characters. Elaine

from *Seinfeld* goes through multiple failed relationships, but so do Jerry and George. All of the main characters in the newer sitcoms, regardless of gender, have a career. Perhaps the least successful is Joey from *Friends* who is constantly struggling to make it as an actor. It appears as though the newer sitcoms have caught up to modern times, not only with accent use, but also in regard to character roles.

### 4.3 Character roles

The characters included in the present study were categorized into various groups, based on their importance and contribution to the plot of each episode. The different groups are *main characters*, *supporting characters*, *guest characters*, and *minor characters*. Table 4.7 illustrates the overall distribution of character roles.

**Table 4.7** Overall distribution of character roles

Character roles	Characters	%
<b>Main</b>	26	11.8%
<b>Support</b>	38	17.2%
<b>Guest</b>	98	43.9%
<b>Minor</b>	59	27.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>

As can be seen in table 4.7, 26 characters are categorized as main characters, and 39 were categorized as supporting characters. The largest group with 98 characters is the guest characters group, and lastly, 59 characters are categorized as minor characters. The different character roles are expected to display different uses of variation in regard to both language varieties, as well as gender. Traditionally, peripheral characters display a higher level of linguistic variation than main characters. One of the reasons for this may be in relation to ‘the other’. (Lippi-Green 1997: 103). Characters that are less familiar to the audience are often depicted in more unorthodox ways, both in behaviour and language. By having less important characters speak in a different way compared to the main characters, the audience will consider them as mores distant and unfamiliar, and thusly feel a closer relation to the main characters.

### 4.3.1 Main characters

As discussed in 3.4.1, one of the expectations in regard to character roles was that there would be fewer main characters than other characters, and that they would for the most part speak in a standard accent. This proved to be the case; constituting of approximately 12% of all characters, this group produces the least linguistic variation. With approximately 85%, GA was by far the dominating variety, however, almost 15% of the main characters does speak with a non-standard accent. As can be seen in table 4.8, two male characters had a New York accent: Buddy and George in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *Seinfeld*, Daphne from *Frasier* speaks Northern British English, and finally, Ricky, Lucy husband from *I Love Lucy*, speaks FAE. These findings are similar to what Lippi-Green and Sønnesyn found in their research, where the main characters would mainly speak in what is considered to be an unmarked standard variety (Sønnesyn 2011: 79).

**Table 4.8** Distribution of varieties with main characters

<b>Main characters</b>						
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Total</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	11	78.6%	11	91.7%	22	84.6%
<b>NYE</b>	2	14.3%	0	0.0%	2	7.7%
<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>RP</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	1	8.3%	1	3.8%
<b>FAE</b>	1	7.1%	0	0.0%	1	3.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100%</b>

Compared to Thompson and Zerbinos study, the present study has a substantially more balanced distribution of genders in regard to lead roles. Their study of gender roles in cartoons found that only 25% of the lead characters are female (Thompson & Zerbinos 1995: 659), whereas the present study resulted in more than 46% female main characters. This, again, implies that in regard to distribution of genders, sitcoms depict a more accurate picture than children's animation.

The main difference between main characters in old and new sitcoms is that there is more variation with male characters in old sitcoms, than with female characters. 100% of all

female main characters speak GA, whereas 60% of the male characters speak GA. The rest of the main male characters in old sitcoms speak NYE and FAE, respectively. This is not the case with regard to newer sitcoms, however. For example, 89% of male characters in new sitcoms speak GA, whereas 83% of female characters have a GA accent. Overall, the main characters conform to the practice in which the main cast speak a standard variety of English.

#### 4.3.2 Supporting characters

The group consisting of supporting characters is much more substantial and varied than what was found with main characters. As seen in table 4.9, supporting characters have the lowest percentage of characters speaking GA, and this is especially noticeable among male characters. Male supporting characters is the only category where a minority of male characters speak GA, and where the ratio between GA and NYE is at its smallest, both with male and female characters.

**Table 4.9** Distribution of varieties with supporting characters

<b>Supporting characters</b>						
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Total</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	9	42.9%	12	70.6%	21	55.3%
<b>NYE</b>	8	38.1%	2	11.8%	10	26.3%
<b>SAE</b>	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	1	2.6%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	1	2.6%
<b>RP</b>	2	9.5%	2	11.8%	4	10.5%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	1	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>

As mentioned above, the most noticeable result when looking at supporting characters is the percentage of GA. In table 4.9, the results show that approximately 55% of the characters speak in a GA accent, mostly because of the male characters, where only about 43% speak GA. As discussed in 2.3.2, this is consistent with the “sporadic appearance of outsiders” entering the established and linguistically uniform main cast by speaking differently (Gill

2011: 744). This group of characters displays the highest percentage of NYE speakers and RP speakers, both varieties that are different, yet not too unfamiliar to an American audience.

Sønnesyn's study produced similar results. The group of characters she called *Aid to hero/-ine* was the group "most prone to make use of various accents" (Sønnesyn 2011: 83). One of the reasons for this could be explained by the fact that supporting characters often have a more farcical role than the main cast. Their role is to be different, and more distinct compared to the main cast. Clear examples of such characters are cousin Ernie from *I Love Lucy*, Estelle in *Friends*, or George's parents in *Seinfeld*. The audience identifies more closely with the hero or heroine, or for the present study, the main characters, and having 'the outsiders' speak in a different way, separates them even more from the established cast, often in a comical way.

When comparing the old sitcoms to the new sitcoms the main difference is found with female characters. 83% of female characters in the old sitcoms speak GA, whereas in the newer sitcoms approximately 58% speak with a GA accent. There is also a small increase of female characters speaking in a New York accent. With regard to male characters, the level of GA speakers is almost identical in both time periods, around 43%. There is, however, a substantial difference with New York speakers. In the older sitcoms, about 28% have a New York accent, whereas, in the newer sitcoms, 43% of the male characters speak NYE.

Roughly 14% of the characters in older sitcoms speak SAE, and more than 16% speak AAVE, whereas none of these varieties are present in newer sitcoms. On the other hand, more than 18% of supporting characters in newer sitcoms are speakers of RP, whilst in regard to supporting characters this variety is completely absent from older sitcoms.

Overall, the main observation with supporting characters is that older sitcoms tend to use American accents, whereas in newer sitcoms, a frequent use of RP was found.

#### 4.3.3 Guest characters

As can be seen in table 4.10 the guest characters display the most variation in terms of use of varieties, although the results do adhere to the main pattern in which GA is the dominating variety. With over 70%, 69 characters were classified as speaking with this accent.

**Table 4.10** Distribution of varieties with guest characters

Guest characters						
	Male		Female		Total	
Varieties	Characters	%	Characters	%	Total	%
<b>GA</b>	38	68.4%	31	79.5%	69	70.4%
<b>NYE</b>	5	8.5%	3	7.7%	8	8.2%
<b>SAE</b>	3	5.1%	1	2.6%	4	4.1%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>RP</b>	2	3.4%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	2	5.1%	2	2.0%
<b>Irish</b>	1	1.7%	0	0.0%	1	1.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	10	16.9%	2	5.1%	12	12.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100%</b>

As table 4.10 illustrates, this group consists of 98 characters, the highest number of all character roles. Unlike with supporting characters, GA is the dominating variety with both genders.

The most noticeable result is the percentage of foreign-accented characters. More than 12% of all guest characters are foreign-accented, compared to an overall representation of 7.2%. This might be considered as a continuation of what Gill meant by having characters portrayed as outsiders “by means of linguistic difference” (Gill 2011: 744). Where supporting characters are more familiar to the audience, and therefore would predominantly speak more familiar varieties, guest characters are new to each episode, and therefore less relatable. This idea is further strengthened by the fact that the majority of characters who are Southern American or speak a regional variety of British English are guest characters, whereas most of the characters speaking RP and NYE are categorized as supporting characters. Only 8% of guest characters speak NYE, compared to 26% with supporting characters, and only one RP speaker is classified as a guest characters, whereas the majority of RP characters are classified as supporting characters.

When comparing the two time periods, some of the results parallel the ones found with supporting characters. The percentage of GA with male characters in both old and new sitcoms is similar, between 63 and 65%, and with female characters the difference is around 20%. In regard to female characters in old sitcoms, the results show that GA is overrepresented with female characters in old sitcoms; about 92% speak in a GA accent. Only one female guest character speaks a non-standard variety, namely the Southerner Elsie Hooper from *The Danny Thomas Show*.



The main observation regarding guest characters is the increased use of foreign-accented English, as well as an increased use of regional British varieties and SAE. Additionally, the majority of foreign varieties, including British varieties encountered in older sitcoms are represented in the supporting characters group.

#### 4.3.4 Minor characters

The minor character group is the second largest group in terms of number of characters. 59 characters were categorized as minor, and as seen in table 4.11, GA is the dominating variety with 78%.

**Table 4.11** Distribution of varieties with minor characters

<b>Minor characters</b>						
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>		<b>Total</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	22	73.3%	24	82.8%	46	78.0%
<b>NYE</b>	4	13.3%	1	3.4%	5	8.5%
<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%	1	3.4%	1	1.7%
<b>AAVE</b>	1	3.3%	1	3.4%	2	3.4%
<b>RP</b>	1	3.3%	1	3.4%	2	3.4%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	1	3.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.7%
<b>North</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Foreign</b>	1	3.3%	1	3.4%	2	3.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>

As table 4.11 illustrates, the results follow the main pattern in which GA is the most frequently used variety, and NYE is second most used variety. However, compared to main characters, this group displays an increased variation of varieties. Two speakers of AAVE, both appearing in newer sitcoms, are minor characters. Two FAE speakers are also classified as minor characters, as well as two RP-speakers, one speaker of SAE, and one Irish character.

The role of minor characters is small, and often trivial to the plot. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the varieties used by these characters are of a smaller importance than with other characters roles. However, there are still implications that point to a systematic correlation between accent type and character type.

In regard to older sitcoms, the most frequent variation of female characters is found with minor characters. 75% spoke GA, whereas overall, the percentage of female characters in older sitcoms is approximately 10% higher. The only female NYE and RP speakers in older sitcoms are minor characters. In contrast, no female NYE and RP speakers from newer sitcoms are represented in this group. It is interesting to note that the group in which female characters from older sitcoms enjoyed the most frequent variation, as well as the highest percentage of AAVE, is the minor characters group. These results imply that non-standard varieties are often reserved for the more peripheral characters, especially in regard to older sitcoms.

The main observation in regard to minor characters is that an increased variation is found in older sitcoms. However, the only AAVE speaking characters from newer sitcoms are represented in this group.

#### 4.4 Sophistication

As discussed in 3.3.5, characters included in the present study are classified as either sophisticated or unsophisticated. In sitcoms, most characters are portrayed as comical and occasionally as what could be considered unsophisticated. Some characters, however, stand out as being less sophisticated than others, mostly to gain extra comic effect, and these are classified as unsophisticated in the present study.

One of the trademarks of sitcoms is the length of each episode. This entails that the amount of screen time available is limited, and that some of the characters are not on screen long enough to be classified in regard to character traits. When this would occur, characters would be left as unclassified.

As can be seen in table 4.12, 62 characters were classified as unsophisticated, and 142 characters were classified as sophisticated. 17 characters, all of which belong to the minor character group, were unclassified.

**Table 4.12** Distribution of characters with regard to sophistication

<b>Sophistication</b>		
<b>Sophisticated</b>	142	64.3%
<b>Unsophisticated</b>	62	28.1%
<b>Unclassified</b>	17	7.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>

The initial observation is that the majority of characters are portrayed as sophisticated. However, it is important to keep in mind that for the present thesis, sophistication is a broader label than usual. It is not only reserved for highly educated, upper-class people, but also for characters belonging to any social class, ethnicity, or level of education and status, and as long as they are not markedly unsophisticated. The classifications are based more on behaviour than on status, although all potential factors are taken into consideration.

#### 4.4.1 Distribution of varieties

In table 4.13 it is clear that GA is the most frequently used variety among both sophisticated and unsophisticated characters. With sophisticated characters GA is clearly dominating with 81%, and FAE is the second largest variety with 6.3%. With unsophisticated characters, however, the percentage of GA is considerably lower. Less than half of the unsophisticated characters speak GA, and the gap between GA and NYE is substantially smaller than in the overall distribution.

One of the most notable findings is the varying percentages for NYE. Overall, approximately 11% of all characters speak a New York accent, whereas the percentages are distinctively different in regard to sophistication. NYE represents almost a third of all unsophisticated characters, whereas with sophisticated characters, the percentage of NYE is only about 4%. This entails that out of 25 NYE speaking characters, 19, or about 75%, are unsophisticated. As shown in table 4.13, GA is the most common variety with both sophisticated and unsophisticated characters. It is, however, interesting to note that in the overall distribution, GA represents 71.5% of all characters, while the frequency is about 10% higher with sophisticated characters. This might imply that GA is deemed to be a more sophisticated and ‘correct’ variety of English. Looking at the percentage scores for the non-standard varieties, it is apparent that most of them are considerably different than in the overall distribution.

Overall, RP represents about 3.6% of all characters, whereas in regard to sophistication, the percentage has increased slightly. All the characters speaking RP were classified as sophisticated, and with the exception of one Irish character, 100% of all speakers of a regional variety of British were classified as unsophisticated. The portrayals of non-standard British speakers follow an old convention in which regional varieties of British are largely associated with comedy and comedic characters (Quirk 1982: 6).

**Table 4.13** Distribution of varieties with regard to sophistication

<b>Sophistication</b>				
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Sophisticated</b>		<b>Unsophisticated</b>	
	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	115	81.0%	28	45.2%
<b>NYE</b>	6	4.2%	19	30.6%
<b>SAE</b>	2	1.4%	4	6.5%
<b>AAVE</b>	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
<b>RP</b>	8	5.6%	0	0.0%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	2	3.2%
<b>Irish</b>	1	0.7%	1	1.6%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
<b>FAE</b>	9	6.3%	7	11.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

The pattern found with NYE also applies to characters speaking SAE. Overall, Southern characters represent 2.7% of all the characters included in the present study. In relation to sophistication, 1.4% of southern characters were classified as sophisticated, and more than 6% were classified as unsophisticated. Out of all the characters with a SAE accent, 67% are unsophisticated. Similar results are found with FAE. Overall, FAE is spoken by roughly 7.2% of all characters. The percentage is increased by about 4% with unsophisticated characters. However, in actual numbers, less than half of foreign-accented characters were classified as unsophisticated.

Throughout the sitcoms many stereotypical portrayals of speakers of non-standard varieties occur. All of the unsophisticated Southerners are portrayed as rural, slow, or simple-minded, and this portrayal contributes to the already established Southern myth of “rural simplicity” (Slade et al. 2012: 11). Characters such as Cousin Zeke (*I Love Lucy*) and Judd Hooper (*The Danny Thomas Show*) are portrayed as slow, “hog-loving” country folk, fascinated by the people from the “big city”. The portrayals of unsophisticated New Yorkers are also clichéd, using “common preconceptions” (Gill 2011: 746). Characters are often rude and mean-spirited. For example, *Seinfeld*’s George and his father Frank are both known for their short-tempered and aggressive personalities. Other speakers of NYE are portrayed as unintelligent, or as tasteless and vulgar. Janice and Estelle from *Friends*, for example, could both be described as having eccentric personalities as well as styles of clothing.

The results from the present study mirror what Sønnnesyn found in her study, where a correlation between accent type and character type emerged. She suggests that this correlation

indicates that standard accents are considered to be “more fitting to characters of high sophistication” (Sønnesyn 2011: 72–76). The results illustrated in table 4.14 indicate that this might be the case in the selected sitcoms as well. When combined, the non-standard varieties represent 55% of all unsophisticated characters, whereas in the overall distribution, they represent approximately 29% of all characters. These results are in line with many previous attitudinal studies where negative associations of non-standard accents have become apparent. In Preston’s (2000) study, respondents were asked to label various speech regions using their own words. The resulting answers gave the researchers an insight into people’s attitudes towards these areas, as well as the people and varieties that go with them. The respondents’ descriptions of the South were, more often than not, unflattering. They used words like ‘hillbilly’, ‘slow’, ‘whiney, and ‘spoken by ignorants [*sic*]’, but also, ‘courteous’ and ‘gentlemanly’ (Preston 2000 in Garrett 2010:181–182). This corresponds with other attitudinal studies as well (Hiraga 2005). The convention, in which SEA is evaluated as less prestigious and sophisticated, but more friendly and polite, is also reflected in the present study. Despite being overrepresented among unsophisticated characters, SEA is the only variety where 100% of the characters are sympathetic.

Another stereotype emerging from the present results is found with RP-speaking characters. 100% of them are portrayed as sophisticated, and some of the characters act out the part to the extreme. Chesterton from *Frasier*, as well as Mr Waltham from *Friends*, are both examples of characters “imbued with old-world arrogance” (Gill 2011: 745).

#### 4.4.2 Gender differences

As seen in table 4.14, the majority of unsophisticated characters are men. The ratio between male and female sophisticated characters is more balanced, however, with 53% male characters and 47% female characters. As women tend to use standard speech more than men (Hudson 1996: 193), and standard varieties tend to be considered as more sophisticated than non-standard varieties, it is unsurprising that female characters represent almost half of all sophisticated characters, and only one third of the unsophisticated characters.

**Table 4.14** Distribution of gender with regard to sophistication

<b>Sophistication</b>				
	<b>Sophisticated</b>		<b>Unsophisticated</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	75	52.8%	42	67.7%
<b>Female</b>	67	47.2%	20	32.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of all female characters, 23% were classified as unsophisticated, whereas this percentage is noticeably higher among male characters. More than one third of all male characters were classified as unsophisticated.

Looking more closely at the gender distribution with sophisticated characters, GA was the dominating variety with both genders. More interesting is that NYE is completely absent among female characters, whereas, as seen in table 4.15, 8% of the sophisticated male characters spoke this variety.

**Table 4.15** Distribution of varieties with sophisticated characters

<b>Sophisticated characters</b>				
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	55	73.3%	60	89.6%
<b>NYE</b>	6	8.0%	0	0.0%
<b>SAE</b>	1	1.3%	1	1.5%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	1	1.5%
<b>RP</b>	5	6.7%	3	4.5%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	1	1.3%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	7	9.3%	2	3.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.15 also shows that the second most used accent with men is FAE. 9.3% of male sophisticated characters speak FAE. This variety is also the third largest variety among female characters with 3%. The position of RP, however, is reversed. RP is the second largest variety with women, and the third largest with men. As previously mentioned, 100% of all RP-speaking characters were categorized as sophisticated. However, only one male character speaking a regional variety of British English could be placed in the same group, that being

Irish uncle Sean from *The Danny Thomas Show*. As shown in table 4.16, the majority of the characters that spoke a regional variety of British are unsophisticated.

**Table 4.16** Distribution of varieties with unsophisticated characters

Unsophisticated characters				
Varieties	Male		Female	
	Characters	%	Characters	%
GA	19	45.2%	9	45.0%
NYE	13	31.0%	6	30.0%
SAE	3	7.1%	1	5.0%
AAVE	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
RP	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
London	0	0.0%	2	10.0%
Irish	1	2.4%	0	0.0%
Northern	0	0.0%	1	5.0%
FAE	6	14.3%	1	5.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results illustrated in table 4.15 show that the percentages of GA and NYE are virtually identical with both genders. Although GA is the largest variety, the percentages are considerably smaller than with sophisticated characters. Approximately 45% of unsophisticated characters speak in a GA accent, whereas with NYE, the score is 30%. Despite that 6 of 19 male speakers of NYE were classified as sophisticated, close to 70% of them were classified as unsophisticated. More interesting is the fact that 100% of female New York speakers are unsophisticated, as well as 100% of female speakers of regional varieties of British. Two foreign-accented female characters were classified as sophisticated, both of which appeared in *Seinfeld*. One of them is a French-accented love-interest, and the other character is a ‘snooty’ saleswoman working in an up-scale clothing store. There are also two sophisticated female characters that speak a non-standard variety of English. The only AAVE speaker that could be classified in regard to both sophistication and likability is Louise, the maid from *The Danny Thomas Show*. She is portrayed as a stereotypical “mammy”, i.e. a loving, nurturing and “loyal domestic servant to White people” (Woodard & Mastin 2005: 271). The final sophisticated female character speaking in a non-standard variety of English is Maggie from *I Love Lucy*. The flirtatious character speaks a smooth “southern belle” variety of SEA. These findings indicate that in order for a female character to be sophisticated, she must speak a standard variety, i.e. GA or RP.

There are several similarities as well as contrasts between the two time periods. In regard to sophisticated characters, the percentage of GA spoken by female characters is approximately 90% in both old and new sitcoms. With unsophisticated characters, however, the percentage of GA differs substantially. In older sitcoms, 60% of unsophisticated female characters speak GA, whereas in newer sitcoms, the percentage is 40%. With sophisticated male characters, the percentage of GA is more varied than with female characters. In older sitcoms, GA represented about 70% of sophisticated male characters, whereas in newer sitcoms the percentage of GA is roughly 80%. With unsophisticated characters, the ratio remains more or less the same. In older sitcoms, 40% of unsophisticated male characters speak GA, whereas in newer sitcoms approximately 48% have a GA accent. The most notable difference between the two time periods is the increased variation found in newer sitcoms among sophisticated characters.

There is however, one other aspect that should be considered, namely the percentage of unsophisticated characters overall. In older sitcoms approximately 23% of all characters were classified as unsophisticated, whereas in newer sitcoms, the percentage was over 35%. This may be an indication of an increased tolerance for all types of unconventional characters.

#### 4.5 Likability

Characters in a sitcom are usually not portrayed as distinctly good or evil as one might find in a Disney film. However, there is usually a clear indication of whether a character is unsympathetic or not. Some of the traits included in this category overlap with unsophisticated characters, traits such as rudeness and selfishness (see 3.4.4). Compared to the classification of unsophisticated characters, categorizing characters as either sympathetic or unsympathetic was less challenging. Despite this, there were some minor characters that could not be labelled as either, and that were therefore left unclassified. Table 4.17 illustrates the distribution of characters with regard to likability.

**Table 4.17** Distribution of characters with regard to likability

<b>Likability</b>		
<b>Sympathetic</b>	172	77.8%
<b>Unsympathetic</b>	40	18.1%
<b>Unclassified</b>	9	4.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100%</b>



Table 4.17 shows that almost 78% of all characters are sympathetic. As the shows in the study are light-hearted comedy shows, this is hardly surprising. Some of the characters were more difficult to categorize than others. For instance, George from *Seinfeld* is classified as unsympathetic based on his egotistical behaviour. Elaine could also be described as a selfish, yet, her personality is not portrayed as extreme as George's, and she is therefore considered to be sympathetic.

#### 4.5.1 Distribution of varieties

As can be seen in table 4.18, the majority of both sympathetic and unsympathetic characters speak GA. The level of GA-speakers with sympathetic characters is approximately the same as found in the overall distribution, whereas with unsympathetic characters, the percentage of GA speakers is noticeably lower.

**Table 4.18** Distribution of varieties with regard to likability

Varieties	Likability			
	Sympathetic		Unsympathetic	
	Characters	%	Characters	%
<b>GA</b>	126	73.3%	25	62.5%
<b>NYE</b>	19	11.0%	6	15.0%
<b>SAE</b>	6	3.5%	0	0.0%
<b>AAVE</b>	1	0.6%	0	0.0%
<b>RP</b>	4	2.3%	4	10.0%
<b>London</b>	2	1.2%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	2	1.2%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	1	0.6%	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	11	6.4%	5	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

Although the percentage of unsympathetic GA characters is lower than in the overall distribution, this does not apply to the other varieties represented. Almost 15% of unsympathetic characters have a New York accent, whereas in the general distribution, only 11% speak NYE. More than 30% of characters speaking FAE were categorized as unsympathetic. In the overall distribution, approximately 7% of all characters speak FAE, whereas among unsympathetic characters 12.5% spoke this variety. The results regarding

foreign-accented characters are similar to what Lippi-Green found in her study: “the overall representation of persons with foreign accents is far more negative than that of speakers of US or British English” (Lippi-Green 1997: 92). Although not as clear-cut, the implication is that FAE speakers have a tendency to be portrayed as unsympathetic.

In regard to RP, the results are similar to what Dobrow and Gidney found in their research: “The foreign accent most often employed by villains was British English” (Dobrow and Gidney 1998: 115). Although not as extreme, RP represents 10% of all unsympathetic characters in the present study, whereas in the overall distribution, approximately 3.6% of the characters speak RP. This entails that 50% of all RP speakers were classified as unsympathetic.

One of the more unexpected findings regarding likability is the low percentage of unsympathetic New York characters. Studies have shown that attitudes towards NYE are often negative and that the New York accent usually receives the lowest ranking (Garrett 2010: 185). The present study shows that only 24% of all characters speaking NYE were classified as unsympathetic. An interesting finding emerged when comparing the results with Sønnesyn’s research. In her study of Disney films, 47% of unsympathetic characters speaking a regional variety of American English are from New York (Sønnesyn 2011: 73-75). In the present study, however, NYE was the only regional variety of American English represented among unsympathetic characters. 100% of southern characters were classified as sympathetic, as was the only classifiable AAVE speaker. With the exception of NYE, there are very few characters speaking regionally marked varieties of American English. If more characters had been encountered, the results might have differed from what is found here.

#### 4.5.2 Gender differences

The ratio between male and female characters is similar to the one found in regard to sophistication. As table 4.19 illustrates, there are 20% more unsympathetic male characters than female characters. This is in coherence with what Lippi-Green found in her study of Disney films, where female characters are “more likely to show positive motivations and actions” (Lippi-Green 1997: 90). This discrepancy is, however, not as large as the one found with unsophisticated characters. This may imply that there is a greater tolerance for unsympathetic female characters than there is for unsophisticated female characters.

**Table 4.19** Distribution of gender with regard to likability

<b>Likability</b>				
	<b>Sympathetic</b>		<b>Unsympathetic</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	97	56.4%	24	60.0%
<b>Female</b>	75	43.6%	16	40.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

With regard to gender, the distribution of varieties follows one of the main patterns that have emerged throughout the study, where the majority of female characters speak a standard variety of English. With regard to sympathetic characters, the male characters display an increased display of varieties. As seen in table 4.20, 66% of men speak GA, whereas close to 83% of women speak this variety. However, it is interesting to note that out of all female characters speaking a regional variety of British English, 100% are sympathetic.

**Table 4.20** Distribution of varieties with sympathetic characters

<b>Sympathetic characters</b>				
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	64	66.0%	62	82.7%
<b>NYE</b>	14	14.4%	5	6.7%
<b>SAE</b>	4	4.1%	2	2.7%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	1	1.3%
<b>RP</b>	3	3.1%	1	1.3%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	2	2.7%
<b>Irish</b>	2	2.1%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	1	1.3%
<b>FAE</b>	10	10.3%	1	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

With both genders, GA is the most frequently spoken variety, with NYE being the second largest language variety. Almost 74% of male NYE speakers were classified as sympathetic, as well as the majority of female speakers of NYE, only one female NYE character is unsympathetic. FAE is the third largest variety spoken by sympathetic male characters. 77% of all foreign-accented male characters were classified as sympathetic, whereas only 1 out of three foreign-accented female characters were classified as sympathetic. The same applies to female speakers of RP. Only one RP speaking female character is sympathetic, whereas the remaining two characters are unsympathetic. The results for male speakers of RP differ from

the ones found with female characters. As table 4.21 illustrates, approximately 60% of all male RP speakers were classified as sympathetic, leaving less than half categorized as unsympathetic.

The main observation in regard to unsympathetic male characters is the lowered use of GA. A little more than 58% of unsympathetic male characters spoke GA, whereas with unsympathetic female characters, the percentage is more than 20% higher.

**Table 4.21** Distribution of varieties with unsympathetic characters

<b>Unsympathetic characters</b>				
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
<b>Varieties</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>GA</b>	14	58.3%	11	68.8%
<b>NYE</b>	5	20.8%	1	6.3%
<b>SAE</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>AAVE</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>RP</b>	2	8.3%	2	12.5%
<b>London</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Irish</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Northern</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>FAE</b>	3	12.5%	2	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100%</b>

Several differences emerge when comparing the two time periods. One of the more distinct differences is found among female characters. In the older sitcoms, approximately 11% of the classified female characters were unsympathetic. In the newer sitcoms, the percentage of unsympathetic characters is more than 21%. This is similar to what is found with unsophisticated female characters, where an increased tolerance for non-traditional behaviour among female characters has taken place.

The main difference between the two time periods, however, is the increased percentage of unsympathetic characters in newer sitcoms. In the older sitcoms, approximately 10.5% of all classified characters are unsympathetic, whereas in the newer sitcoms the percentage is more substantial; close to 25% of all classified characters are portrayed as unsympathetic. It seems that the formerly common convention of portraying foreigners as “amusing and lovable” is in decline (Jones 1993: 12). This is further strengthened by the fact that in the older sitcoms 100% of speakers of RP, SAE, AAVE, and FAE are classified sympathetic, whereas the more familiar varieties GA and NYE are the only varieties represented among unsympathetic characters. The stereotypical portrayals of ‘the other’ is not only meant to be

entertaining, but “consequently less threatening” (ibid). In the newer sitcoms, on the other hand, there is more variation among unsympathetic characters. 50% of characters speaking RP in the newer sitcoms are classified as unsympathetic, continuing the tradition in which the use of RP speakers as “authoritarian snobs” is maintained, perhaps even enhanced (Gill 2011: 753).

The increased level of unsympathetic characters in newer sitcoms is mirrored to the level of unsophisticated characters in newer sitcoms. It appears that newer sitcoms are developing in a less sophisticated and sympathetic direction, and this may be connected to political correctness. As discussed in 2.2, society has undergone several changes, one of which is the rise of political correctness. One of the expectations was that an increase of non-standard varieties, both overall and with female characters, would occur with newer sitcoms. However, because of an increased awareness of political correctness, the expectation was also that the use of these accents would be less stereotypical. These results may be an indication that although non-standard varieties are more represented in newer sitcoms, they are continually, if not increasingly used in a stereotypical manner. Additionally, this increase may also be caused by the fact that older sitcoms were generally more careful in the use of stereotypes.

#### **4.6 Foreign-accented characters**

16 characters with a FAE accent were included in the present study. Five of these are from the older sitcoms, and, as previously discussed, they are all male. 11 appeared in the newer series, three are female characters, and eight are male characters. Most of their nationalities could be identified, either by a mentioning of their home country or by inferring the information through their names or pronunciations.

When Lippi-Green conducted her study of Disney films, she found that characters that speak with a French accent are consistently portrayed as stereotypes. Either the characters are in some way associated with “food preparation”, or, they had a “special talent for lighthearted sexual bantering” (Lippi-Green 1997: 100). These stereotypes also emerge in the present study. As in Lippi-Green, all of the French characters encountered in the present study, work with food, and/or are passionate and romantic. The various nationalities are presented in table 4.22.

**Table 4.22** Nationalities of foreign-accented characters

Varieties	Male	Female	Total
French	2	1	3
Italian	3	0	3
Latino	2	0	2
German	2	0	2
Eastern European	1	1	2
Greek	0	1	1
Lebanese	1	0	1
Indian/Pakistani	1	0	1
Unknown	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>

As seen in table 4.22, three French characters, two men and one woman, appear in two sitcoms, specifically in *Frasier* and *Seinfeld*. All three are sophisticated characters, as well as rather “snobbish”, the latter especially with the male characters. The male characters both appear in episodes from *Frasier*. One of the French characters is a gourmet food salesman, and the other is a gourmet chef. The latter is also portrayed as flirtatious and highly sensual. The last French character is one of Jerry’s romantic interests in an episode from *Seinfeld*, and could also be described as sophisticated and sensual. These results largely adhere to Gill’s prediction in regard to French-accented characters: “French accents will continue to be used in order to variously convey ideas of seductiveness, innocence or sophistication.” (Gill 2011: 753).

Because Latinos have historically been the “most underrepresented of all the minority groups in film and TV” (*The Hollywood Reporter* in Pachon 2000: 2), I did not anticipate a high number of characters belonging to this group. Three Latino characters speaking a variety of English were encountered. Two of the characters appear in *I Love Lucy*. The first is Ricky, one of the main characters on the show. The second is a guest character appearing in the episode *Lucy’s Mother-in-law* as a nightclub performer. The third Latino is Mr Martin who briefly appears in an episode on *Frasier*. This character is the only Latino character that appears in of the newer sitcoms. Despite the fact that his heritage is made perfectly clear (he loves Latin music), Mr Martin speaks GA. Seeing as Latinos are the largest growing minority in the United States, it is noteworthy to see that they are largely underrepresented in sitcoms, both old and new. As as the number of Latino characters in the newer sitcoms appears to be

decreasing, the implication that Latinos will continue to become an even bigger minority in the film industry remains (Pachon 2000).

#### 4.7 Unusual pronunciations

Since the majority of all characters included in the present thesis speak GA, it is somewhat difficult to firmly conclude that accent is actively used as a way to portray certain character traits. There were, however, two GA characters whose speech was used to denote behaviour, namely Niles and Frasier from *Frasier*. Their “snobbish” behaviours are clearly accentuated by their speech. Features such as less T-voicing, full and rich “pear-shaped vowels” (The New York Times), and overall less phonological reduction such as a variably occurrence of non-rhoticity are characteristic of the two characters. One example is Niles’ pronunciation of the word *charade*. As a part of the character’s punch line, the word is pronounced in a more British, and therefore more ‘posh’, manner: [ʃərə:d] instead of [ʃərəɪd]. The distinct pronunciation is made in order to gain extra comic effect, and it is successful. Niles’ attempts on appearing ostentatiously elitist brought on a rain of laughter from the audience, all because the character used language in an unconventional way.

In regard to other accent varieties, three characters stood out from the rest. Paddy and Sean from *The Danny Thomas Show*, and the Sheriff from *I Love Lucy* are all unsuccessful in their attempts to imitate certain varieties. The former appeared in the episode *The Chess Game*. Despite their effort, Sean and Paddy are unsuccessful in their imitations of Irish English, as it was apparent that the variety was not their native accent. The lack of clear /l/, TH-stopping, and monophthongization of FACE and GOAT words are some of the salient features that the couple are unable to produce systematically or correctly. Despite this, however, it was apparent which variety the characters are attempting to emulate, and they were therefore categorized accordingly.

The third character, whose name we do not learn, is the Sheriff from *I Love Lucy*. Compared to the other southern characters encountered in this episode, his accent is not nearly as broad or authentic. However, the Sheriff uses syntactic structures and lexical items commonly associated with SEA, and he was therefore categorized as Southern American.

## 4.8 Questionnaire

As part of the present thesis, a small-scale survey was conducted as a supplement to the main investigation of sitcoms. The study was executed as an online questionnaire, where respondents ranked seven English varieties on various traits, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the best. Traits belonging in the prestige and social attractiveness dimension, such as intelligence and pleasantness, were included. At the end of each variety, the respondents had the option of filling in some additional terms and labels they thought fit. The labels used in the questionnaire differed slightly from the ones used in the main study. These include *Standard American accent* instead of GA, *Standard British accent* instead of RP, and *African-American accent* instead of AAVE. In addition, the word *accent* was used instead of *English* in regard to NYE and SAE. The labels have been changed here to cohere with the labels used in the main study.

66 native speakers of American English contributed to the survey. Of the ones who filled out their personal information, 20 were male and 30 female. Their age varied from 20 to 93, with an average age of 29. Geographically, the respondents were spread more or less throughout the country. Spanning from Washington and Alaska in the north, to Texas in the south, and New York in the east, a total 23 states were represented in the survey. There was also a fair amount variation in regard to the occupation of the respondents. The respondents listed occupations such as youth pastors, PhD students, psychotherapists and actors. The largest occupational group consisted of students from various fields.

The highest ranked varieties overall were RP and GA, both with a mean score of 3.7. Unsurprisingly, the ratings of the NYE accent resulted in the worst score with 2.3. These findings are similar to previous attitudinal studies where standard varieties are rated the highest, and non-standard varieties, especially urban varieties, tend to always come out on the bottom. As seen in table 4.23, Irish English came in third place with a mean score of 3.6. The fact that Irish English was rated more positively than the remaining American varieties implies that in-group solidarity did not influence the respondents. Previous studies have shown that respondents often rate varieties belonging to their own regions more positively than those from other regions (Coupland & Bishop 2007: 81).



**Table 4.23** Overall questionnaire ranking of accents

Rank	Accent	Mean
1	RP	3.7
2	GA	3.7
3	Irish	3.6
4	SAE	3.2
5	London	2.8
6	AAVE	2.6
7	NYE	2.3

RP and GA were rated more favourably for traits belonging in the status dimension, such as intelligence, correctness, and education level. However, in regard to social attractiveness, RP and GA received lower rankings. SAE, on the other hand, was rated more negatively in the status dimension, yet gained better ratings for traits associated with social attractiveness, such as pleasantness and sympathy. As seen in table 4.24, NYE and AAVE were ranked negatively in both dimensions.

**Table 4.24** Questionnaire rankings in the status and social attractiveness dimensions

Status			Social attractiveness		
Rank	Accent	Mean	Rank	Accent	Mean
1	RP	4.2	1	Irish	4.1
2	GA	3.6	2	SAE	2.0
3	Irish	3.1	3	GA	3.8
4	London	2.6	4	RP	3.2
5	SAE	2.5	5	AAVE	3.1
6	NYE	2.5	6	London	3.0
7	AAVE	2.2	7	NYE	2.2

Overall, the results from the questionnaire mirror previous research, in which standard varieties are rated more positively in the status dimension, and more negatively in the social attractiveness dimension. Comments from the respondents in regard to GA include ‘normal’ and ‘real’, and although they are not overly positive, they imply that GA is considered to be a more correct as well as the main variety of American English. Most of the comments about RP were negative: ‘frequently condescending’ as well as ‘unwelcoming’, although one respondent described the variety as ‘friendly’.

AAVE was placed at the bottom in the status dimension. However, it did receive a higher mean score in the status dimension, and this is clearly illustrated by the comments

made by the respondents. On the one hand, AAVE was labelled as ‘nice’. On the other hand, the variety was described as ‘uneducated’ and ‘ghetto slang’.

Overall, NYE received the lowest ratings out of all varieties. It was placed second to last in the status dimension, beaten only by AAVE. In the social attractiveness dimension, NYE was placed at the very bottom. These results are mirrored in the comments, where the attitudes towards NYE are overtly expressed. NYE was described as ‘lame’, ‘terrible’, and ‘gross’, as well as the even more descriptive phrase ‘made famous by wiseguys’.

The results are similar to previous studies in that regional varieties, such as SAE and Irish English, enjoy higher covert prestige on traits belonging to the social attractiveness dimension (Hiraga 2005: 297). As previously mentioned, Irish English is well known in the United States, especially on the east coast. Many of the Irish immigrants were seen as belonging to the lower classes, and they were often faced with discrimination (Kinsella). However, over time, the Irish were able to change the negative stereotypes into positive stereotypes, and today, St. Patrick’s day is a very popular holiday celebrated in the United States. The positive views of SAE and Irish English are also reflected in the open-ended questions. All the comments describing SAE and Irish English were of the positive nature. For instance, SAE was described as ‘funny’, ‘friendly’, ‘warm’ and ‘enviable’. Comments describing Irish English were ‘fun’, ‘bright’, ‘cute and different’, as well as the phrase ‘brings to mind the wee ones’.

Another expected result is the evaluation of the urban varieties NYE and London English. Where NYE received negative rankings in both dimensions, London English was ranked as fourth in the status dimension. The placement of London English within the status dimension is similar to the one found in Coupland and Bishop’s BBC Voices (2007) study. One of the main differences between a study conducted by Giles (1970) and the BBC Voices study is the placement of Cockney, or London English within the status, or, prestige dimension. In Giles 1970, the term *Cockney* was used, and it was consequently placed towards the bottom of the rankings. In the BBC Voices study however, the label *London* was used instead, and as shown in table 4.25 (taken from Coupland & Bishop 2007), the variety was rated more positively. Garrett claims that the reason for this is that the name *London* “fuses stereotypes of working-class speech with those of a dynamic and overall prosperous metropolis” (Garrett 2010: 174). It is reasonable to assume that the American respondents experienced similar connotations while rating the London variety, especially in terms of “prosperous metropolis”. Also, it is feasible to presume that the respondents were aware of the fact that London is the capital of England, which would conjure up additional positive

connotations of a fascinating and a more unknown place. As respondents described the variety as nice', this assumption may well be the case.

The study conducted by Coupland and Bishop was a substantial online study, with more than 5000 British respondents. Before further parallels can be drawn between the BBC Voices survey and the present survey, some clarifications are in order. There were several differences between the two studies. One of the ways in which the present questionnaire differs from the BBC Voices study is in regard to the labels used. Firstly, Coupland and Bishop included only one American variety. The researchers labelled this variety *North American*, and it is reasonable to assume that North American is meant to be a GA-like variety. Secondly, the display of British varieties was much larger than in the present questionnaire. Thirdly, Coupland and Bishop included several foreign varieties of English, and as shown above, the present survey did not. As the study of sitcoms resulted in several recognizable foreign-accented varieties of English, it would have been relevant to include varieties of foreign English. As it were, however, this was not done.

When comparing the results from the present survey and the BBC Voices study, several similarities emerge. The American variety included in Coupland and Bishop's study did not rank towards the very top. However, when comparing the two dimensions, North American was rated more positively in the prestige dimension. Several varieties of Irish English were included in the BBC Voices study. The comparison will be made with what Coupland and Bishop have labelled *Southern Irish*, as the characters included in the main study are from Dublin. The Irish varieties were rated similarly in both studies. In the 2007 study Southern Irish was placed approximately in the middle in the status dimension. However, in regard to the social attractiveness dimension, Southern Irish was the third highest rated variety. These results are paralleled to the present questionnaire, where Irish English was rated considerably higher in the social attractiveness dimension, yet not too negatively in the status dimension.

Other similarities are found for RP. Coupland and Bishop operate with two varieties that could both be considered to be RP-like. As seen in table 4.25 (from Coupland & Bishop 2007), one of these varieties is labelled *Queen's English*. This variety ranked first in the prestige dimension, but seventh in the social attractiveness dimension. The other variety is what the researchers have called *Standard English*. Standard English was ranked as number two in the prestige dimension, and as number one in the social attractiveness dimension.

**Table 4.25** Results from the BBC Voices study

		Social attractiveness	Prestige
1.	Accent identical to own	4.87 (2)	4.14 (3)
2.	Afro-Caribbean	3.72 (21)	2.90 (30)
3.	Asian	3.21 (31)	2.74 (33)
4.	Australian	4.04 (13)	3.51 (11)
5.	Belfast	3.67 (23)	3.11 (27)
6.	Birmingham	2.92 (34)	2.70 (34)
7.	Black Country	3.16 (33)	2.81 (32)
8.	Bristol	3.64 (25)	3.22 (21)
9.	Cardiff	3.67 (24)	3.16 (25)
10.	Cornish	4.22 (8)	3.38 (13)
11.	Edinburgh	4.49 (5)	4.04 (4)
12.	French	4.09 (11)	3.74 (9)
13.	German	3.20 (32)	3.21 (23)
14.	Glasgow	3.45 (29)	2.93 (29)
15.	Lancashire	3.90 (15)	3.24 (20)
16.	Leeds	3.73 (20)	3.15 (26)
17.	Leeds	3.40 (30)	2.82 (31)
18.	Liverpool	3.70 (22)	3.89 (6)
19.	London	3.61 (27)	3.22 (21)
20.	Manchester	4.13 (10)	3.21 (23)
21.	Newcastle	4.37 (6)	3.84 (7)
22.	New Zealand	3.90 (15)	3.80 (8)
23.	North American	4.05 (12)	3.30 (17)
24.	Northern Irish	3.81 (18)	3.38 (13)
25.	Norwich	3.78 (19)	3.39 (12)
26.	Nottingham	3.78 (19)	5.59 (1)
27.	Queen's English	4.28 (7)	3.98 (5)
28.	Scottish	4.52 (4)	3.34 (16)
29.	South African	3.51 (28)	3.63 (10)
30.	Southern Irish	4.68 (3)	3.29 (18)
31.	Spanish	3.88 (17)	5.44 (2)
32.	Standard English	4.96 (1)	3.11 (27)
33.	Swansea	3.64 (25)	3.29 (18)
34.	Welsh	3.95 (14)	3.36 (15)
34.	West Country	4.16 (9)	

There are several parallels between the two studies represented in the present thesis, one of which pertains to NYE. In the sitcom study, the New York accent was highly represented among unsophisticated characters. Additionally, a fair amount of unsympathetic characters were found speaking NYE, although, the percentages here were not as considerable. This is reflected in the questionnaire, where NYE was rated poorly in both dimensions.

Another similarity is found with RP. This variety ranked very highly in the status dimension, but the mean score for RP dropped considerably in the social attractiveness dimension. The results from the main study are strikingly similar. In regard to sophistication, 100% of all RP speakers were classified as sophisticated. However, only 50% were classified as sympathetic.

The results found in the questionnaire regarding Irish English indicate that this variety is considered to be somewhat correct and sophisticated, as well as very pleasant. This is very

similar to how the Irish characters were portrayed. One of them was regarded as unsophisticated, however, both were considered sympathetic. The same pattern applies to SAE. Whereas in the main study, 100% of SAE characters were classified as sympathetic, a majority were considered to be unsophisticated. These results are mirrored in the results of the survey in that SAE was rated poorly in the status dimension, but was placed in second place in the social attractiveness dimension.

The status of GA was prominent in both studies. In regard to social attractiveness, GA was placed in the middle, whereas it was rated on top in the status dimension. In the sitcom study, GA was the accent most frequently spoken by all character groups, except the unsophisticated. GA appears to be more neutral than all the other varieties. Comments such as “average and neutral” indicate that GA does not conjure up any specific connotations.

The results from the two studies did to a large degree complement each other. This implies that the target audience of American sitcoms, namely, American adults, inhabit the same language attitudes that are depicted on the screen.

## CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 contains a summary and conclusion of the findings presented in chapter 4. The chapter also discusses the limitations and contributions of the present study, as well as suggestions for further research.

### 5.1 Summary of findings

The goal of the present thesis was to investigate accent use in American sitcoms. The expectation was that certain language varieties systematically corresponded with certain character types. Six sitcoms, from two time periods, were chosen based on their popularity, and 10 episodes from one season were included for each sitcom. In total, the speech of 221 characters were analyzed and classified. All of the characters included spoke a variety of English, and in total 9 different varieties were represented. Four American varieties were represented: *General American*, *New York English*, *Southern American English*, and *African-American English*. The British Isles were represented by four varieties, and these were *Received Pronunciation*, *London English*, *Irish English*, and *Northern British English*. The final variety encountered was *Foreign-accented English*. The nationalities of characters speaking English within this category varied from Eastern-European to Southern Asia.

In addition to the study of sitcoms, a small-scale survey of English varieties was conducted. American respondents filled out an online questionnaire where they rated English varieties on traits belonging to the status dimension and the social attractiveness dimension.

#### 5.1.1 Results from the main study

One of the expectations for the main study was that GA would be the variety most frequently encountered. With more than 70% of the characters, the overall results showed that GA was by far the dominating variety. The second and third most frequently used varieties were NYE and FAE. With regard to British varieties, the majority of characters spoke RP, which was also the fourth most used variety overall. This confirms the hypothesis that standard varieties would be more frequently used than non-standard varieties.

The main aim of the present study was to investigate whether systematic correlations between accent type and character type would occur in American sitcoms. When looking more closely at the different variables, several patterns emerged in a consistent and systematic way. Although the majority of characters spoke GA, the percentage of GA speakers was considerably higher with female characters. The majority of characters who spoke non-standard varieties were male characters. However, there was a slightly higher amount of female characters that spoke AAVE as well as regional varieties of British English.

One of the expectations regarding character roles was that main characters would mainly speak a standard variety. The results show that a clear majority of the main characters spoke GA, especially female main characters. There were, however a few main characters that did not speak a standard variety of English. Four characters speaking NYE, FAE, and Northern British were classified as main characters. The other character groups displayed a much greater distribution of varieties than main characters. This was especially prevalent among supporting characters and guest characters. The majority of characters with a NYE and RP accent were classified as supporting characters, whereas the majority of SAE and FAE speakers were classified as guest characters. The latter also contained the majority of regional British varieties. This suggests that the familiar non-GA varieties, such as RP and NYE are reserved for the more intimate group of peripheral characters, i.e. supporting characters, and that the slightly less familiar varieties were reserved for the more unfamiliar group of characters, namely the guest characters.

Minor characters also displayed an increased use of varieties than what was found with main characters. However, the percentage of GA speakers was higher than with supporting and guest characters, and this suggests that the use of language as a mean to describe characters was not as prevalent with the most peripheral characters.

With regard to sophistication the main expectation was that non-standard varieties would be highly represented among unsophisticated characters. This proved to be the case as more than 50% of unsophisticated characters spoke a non-standard variety of English. Several of the non-standard varieties were largely overrepresented with unsophisticated characters. The majority of speakers of SAE as well as speakers of regional British English were classified as unsophisticated. In addition to this, the percentage of FAE characters was more substantial among unsophisticated characters than in the overall distribution. The most notable find was the percentage of NYE speakers. Almost a third of all unsophisticated characters spoke NYE, whereas in the overall distribution, this variety represented approximately 11% of all characters. In addition to this, it is worth noting that all female

speakers of NYE were classified as unsophisticated. In regard to sophisticated characters, the most notable finding was that 100% of all RP speakers were classified as sophisticated.

The distribution of both genders and varieties was more balanced in regard to likability. The ratio between unsympathetic male and female characters was smaller than with unsophisticated characters. This suggests that it may be more acceptable to have female characters portrayed as unsympathetic rather than unsophisticated. The percentage of GA characters among unsympathetic characters was also noticeably higher. One of the expectations regarding likability was that NYE and FAE would represent a substantial amount of unsympathetic characters. In regard to FAE, this turned out to be somewhat accurate, whereas the percentage of unsympathetic NYE speakers was noticeably lower compared to unsophisticated characters. 50% of characters speaking RP were classified as unsympathetic, whereas none of the characters speaking a regional variety were classified as such. This find is in contrast to the one result for unsophisticated characters.

The present study was also concerned with comparing and contrasting the results from the two time periods. The expectations were that several marked differences would occur, mostly in regard to gender distribution, as well as the distribution of non-standard varieties. Only some of these expectations were met; the ratio between male and female characters was smaller in the newer sitcoms. There was also a marked increase of female characters speaking a non-standard variety of English. The most striking result, however, was found in the overall distribution accent for each time period. The percentages of varieties found in both time periods were almost identical. This implies that although the sitcom has evolved and changed in some aspects, it has remained remarkably stable when it comes to distribution of language varieties.

As discussed in chapter 4, the main study produced similar results to previous societal treatment studies. Research on children's animation has shown that non-standard varieties are overrepresented among unsophisticated characters, as well as a systematic use of RP and FAE with unsympathetic characters.

There were some discrepancies between the present study and the other societal treatment studies, however. The results from the study of sitcoms showed that the percentage of GA was considerably higher, and that there was a more balanced distribution of male and female characters. Additionally, the female characters in the present study displayed an increased use of non-standard varieties compared to previous societal treatment research.



### 5.1.2 Results from the questionnaire

In addition to the investigation of sitcoms, a small online survey was carried out. The aims for the questionnaire were mainly concerned with comparisons. Firstly, the questionnaire was compared to a similar, although substantially bigger, attitudinal study conducted by Coupland and Bishop (2007). Secondly, the results from the questionnaire were compared to the results found in the main study.

Overall, the results from the questionnaire largely corroborated the hypotheses. The standard varieties were clearly rated more positively than non-standard varieties, especially in the status dimension. Regional varieties, such as SAE and Irish English were rated considerably more positively in the social attractiveness dimension, whereas the urban varieties of NYE and London English were rated poorly in both dimensions. The latter also applied to AAVE.

As discussed in chapter 4, the results from the questionnaire largely parallel previous attitudinal research. Also, the results largely corresponded with the results from the main study in that varieties associated with unsophisticated and unsympathetic characters received more negative ratings. The findings indicate that the accent attitudes exhibited by the respondents may also be found in sitcoms.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The results of the main study indicate that sitcoms to a great extent display a stereotypical use of accents. The study of sitcoms largely corresponds to previous societal treatment studies, which showed that a systematic correlation between accent type and character type occur. However, the results from the main study are not as clear-cut. For example, Dobrow and Gidney found that a “majority of shows used dialect stereotypes to indicate a character’s personality or status” (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 115). This is not as evident in the present study, as the majority of characters speak GA. Nevertheless, the present study shows that accents are used to accentuate stereotypical portrayals of characters.

Characters speaking a non-standard variety of English are more frequently portrayed in an untraditional manner than characters speaking a standard variety. As sitcoms are comedic and usually light-hearted shows, there were few characters that could be considered to be clearly evil. Subsequently, the percentage of unsympathetic characters was lower than

the percentage of unsophisticated characters. When comparing the two time periods, the results show that the depiction of stereotypes is more frequent in newer sitcoms than in older sitcoms. This find implies that the use of language in sitcoms has evolved over time. A higher level of both unsophisticated and unsympathetic characters are found in newer sitcoms, and these results implies that an increased tolerance for non-standard varieties, as well as unconventional characters. The absence of southern characters in newer sitcoms, however, may indicate that the more recent shows avoid certain stereotypes. Overall, the results from the present thesis strengthens the claim that sitcoms “provide numerous examples” of linguistic stereotypes (Lippi-Green 1997: 101).

### **5.3 Limitations and contributions**

Certain choices and limitations were faced in while conducting the study. The most prevalent of the limitations is the issue of subjectivity. The classifications were based on subjective impressions, and others may have decided to classify the variables differently. In order to strengthen the choices that were made, a second party was brought in to confirm the analyses and classifications.

Another limitation is the size of the sample. Although the selection of sitcoms is objectively small, it is considered to be extensive enough for a study of this scope. The results clearly indicate that a systematic correlation between accent type and character type occur in sitcoms, and that stereotypes in sitcoms are primarily portrayed using language.

Additionally, assessing the relative contribution of each variable can be challenging. When analyzing multiple variables, the actual reason for the various findings may be lost in all the numbers. For example, the results show that most female characters are sophisticated. A question can be raised as to whether the majority of female characters use a standard variety because they are women or because they are sophisticated. The same can be asked with regard to male characters. Do male characters use non-standard varieties more frequently than women because they are unsophisticated, or because they are men? These ambiguous patterns, and more pressingly, their origins are difficult, if not impossible to explain. Studies have shown that “for virtually every variable, in virtually every community, females (of every age) use high-prestige standard variants more often than males do” (Hudson 1996: 193).

In either case, the results for each variable provide interesting insights to the use of varieties of English.

### 5.3.1 Contributions made by this thesis

The present study places itself in the long line of language attitudinal studies. However, this study is the first of its kind in that that it investigates accent use in sitcoms. The present thesis brings attention to the important role of accents within the ever-growing realm of the sitcom. By devoting special attention to this particular employ of stereotypes based in sociolinguistics, this thesis affirms, that, indeed, “*all* forms of fiction employ rules and conventions – stereotypes among them – and that such use does not necessarily reduce the work’s value” (Seiter 1986: 22, original emphasis).

This study into the role of accents to portray stereotypes within sitcoms specifically, alongside similar past studies, can function as a starting point for future societal treatment studies. As Seiter implies, perhaps comparable studies of this nature might find similar results in other genres. As several societal treatment studies have been conducted on children’s animation, it would be illuminating to conduct comparative studies of animated shows directed toward a more adult audience. Shows of the nature of both *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy* could be a place to begin, compare, and contrast.

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*Seinfeld*. 1989–1998. Jerry Seinfeld & Larry David: NBC.

*The Danny Thomas Show. (Make Room for Daddy)*. 1957–1964. Melville Shavelson: ABC/CBS.

*The Dick Van Dyke Show*. 1961–1966. Carl Reiner: CBS.

*The Office*. 2001–2003. Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant: BBC.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix I – Overview of the sitcoms\*

<i>I Love Lucy - season 4</i>						
Episode	Name	Gender	Character	Variety	Sophistication	Likability
All	Lucy	Female	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Ricky	Male	Main	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Ethel	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Fred	Male	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Business Manager</i>	Mr Hickocks	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Business Manager</i>	Mrs Trumbull	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Matchmaker</i>	Dorothy	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Matchmaker</i>	Sam	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ricky's Movie Offer</i>	B. Benjamin	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ricky's Movie Offer</i>	Pete	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Lucy's Mother-In-Law</i>	Professor	Male	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Lucy's Mother-In-Law</i>	Assistant	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Tennessee Bound</i>	Cousin Zeke	Male	Guest	South	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Tennessee Bound</i>	Sheriff	Male	Guest	South	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Tennessee Bound</i>	Cousin Ernie	Male	Supporting	South	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ethel's Hometown</i>	Will Potter	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ethel's Hometown</i>	Billy Hackett	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>L.A. at Last</i>	Mr. Sherman	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>L.A. at Last</i>	Bobby	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Don Juan</i>	Dolores	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Don Juan</i>	Maggie	Female	Minor	South	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Don Juan</i>	Ross	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Don Juan</i>	Maid	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hedda Hopper Story</i>	MrsMcGillicuddy	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hedda Hopper Story</i>	Charlie	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hedda Hopper Story</i>	Lifeguard	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>The Tour</i>	Bus driver	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Tour</i>	Maid	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified

\* Some of the episode titles have been shortened

***The Dick Van Dyke Show - season 3***

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Variety</b>	<b>Sophistication</b>	<b>Likability</b>
All	Rob	Male	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Laura	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All except one	Buddy	Male	Main	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All except one	Sally	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Masterpiece</i>	Auctioneer	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Masterpiece</i>	Mr. Holdecker	Male	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Old, shoe, old rice</i>	Mel	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Old, shoe, old rice</i>	Donald Parker	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Old, shoe, old rice</i>	Dodo Parker	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Old, shoe, old rice</i>	Judge Krata	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Antonio Stradivarius</i>	Uncle Edward	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Antonio Stradivarius</i>	Aunt Milred	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Antonio Stradivarius</i>	Graciella	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Uncle George</i>	Uncle George	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Uncle George</i>	Mrs Glimscher	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Uncle George</i>	Herman Glimscher	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Big Max Calvada</i>	Max Calvada	Male	Guest	NY	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Big Max Calvada</i>	Bernard	Male	Minor	NY	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Big Max Calvada</i>	Kenny Dexter	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Lady &amp; Tiger</i>	Arthur	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Lady &amp; Tiger</i>	Donna	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Game of cards</i>	Lou	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Game of cards</i>	Beth	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Game of cards</i>	Millie	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Game of cards</i>	Jerry	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Honeymoon</i>	Captain Lebost	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Honeymoon</i>	Sam	Male	Guest	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Honeymoon</i>	Mrs Campbell	Female	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Plots Thicken</i>	Sam Petrie	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Plots Thicken</i>	Clara Petrie	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Plots Thicken</i>	Mr. Meehan	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Plots Thicken</i>	Mrs. Meehan	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Edwin Carp</i>	Edwin Carp	Male	Guest	RP	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Edwin Carp</i>	Mrs. Carp	Female	Minor	RP	Sophisticated	Sympathetic

***The Danny Thomas Show - season 5***

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Variety</b>	<b>Sophistication</b>	<b>Likability</b>
All	Danny Williams	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Kathy Williams	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
Almost all	Terry	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Non-orgs</i>	Peggy	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Non-orgs</i>	Freddy Baxter	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-orgs</i>	Sorority girl	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Two Sleepy People</i>	Sue	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Two Sleepy People</i>	Dr. Henry	Male	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Terry the Breadwinner</i>	Alysse	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Terry the Breadwinner</i>	Irate customer	Female	Minor	NY	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Terry the Breadwinner</i>	Miss Allman	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Honesty is the best policy</i>	R.J. Titus	Male	Guest	NY	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Honesty is the best policy</i>	Elevator guy	Male	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Chess Game</i>	Uncle Sean	Male	Guest	Irish	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Chess Game</i>	Paddy	Male	Minor	Irish	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Rusty the Bully</i>	Liz O'Neill	Female	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Rusty the Bully</i>	Mrs. Beckett	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>St. Vincent's Frolics</i>	Louise	Female	Supporting	AAVE	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>St. Vincent's Frolics</i>	Dr. Barnes	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>St. Vincent's Frolics</i>	Mrs. Baker	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Tonoose &amp; Daly</i>	Uncle Tonoose	Male	Supporting	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Tonoose &amp; Daly</i>	Mr. Daly	Male	Supporting	NY	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Country Girl</i>	Benny	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Country Girl</i>	Judd Hooper	Male	Guest	South	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Country Girl</i>	Elsie Hooper	Female	Guest	South	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Terry's coach</i>	Derek Campbell	Male	Guest	RP	Sophisticated	Sympathetic

***Seinfeld - season 5***

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Character role</b>	<b>Variety</b>	<b>Sophistication</b>	<b>Likability</b>
All	Jerry	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Elaine	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Kramer	Male	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	George	Male	Main	NY	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Dwayne	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Doctor	Male	Minor	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Amy	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Blind Man	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Uncle Leo	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Glasses</i>	Tough Guy	Male	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Lloyd	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Frank Constanza	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Estelle Constanza	Female	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Newman	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Female owner	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Lab assistant	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Non-fat Yogurt</i>	Doctor	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Barber</i>	Mr. Tuttle	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Barber</i>	Enzo	Male	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Barber</i>	Gino	Male	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Masseuse</i>	Karen	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Masseuse</i>	Jodi	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Masseuse</i>	Joel Rifkin	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Masseuse</i>	Ticket Man	Male	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Dinner Party</i>	Barbara	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Dinner Party</i>	David	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Dinner Party</i>	Liquor man	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unsympathetic
<i>The Dinner Party</i>	Counterwoman	Female	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Marine Biologist</i>	Diane	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Marine Biologist</i>	Mr. Lippman	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Marine Biologist</i>	Testikov	Male	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Marine Biologist</i>	Corinne	Female	Guest	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	Audrey	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	Saleswoman	Female	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	Poppy	Male	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	Olive	Female	Guest	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	Bob	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Pie</i>	MacKenzie	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Meryl	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Helen	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic

<i>The Wife</i>	Morty	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Marty	Male	Guest	NY	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Greg	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Owner	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>The Wife</i>	Paula	Female	Minor	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Wife</i>	Grandpa	Male	Minor	AAVE	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>The Fire</i>	Toby	Female	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Fire</i>	Robin	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Fire</i>	Ronnie	Male	Guest	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Fire</i>	Clown	Male	Minor	NY	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Fire</i>	Old Lady	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Sympathetic
<i>The Fire</i>	Michael	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>The Fire</i>	Joanne	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>The Hamptons</i>	Jane	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hamptons</i>	Carol	Female	Guest	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hamptons</i>	Ben	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Hamptons</i>	Rachel	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Hamptons</i>	Michael	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic

**Friends - season 5**

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Variety</b>	<b>Sophistication</b>	<b>Likability</b>
All	Rachel	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Monica	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Phoebe	Female	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Chandler	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Joey	Male	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Ross	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>After Ross says Rachel</i>	Judy Geller	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>After Ross says Rachel</i>	Jack Geller	Male	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>After Ross says Rachel</i>	Emily	Female	Supporting	RP	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>After Ross says Rachel</i>	Stephen Waltham	Male	Supporting	RP	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>After Ross says Rachel</i>	Andrea Waltham	Female	Supporting	RP	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Frank Jr.	Male	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Alice	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Dr. Harad	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Dr. Oberman	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Joey's doctor	Male	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The One Hundredth</i>	Dan	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ross moves in</i>	Larry	Male	Guest	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ross moves in</i>	Danny	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Ross moves in</i>	Gunther	Male	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Thanksgiving</i>	Nora Bing	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Thanksgiving</i>	The Doctor	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>Thanksgiving</i>	Estelle	Female	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Inappropriate sister</i>	Krista	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Chandler's Laugh</i>	Doug	Male	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Chand</i>	Janice	Female	Supporting	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Girl hits Joey</i>	Katie	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Girl hits Joey</i>	Steve	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Cop</i>	Couch salesman	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Cop</i>	Smoking woman	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unsympathetic
<i>The Cop</i>	Gary	Male	Supporting	NY	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Cop</i>	Couch saleswoman	Female	Minor	AAVE	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>Rachel smokes</i>	Carol	Female	Supporting	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Rachel smokes</i>	Kim	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Rachel smokes</i>	Nancy	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Rachel smokes</i>	The Director	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>Ross can't flirt</i>	Caitlin	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic



<i>Frasier</i> - season 5						
Episode	Name	Gender	Character	Variety	Sophistication	Likability
All	Frasier	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Niles	Male	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Martin	Male	Main	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Daphne	Female	Main	North	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
All	Roz	Female	Main	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Imaginary friend</i>	Kelly	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Imaginary friend</i>	Joanne	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>Imaginary friend</i>	Felicity	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unclassified
<i>Knows your name</i>	Player 1	Male	Minor	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Knows your name</i>	Player 2	Male	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Knows your name</i>	Player 3	Male	Minor	NY	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Knows your name</i>	Clare	Female	Guest	London	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Nobody's business</i>	Sherrie	Female	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Nobody's business</i>	Policewoman	Female	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Unsympathetic
<i>The Zoo Story</i>	Ben	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Maris Counselor</i>	Dr. Schenkman	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Maris Counselor</i>	Janice	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Ski Lodge</i>	Annie	Female	Guest	London	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Ski Lodge</i>	Guy	Male	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Nikos	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Aunt Zora	Female	Guest	Foreign	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Cousin Yvonne	Female	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Mary Ann	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Uncle Walt	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Sympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Chrystal	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Beware of Greeks</i>	Eddie	Male	Minor	GA	Unclassified	Sympathetic
<i>The Perfect Guy</i>	Robert	Male	Guest	Foreign	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Perfect Guy</i>	Sharon	Female	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Perfect Guy</i>	Clint Webber	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>The Perfect Guy</i>	Chesterton	Male	Supporting	RP	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>The Perfect Guy</i>	Bob the Bulldog	Male	Supporting	GA	Unsophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Party, party</i>	Tricia	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Party, party</i>	Allison	Female	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Party, party</i>	Rhino	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Unsympathetic
<i>Party, party</i>	Snobbish man	Male	Minor	RP	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Party, party</i>	Noel	Male	Minor	GA	Unsophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Sweet Dreams</i>	Kenny	Male	Guest	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic
<i>Sweet Dreams</i>	Mr. Martin	Male	Minor	GA	Sophisticated	Sympathetic



## Appendix II – Sample page from the questionnaire

### Questionnaire

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Native language:

Please rate the following accents by circling the appropriate number. At the end of each accent you may add other descriptions that you find appropriate.

#### Standard American accent

Beautiful

Ugly

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Intelligent

Stupid

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Friendly

Unfriendly

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Correct

Incorrect

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Educated

Uneducated

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Pleasant

Unpleasant

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Sophisticated

Rough

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Arrogant

Down to earth

1    –    2    –    3    –    4    –    5

Other: