The Wonderful World of Accents:

Accent Use in Disney's Animated Television Series 1985-2020

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven har hatt som formål å se på bruken av engelske uttalevarianter ("accents") i animerte tv-serier fra Disney, utgitt mellom 1985 og 2020. Totalt har 490 karakterer fra 14 ulike serier blitt analysert og kategorisert for å undersøke hvorvidt det finnes systematiske korrelasjoner mellom bestemte karaktertrekk og spesifikke uttalevarianter. I tillegg har et viktig mål for oppgaven vært å avdekke potensielle diakroniske endringer mellom de gamle og de nye tv-seriene, og om dette eventuelt kan knyttes til endringer og utvikling i samfunnet.

Et grunnleggende premiss for oppgaven er at språkbruk i media reflekterer språkholdninger og stereotypiske oppfatninger som eksisterer i samfunnet. Tidligere forskning på språkholdninger har vist at folk typisk assosierer ulike varianter av engelsk med spesifikke personlige egenskaper og sosiale bakgrunner. Det å bruke ulike uttalevarianter i film og tv-serier kan dermed være et effektivt virkemiddel for bygge karakterer.

Resultatene fra denne oppgaven blir sammenlignet med funn fra tidligere studier som har sett på bruk av engelske uttalevarianter i film og tv. Noen av studiene har fokusert på tv-serier rettet mot enten barn eller mot et litt eldre publikum. Andre har sett på ulike typer filmer, f.eks. fantasy-filmer, filmer i Harry Potter-serien eller filmer fra Disney. Samtlige studier har funnet systematiske sammenhenger mellom ulike karaktertrekk og varianter av engelsk, og det er disse korrelasjonene som har dannet grunnlaget for hypotesene i denne oppgaven.

I forhold til de underliggende hypotesene var det forventet å finne systematiske sammenhenger mellom uttalevarianter og karaktertrekk, som alder, kjønn, karakterrolle i serien, om karakterene var onde eller gode, om de var sympatiske eller ikke, om de var mennesker eller ikke, samt hvor sofistikerte de var. Forventingen var også å finne forskjeller mellom de gamle og de nyere seriene. Siden samfunnet har utviklet seg mye over de siste tiårene, var forventningen å finne mer stereotypisk språkbruk i de gamle seriene, og mindre av dette i de nye seriene.

Resultatene viser at det er korrelasjoner mellom uttalevarianter og karaktertrekk i Disneys tv-serier, men at noen endringer har skjedd over de siste årene. Den meste brukte uttalevarianten i alle seriene var standard amerikansk, og andelen karakterer som snakket denne varianten av engelsk var enda større i de nye enn i de gamle seriene. I analysen av språkbruk i seriene ble det funnet forskjeller mellom barn og voksne, kvinner og menn, gode og onde, sympatiske og usympatiske, mennesker og ikke-mennesker, sofistikerte og usofistikerte. Selv om forskjellene er mindre i de nye seriene, viser resultatene i denne oppgaven at det fremdeles finnes stereotypisk språkbruk i Disneys animerte tv-serier.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This first chapter outlines the aim and scope of the present thesis, before the research questions and hypotheses are presented. Finally, an overview of the structure of the thesis is given.

1.1 Aim and scope

The present thesis studies language attitudes by looking at accent use in Disney's animated television series. The main aim of the study is to find out whether any systematic correlations between the characters' accents and their character traits can be detected in the selected series. Another important aim is to look for diachronic changes between older and newer shows, and examine whether these potential changes can be related to societal changes. This thesis employs a so-called societal treatment approach, an indirect approach to studying language attitudes which looks at language use in publicly available sources. In societal treatment studies, language attitudes are inferred from observations of how different language varieties are treated in society.

This study on animated television series from Disney was inspired by previous research on films and television series. Lippi-Green (1997), Sønnesyn (2011) and Urke (2019) all studied accent use in animated Disney films from various time periods. Dobrow & Gidney (1998) looked at language attitudes in children's animated television, whereas Dragojevic et al. (2016) examined accent use in American primetime television, aimed at a broader, more adult audience. Moltu (2014) focused on American fantasy films, while Lundervold (2013) combined films and television shows in her MA thesis, where she looked at accent use in the *Harry Potter* films, and the *Game of Thrones* series. The different findings from these studies are of relevance for the present thesis and will be presented in more detail in chapter 2.

Although there have been conducted several attitudinal studies on accent use in Disney's feature films, the present study is, to my knowledge, the first to examine language attitudes in Disney's animated *television series*. In contrast to Dobrow & Gidney (1998), who looked at television shows for children from various broadcasts and networks, the present study focuses exclusively on animated series from Disney Television Animation (DTVA). In

addition, no other societal treatment study on children's television has involved the same time span (1985-2020, 35 years) as the present study does.

The data in the present study consists of 14 animated television series from Disney, including eight older shows released between 1985 and 2002, and six newer shows released between 2015 and 2020. In total, 490 characters have been analyzed in terms of their accents. The accent categories included in this study are General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American, non-standard British, Australian and foreign-accented English. Central accent features of the various categories are presented in section 3.3. Furthermore, all characters are categorized with regard to *character role*, *gender*, *alignment*, *likability*, *species*, *level of sophistication* and *age*. A full description of the different character variables is given in section 3.4. Categorizing the characters according to these character variables, as well as their accents, can potentially reveal stereotypical accent use in Disney's animated television series.

Although Disney is perhaps best known for their 'classic' feature films, their animated series have also gained great popularity since the establishment of Disney Television Animation (DTVA) in 1984. The short duration of the episodes, as well as the series' easy accessibility (e.g. on Disney Channel and now Disney Plus) makes these TV series both suitable and very available for children's everyday media consumption. Studying accent use in Disney's television shows could thus provide insight into the language attitudes that many children are exposed to on a daily basis.

An underlying assumption in the present thesis is that language use and accent distribution in entertainment media reflect contemporary attitudes and stereotypes in society as a whole. Studies on language attitudes have found that various varieties of English are typically evaluated differently, and are associated with specific qualities and traits (see 2.2.2). Comparing accent use in series made 20-40 years ago with accent use in series made 2-7 years ago, might then provide information about whether, and how, society's treatment of English varieties has changed over the past decades.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions and hypotheses of the present thesis are inspired by, and largely based on, findings from previous studies on language attitudes (see 2.5) as well as societal developments over the past decades. The research questions are as follows:

1. Are there systematic correlations between character traits and accents in Disney's animated television series?
2. Are there differences in accent use between the older and newer shows?

The hypotheses for this study of Disney's animated television series are outlined below:

1) General American (GA) will be the most used accent overall, and its dominance will increase in the newer shows.
2) There will be less accent diversity in the newer shows.
3) Child characters will speak more standard than adult characters. There will be no notable differences between older and newer shows, because the target audience consists of children in both sets of series.
4) Female characters will be underrepresented and speak in more standard accents than males in all the series, but the gender differences will be smaller in the newer shows.
5) There will be more stereotypical accent use in the older shows than in the new ones. This means more non-standard accents among:
   a. Less important character roles
   b. Bad characters
   c. Unsympathetic characters
   d. Non-humans
   e. Unsophisticated characters

1.3 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents the aim and scope of the study, as well as the research questions and hypotheses. In chapter 2, the relevant theoretical background is outlined. This involves a brief introduction to the field of sociolinguistics, some theory on language attitudes, attitudinal research and stereotypes. Moreover, the relationship between language and society is discussed, and some information about the Walt Disney company and their animated series is given. Lastly, previous studies that are of relevance to the present thesis are presented. Chapter 3 gives a short description of the different main approaches used when studying language attitudes. Then, the data material, accent categories and character variables of the present thesis are presented, and challenges related to the data collection and analysis are discussed. The fourth chapter consists of a

presentation and discussion of the results from the analysis, including comparisons with previous research. A summary of the findings and some concluding remarks are provided in chapter 5, in addition to a discussion of the contributions of the present study and potential future research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will present the theoretical framework on which this thesis is built. The first section introduces the field of sociolinguistics, and then the field of language attitudes is presented. The part about language attitudes involves a discussion on what 'attitudes' are, as well as a brief overview of studies on attitudes towards varieties of English, and a short segment on stereotypes. Then, different aspects related to language and society are discussed; societal change, the media and the relationship between language and gender. Next, the Walt Disney company's history and animated series are presented, before relevant previous research is outlined.

2.1 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics can be defined as "the study of language in relation to society" (Hudson 1996:1). The field is based on the belief that there is a connection between societal factors surrounding us and the language we use. Sociolinguistics as an academic discipline is considered to have evolved in the 1960s, with the research of William Labov, who is often regarded as the founder of modern sociolinguistics. In 1966, Labov published a study on social stratification, revealing that the use (or non-use) of post-vocalic /r/ in New York City was socially indexical. The language of a speaker can provide information about their background, identity, and reveal other social information about them (Holmes 2013:2). This is one of the central points of interest to sociolinguists, who are primarily concerned with language variation and change.

Language is a social and cultural phenomenon (Trudgill 2000:21), and sociolinguists are interested in both the nature of language and the nature of society (Hudson 1996:1). Generally, the field of sociolinguistics is concerned with "how people use language and what they use it for" (Meyerhoff 2011:2). However, Meyerhoff (2011:1-2) points out that different types of sociolinguists can be interested in different questions, use different research methods and have different goals. Some might want to study how speakers use various language structures in different contexts and find out whether they are aware of their language choices. Others want to know how much we can control or change our language use, whereas some try

to explore why certain linguistic forms 'win out' over others. Furthermore, there are sociolinguists who are interested in the social information people ascribe to various language forms and varieties (Meyerhoff 2011:3), and these researchers operate within the field of language attitudes.

2.2 Language attitudes

One of the social factors that influence language is language attitudes. "Language variation carries social meaning and so can bring very different attitudinal reactions, or even social disadvantage or advantage" (Garrett 2010:2). These attitudinal reactions constitute the main point of interest for sociolinguists who study the field of language attitudes. Research on language attitudes has shown that various accents and dialects tend to be evaluated differently. For example, standard accents like Received Pronunciation (RP) are often associated with status and prestige, whereas some non-standard varieties of English are associated with friendliness and loyalty (see 2.2.2). Before exploring this field further, it is useful to have a closer look at the concept of 'attitude'.

2.2.1 Attitudes

Most people have some idea of what attitudes are, and a lay person would perhaps think of an attitude as the way one relates to something, based on previous knowledge and experiences. Such a definition is relatively vague and very broad, revealing that attitude is not necessarily an easy phenomenon to define. It is an abstract concept which in the *Oxford Dictionary* is defined as "a settled way of thinking or feeling about something". Even though there is no universal agreement on what exactly an attitude is, many linguists agree that it involves three components, namely cognition, affect and behavior (Garrett 2010:23). A suitable definition in accordance with this viewpoint is then that attitudes are "a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way" (Allport 1954, in Garrett 2010:19).

Any encounter might trigger one's attitudes, both in positive and negative form. In terms of cognition, attitudes involve beliefs about the world, about different people and societies. One might believe that people from some social groups are more intelligent, less friendly or more successful than other societal groups. In addition to beliefs about people, different social groups might trigger different emotions in us. Most of us tend to like or dislike some people more than others, which is related to the emotional aspect of attitudes.

According to Sarnoff (1970:279), attitudes are "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects", implying that attitudes are also behavioral. Attitudes do not always equal behavior, but as a disposition to act in a particular way, they can encourage certain actions, such as hiring a job candidate with an accent associated with prestige (Cargile et al. 1994:221). In sum, attitudes can be said to involve that one "knows or believes something, has some emotional reaction to it and, therefore, may be assumed to act on the basis" (Edwards 1982:21).

Moreover, a central part of Allport's definition, and relevant for this thesis, is the point that attitudes are *learned*, and not something we are born with. Garrett (2010) especially points to people's personal experiences and social environment, including the media, as two important factors in the development of one's attitudes. As television is often the biggest part of children's media lives (Rideout & Robb 2020), it is not unreasonable to presume that shows on TV can influence the attitudes that children learn and develop. TV can provide information about our own society and other societies (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:118), and attitudes can be viewed as something we learn "in the process of becoming a member of a family, a member of a group, and of society" (Sherif 1967:2).

As mentioned, attitudes constitute a rather abstract concept, as thoughts and feelings are hidden, and not possible to directly observe (Baker 1992). Oppenheim (1982) argues that attitudes are inner components of mental life that manifest themselves, directly or indirectly, in much more obvious ways. They can take the forms of e.g. "stereotypes, beliefs, verbal statements or reactions, ideas and opinions, selective recall, anger or satisfaction or some other emotion and in various other aspects of behavior" (Oppenheim 1982:39). Thus, even though attitudes are impossible to study directly, they can become visible through our words, reactions and behavior (Baker 1992). In the field of language attitudes, various methods have been developed (see 3.1) in an attempt to uncover different patterns in people's attitudes, e.g. towards varieties of English.

2.2.2 Studies on attitudes towards varieties of English

There are several reasons to study language attitudes. It can help us understand and explain language variation and change, as well as understand more about society, and uncover and fight social injustice. Typical focus areas in attitudinal research have been e.g. attitudes to linguistic varieties, attitudes to language learning, attitudes towards societal groups and communities, and society's treatment of linguistic varieties. Language attitudes research first developed in the 1970s (Garrett 2010:17), with Howard Giles as an important contributor.

Through attitudinal studies in the UK, he discovered that various British accents were evaluated differently, e.g. regarding perceived status (Giles 1970, Giles & Powesland 1975).

Generally, in attitudinal studies, two or three evaluative *dimensions* are included when participants are evaluating different accents and varieties. Typical dimensions are *social attractiveness*, *status/prestige* and *linguistic quality*. Social attractiveness involves traits like *friendliness*, *helpfulness*, *solidarity*, *sense of humor* and *reliability*, whereas *status/prestige* involves evaluation of a speaker's perceived *education*, *intelligence* and *wealth*. If the *linguistic quality* dimension is included, accents are evaluated according to e.g. *correctness*, *aesthetic quality* and *fluency*.

The use of these dimensions in a number of attitudinal studies has revealed a form of hierarchy with regard to various varieties of English. In older studies conducted in Britain, RP is always rated highly on all dimensions, particularly in the status dimension, whereas urban accents like Cockney and Birmingham score the lowest on all dimensions (Giles 1970, Giles 1971, Milroy & McClenaghan 1977, Giles et al. 1981, Giles & Sassoon 1983, Giles & Coupland 1991).

Similar patterns were found in the US, where the standard, non-regional variety General American (GA) typically come out on top of the hierarchy, and the urban New York accent and the rural Southern accent are placed at the bottom (e.g. Hewitt 1971, Labov 2001, Niedzielski & Preston 2000). Although both Southern American and NYC English tend to be negatively evaluated in attitudinal studies, the two variations of English have different connotations. The working-class NYC accent is associated with being rude and loud, whereas the Southern accent can be associated with hillbillies, pick-up trucks and inbred hicks, but also with hospitality, friendliness, loyalty and the Southern gentleman (Niedzielski & Preston 2000). Clear accent hierarchies have also been found in later studies. Some of these are outlined below.

Generally, both in the UK and US, non-regional accents like RP and GA are evaluated highest on the status dimension. Non-standard urban varieties are still at the bottom of the hierarchy, whereas rural or regional accents are placed somewhere in the middle. The varieties of English located in the middle of the hierarchy are typically rated low in the status dimension, but high in the social attractiveness dimension. Many studies have found evidence supporting the existence of this accent hierarchy.

In 2005, Yuko Hiraga examined the attitudes of British subjects towards three American and three British varieties of English. The accents RP, GA, Alabama, NYC English, Birmingham and West Yorkshire were evaluated according to their perceived *status*

and *solidarity*. In the *status* dimension, RP was rated on top, followed by GA. The Birmingham and NYC accents scored the lowest, but on the *solidarity* dimension, the Birmingham accent scored rather high, compared to RP which scored relatively low. Interestingly enough, a vast majority of the British respondents seemed to prefer a regional American over a regional British accent, because they considered it more comforting, intelligible, easier to overcome and sounding nicer.

Coupland and Bishop (2007) conducted a large study that revealed results in line with Hiraga's findings. They created an online survey, where the task was to evaluate 34 varieties of English according to the two dimensions *social attractiveness* and *prestige*. 5010 UK informants participated, and once again standard varieties were rated higher than non-standard English varieties. What they referred to as "Queen's English" and "Standard English" were rated on top, whereas Birmingham was placed in the bottom in both dimensions. Only one American accent ("North American") was included, and this variety only got a medium high score on *social attractiveness*, but a rather high score on *prestige*. Other studies, like one by Bayard et al. (2001), have found indications of a 'rise' of GA, as it seems to increasingly replace RP as the most preferred and prestigious English variety (Coupland and Bishop 2007:22).

Attitudinal studies have over the past few decades also been carried out among informants in non-English speaking countries. Results from these studies are in line with the attitude patterns from studies of native English speakers. One example is Ladegaard & Sachdev's (2006) study of language attitudes among 96 students in Denmark. They were asked to evaluate American, Australian, RP, Scottish and Cockney in regard to three dimensions: *social status/competence*, *social attractiveness/personal integrity* and *quality of language*. RP came out on top of the hierarchy in terms of *status* and *linguistic quality*, but had the lowest score on *social attractiveness*, where Scottish was rated highest. When asked which accent they aimed for themselves, the majority of the respondents (55%) answered RP. However, in terms of cultural preference, American culture proved to be nearly three times as popular as British culture (Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006:102).

Similar results have been found in Norwegian attitudinal studies as well (e.g. Loftheim 2013, Rindal 2014). Even though the respondents do not live in English-speaking countries, they generally share many of the same opinions and attitudes towards different varieties of English. One reason for this is that increasing globalization has led to world-wide consumption of English-language (mainly American) media content, which contributes to disseminating stereotypes and language attitudes.

In addition to research on attitudes towards native English accents, there have also been conducted studies on native English speakers' attitudes towards various non-native, or 'foreign', accents of English. Findings imply that there is a hierarchy among different foreign accents as well, where e.g. French and Italian accents typically are rated higher than for example Slavic or Asian accents. In the study by Coupland and Bishop (2007) mentioned above, respondents were asked to rate e.g. Asian-, French-, German-, and Spanish-accented English in terms of social attractiveness and prestige. The results showed that the French and Spanish accents scored relatively high on both dimensions, whereas Asian- and German-accented English were rated as two of the least prestigious *and* least socially attractive varieties (Coupland & Bishop 2007:79).

Another study, conducted by Lindemann in 2005, examined over 200 US English speakers' constructions of social categories for people outside the United States (Lindemann 2005:187). The respondents were asked to label maps, and to rate countries in terms of how familiar, correct, friendly and pleasant they found the English accent of that specific country (Lindemann 2005:191). The results show a hierarchy where native English speakers are evaluated on top on all dimensions, Western/Central European and Latin American are in the middle, and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian are in the bottom (Lindemann 2005:194). Lindemann points out that for the countries that were quite unfamiliar to the respondents, their evaluations of accents seem to be based largely on stereotypes, as "they lacked access to counterexamples that could neutralize or soften them" (Lindemann 2005:206).

2.2.3 Stereotypes

The concept of 'stereotypes' is a central element when working with language attitudes. Stereotyping is a cognitive process that involves sorting various people into different social groups based on the traits they have in common (Garrett 2010), e.g. if they share a specific accent. This categorizing technique is a natural way for the human brain to organize our surroundings and impressions, in order to comprehend the complex world we live in. In other words, stereotyping can be defined as "a functional cognitive device by means of which we systemize our social environment, creating distinct and apparently homogenous categories" (Kristiansen 2001:137). In this categorization process, differences between various groups, as well as similarities between members of a social group, tend to be exaggerated (Garrett 2010:32). Stereotypes can be both negative and positive, and can influence how people treat each other. According to Edwards (1999:103), research has shown that in all kinds of

counselor-client relations, e.g. in school or in the workplace, negative stereotypes can hinder individual action. It is therefore unfortunate that stereotypes, and especially negative stereotypes, are generally difficult to change. Even increased contact with members of a specific group will not necessarily have any significant effect on stereotypes established (Garrett 2010:33).

In the cognitive process of placing someone in a specific social category, language often functions as one of the most important social markers (Kristiansen 2001:140). The human brain is very quick to establish connections between linguistic features and social identities. Therefore, hearing someone's accent might lead us to immediately draw inferences about e.g. the social class, ethnicity, personality and background of a speaker we know nothing about. Lippi-Green (1997) argues that especially in animated film, this phenomenon is often taken advantage of, as dialects and accents are a common way to introduce and establish a character. She points out that language is used as a quick and effective way to develop characters and reaffirm stereotypes (Lippi-Green 1997:85). For example, in American entertainment, British characters have often been portrayed as snobs and/or villains, characters with Southern accents as simple and slow, whereas New York City accented speakers have traditionally been portrayed as angry and loud. Stereotypes are thus closely linked to language attitudes, and also to the society we live in.

2.3 Language and society

Language and society are deeply intertwined, and as societies change and develop, so do language and language attitudes. One of the hypotheses in this thesis involves finding differences in the old versus the newer shows in terms of accent use, reflecting societal changes over the past decades. This section will first present some relevant societal changes, before giving a brief discussion on language and gender, and finally look at the relationship between language and the media.

2.3.1 Societal change

Since this thesis compares older television shows from the 80s, 90s and early 2000s, with more recent shows made in 2015 or later, it is relevant to consider some of the main social changes that has taken place in the Western society during that period. One important social phenomenon that has developed over the past decades is 'political correctness', which involves speaking and behaving in a manner that does not discriminate or offend anyone, but

promotes equality and social justice. According to Hughes (2010:3-4), political correctness started as an effort to 'sanitize' people's language by putting an end to prejudicial features, and it has had "a major influence on what is regarded as 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' in language, ideas, behavioural norms, and values". Areas or topics where politically correct language is often particularly relevant, are e.g. ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

Morris (2001:249) points out that much of people's behavior can be explained by the fact that people generally care a great deal about what others think of them. It is not unreasonable to believe that this also applies to companies like Disney, which creates films and television shows for the masses. They care about what their audiences think, and therefore, this thesis assumes that the political correctness movement has influenced the way Disney uses language in their animated series. The expectation is to find less use of linguistic stereotypes in the newer shows, compared to the old ones. A way to make accent use more 'politically correct' is to involve more diversity, and to avoid stereotyping by distributing accents independently of gender, status and personality traits.

Secondly, another social change that is perhaps related to the previous one, is increased tolerance for diversity in most societies. McMichael & Weber (2020) points to globalization, increase in migration, informalization, and antiracist and women's movements over the past decades as indicators that the world increasingly recognizes the importance of cultural diversity and racial justice. Increasing tolerance for *cultural* diversity entails increasing tolerance for *accent* diversity as well. An example of this can be found in the UK, where the BBC has gone from only allowing the RP accent on its radio airwaves, to allow, and even encourage, regional accents on its broadcasts (Hogenboom 2018). BBC is a large and well-known institution, often regarded as rather conservative and serious with regard to language (Bailey 2008), and is therefore a very important example of the increasing approval and tolerance of non-standard accents in society.

A third social change that is relevant in this context, is feminism, the empowering of women and the increase that has taken place in terms of gender equality (McMicheal & Weber 2020). Bucholtz (2014:23) defines feminism as "a diverse and sometimes conflicting set of theoretical, methodological, and political perspectives that have in common a commitment to understanding and challenging social inequalities related to gender and sexuality". Women have historically been less powerful than men, and increasing dissatisfaction has led to several 'waves' of feminism over the years, attempting to even out these inequalities related to gender. The traditional differences in social roles of men and women are also typically reflected in linguistic differences between the genders (Talbot

2020). This relationship between language and gender will be further discussed in section 2.3.2. However, over the past decades, women's roles have changed and expanded, women have become more empowered, and have begun to take on jobs and positions previously reserved for men. Increased gender equality can perhaps also mean a reduction in language differences between men and women, which again might be reflected in television and other media.

Finally, a last important societal development is the globalization of American popular culture, including the television industry. Pells (2011:369) links the growth and extension of American films and mass culture to "the rise of transnational corporations, the vital role of the Internet, and the integration of markets in all parts of the world". Especially the internet and the development of digital technology have contributed to reducing the distance between people with different backgrounds, nationalities, societies and languages. It is thus much easier today to gain knowledge about other cultures and languages, than it was before the Internet existed. Over the past years, online streaming services, such as Netflix and Disney Plus, have become "the most popular form of television entertainment due to their accessibility and variety of content" (Meckel 2021:1). These platforms contain a wide selection of content which the consumers have constant access to.

The audiences of films and television shows today have thus, due to the globalized television industry and the internet, probably been exposed to more different types of accents and languages, than the pre-internet audiences. Increased exposure leads to increased awareness, which again affects people's expectations to authenticity and quality regarding accent use in films and television. Bradley (2017) explains that "For most of Hollywood history, accents were a character feature that could reasonably be ignored or drawn from a very limited menu of "Southern" or British or vaguely Eastern-European dialects". It is reasonable to expect that globalization has changed the patterns Bradley is describing, and that the American entertainment industry's increased international focus has led to more accent diversity and less use of stereotypes in films and TV shows.

2.3.2 Language and gender

One of the hypotheses of this thesis involves that there will be systematic correlations between gender and accents in the selected animated TV series. Therefore, it is relevant to have a closer look at the relationship between language and gender. Several studies have demonstrated that in most English-speaking societies we find differences in the way men and women tend to speak. Generally, the pattern found in sociolinguistic research is that women

tend to speak more standardized, or use more standard forms, than men (Trudgill 1974, Hudson 1996, Meyerhoff 2011, Holmes 2013). Already in the 1960s and 70s, sociolinguistic surveys revealed that both in English and other languages, women across various social classes tended to use linguistic features associated with a more prestigious 'standard' variety of their language more than men (Talbot 2020). Standard forms have thus traditionally been linked to femininity, whereas non-standard language has rather been associated with masculinity and 'toughness' (Trudgill 2000). Men and women have traditionally had different roles, where men derive status from what they do, whereas women are evaluated from their appearance, which includes their language (Hudson 1996: 195-199).

The reasons behind the tendency for women to speak more standardized are debated among sociolinguists. Some argue that women use more standard forms because of society's expectations towards the different genders (Trudgill 2000:73). Even from a young age, girls and young women are expected to behave in certain ways, and are often corrected more than boys, who are normally allowed more freedom (Holmes 2008:165). Talbot (2020) points out that linguistic interaction is a learned behavior, and not an innate quality. Thus, if there is a difference in how boys and girls speak, it must have been learned somehow. Moreover, social groups that are 'subordinate' are often expected to be polite (Holmes 2008:166), and women have a long history of being subordinate to men, which might be another explanation for their tendency to use standard, formal speech.

Others argue that socially subordinate and oppressed women have used their language deliberately in order to compensate for their low social status. Women seem to be more conscious than men of how social background and status are reflected in language (Holmes 2008:164), and simultaneously more easily distinguish standard and non-standard forms (Meyerhoff 2011). An explanation for why women use prestige variants more could thus be that they are more conscious of status, and of linguistic forms, but it could also be that women actually master standard speech better than men (Chambers 2003:139). Different tests have shown that women often score better on aspects like sentence complexity, spelling and fluency than men (Chambers 2003:148). Generally, it seems that girls and women show greater "use of linguistic variability across social categories" (Eckert 2008:393). It can thus be discussed whether language differences linked to gender is a shortcoming or an advantage for women (Chambers 2003), but many agree that these differences exist because of the social roles men and women traditionally have had (Talbot 2020).

2.3.3 Language and the media

Language attitudes can be conveyed and learned through different agents such as one's family, educators, peers, but also the media (Dragojevic 2017). In line with this, Garrett (2010:22) points to people's personal experiences and social environment, including the media, as the most important sources for the development of language attitudes. Since this thesis deals with television series, the relationship between the media and language attitudes is of particular relevance. The media can be seen as important linguistic institutions, since various media outputs make up a significant part of the language people read and hear every day (Bell 1995). Research has shown that, on average, children in the United States watch television for around two and a half hours every day (Kimbro et al. 2011:671, Rideout & Robb 2020:3). Zurcher et al. (2018:2) argue that "extensive media use suggests a further exploration for not only the types of content children consume but also the possible effects of repeated consumption".

Some linguists (e.g. Bell 1995) argue that the media can reflect and shape both people's language attitudes and language use. Others (e.g. Aitchison 1998, Chambers 1998) are skeptical of the idea that the media actually influence language use, but there is a general agreement that the media reflect and potentially perpetuate language attitudes that already exist in society. However, even if the nature of the relationship between language and the media is an unsettled discussion, the television industry undoubtedly provides "a major avenue of contact to the world outside our homes and communities" (Lippi-Green 1997:81). The media are thus important social institutions (Bell 1995). Therefore, the tendency to portray different linguistic groups in stereotypical ways (Dragojevic et al. 2021) is very unfortunate. Lippi-Green (1997:81) states that many people, especially children, have television as "the only view they have of people of other races or national origins".

As discussed in section 2.2.1, attitudes are learned. According to Bandura's (1994) Social Learning Theory (SLT), learning does not happen only in real-life encounters, but people also "observe, evaluate, are instructed from, and possibly imitate various forms of models surrounding them—including mass media models" (Zurcher et al. 2018:3). It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that stereotypical portrayals of social and linguistic groups can affect children's learning of language attitudes. Negative attitudes can further lead to the promotion of prejudice, problematic social interactions and discrimination (Dragojevic 2017).

Stereotypes and attitudes that can be found in the media, already exist somewhere in society. Therefore, studying animated television series can potentially contribute to providing

information about contemporary attitudes and stereotypes present in society when the shows were made. An important underlying assumption in this thesis is thus that television is a media source from which language attitudes can be inferred and studied.

2.4 The Walt Disney company's history and animated series

The Walt Disney company is today one of the largest and most iconic media empires in the entire world, and can be seen as an example of how the media can "interact with society and influence culture" (Harrington 2015:6). Wills (2017:131) describes the company as a "truly global business model" with a "worldwide multimedia presence", as it owns several major franchises and television channels. They have, among other things, produced numerous animated films and TV series seen by people all around the world. These films and series are very often set in fictional worlds, inhabited by characters that are relatively simplistic and easy to classify as either 'good' or 'bad', 'sophisticated' or 'unsophisticated', etc. This makes them very suitable for attitudinal studies, because their accent use will not reflect reality, but rather be a result of existing language attitudes in society (see 3.2.2). As the data material for this thesis consists of animated series produced by Disney, a brief overview of the company's history is appropriate.

The Walt Disney company was founded in 1923, in California (Official Disney Fan Club 2022), and released its first sound cartoon film, *Steamboat Willie*, introducing the character Mickey Mouse, in 1928 (Wills 2017:2). Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and the *Silly Symphonies* series made Disney an important part of American entertainment in the 1930s, and in 1937, Disney's first feature-length animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was released (Wills 2017). The film was an enormous hit, and after its huge success, the Disney Studios grew rapidly. Except for an economic drawback during the second World War, the Walt Disney company has continued to grow and expand massively (Official Disney Fan Club 2022). In 1955, Disneyland in California was opened, and the large success of Disney's first amusement park has resulted in many more around the globe (Giroux & Pollock 2010:35-36). Walt Disney passed away in 1966 (Wills 2017:19), but his legacy lived on. The Disney company kept making successful feature films, more amusement parks, and eventually they moved into cable television in the 1980s.

The Disney Television Animation (DTVA) department was established in November 1984, and its first show was *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (The Walt Disney Company 2014). Just a decade later, DTVA was producing around 150 half-hour episodes of

programming a year, as well as specials, films and much more. In 1987, *DuckTales* was released and became a big hit. A new version of the show was released in 2017. Other shows based on the characters from the Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse universes developed into popular TV series like *Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers* (1989), *Goof Troop* (1992) and *Quack Pack* (1996) (Official Disney Fan Club 2022). In addition to the Disney Channel, other channels like Disney XD and Disney Junior became platforms for the DTVA shows to air. DTVA has both created spin-off series[1] from Disney's original feature films, but also produced brand new characters and shows like *Recess* (1997), *Kim Possible* (2002) and *Phineas and Ferb* (2007), the latter being considered one of the biggest shows in DTVA's history (Valley News 2014). One of the more successful shows made even more recently is *The Owl House* (2020), created by Dana Terrace, who is the youngest female ever to be a creator of a Disney animated series (IMDb 2022).

In addition to having several channels on linear TV, Disney became, in 2006, "the first company to sell its films and television shows online for download from the Apple iTunes store to computers and portable media devices" (Giroux & Pollock 2010:2). Over the past few years, viewership numbers have gone down for Disney's linear Channels, but this is likely because of Disney's new streaming service, Disney Plus, where almost all of Disney's films and series are available for watching at any time. Disney Plus launched in November 2019, and two years later the streaming service had over 118 million paying subscribers (The Walt Disney Company 2021).

Although Disney films and series are watched and loved by many people all over the world, the company has also received some criticism. Disney films have for instance been criticized for portraying gender, race and culture in stereotypical ways. Moreover, critics point out that marginalized groups have typically been portrayed negatively, rarely, or not at all in the Disney universe (Towbin et al. 2004). Nonetheless, the simplistic characters and fictional settings that characterize films and television shows from Disney make them, as mentioned above, very suitable for attitudinal studies. Examples of studies that have looked at accent use in Disney films, as well as other relevant studies that have focused on films and television shows, are presented in the next section.

[1] Spin-off series are television series derived from already existing films or series.

2.5 Previous studies

This MA thesis is an example of a *societal treatment study*, an indirect approach to studying language attitudes where the goal is to look at how language varieties are treated by society, by looking at publicly available sources (see 3.1.3). Language attitudes are thus inferred from the material studied, and not explicitly expressed by informants (Garrett 2010). A common way to apply this method, is by looking at language in films, and studying correlations between accent use and character traits. Previous studies using this approach have served as an inspiration for the present thesis, and some of the most relevant ones will therefore be presented in this section.

2.5.1 Lippi-Green (1997)

An important inspiration that this thesis builds on, is the study by Rosina Lippi-Green in 1997. She looks at the use of various accents in 24 animated Disney films released between 1937 and 1994, and her work is published in her book called *English with an Accent* (1997). The purpose of her research is to look for systematic patterns between accents and character traits in films directed at children. The basis for Lippi-Green's study is as follows:

> Animated films entertain, but they are also a way to teach children to associate specific characteristics and life styles with specific social groups, by means of language variation (Lippi-Green 1997:85)

This statement indicates that the accents chosen for different characters are not random, and that patterns in language variation in these films can affect children's perception of speakers of different groups. Lippi-Green analyzed all the Disney feature films currently available, and ended up with 371 characters, after eliminating those who only speak one word. A second edition of the study was published in 2012, analyzing 14 newer films in addition to the 24 original ones (Lippi-Green 2012).

The results reveal that the majority of the 371 characters speak with a native English accent, whereas foreign-accented speakers only conduct 9% of the characters. The most used accent in Lippi-Green's analysis is GA,[2] represented in 43% of the characters. Other accents found in the study are RP[3] (22%), Other British (11%), Regional US (8%), Social US (5%) and 'Other Englishes' (2%).

[2] Lippi-Green (1997) uses the term Mainstream US English, which corresponds to General American (GA).
[3] Lippi-Green (1997) uses the term Mainstream British, which corresponds to Received Pronunciation (RP).

It is not necessarily surprising to find an overweight of GA speakers in animated films produced by an American company. However, Lippi-Green points out that out of the 91 characters who according to the films' settings should speak with a foreign accent, only 34 actually do (Lippi-Green 1997:87). There is also a difference with regard to various geographical settings, as films set in Western European countries have more use of foreign accents than films set in more distant countries, e.g. countries in Asia or Africa. Taking into account the settings of the different films, Lippi-Green found that even though most characters speak with a native English accent, only 60% of them are placed in native English settings (Lippi-Green 1997:89).

In addition to an underrepresentation of non-native English speakers, Lippi-Green also found an uneven distribution in male (70%) and female (30%) characters (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). Gender roles in these films are portrayed in very traditional ways, with female characters represented mostly as mothers, wives or princesses, rarely leaving their homes, and only working in 'female' occupations. Male characters are much more diverse and work as advisors to kings, doctors, detectives, etc. (Lippi-Green 1997:87). Disney thus seems to portray a rather traditional and conservative view of gender roles, and Lippi-Green states that there is not much difference to be found in the newer films (Lippi-Green 2012:114). There is also a gender difference in accent variation. Even though GA is the most used accent for both male lovers and fathers, and female lovers and mothers, a slightly greater diversity can be detected among the male characters.

Another way in which Lippi-Green categorize her 371 characters involves whether their actions and motivations are positive, negative, mixed or unclear (Lippi-Green 1997:90). Positive characters are dominating, and just 20% are categorized as negative or bad. The results furthermore show that 15% of the negative characters speak with a foreign accent, whereas 46% speak US English and 39% use a British or other English accent. However, compared to characters with a native English accent, twice as many of the foreign accented characters are categorized as bad or negative. Thus, the overall representation of characters with foreign accents prove more negative than the speakers of British or US English (Lippi-Green 1997:92).

Lippi-Green also goes more in depth on three different focus points, namely the representation of certain character groups, the representation of African-Americans, and the portrayal of stereotypical French characters. Looking at how character groups like mothers and lovers are represented, Lippi-Green discovered that the dominating accents in these groups are GA and RP (Lippi-Green 1997:95). Looking at characters speaking in African

American Vernacular English (AAVE), the results reveal that all characters with this accent appear in animal form rather than humanoid form (Lippi-Green 1997:93). However, since the number of characters speaking AAVE is very low, it is not possible to draw any inferences or make any generalizations. As for the characters with French accents, the Disney films present a rather stereotypical picture of the French as "persons associated with food preparation or presentation, or those with a special talent for lighthearted sexual bantering" (Lippi-Green 1997:100). Although the stereotypes presented are not necessarily negative, Lippi-Green still points out that this kind of stereotyping is unfortunate because it presents children with a distorted and narrow view of what French people are like (Lippi-Green 1997:100).

2.5.2 Sønnesyn (2011)

Janne Sønnesyn's MA thesis from 2011 is inspired by Lippi-Green's (1997) study. The aim of Sønnesyn's thesis is to look for systematic correlations between accents and character traits in 18 Disney animated feature films released between 1995-2009, and compare the results with those of Lippi-Green. The study includes 372 characters, who are all categorized by accents and analyzed in terms of their gender, level of sophistication, ethnicity, and character role.

Overall, Sønnesyn (2011) found an increase in the use of General American (GA) and Regional American, and a decrease in accents like RP and other British accents. 61% of the characters speak with a GA accent, compared to Lippi-Green's (1997) 43% in the same accent category. Changes are small in other accent groups, but Sønnesyn's results still indicate a small decrease in diversity. Sønnesyn connects the changes detected to societal changes, and an increase in what is known as 'political correctness', which involves not offending anybody. She tentatively concludes that Disney is "playing it safe" by reducing the use of non-standard accents.

In terms of the *gender* variable, the results are similar to those of Lippi-Green (1997). The underrepresentation is very clear, with only 23% female characters out of the 372 characters analyzed (Sønnesyn 2011:57). Both among female and male characters, GA is the most prevalent accent, and RP the second most dominating, but the percentages of both accents are slightly higher in the female category. These results show a pattern where female characters tend to speak more 'standardized' than male characters (Sønnesyn 2011: 59), which is in line with traditional gender patterns found in language research.

When categorizing characters according to their *level of sophistication*, Sønnesyn labels 53% as sophisticated, 42% as unsophisticated and 5% as unclassified (Sønnesyn 2011:71). GA is the most dominating accent among both sophisticated and unsophisticated

characters, but in the second largest accent category the numbers are rather different. Among the unsophisticated characters, the second most used category is Regional American English, whereas for the sophisticated characters, it is RP (Sønnesyn 2011:72-73). Although there is a decrease in the use of RP overall, there is still a clear correlation between this accent and sophistication. This finding is in line with RP's traditional tendency to be evaluated highly on status and prestige, which might explain why only a very small percentage of the unsophisticated characters in Sønnesyn's study speak RP.

Lastly, characters are categorized according to what kind of *role* they had in the films. Again, GA is dominant in all groups, but some character roles show more diversity than others. The hero/heroine category show the smallest degree of diversity, with 83% speaking in GA. Among the villains, GA is still the dominating accent, and even if there is an increase in RP compared to the heroes and heroines, Sønnesyn found a lower distribution of RP, and foreign accents, than expected in the villain group. The only character group where all the selected accents are represented is in the aid to hero/-ine category (Sønnesyn 2011: 83). Contrastingly, aide to villain show the smallest degree of diversity and the highest usage of GA. Unsympathetic characters constitute the group with the smallest percentage of GA (40%).

However, overall, Sønnesyn found more usage of standard accent varieties, especially GA, than she had expected. Comparing her thesis to Lippi-Green's work, Sønnesyn concludes that the extent of stereotypic language use has decreased, probably because of an increase in political correctness (Sønnesyn 2011:91).

2.5.3 Urke (2019)

In 2019 Åsa B. S. Urke, inspired by Lippi-Green and Sønnesyn, also wrote her MA thesis on accent use and character traits in the Disney universe. In recent times, Disney has started to create live-action remakes of some of their original 'classics'. In Urke's study, she compares these remakes to their originals in order to look for possible diachronic changes. 16 films are analyzed (eight originals, eight remakes), and a total of 234 characters are put in various accent groups and categorized in terms of gender, level of sophistication, alignment, species and character role.

Urke found that General American (GA) is the most used accent in the original films with a distribution of 46%, whereas Received Pronunciation (RP) dominates in the live-action remakes with 62% (Urke 2019:43-44). To explain the great increase of RP in the live-action remakes, Urke points to a "growing trend of British accents in fantasy films and series" in

America (Urke 2019:18), and also the fact that some of the selected films are set in England. Overall, the standard accents prove to be dominating, and the results reveal that, compared to Lippi-Green and Sønnesyn, fewer characters speak with non-standard accents in both the originals and the remakes (Urke 2019:45). There are not really any notable differences in the use of non-standard accents when comparing the remakes to their originals (Urke 2019:78).

In line with other studies, Urke found an underrepresentation of female characters in both film sets (Urke 2019:46). Furthermore, females tend to use more standard forms than males, and the gender differences are actually even greater in the remakes. The only exception from this pattern is a small increase in female characters with foreign accents in the remakes (Urke 2019:76). Like Sønnesyn, Urke also found that characters categorized as sophisticated tend to use more standard accents than the unsophisticated ones. This is the case for both the originals and the remakes, although there is a small increase of non-standard accents in the sophisticated category in the remakes (Urke 2019:55).

The *alignment* variable, which involves a character's ethical motivations, provided some unexpected results. There is actually less accent diversity among the 'bad' characters than among the good characters in the originals (Urke 2019:76). Moreover, in the remakes all accent categories are represented among 'good' characters, whereas none of the 'bad' characters speak with a foreign accent (Urke 2019:77). In terms of correlation between accents and *species*, Urke (2019:63-64) found it hard to draw strong inferences or conclusions, but discovered slightly more diversity in the 'non-human' category (Urke 2019:77). When *character roles* were analyzed, the findings revealed that, in both originals and remakes, main characters show greater use of standard accents, whereas there is more linguistic diversity among the characters described as peripheral and supporting (Urke 2019:77).

In addition to her analysis of accent use and character variables, Urke investigates and compares accent authenticity in the originals versus the remakes. In the originals, 19% of the characters speak with an inauthentic accent, whereas in the remakes, only 3% are placed in this category (Urke 2019:72). Urke argues that this increase in accent authenticity is linked to societal changes, globalization, the internet, larger international audiences, higher realism and authenticity expectations, and better possibilities of finding voice actors from various countries (Urke 2019:74).

2.5.4 Dobrow & Gidney (1998)

Another study that is relevant for this thesis is one conducted by Dobrow and Gidney in 1998, which examines characters and dialect use in children's animated television programming (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:105). 323 characters, from 12 different American animated TV programs, are analyzed. 69% of these characters are identified as male, and 27% as female (the remaining characters were unidentified), and these numbers show that once again there is an underrepresentation of female characters. This is also the case for non-white characters, who constitute only 17% when the characters are analyzed in terms of ethnicity.

Another interesting aspect, and one of the main findings in Dobrow and Gidney's study, is that "the majority of shows used dialect stereotypes to indicate a character's personality or status as hero or villain or as serious or comic" (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:115). Their results show that none of the characters identified as villainous speak with a GA[4] accent, but rather with British English (predominantly RP), foreign accents[5] or nonstandard American dialects (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:115-116). In contrast, GA is the most common accent among heroic characters, especially among the 'serious' ones, and only two heroes are found to be speaking with foreign accents (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:116). Characters categorized as 'comic' generally use regional or social varieties of American English, or foreign accents like German or Slavic. Unlike the villains, none of these 'comic reliefs' speak with a British English accent (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:116). The results thus indicate that generally, serious characters speak in more standard forms, whereas the comic and less sophisticated characters tend to display more diversity in their language use.

Lastly, when comparing older and newer shows, Dobrow and Gidney found a few, small differences, especially regarding gender-related speech. In addition to being presented as weaker, more dependent and passive in the older shows, female characters also use very stereotypical female discourse features. Male characters, on the other hand, appear as strong, smart and independent, and use stereotypical male discourse features (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:116-117). In the more contemporary shows, however, gender-related differences in language use seem to be almost non-existent. Moreover, the tendency to link dark skin with bad characters in the older shows, are not found in the more recent shows. Dobrow and Gidney thus conclude that young, male, Anglo-Saxon characters still dominate in children's

[4] Dobrow & Gidney (1999) use the term Standard American English (SAE), which corresponds to General American (GA).
[5] In Dobrow & Gidney (1998:112) a 'foreign accent' refers to "the product of the inference of one linguistic system (sounds, grammar, and so forth) with another language system".

animated television at the time of their study, but also point out that it seems like the trend is moving towards a larger degree of character diversity, even if not accent diversity (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:117).

2.5.5 Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink (2016)

All of the studies mentioned above focus on films and television programs aimed at children. In 2016, Dragojevic et al. also conducted a study on television programs, but with focus on shows aimed at a broader and more adult audience. Their goal is to investigate accent use in American primetime television, in order to find out how various social groups are represented on TV. The study involves 89 programs airing between 8 and 11pm across nine different broadcast and cable networks in the fall of 2013. A total of 1252 characters are coded in terms of their accent, role and attributes (Dragojevic et al. 2016:69-70). Accent categories used in the study are Standard American[6] (SA), Nonstandard American (NSA), Foreign-Anglo (FA) and Foreign-Other (FO) (Dragojevic et al. 2016:59).

In line with findings from previous studies, the majority (84%) of the characters speak with a SA accent. Only a few percent of the characters analyzed use NSA English, FA accents, or FO accents (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 74). Comparing the numbers with the real-world distribution of people in the United States, the results reveal an overrepresentation of SA and FA speakers, and an underrepresentation of NSA and FO speakers. Dragojevic et al. (2016:75) argue that this biased speaker distribution in the media contributes to bolster some societal groups' power and influence, and simultaneously marginalize and silence other members of society.

Characters with standard accents (SA and FA) also prove more likely to appear in main roles than those who speak with a FO accent, which increases their presence on the screen (Dragojevic et al. 2016:74). Moreover, some accent groups are portrayed more favorably than others in several ways, revealing a form of hierarchy in American primetime television. For example, standard-accented (SA and FA) speakers generally score higher on attributes related to status (e.g. intelligence, articulateness) and physical attractiveness than non-standard speakers. In general, Dragojevic et al. found that characters with SA and FA accents are usually portrayed most favorably, FO speakers are portrayed least favorably, and NSA accents end up in the middle of the hierarchy (Dragojevic et al. 2016:75-76). As non-standard accented groups are both underrepresented in American television, as well as

[6] Dragojevic et al. (2016) use the term Standard American (SA), which corresponds to General American (GA).

portrayed in stereotypical and unfavorable ways, Dragojeciv et al. conclude that these groups are effectively silenced (Dragojevic et al. 2016:79). They also point out that media consumption can potentially influence the consumers' social perception of different linguistic groups, which is the reason why these kinds of studies are important.

2.5.6 Lundervold (2013)

Lene Lundervold (2013) wrote her MA thesis on language attitudes, comparing accent use in the eight *Harry Potter* films and the first season of the HBO-series *Game of Thrones* (ten episodes). The 124 characters detected are analyzed in terms of their accents, character role, gender, level of sophistication, maturity (whether they were children or adults), and are identified as either sympathetic or unsympathetic, and good or evil. Accents included are various British varieties of English, as well as foreign accented English (Lundervold 2013:6).

Overall, Received Pronunciation (RP) is the most used accent, spoken by 55% of the characters in *Harry Potter*, and by 48% in *Game of Thrones.* The films have more linguistic diversity than the series, but they also involve a greater number of characters in total. Once again, the results show that female characters are underrepresented, and tend to speak with more standard accents than males (Lundervold 2013:57). The same pattern is detected amongst the characters with major roles, who mostly speak RP, whereas e.g. Cockney speakers are generally minor or peripheral characters (Lundervold 2013:70).

The *level of sophistication* variable reveal that most of the characters speaking with an RP accent are classified as sophisticated (Lundervold 2013:85). Cockney and Irish speakers, on the other hand, are all classified as unsophisticated (Lundervold 2013:86). Sympathetic characters show a slightly higher degree of variation in accent use than the unsympathetic ones, and, percentagewise, evil or 'mixed' characters show greater use of RP, and less variation, than good characters (Lundervold 2013:85).

Lundervold also included a category that she called *maturity,* because she wanted to see how the accents are distributed amongst children and adults, and whether these distributions are different or similar (Lundervold 2013:85). In *Game of Thrones*, all four children are identified with an RP accent, whereas in *Harry Potter,* the dominant accent category is Estuary English, followed by RP in second place. Among adult characters, RP is the most dominant accent, but in *Game of Thrones,* the Northern accent come in a close second place. In general, fewer varieties of English are detected among the children than among the characters categorized as adults (Lundervold 2013:60-61).

2.5.7 Moltu (2014)

Gunvor Kjos Moltu (2014) conducted a sociolinguistic study to look for systematic correlations between accents and character traits in American fantasy films. Moreover, she wanted to examine whether accent use is different according to the films' target audience. 12 films are included in the sample, six PG-13 films and six family films, and 189 characters are analyzed. In addition to accent, the other character variables are gender, character role, alignment, species and level of sophistication (Moltu 2014:33-34).

RP proved to be the dominating accent, whereas 19% use regionally marked British English, and only 16% of the characters speak GA. Even though the films are produced by American film companies, the findings are not very surprising because of the fantasy genre's settings, fictional universes, and its connection to medieval history, mythology and ancient legends (Moltu 2014:40). American films and series often tend to use RP as a tool to signal distance in time, or to create fantasy worlds that are mythical, but still inhabit native English-speaking people.

Around three quarters of all the characters are identified as male (Moltu 2014:45), once again leaving females largely underrepresented. As in previous studies, females are found to speak more 'standard' than males. 96% of the female characters speak in either RP or GA, whereas the percentage of standard-speaking males is 71% (Moltu 2014:46). When characters are analyzed in terms of character roles, the results show that minor characters have a higher representation of non-standard accent than major role characters, who largely speak in standard accents (Moltu 2014:48). In contrast to many other studies, RP is more represented among good characters than bad, but this is probably because of the high distribution of RP in the films in general (Moltu 2014:56). Both the good and the bad characters have a decent group of regionally marked British speakers, but whereas the good category show a great variety of accents, all bad characters speak Cockney (Moltu 2014:57).

In terms of *species*, RP is the dominating accent in all categories, but GA has a higher representation among humans, whereas regionally marked British accents are more common among the non-human and human-like characters (Moltu 2014:51-52). The most striking findings of the study, however, are arguably in the *level of sophistication* variable. Moltu divides the characters into groups of sophisticated, neutral and unsophisticated characters, and every single one of the 41 characters categorized as sophisticated speaks with a standard accent. In the unsophisticated category, on the other hand, the majority speaks regionally marked British English, 30% used RP, 8% GA and 3% AAVE (Moltu 2014:58). Moltu points out that the results could have looked a little different if the neutral category had not been

included. Still, her findings clearly reveal a correlation between the characters' accents and their level of sophistication.

2.5.8 Summary of previous studies

Seven previous societal treatment studies related to films and television have been outlined above. Three of them focus on Disney films, two on American television series, one combines films and series by looking at *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*, and the last one looks at American fantasy films. Even though there is some variation between the different studies in terms of data material, focus areas, and selection of variables, their results show some interesting patterns that are relevant for the present thesis:

- *Overall distribution:* Standard accents (predominantly GA) dominate in films and television. Non-standard varieties of English are underrepresented.
- *Character role:* Main characters tend to speak with standard accents, whereas there is more accent diversity among minor characters.
- *Gender:* Females are underrepresented, and speak more standardized than males.
- *Alignment:* There is more use of RP and non-standard varieties among bad/evil characters than among the good ones (exception: Urke 2019).
- *Species:* There is slightly more accent diversity among non-humans than humans.
- *Level of sophistication:* characters categorized as sophisticated tend to use more standard accents than the unsophisticated ones.
- *Age:* Lundervold discovered fewer varieties of English among children than among adult characters.
- *Diachronic change:* The trend seems to be moving towards less accent diversity overall, in order to avoid stereotyping.

3 METHOD AND DATA

The first part of this chapter is devoted to a brief overview of the main approaches to studying language attitudes. The rest of the chapter concerns the method and data of the present thesis. The processes of collecting data and selecting television shows are explained, before accent categories and character variables in the present study are presented. Challenges related to the categorization of accents and character variables will also be discussed. Lastly, a summary of all the variables in this study is given.

3.1 Methods in attitudinal studies

Since it is not possible to observe attitudes directly, there are challenges connected to studying them. However, there are three main approaches developed in an attempt to reveal people's language attitudes, namely the *direct approach*, the *indirect approach* and *societal treatment approach*. This MA thesis uses the societal treatment approach, but a brief account of each of the two other approaches will also be given.

3.1.1 Direct approach

In the *direct approach*, studies are typically carried out through interviews or questionnaires (Garrett 2010). Like the name implies, it is a very direct way of examining people's language attitudes, usually by asking them directly about their emotions towards, and thoughts about, different linguistic varieties (Ryan et al. 1982:7). Respondents are usually asked to evaluate various accents in terms of different dimensions like *social attractiveness*, *status/prestige* and *linguistic quality* (see 2.2.2). Typically, the participants are presented with different labels, e.g. *General American*, *Scottish*, or *Cockney*, and encouraged to explicitly express their attitudes towards the various linguistic varieties, without listening to them. Coupland and Bishop's study from 2007, discussed in 2.2.2, is a good example of the direct approach. In this online survey, respondents were presented with labels like *Queen's English* or *Birmingham*, and asked to evaluate the accents with reference to *social attractiveness* and *prestige*.

The direct approach is a very efficient and straightforward method, which makes it possible to collect a lot of data in a short amount of time. However, there are some weaknesses and challenges to be aware of. First, social norms and the desire to be perceived as politically correct might influence the respondents' answers. This is called the *social desirability bias* (Garrett 2010:44), and might affect the truthfulness of the participants' response. Secondly, another difficulty in the direct approach can be the *acquiescence bias*, which involves that people might give the answers they think the researcher wants to hear, instead of their own opinions, consciously or unconsciously (Garrett 2010:45). Lastly, research results from using direct methods might be affected by the *interviewer's paradox* (McKenzie 2010:43), also called the *observer's paradox* (Labov 1972:209). This paradox involves that the mere presence and the characteristics of a researcher might influence the respondents' answers (Garrett 2010:45).

3.1.2 Indirect approach

In the *indirect approach*, respondents are not aware of what is being tested or measured, which makes it possible, to a larger extent, to avoid the biases mentioned above. There are two main techniques within the indirect approach, namely the *matched guise technique* and the *verbal guise technique* (Garrett 2010). Both techniques are more subtle ways of studying attitudes than the direct method.

The matched guise technique involves respondents listening to a recording of a person who reads the same text several times, but with different accents (Edwards 1982:22). The participants are informed that the recordings are of different people, and are asked to evaluate these people on different scales, e.g. in terms of intelligence, status, friendliness and appearance. An example of a study using this technique is one by Giles from 1970, where secondary school students in the UK were asked to evaluate 13 various accents of English. They listened to recordings of a man reading the same text with different accents, and evaluated the 'various speakers' on several scales. The results revealed that the accents were in fact evaluated differently, e.g. that RP generally scored high on all scales.

An important advantage with the matched guise technique is that by using the same speaker, there is less chance of the respondents' evaluations being influenced by the speakers' different voice qualities, and they are more likely to actually judge the relevant accents. However, there are also some disadvantages and challenges related to this technique. Since the goal is for the participants to focus on accent, the speaker is encouraged to hold other features, like intonation and speech rate, constant. In real life, however, these features might

vary in different accent varieties, raising a question which Garrett (2010:58) refers to as the *accent-authenticity question*. Moreover, not many speakers are able to speak more than two or three accents fluently, creating a question of *mimicking-authenticity* when using recordings of only one person (Garrett 2010). An alternative technique that eliminates these challenges is the verbal guise technique, which involves a text being read by different native speakers with various accents, instead of just one person (Garrett 2010:42). A disadvantage of this method is of course that the respondents' evaluation might be affected by the various speakers' distinct voice qualities.

3.1.3 Societal treatment approach

Finally, the *societal treatment approach* is the most indirect approach to study language attitudes. The approach has no informants or respondents, and is the methodology employed in the present thesis. As mentioned in 2.5, the approach aims to explore how linguistic varieties or features are treated by and in society by looking at publicly available sources. This means that language attitudes are *inferred* rather than being expressed openly by respondents (Garrett 2010). Examples of public sources of interest can be newspapers, books, advertisements, letters, blogs, political documents, road signs, films or television shows.

Various studies have been conducted using the societal treatment approach, e.g. the previous research outlined in 2.5. Another example is a study by Schmied (1991), who investigated attitudes towards English in Africa, by looking at letters to editors in African newspapers. The approach has also been applied to study language use in consumer advertisements, exploring e.g. how stereotypical uses of foreign languages are contributing to portray a product as more elegant, practical or attractive than others (Garrett 2010:142-144).

A great advantage to the societal treatment approach is the possibility it provides for studying language attitudes from different periods of time. In addition, the issues related to respondents disappear, and it is possible to study language attitudes in 'natural settings'. However, the approach has been criticized for being somewhat informal and relying upon the researcher's subjective interpretations (Garrett 2010). For example, when studying correlations between character traits and accent use in television series, the researchers have to decide which criteria they use to categorize a character as e.g. sophisticated or unsophisticated. Moreover, the lack of access to the intentions and thoughts of e.g. the creators of a TV series, only allow the researcher to infer attitudes from patterns discovered in the finished products. Thus, an important underlying assumption in societal treatment studies that focus on films and television, is that the accent distribution is a result of deliberate

choices made by the creators. An argument that supports this assumption is that many actors have to get accent coaching after being cast for a specific character role, which indicates that creators of films and series consciously use accents as a tool for building characters.

3.2 The present study

The present study is an example of a societal treatment study, focusing on animated television series aimed at children. The rest of this chapter is devoted to the process of data collection and selection of television shows, as well as a presentation of all the variables included in the study.

3.2.1 Data collection

The present thesis is based on an analysis of characters from 14 different television series from Disney Television Animation (DTVA). Eight of the series were released in the earlier years of DTVA, between 1985 and 2002, whereas the last six were released much more recently, between 2015 and 2020. An even number of characters from the different series were collected by starting on episode 1, season 1, on every show, and watching as many episodes as it took to end up with a total of 30 characters from each of the 'old' shows and 40 from the 'new' ones. All episodes were watched in their full length. If some characters were challenging to categorize, episodes were watched over again several times. Characters who were particularly problematic to identify in terms of accents were presented to my supervisor, who helped me decide which accent category to put them in. In addition, my supervisor control-checked a random sample of 'regular' characters to make sure she agreed with the linguistic varieties I had attributed to them.

In total, 490 characters have been analyzed in terms of their accents and character traits. 249 of them are from the older shows, and 241 are from the more recent shows. There are two main criteria for including a character in the present study. First, a character had to have enough speech time to identify his or her accent, and secondly, the character could not be categorized as 'unidentified' in more than one of the non-linguistic variables. If these criteria were not met, the character was excluded.

3.2.2 Selection of television shows

Since Disney Television Animation was established in 1984, the studio has produced a great number of television shows, and a selection thus had to be made. To ensure a certain degree

of variation, an attempt was made to find series that were launched in different years, instead of e.g. three series from 2001. Furthermore, in order to compare older and more recent shows, a distinct gap between two time periods was necessary. Therefore, no shows launched in the period from 2003-2014 were included. I also decided to exclude all spin-off series, to avoid analyzing some of the same characters that have already been part of previous studies on Disney's feature films. Moreover, the series aimed at the youngest children (0-3-year-olds) were excluded because characters in these shows typically speak with extremely overexaggerated standard accents and unnaturally clear pronunciation. Then, series set in real places were left out, because the choice of accent use is more interesting when the setting is fictional, as accents cannot be linked to any social or geographical background. And lastly, some of the many series based on Donald Duck & Co were excluded, because they often involve many of the same characters. Thus, after eliminating (1) spin-off series, (2) Disney Junior series, (3) series set in real places, (4) some of the series based on Donald Duck & Co, and (5) the shows 'in the middle' that are not old nor new, the final selection of series is as follows in table 3.1.

***Table 3.1**: Disney's animated television series used in this study*

Old shows (20 years old or older)	New shows (less than 7 years old)
1. *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985) 2. *DuckTales* (1987) 3. *Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers* (1989) 4. *Goof Troop* (1992) 5. *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996) 6. *Recess* (1997) 7. *The Proud Family* (2001) 8. *Kim Possible* (2002)	1. *Star vs. the Forces of Evil* (2015) 2. *Milo Murphy's Law* (2016) 3. *Duck* Tales (2017) 4. *Big City Greens* (2018) 5. *The Owl House* (2020) 6. *The Wonderful World of Mickey Mouse (2020)*

It is important to note that another selection could arguably have resulted in different findings than those presented in this thesis.

Within the scope of this study, there is not room for a detailed review or summary of every single television show. However, a few words on what characterizes the selected Disney's animated television series are relevant. They are all set in fictional worlds, aimed at children, and often involve humor and exaggeration. Typically, the shows have one or several main characters, who in each episode encounter a problem which is resolved in the end. Often, there are one or several recurring antagonists who create problems, but always lose in

the end to the main characters. In addition, there are usually minor recurring characters, either good or bad, whose purposes are generally to be humoristic elements.

Overall, the characters of Disney's animated TV series are relatively one-dimensional, and portrayed very clearly as either good or evil, either sophisticated or unsophisticated, etc. However, some regular and recurring characters sometimes develop into slightly more complex characters over time, as the audience follows a character in various situations. What perhaps distinguishes the television series from Disney's animated feature films, is that many of the series involve more 'everyday' problems, to which the audience often can relate. For example, in some episodes the problem to be solved might be a conflict between family members or friends, rather than conquering some evil villain.

The relatively simplistic characters, as well as the fictional setting, relatable situations and simple plots, make Disney's animated television series suitable for attitudinal studies. As the characters' accents are generally not directly linked to any realistic factors, like geographical setting or social background, the relationship between accent use and character traits is particularly interesting.

3.3 Accent categories

Identifying various accents is an essential part of this thesis. Since the main point of interest is the correlation between accent categories and character traits, a very thorough and detailed phonetic analysis is not considered necessary. The accent categories are intentionally quite broad, and despite some phonetic variation, the characters of each accent category mainly share the same linguistic features. There are six different accent categories included in this study: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American, non-standard British, Australian, and English with a foreign accent. The non-standard American category includes New York City (NYC) English, Southern American English, and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The non-standard British category includes Cockney, Scottish and West Country/'pirate' English. An overview of the most central accent features of these categories is presented below. The presentations are based on descriptions in Wells (1982), Cruttenden (2014), Kretzschmar (2008), Gordon (2008), Thomas (2007, 2008), Wolfram (2008), Tollfree (1999), Stuart-Smith (2008), Timberlake (2003), and Horvath (2008). The descriptions of vowel features refer to Wells' (1982) standard lexical sets. Each set is represented by a keyword.

3.3.1 General American (GA)

GA is an accent category that refers to the standard variety of American English. It is the most prestigious American accent, and it is regionally neutral. Since GA is the most widely used accent variety in the US, there is bound to be some variation within this accent category. However, there are some main features that characterize the General American accent:

- Rhotic accent, meaning that /r/ is pronounced in all positions.
- Intervocalic /t/ is realized as a voiced tap [ɾ], for example in *butter* or *city*.
- /l/ is dark (velarized) in all positions.
- The vowel of BATH is open front [æ].
- The LOT vowel is long open back [ɑː].
- The GOAT vowel is a diphthong with back rounded starting point [oʊ].

3.3.2 Received Pronunciation (RP)

RP is an accent category that refers to the standard variety of British English, as it is non-regional. It is spoken only by a relatively small part of the population in Great Britain, and is by many often associated with prestige, status and power. RP has the following main features:

- Non-rhotic accent, /r/ is only pronounced in prevocalic positions.
- Intervocalic /t/ is realized as a fortis plosive [t].
- /l/ is clear before vowels, but dark (velarized) in other positions.
- The vowel in BATH is long open back [ɑː].
- The vowel in LOT is short open back rounded [ɒ].
- The vowel in GOAT is a diphthong with mid central starting point [əʊ].

3.3.3 Non-standard American

3.3.3.1 New York City English (NYC)

The NYC accent is a regional variety of American English, spoken in the New York area. The broadest form is usually associated with Brooklyn, and with lower social class. The main features of the NYC accent are:

- Variable rhoticity. Non-rhotic speech is associated with lower class.
- Centring diphthongs that end in a mid central vowel quality are typical NEAR ([ɪə]), SQUARE ([eə]), CURE ([ʊə]), PALM and START ([ɑə]), THOUGHT, CLOTH and NORTH ([ɔə]).

- In BATH and TRAP, the vowel is raised and diphthongized to [eə] in certain contexts.

3.3.3.2 Southern American English

The South in America covers a wide geographic area, and Southern American is thus a quite broad category. There are, however, some main diagnostic features which characterize this accent category:

- Traditionally non-rhotic, today variably rhotic.
- The PRICE vowel is realized as a long open front monophthong: [aː].
- The STRUT vowel is a mid central [ə].
- The BATH and TRAP vowel is often realized as a front-closing diphthong: [æɪ].
- The THOUGHT and CLOTH vowel is realized as a back-closing diphthong: [ɑɔ].
- The accent has breaking/diphthongization in KIT, DRESS, TRAP: [ɪə], [ɛə], [æə].
- Before nasals, the vowel in DRESS is raised to close-mid front [ɪ].

3.3.3.3 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

African American Vernacular English is not a regional, but a social variety of American English, associated with the African American population. It originated from the South, but is today more common in urban areas. Often, it is referred to as a dialect rather than an accent, and AAVE is recognized both in terms of its syntactic, morphological, and phonetic characteristics:

- Non-rhotic accent.
- Vocalization or deletion of non-prevocalic /l/ is common. For example in *feel* [fiːo], [fiːə] and *pull* [pʊ].
- Fronting or stopping of TH: /θ/ and /ð/ become /f, v/ or /t, d/.
- Consonant clusters are typically reduced by deleting one or more consonants, e.g. *past* /pæːs/ and *left* /lef/.
- AAVE has 'Southern' vowels (see 3.3.3.2).
- Absence of the linking verb *be*, e.g. *he good*.
- Invariant *be*, e.g. *they be sleeping.*
- Lack of subject-verb agreement, e.g. *we was at home.*
- Multiple negation, e.g. *I didn't see nothing.*
- Irregular past participle, e.g. *we had went home.*

3.3.4 Non-standard British

3.3.4.1 Cockney

Cockney is a broad variety of London English, associated with the London working-class. The main features of the Cockney accent are:

- T-glottalling, where intervocalic /t/ is realized as a glottal stop [ʔ], e.g. in *city* [sɪʔi].
- TH-fronting, where /θ/ and /ð/ becomes /f/ and /v/.
- L-vocalization where /l/ is realized as [ʊ], e.g. in *milk* [mɪʊk].
- H-dropping, where /h/ is dropped in lexical words.
- Diphthong shift in the following lexical sets: FLEECE (/əi/), GOOSE (/əu/), FACE (/æɪ/), PRICE (/ɑɪ/), CHOICE (/oɪ/), GOAT (/ʌʊ/) and MOUTH (/ɛʊ/).

3.3.4.2 Scottish

Scottish English is the British variety spoken in Scotland. The accent is characterized by the following main features:

- Rhotic accent, where /r/ is often realized as a trill or a tap.
- Dark /l/ in all positions.
- The FOOT and GOOSE vowel is realized as a close central vowel [ʉ].
- The pronunciation of the NURSE vowel depends on the spelling. E.g. the vowel of FIRST and HURT is /ʌ/ (open central), whereas the vowel in PERCH is pronounced as /ɛ/ (open mid front).
- The FACE and GOAT vowels are monophthongs: /e/ and /o/.
- Typically, the vowel of KIT is an open-mid [ɛ].
- The length of vowels depends on the context, and is not phonemic.

3.3.4.3 West Country/'pirate'

West Country English is spoken in the southwest of England, in the areas of Bristol, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. In films and television, pirates often speak with a West Country accent, with gruff voices, accompanied by rhotic verbal exclamations like "Arr" [ɑɻ̟]. The main features of the West Country accent are:

- The accent is rhotic, and /r/ is typically retroflex [ɻ].
- H-dropping is common.

- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START is an open front [aː].
- The vowels of PRICE and MOUTH have a raised starting point, and are realized as [əɪ] and [əʊ] or [ɛʊ].

3.3.5 Australian

Australian English is the English variety spoken by people in Australia. The main features of this accent are the following:

- Non-rhotic accent.
- Dark /l/ in all contexts.
- Between vowels, /t/ is realized as a voiced tap.
- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START is an open front [aː].
- The vowels of DRESS and TRAP are raised to [e] and [ɛ].
- Diphthong shift in some lexical sets, corresponding largely with those of Cockney (see 3.3.4.1).

3.3.6 English with a foreign accent

Foreign accented English is a so-called umbrella category, consisting of accents perceived as non-native varieties of English. In the data collected in this study, the foreign accents detected were Spanish, French, German, Eastern European, Italian, Indian and other Asian. There are also six characters who are categorized as having a foreign accent with unidentified origin, as they display a mix of unrelated foreign features. Because of the diversity of foreign accents, a general description of linguistic features is challenging. However, below are some examples of typical 'foreign' features.

- Nasalized vowels.
- Vowels added to the end of words.
- Vowels added inside of words to break consonant clusters.
- /r/ pronounced as a uvular fricative or as a trill.
- Non-native stress placement and intonation.
- Retroflex /t, d/.
- /w/ pronounced as /v/.
- Mix /r/ and /l/, e.g. 'rice' pronounced with /l/ instead of /r/.

3.3.7 Challenges related to accent categorization

Placing characters in different accent categories was not always unproblematic. Some characters speak with a mix of linguistic features, making them harder to categorize as having one accent or another. Before beginning the process of my data collection, I expected that categorizing characters by their accents, and distinguishing between characters who speak e.g. GA versus RP, would be quite easy, but this was not always the case. Generally, the strategy was to place characters in the accent category which they share the most linguistic features with. For instance, in *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996), a character named Captain Klegghorn speaks one or two sentences where he uses examples of NYC traits. Otherwise, he speaks with a clear GA accent, and was therefore categorized as a GA speaker, since this is the predominant accent.

Generally, characters were thus categorized according to which accent they use the most. An exception from this rule, however, is when a character is *pretending* to have one accent most of the time, but then it turns out that they actually speak with another accent. E.g. in *Star vs. the Forces of Evil* (2015), there is a guest character called Gustav, who for almost the entire episode speaks with a Scandinavian accent, but then it turns out that his accent is 'fake', and in reality he is a GA speaker. The same goes for a guest in *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996), Tai Quack Do, who speaks with a fake Asian accent when he wants to appear mystical and wise, but has a NYC accent when he is 'being himself'. These characters were placed according to their 'real' accents, regardless of how much that accent was used.

Moreover, some characters were problematic because they speak with an accent which could almost be perceived as a 50-50 mix between GA and RP. An example of this is found in the older version of the *DuckTales* (1987) series, where a guest character called Major Courage speaks with an accent involving features from both GA and RP. My decision was to categorize characters like this one according to what appeared to be their *intended* accent. Major Courage's non-rhoticity, and the contrast between his accent and the other characters' GA accents, imply that RP is the intended accent, and therefore he is placed in the RP accent category. Other similar instances were treated the same way, so characters who used a halfway mix of accent features were generally categorized according to what seemed like their attempted and intended accent.

Two other characters who stood out as problematic regarding accent categorization are two different versions of a classic Disney character called Pete, who appears in *Goof Troop* (1992) and in *The Wonderful World of Mickey Mouse* (2020). In both shows he is clearly

speaking with a non-standard American accent, e.g. by using ‘t’ and ‘d’ instead of /θ/ and /ð/ when pronouncing words like ‘this’ and ‘that’. However, his mix of random linguistic features makes his accent impossible to identify. Therefore, the two character versions of Pete are categorized as speaking non-standard American, but are not placed in any of the subcategories in this accent category.

If it was neither possible to identify the intended accent, nor which accent category the character shared the most linguistic features with, the character was excluded from the study. This was only the case with *one* character, namely the Bat Queen, a recurring character in *The Owl House* (2020). She shows no consistent speech pattern, as she uses random linguistic features from both RP, GA and foreign accents, and sometimes even pronounces one word in many different ways. With the exception of the Bat Queen, all the other ‘problematic’ characters were possible to place in a category by following the categorization methods explained above.

3.4 Character variables

This study aims to reveal attitudes towards different varieties of English by looking at correlations between accents and character traits in Disney’s animated series. All 490 characters analyzed are categorized in terms of their *age*, *gender*, *character role*, *alignment*, *likability*, *species*, and *level of sophistication*. These particular variables have been chosen in order to enable comparison with previous studies, and to capture interesting features in the selected series. In some of the character variables, a certain degree of subjectivity related to the categorization process is inevitable. However, consistency has been aimed for throughout the entire analysis, and the evaluation criteria for the different categories are described as explicitly as possible.

3.4.1 Age

In many of Disney’s animated television series, children are prominent characters. Since the target audience is also children, and since they probably identify themselves more with younger characters, it is interesting to examine whether there is any difference in accent use among adults and children in the series. This variable is treated as binary, meaning that all characters are either categorized as *child* or as *adult*. The child category involves children and teenagers, whereas all adult characters (young, old and middle-aged) are placed in the adult category. Children were identified by their voices, appearance, actions and life situation. For

example, T. J. Detweiler from *Recess* (1997) looks and sounds like a young boy, goes to school, plays with his friends and lives with his parents and sister. He is therefore easy to identify as a child. Characters who live by themselves, have children, have jobs, sound and look like adults are categorized as such. Only one character proved to be problematic to categorize according to these criteria, namely a guest character in *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985), called a sprite. He is a small, unsympathetic mythical creature with a high-pitched voice, making him sound a bit like a child or teenager. I still decided to classify him as an adult because he lives by himself, doesn't have a family and moreover has fairly masculine features, including something that looks like a beard.

3.4.2 Gender

In order to examine whether any differences in accent use can be detected between *males* and *females*, all characters are categorized in terms of their gender. Studies have revealed that females often use more standard forms than males (see section 2.3.2). Research on Disney's feature films has revealed a tendency to portray relatively traditional gender patterns (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011, Urke 2019). Looking for systematic correlations between accent and gender in this study can reveal if the same patterns are found in Disney's animated television series. Furthermore, it might help detect possible diachronic changes between the older and the more recent shows.

The characters' gender is generally not difficult to identify. For example, in *The Proud Family* (2001) it is fairly straightforward to categorize Trudy Proud as female, but Oscar Proud as male. Indicators are their voices, appearances, clothing, names and roles (e.g. as mother or father). If none of these indicators are present, gender is determined according to what pronoun other characters use when addressing the character of interest. E.g. in *The Owl House* (2020) there is a character named *Hooty*, who is a living 'owl house' in which the main characters live. Neither the character' voice, appearance, clothing, name or role indicate any gender, but the other characters refer to Hooty as *he/him*, and he is thus categorized as male.

3.4.3 Character role

The relationship between accent use and character role is of interest because it can reveal whether the importance, or prominence, of a character influences which accent he or she speaks. This thesis operates with four categories of character roles, namely *regular*, *recurring*, *guest* and *peripheral*. As mentioned in section 3.2.2, Disney's animated television series

usually involve one or several main characters overcoming some kind of problem. In this study, the main characters are referred to as *regular*, meaning that they are present in every episode of the show, e.g. Chip and Dale from *Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers* (1989). *Recurring* characters are not as prominent as the regular characters. The criterion for being placed in this character group is being present in more than one single episode, e.g. like the Beagle Boys in *DuckTales* (1987/2017) who appear in many different episodes. Characters in the *recurring* group are often either antagonists, or parents, neighbors, and friends of the regular characters. If characters are only found in *one* episode, they are categorized as *guests*, as long as they make several appearances during that episode. E.g. in one episode in *Star vs. the Forces of Evil* (2015), the main character's best friend, named Pony Head, comes to visit for almost the entire episode, and is therefore classified as a guest. Characters who only make one appearance in one episode are identified as *peripheral.*

3.4.4 Alignment

A character's *alignment* involves whether its intentions and ethical motivation are *good*, *bad* or *neutral*. A good character is typically kind and fair, has good intentions, and aims to fight for what is good in the world, e.g. the heroine Kim Possible from the series *Kim Possible* (2002). A bad character, on the other hand, has evil intentions and is typically immoral, dishonest and egocentric, e.g. the evil antagonist Lord Dragaunus from *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996).

Characters who do not correspond to the descriptions of either good or bad, are categorized as *neutral.* These characters are often peripheral or guests, sometimes recurring characters, and do not seem to have any evil intentions, but they are not necessarily on the 'good side' either. Some types of characters seem to more often be neutral than others, e.g. news reporters, bodyguards, narrators, sports commentators, salespeople, principals, receptionists and waiters.

Most characters are relatively easy to put in one of the three alignment categories, but there are some exceptions. An example of a character who is problematic to identify with regard to alignment is a regular character from *Recess* (1997), called Ms. Finster, who works as an administrative assistant at the school where the series takes place. She is strict, cold and grumpy, and always tries to prevent the children from having fun. Although her intentions are probably to educate and to discipline the children for their own good, she is categorized as 'bad' because that is how she is perceived by the main characters.

3.4.5 Likability

Even if a character is identified as 'good', he or she is not necessarily very sympathetic. E.g. in *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985), one of the regular characters, named Gruffi Gummi, fights for the good and has good intentions, but is at the same time a bad-tempered and unsympathetic bear. There are also a few examples of characters who are categorized as bad, but sympathetic. E.g. in episode 13 of *Big City Greens* (2018), there are two realtors who appear very polite, positive and friendly, but their intention is to destroy the Green family's house which puts them in the 'bad' category.

In order to capture these nuances, all characters were thus categorized as being either *sympathetic*, *unsympathetic* or *mixed*. Unsympathetic characters are typically grumpy, arrogant, self-centered, rude, short-tempered, and sometimes snobbish. Contrastingly, sympathetic characters are warm, friendly, positive, polite, generous and pleasant. There are some characters who switch between being sympathetic and unsympathetic, and are consequently categorized as having *mixed* likability. An example of such a character is Scrooge McDuck, a regular character in *DuckTales* (1987/2017). He is often grumpy and short-tempered, and sometimes seems to care more about himself and his money than about other people. At the same time, he can also be friendly and positive, and he grows to become more generous and pleasant, e.g. towards his nephews, even though he still is occasionally quite unsympathetic.

3.4.6 Species

The *species* of a character refers to whether it is a *human*, *non-human* or *human-like* character. Some series, e.g. *Milo Murphy's Law* (2016), involve mostly human characters, while others, like *Goof Troop* (1992) are dominated by non-humans. A character's species is determined by aid of visual cues, and sometimes by noticing whether someone is referred to as human or not. In animated television shows, the creators have the possibility of making whatever kinds of creatures they want; talking animals, witches, fairies, ogres, aliens, monsters, etc. This makes it interesting to see what kind of accents are chosen for the different creatures.

Non-human characters are typically animals, objects or mythical animal-like creatures, but sometimes they look very much like humans. Therefore, a *human-like* category was included. An example of an animal character is Mickey Mouse from *The Wonderful World of*

Mickey Mouse (2020), whereas a talking mirror from the same series is an example of an object character. Mythical animal-like creatures are e.g. various monsters in *Star vs. the Forces of* Evil (2015), and a dragon in *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). Lastly, examples of human-like characters are e.g. witches and wizards in *The Owl House* (2020), or the regular characters in *Big City Greens* (2018), who appear almost exactly like humans except that they have yellow skin and no noses.

3.4.7 Level of Sophistication

Another character variable included in this study is the characters' *level of sophistication*. All characters were categorized as either *unsophisticated*, *sophisticated* or *neutral*. Traits that characterize the unsophisticated characters can be clumsiness, simplicity, low intelligence, silliness, little world experience, naivety and poor social skills. An example of a character in this category is Goofy from *Goof Troop* (1992), whose clumsiness and naivety always end up embarrassing his son and annoying his neighbor. Unsophisticated characters are often comic elements, in contrast to the sophisticated ones, who are often a little more serious. Sophisticated characters also appear more intelligent, socially apt, cultivated, elegant and worldly. An example of a sophisticated character is King Gregor from *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). He is a recurring character, and a beloved king, who is portrayed as intelligent, fair, wise and good with people. Characters who are neither sophisticated, nor unsophisticated, are categorized as neutral. An example of a character group where most members are categorized as neutral in terms of sophistication is the child characters. Children are naturally less mature than adults, as well as less experienced, worldly and cultivated. That does not necessarily mean that the child characters are clumsy, unintelligent or socially incompetent. Many of them are consequently identified as neutral in this character variable.

3.5 Summary of variables

In total, six main accent categories and seven character variables are applied in the present study. Table 3.2 below shows an overview of all accent categories and all character variables included in the analysis.

***Table 3.2**: An overview of all variables*

Accent categories	Character variables
General American (GA)	**Age** (*child – adult*)
Received Pronunciation (RP)	**Gender** (*male – female*)
Non-standard American • New York City English • Southern American English • African American Vernacular English	**Character role** (*regular – recurring – guest – peripheral*)
Non-standard British • Cockney • Scottish • West Country/'pirate'	**Alignment** (*good – bad – neutral*)
Australian	**Likability** (*sympathetic – unsympathetic – mixed*)
English with a foreign accent	**Species** (*human – non-human – human-like*)
	Level of sophistication (*sophisticated – unsophisticated – neutral*)

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the results from the analysis of language attitudes in Disney's animated television series. The overall distribution of accents is outlined first, followed by a comparison of the accent use in the older and the newer shows. Then, the different character variables and their respective accent distributions in the old and new series are presented and discussed.

4.1 General distribution of accents

One of the hypotheses of this thesis is that General American (GA) will be the most used accent overall. Table 4.1 shows the general distribution of accents among the 490 characters analyzed. Figure 4.1 below illustrates the distribution graphically.

***Table 4.1**: The overall distribution of accents*

Accents	**Characters**	
	n	%
GA	304	62.0
RP	56	11.4
Non-standard Am.	78	15.9
Non-standard Br.	14	2.9
Foreign	37	7.6
Australian	1	0.2
Total	**490**	100

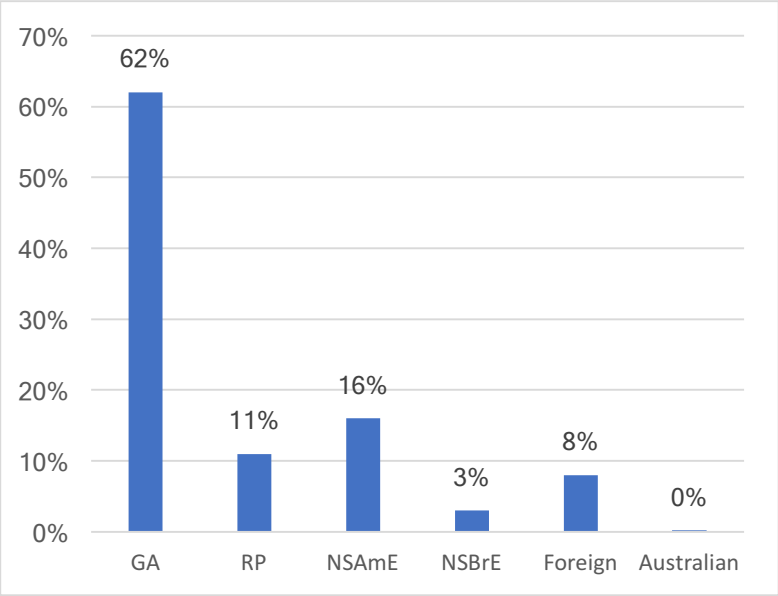

***Figure 4.1**: The overall distribution of accents*

The results show that over 60% of the characters speak GA, making this the dominating accent by far. The second most used accent category is non-standard American English with 16%. Out of the 78 characters with a non-standard American accent, 30 speak Southern American, 26 have a NYC accent and 20 speak AAVE. The last two characters have an unidentified non-standard American accent (see 3.3.7 for a more detailed description). RP makes up 11% and is the third most used accent, followed by foreign-accented English with 8%, and non-standard British with 3%. Out of the 14 characters with a non-standard British accent, six speak Cockney, four Scottish and the last four speak with a West Country/pirate accent.

Only *one* character was identified with an Australian accent. This is one of the regular characters in *Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers* (1989) called Monterey Jack. He is categorized as adult (age), male (gender), good (alignment), sympathetic (likability), non-human (species) and neutral (level of sophistication). With only *one* representative, the Australian English accent is very marginal in this study. Therefore, this particular character will only be included in the tables, but is excluded from the remaining figures and discussions in this chapter.

It is however worth mentioning that many of Monterey Jack's attributes correspond to common stereotypical ideas of the Australian. Studies show that Australian English is often associated with being reliable and down-to-earth, but also with being a little 'uncultured' and less educated. In addition, Australian English is often associated with the laid-back toughness, and the

adventurous, 'outdoorsy', rugged nature of Crocodile Dundee (Garrett et al. 2005). Monterey Jack fits into several of these descriptions. Being the only Disney character in this study with an Australian accent, Monterey Jack thus offers a relatively stereotypical image of Australian English speakers.

Overall, the general distribution of accents is a little different compared to previous research, but there are also some similarities. All previous studies mentioned in section 2.5 found that the majority of the characters they analyzed used native English accents. The present study shows the same tendency, but compared to results from Disney feature films (Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011, Urke 2019), the findings from Disney's animated series generally show a lower percentage of RP, and a higher percentage of non-standard American. Non-standard British and foreign-accented English also have a lower representation in Disney's animated series than in their feature films. Thus, compared to the other Disney studies, there seems to be an even larger 'gap' between GA and the other accents categories in the results of the present study. However, the prevalence of GA is not quite as extreme as in the study of Dragojevic et al. (2016), where GA made up 84%. With regard to GA, the results of my study are most similar to Sønnesyn's (2011) findings. She found that 61% of the characters spoke with a GA accent, compared to 62% in the present study.

All the findings presented and discussed above are numbers from the old and the new series combined. The next section separates the two time periods, and shows a comparison of the accent distribution in series launched between 1985-2002, and series launched between 2015-2020.

4.1.1 Comparison of old and new shows

One of the aims of the present study is to compare older and newer television series in order to detect any diachronic changes in terms of accent use. Based on results from previous studies, the expectation was to find that the newer shows have more use of GA and less accent diversity than the older shows do. Table 4.2 below presents the general distribution of accents in the old versus the new shows, and Figure 4.2 shows this distribution graphically.

***Table 4.2**: The overall distribution of accents in old and new shows*

Accents	Characters			
	Old shows		New shows	
	n	%	n	%
GA	142	57.0	162	67.2
RP	30	12.0	26	10.8
Non-standard Am.	46	18.5	32	13.3
Non-standard Br.	8	3.2	6	2.5
Foreign	22	8.8	15	6.2
Australian	1	0.4	0	0.0
Total	**249**	100	**241**	100

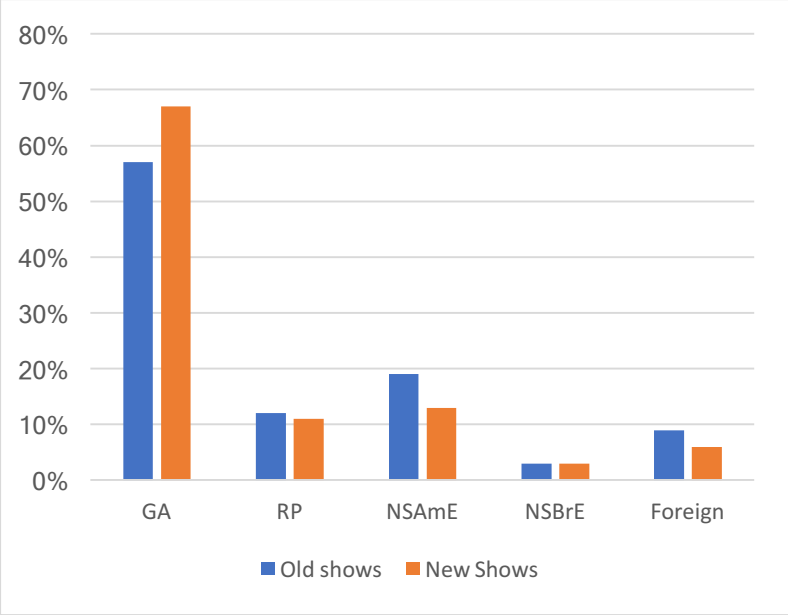

***Figure 4.2**: The overall distribution of accents in old and new shows*

GA is the dominating accent in both the old and the new shows, but there has been an increase from 57% to 67% in the newer series. At the same time, the percentages of all the other accent categories have decreased. Non-standard American English comprises 19% in the old shows, but has gone down to 13% in the newer ones. RP has only had a small decrease from 12% to 11%, whereas foreign-accented English shows a decrease from 9% to 6%. Non-standard British English does not show any notable change in the distribution in the old shows (eight characters) compared to the new shows (six characters).

Overall, the comparison between the old versus the new series shows a significant difference in the distribution of accents. The increasing dominance of GA, as well as the reduction of characters in all other accent categories, is largely in line with previous studies.

When Sønnesyn (2011) compared her data with Lippi-Green's (1997) she found an increase in GA, from 43% to 61%, in the more contemporary Disney films, compared to the 'classics' that Lippi-Green had examined. Other accent groups had also decreased in the newer set of Disney films, compared to the older ones (Sønnesyn 2011:53). Moreover, compared to the two studies mentioned above, Urke (2019) more recently found even fewer characters with non-standard accents in her set of Disney films. The results in the present thesis are thus largely in line with patterns from previous research, and both hypotheses 1 and 2, which predict more GA and less diversity in newer shows, are supported.

The trend in children's animated films and television seems to be moving towards less diversity and greater domination of standard accents, but *why* this is the case is an interesting question. As discussed in chapter 2, most societies have developed a greater acceptance for diversity over the past decades, which arguably should have led to *increased* diversity in films and television, and not the opposite. Furthermore, one can argue that the development of political correctness (see 2.3.1) should entail a more equal distribution of accents to avoid portraying some accents as more important or 'better' than others. On the other hand, political correctness might manifest itself through avoidance of accent variety in films and television, in order to not step on anyone's toes by using accents in stereotypical ways. As discussed in chapter 2, the Walt Disney company has been criticized for portraying gender roles in old-fashioned, traditional ways, and for using racial and cultural stereotypes in their films. Thus, Disney's increased preference for standard varieties (predominantly GA) might be related to a fear of causing offense, and a strategy to avoid doing so.

The analysis of the general accent distribution shows that, as expected, GA dominates in the older series, and even more so in the new series. Consequently, all other accent categories have relatively low representations in both sets of series, especially in the newer shows. An overview of the overall distribution of accents has now been given, and the rest of the chapter will be devoted to an analysis of accent distributions with reference to the different character variables.

4.2 Age

The variable of *age* was included in the present study to investigate whether there are any differences between the accent use among children and adult characters. In her study of *Harry*

Potter and *Game of Thrones*, Lundervold (2013:60-61) found fewer accent varieties among children than among the adult characters. The same pattern is expected to be found in this study, as stated in hypothesis 3. This hypothesis also predicts that there will be no significant changes from older to newer shows, since the target audience remains the same. Out of 490 characters analyzed, 134 are identified as children, and 356 as adults. Children and teenagers are categorized as *child*, whereas the *adult* category includes all adult characters, from young adults to elders.

The low representation of children in the television series is in line with Lundervold's (2013) numbers, but is still a little surprising in this study. Considering that the animated series are all specifically aimed at children, I expected to find a more even distribution of characters identified as children and adults. It is nonetheless interesting to see if there are any correlations between age and accents in Disney's animated series, and to compare accent use and age in old and new shows.

The following Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3 presents the distribution of accents among children and adults in the older animated series.

***Table 4.3**: Accent distribution in terms of age in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**			
	Child		**Adult**	
	n	%	n	%
GA	61	83.6	81	46.0
RP	2	2.7	28	15.9
Non-standard Am.	10	13.7	36	20.5
Non-standard Br.	-	-	8	4.5
Foreign	-	-	22	12.5
Australian	-	-	1	0.6
Total	**73**	100	**176**	100

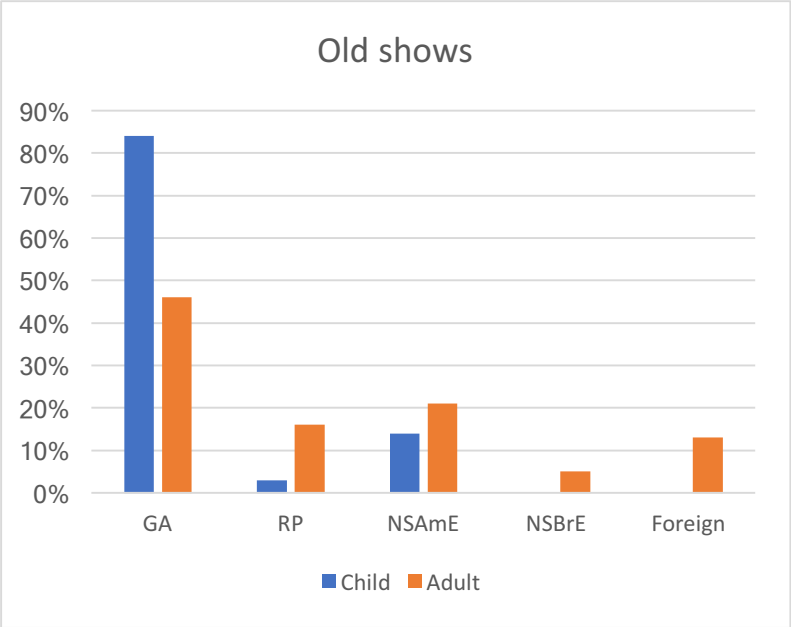

***Figure 4.3**: Accent distribution in terms of age in the old shows*

The results show that in the older series, only three accent categories are represented among the children, whereas all accent categories are represented among the adult characters. The two character groups show a great difference in the distribution of GA, as 84% of the children use this accent, but only 46% of the adults.

When it comes to RP, only two children use this accent in the older series. One of them is a penguin called Skiddles, who is a guest in *DuckTales* (1987). She is very polite, and mature for her age. The other one is a peripheral 'adult baby' in *The Proud Family* (2001). We do not get to know much about him, but he speaks like an adult even though he is in a baby's body, and he appears intelligent and worldly. Although most child characters in the study are categorized as neutral in terms of sophistication, both of these two RP-speaking children are identified as sophisticated. Taking into account the close correlation between sophistication and RP (see 4.8), it seems that these two children may have been given RP accents to appear more mature and refined than the average child.

The non-standard American English accent category has the smallest difference between adults and children. Still, the percentage among the adult characters is notably higher, with 21% compared to the 14% among children. With regard to the subcategories of non-standard American English, there are also differences between adults and children. Among the non-standard American *adult* speakers, NYC English is the most used accent, Southern American the

second most used, and AAVE the least used accent. Contrastingly, nine out of the ten children speaking non-standard American, have an AAVE accent. Only one child speaks NYC English and none of the children in the older series use a Southern American accent. Most of the AAVE-speaking children are from the same show; *The Proud Family* (2001), which is by far the show with the largest distribution of AAVE overall, as it hosts 14 of the 20 AAVE speakers in the present study. The tendency for NYC English to be reserved for adult characters could be linked to the accent's typical connotations. Being an adult is not necessarily negative, but perhaps the 'innocence of a child' is not compatible with the loud, rude NYC accent (see 2.2.2). The only child speaking NYC English is an unnamed unsympathetic guest from *Recess* (1997) who functions as a bodyguard for the 'king' of the playground.

In the non-standard British category and the foreign accent category there are only adult characters and no children. Little to no use of British and foreign accents among children might be linked to viewer identification. The target audience of Disney's animated series consists of children, and the characters who this audience perhaps identifies the most with, are the child characters. Research has shown that viewers of films and television (particularly young audiences) often strongly identify with the characters they encounter in the media. Strong identification with characters, makes the viewer more emotionally involved in the fictional story, and more likely to keep watching (Cohen 2001). Therefore, the predominance of American accents among children is not very surprising, as American children are more likely to identify with a child character speaking American English than someone speaking British or foreign English.

The newer series' distribution of accents with reference to age is presented in Table 4.4, and the percentages shown graphically in Figure 4.4.

***Table 4.4**: Accent distribution in terms of age in the new shows*

Accents	**New shows**			
	Child		**Adult**	
	n	%	n	%
GA	50	82.0	112	62.2
RP	-	-	26	14.4
Non-standard Am.	10	16.4	22	12.2
Non-standard Br.	-	-	6	3.3
Foreign	1	1.6	14	7.8
Australian	-	-	-	-
Total	**61**	100	**180**	100

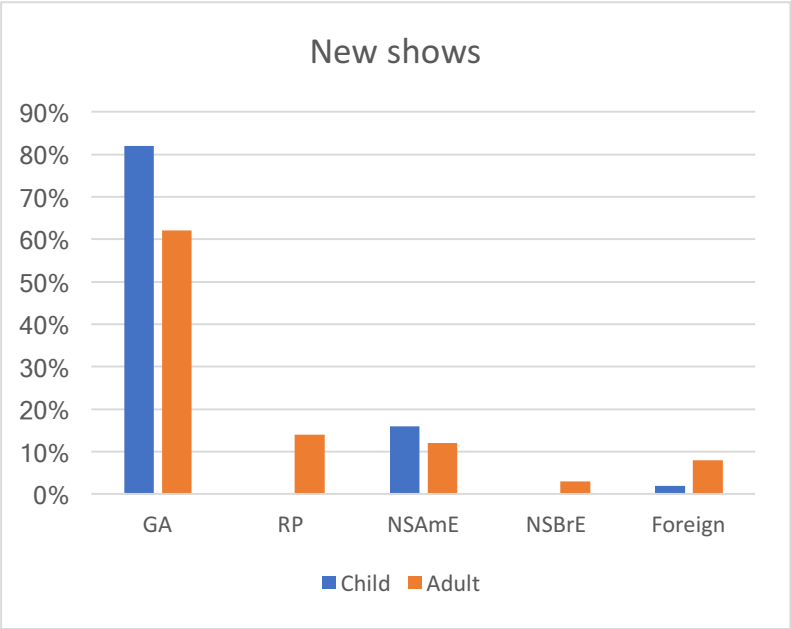

***Figure 4.4**: Accent distribution in terms of age in the new shows*

In the newer series, there are still only three accent categories represented among the children, which is the same number of categories as in the older shows. RP has however been replaced by foreign-accented English. GA is still the dominating accent in both character groups, but the difference between children and adults is considerably smaller than in the older series. Note that the child character group is the only group in this entire study where the use of GA has actually gone slightly *down* (from 84% to 82%). Still, the percentage is very high, and considerably higher than among the adult characters, even though adult GA-speakers have increased from 46% to 62% in the new shows compared to the older shows.

In the RP accent category, adults show a small decrease from 16% to 14%. As mentioned, no children in the newer series speak RP. Moreover, non-standard British English still seems to be reserved for adult characters, as there are no children in this accent category.

With regard to non-standard American English, children and adult characters have 'switched places' in the new series compared to the old. Among the children, non-standard American has increased slightly from 14% to 16%, making this the only character group in this study that shows a small *increase* in a non-standard accent category. The percentage of adult speakers of non-standard American accents has gone down from 21% to 12%. Southern American is the most used accent among both adults and children speaking non-standard

American English in the newer series. This is in line with the overall pattern of the distribution of non-standard American in new shows compared to the old shows. Southern American English has by far become the most common non-standard American accent in Disney's animated TV series, at the expense of AAVE and particularly NYC English. Among adult characters, the NYC accent has gone from the most to the least used non-standard American accent. Although there is a larger percentage of children speaking non-standard American than the percentage of adults, there is more variation within the group of adult non-standard American speakers, as all subcategories are represented. Among the children in the new series, only Southern American and NYC English are used.

When it comes to the foreign-accented English category, there is now *one* child with a foreign accent, compared to none in the older series. This one child has a Spanish accent, and is a recurring character in *Milo Murphy's Law* (2016) called Amanda Lopez. She is one of Milo Murphy's classmates, and eventually becomes his 'love interest'. Her character is sympathetic, and she is classified as sophisticated because she is very organized, serious and proper. Her character traits are not necessarily very stereotypical, but Spanish is often associated with romance and passion, so it might not be a coincidence that the main character's love interest uses this accent. Among the adult characters, foreign-accented English has decreased from 13% to 8%, and the accents represented are Spanish, Eastern European, French, German, Italian and Asian English.

In sum, hypothesis 3 is given large support, as child characters to a large extent speak more standard than adult characters in both the older and the newer shows. The most unexpected result in this variable was the (albeit slight) decrease of GA and increase of non-standard American English among children in the new shows. The changes are too small to draw any sweeping conclusions, but it is nonetheless surprising that the older series have slightly more use of standard accents than the newer series.

4.3 Gender

Characters were identified in terms of their gender in order to detect potential differences between accent use of males and females. Hypothesis 4 states that female characters will be underrepresented and speak in more standard accents than males in all the series, but also that the

gender differences will be smaller in the newer shows. The general distribution of gender in the old versus the new series is presented in Table 4.5.

***Table 4.5**: Distribution of gender in old and new shows*

Gender	Old shows		New shows	
	n	%	n	%
Male	194	77.9	166	68.9
Female	55	22.1	75	31.1
Total	**249**	100	**241**	100

The results show an underrepresentation of female characters in both the old and the new shows. However, there has been an increase of females in the newer series, moving from 22% to 31% of the characters. As expected, the general gender distribution has thus become a little more equal in the series that have been released over the past few years. Nevertheless, female characters still only make up one third of the characters in the newer animated series.

There are also gender differences in terms of accent distribution in both sets of shows. The distribution in the old shows is displayed in Table 4.6 below, and presented graphically in Figure 4.5.

***Table 4.6**: Accent distribution in terms of gender in the old shows*

Accents	Old shows			
	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
GA	104	53.6	38	69.1
RP	24	12.4	6	10.9
Non-standard Am.	37	19.1	9	16.4
Non-standard Br.	8	4.1	-	-
Foreign	20	10.3	2	3.6
Australian	1	0.5	-	-
Total	**194**	100	**55**	100

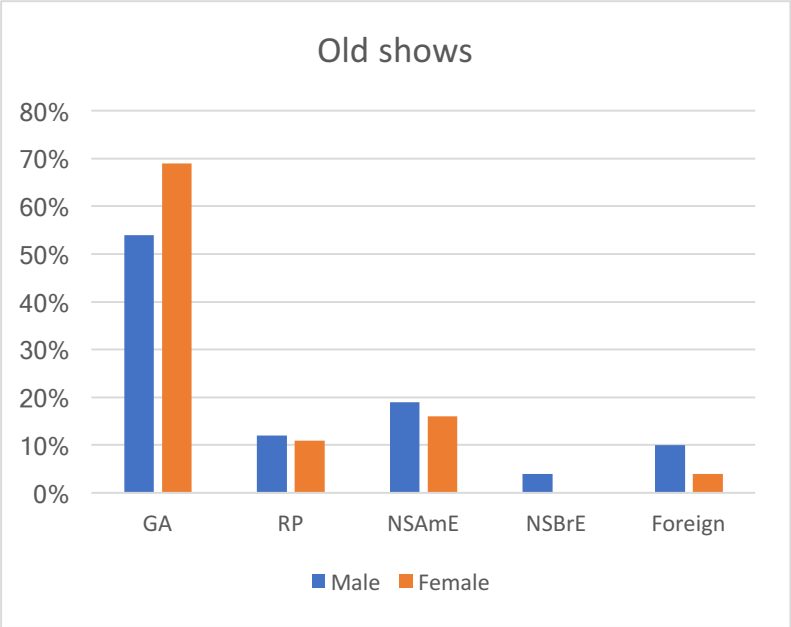

***Figure 4.5**: Accent distribution in terms of gender in the old shows*

The overall distribution of GA as the most dominating accent is reflected among both males and females in the older series. However, almost 70% of the female characters speak GA, whereas the percentage among male characters is 54%. In all other accent categories, the percentages of male characters are higher than those of female characters. Moreover, every accent category is represented among the males in the older series, while only four accent categories are represented among the females.

Taking RP into account, the total percentage of female characters speaking in standard accents is 80%, whereas the total percentage of standard-speaking males becomes 66%. Percentagewise, the gender differences are not very significant in RP and non-standard American English. However, a closer look at the subcategories of non-standard American reveals that the distribution is a little different among the two genders. Out of the nine female characters who speak non-standard American English, five (56%) speak AAVE, three speak in Southern American English, and only one female character speaks with a NYC accent. Contrastingly, NYC English is spoken by 19 males in the older shows, and is by far the largest subcategory among the male characters with 51%. AAVE is the second most used non-standard American accent among

the male characters, represented by ten males, followed by Southern American English which is spoken by seven males[7].

These gender differences regarding the various non-standard American accents might be rooted in the accents' different connotations (see 2.2.2). The NYC accent is often associated with rough, harsh and rugged qualities, which are stereotypically perceived as male qualities. An example of a male character that fits this stereotype is a regular character and one of the gummi bears from *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). He is the only gummi bear with a NYC accent, and the only gummi bear who is gruff, rude and angry. His rough and gruff features are even underlined by his name: Gruffi Gummi. The great prevalence of NYC English among the males speaking non-standard American, and the low representation among females, might indicate an old-fashioned, traditional gender pattern in these older series.

None of the female characters in the older shows speak in non-standard British English, and only two females are identified with a foreign accent. One of these is Magica, an Eastern European villain from *DuckTales* (1987), and the other one is an Asian translator in *Kim Possible* (2002) called Yoshiko. None of these accents are necessarily associated with positive qualities, as both Eastern European and Asian accents are typically negatively evaluated in terms of e.g. familiarity, correctness and friendliness (see 2.2.2). Contrastingly, there are 20 male characters with foreign-accented accents of English in the older shows. Spanish, French, German, Asian and Indian are all accents that are represented among the male characters. Moreover, five males have an unidentified foreign accent. Thus, in addition to more accent diversity among males overall, the male characters also show more diversity than females within the accent category of foreign-accented English.

The distribution of accents among male and female characters in the newer shows is presented in Table 4.7. Figure 4.6 below shows the percentages graphically.

[7] The last male character speaking non-standard American English is Pete from *Goof Troop* (1992) who has an unidentifiable non-standard American accent (see 3.3.7).

***Table 4.7**: Accent distribution in terms of gender in the new shows*

Accents	New shows			
	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
GA	108	65.1	54	72.0
RP	16	9.6	10	13.3
Non-standard Am.	24	14.5	8	10.7
Non-standard Br.	6	3.6	-	-
Foreign	12	7.2	3	4.0
Australian	-	-	-	-
Total	**166**	100	**75**	100

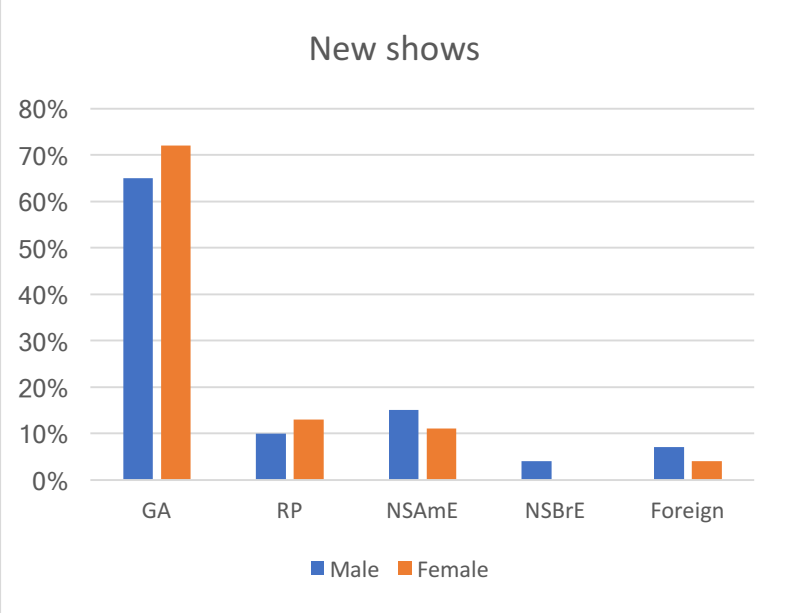

***Figure 4.6**: Accent distribution in terms of gender in the new shows*

When comparing the accent distribution of the different genders in the newer shows with the older shows, we see an increase of GA among both male and female characters. The difference is however much greater among the males, whose percentage of GA speakers moves from 54% to 65%. GA only has a small increase (up 3 percentage points) among the female characters, but since there is also an increase in RP, the total percentage of females speaking in a standard accent is 85%. Among the male characters, RP decreases slightly from 12% to 10% in the newer series, leaving the percentage of standard-speaking males at 75% in total. Just like in the older series, every accent category is represented among the males, while only four accent categories are represented among the females in the newer series.

With regard to non-standard American English, there is an equal decrease among both genders from the older series to the new ones. However, Southern American English has now become the most used subcategory of non-standard American among both genders, spoken by six female characters and 14 male characters. In the new series, one female and four males speak AAVE. Only five males speak NYC English, compared to 19 in the old shows, whereas still only one female has this accent. These findings show that the NYC accent is much less used among males in the newer shows than in the older shows. This could be an indication of more equal gender portrayals in the newer series, and less stereotypical use of the NYC accent as tough, gruff and 'masculine'. However, there is less diversity within the non-standard American accent category *overall* in the new shows compared to the older ones. Especially the use of NYC English shows a considerable decrease.

It is hard to say why there is less use of NYC English in the more recent animated series, but it might be because the NYC accent seems to be in decline. Some linguists say that the NYC accent is fading away, because the high costs of living in New York invites wealthy 'outsiders' to move into the city (National Public Radio 2015). People in the traditional NYC working-class, associated with the classic NYC accent, cannot afford living in this exclusive and expensive city. They move to other areas, making it less probable that their kids will take after their parents' NYC accent. The high costs of living also keep many immigrants from moving there, which prevents new accents from being established. Increased social pressure to sound more standard-American-speaking might also play a role in the decline of the NYC accent (National Public Radio 2015). Whether the possible decline of NYC English has actually affected the use of this accent in animated television series is of course a matter of speculation. However, the results from the present study clearly show that the NYC accent is much less used in shows from 2015-2020 than in shows from 1985-2002.

When it comes to non-standard British English speakers, there are still no female characters in this accent category, and there is no significant change among the males. In terms of characters speaking foreign-accented English, there has been a small decrease among the male characters from 10% to 7%, and an even smaller increase among the female foreign-accented characters who have gone from two to three characters. One of these female characters speak with an Eastern European accent, the other two speak Spanish-accented English. Again, there is more diversity among the males. Although there are fewer male characters with foreign accents

in the newer series, the number of different foreign accents represented has increased from five to six compared to the older shows. Among the males in the newer shows we find Spanish, French, German, Italian, Eastern European and Asian English.

Overall, the results show more equality between the genders in terms of accent use in the newer series. However, instead of more diversity among female characters, there is generally less diversity among males in the new shows compared to the old. Still, every non-standard accent category is represented among the male characters in both the old and the new series, whereas no females are found to speak non-standard British English. The findings in this study are in line with results from previous societal treatment studies (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997, Dobrow & Gidney 1998, Sønnesyn 2011, Lundervold 2013, Urke 2019) who also found less accent diversity, and more standard accents, among female characters than males. These gender differences in accent use might be connected to the tradition of associating standard forms with femininity and non-standard language with being 'tough' and masculine (see 2.3.2). The gender differences in accent use are nonetheless smaller in the newer shows than the older series, which means that hypothesis 4 is largely supported by the present findings.

4.4 Character role

A part of hypothesis 5 is that less important character roles are expected to show more accent diversity than the main characters. As mentioned previously in this chapter, research has shown that viewers of films and television (particularly young audiences) often strongly identify with the characters they encounter in the media (Cohen 2001). This viewer identification is often particularly linked to the heroes or main characters. Typically, the degree of exposure to a character influences the audience's level of identification with that character (Cohen 2001). Therefore, it is interesting to examine whether there are differences in the accent use among important and less important characters.

The difference in accent use according to character roles was expected to be smaller in the newer shows than the older ones. All characters were categorized as either *regular*, *recurring*, *guest* or *peripheral* according to how much they are present in the series (see 3.4.3). In total, 69 characters are identified as regular, and 121 as recurring, while there are 197 guests and 103 peripheral characters.

There are some differences in the distribution of character roles between the old and new shows. In the old shows, the regular characters make up 18% of the characters, but they only comprise 10% in the new shows. Recurring characters constitute 26% in the old shows and 23% in the new shows, guests make up 32% in the old series and 49% in the new series, whereas the peripheral characters constitute 23% and 19% in the old versus the new series.

The distribution of accents among the various character roles in the old series is shown in Table 4.8, and the percentages are presented graphically in Figure 4.7 below.

***Table 4.8**: Accent distribution with regard to character role in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**							
	Regular		**Recurring**		**Guest**		**Peripheral**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	29	63.0	43	66.2	43	53.8	27	46.6
RP	2	4.3	6	9.2	12	15.0	10	17.2
Non-standard Am.	13	28.3	8	12.3	14	17.5	11	19.0
Non-standard Br.	1	2.2	1	1.5	5	6.2	1	1.7
Foreign	-	-	7	10.8	6	7.5	9	15.5
Australian	1	2.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**46**	100	**65**	100	**80**	100	**58**	100

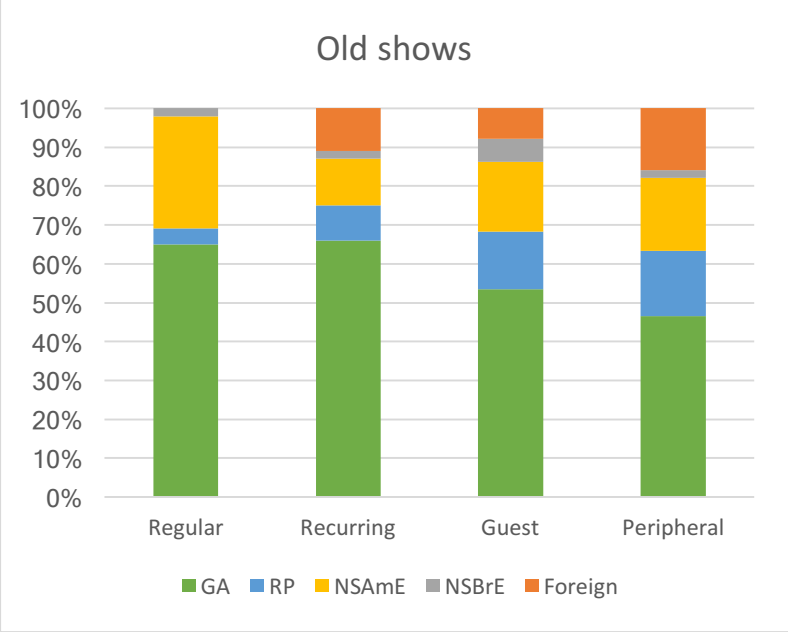

***Figure 4.7**: Accent distribution with regard to character role in the old shows*

In the old series, GA is the most used accent among all the character roles. It makes up over 50% in all character groups, except in the peripheral group. As expected, there generally seems to be

more accent variation among the less important characters than among the regular characters. However, there is slightly more use of GA among the recurring characters (66%) than among the regular ones (63%). Still, the recurring characters display more variety, as all accent categories are represented. Among the regulars, RP and non-standard British are only represented with very low percentages (2% and 4%), whereas foreign-accented English is not represented at all.

An interesting result is the relatively high representation of non-standard American English among the regular characters compared to the other character roles. All subcategories of non-standard American are represented in this group. Three regular characters speak Southern American English, five have a NYC accent, four speak AAVE[8] and the last one has an unidentified non-standard American accent[9]. An explanation for this might be that these animated series are made in a way that will make the target audience, first and foremost American children, identify with the regular characters. American accents, both GA and non-standard American, make characters more 'familiar' to the children watching. The audience will consequently feel a closer relation to the regular characters compared to the peripheral characters, who undoubtedly show the most accent diversity.

The peripheral characters furthermore have the highest percentage of foreign-accented speakers, which might contribute to create a sense of distance and 'otherness' among the audience. Less important characters also have less screen time, and the audience therefore get limited possibilities to 'get to know' these characters. It is thus necessary to quickly establish these characters' various traits, and as mentioned in 2.2.3, Lippi-Green (1997:859) points to language as a quick and effective way to develop characters and reaffirm stereotypes.

Overall, the results seem to reveal a kind of hierarchy related to character role and accent diversity. In this hierarchy, there is most accent diversity among the least prominent characters, and the diversity decreases gradually with the guests, the recurring characters and the regulars. The findings thus support hypothesis 5a.

In Table 4.9 below, the distribution of accents in terms of character roles in the new shows is presented. Figure 4.8 shows the analysis graphically.

[8] All four regular characters speaking in AAVE are from the same show: *The Proud Family* (2001) – a show about an African American girl and her family.
[9] Pete, a regular character in *Goof Troop* (1992), described in 3.3.7.

***Table 4.9**: Accent distribution with regard to character role in the new shows.*

Accents	New shows							
	Regular		Recurring		Guest		Peripheral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	18	78.3	37	66.1	79	67.5	28	62.2
RP	-	-	8	14.3	14	12.0	4	8.9
Non-standard Am.	4	17.4	7	12.5	14	12.0	7	15.6
Non-standard Br.	1	4.3	1	1.8	2	1.7	2	4.4
Foreign	-	-	3	5.4	8	6.8	4	8.9
Australian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**23**	100	**56**	100	**117**	100	**45**	100

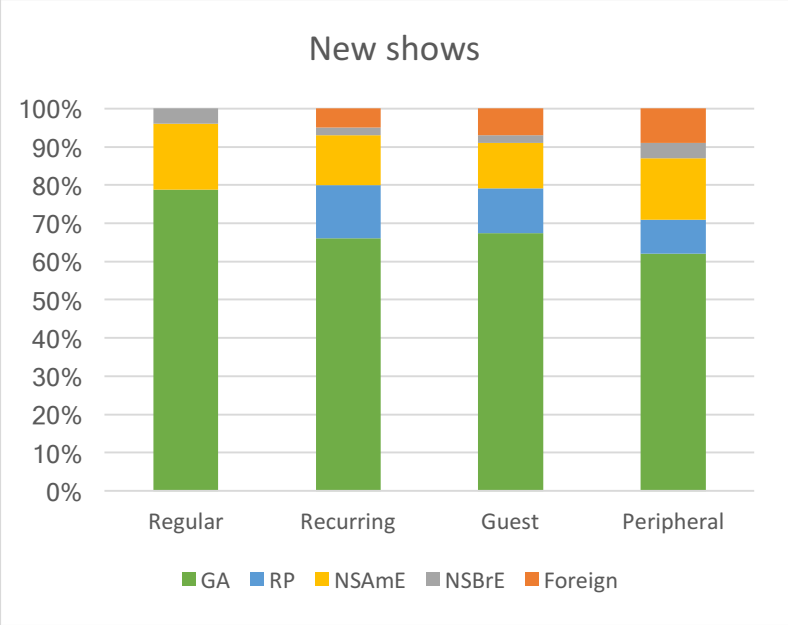

***Figure 4.8**: Accent distribution with regard to character role in the new shows*

In the new series, GA is still the most used accent among all the character roles. Moreover, the percentage of GA has gone up in every character group, except among the recurring characters where the percentage is unchanged compared to the old shows. GA now makes up over 78% among the regular characters, still 66% among the recurring characters, 68% among the guests, and even 62% of the peripheral characters now speak in GA.

In terms of regular characters, the decrease of accent diversity is realized through the 15% increase of GA, but also by the large reduction of non-standard American speakers and the removal of RP from this character group. In the new shows, only three accent categories are represented, compared to four (five if you count the excluded Australian character) in the old shows. The percentage of regular characters speaking non-standard American English has gone

from 28% to only 17%. This percentage of non-standard American is still higher than among the other character roles, but the reason for this is the overall low number of regular characters. Moreover, all the non-standard American speakers among the regular characters now speak Southern American English, whereas the other subcategories are not represented in this character group. The percentages of non-standard British English have gone from 2% to 4% in the new shows, but this is because there are only half as many regular characters in the new shows compared to the old ones. In fact, there is only one regular character in each set of shows who speaks in non-standard British English, and this is the Scottish Scrooge McDuck from respectively the old (1987) version and the new (2017) version of *DuckTales*[10].

The characters who show the least difference between old and new shows are the recurring characters, as the percentage of GA is identical in the two data sets. There is however a small increase of RP at the expense of foreign-accented English which has decreased from 11% to 5%.

Among the guests, GA has increased from 54% to 68%. At the same time, there is a decrease in all other accent categories. The largest difference is found in non-standard American English, which has gone from 18% to 12%, whereas foreign-accented English displays the smallest change with a slight decrease from 8% to 7%.

In the older shows, GA is only spoken by 47% of the peripheral characters, whereas in the new series the percentage is 62%. In other words, there is an increase in GA from right under to well over half of the characters. Other differences among the peripheral characters are a significant decrease of RP and foreign-accented English, and a small decrease in non-standard American. There is also a tiny increase in non-standard British, from one to two characters.

The overall pattern shows a decrease of accent diversity in the newer shows among all the character roles in this study. Even though the differences between the various character roles' accent use are smaller in the newer series, there still seems to be a clear correlation between character's accent and prominence. The more important characters speak in more standard accents and vice versa. This was the expected result, but the findings are still interesting from a societal perspective. It is not unreasonable to argue that greater tolerance for diversity, as well as globalization and increased migration should have led to more accent diversity among all

[10] The characters who appear in both versions of *DuckTales* are analyzed as different characters because some of them change accents in the newer version.

character roles over the past years. The audience of these animated series is probably much more diverse in terms of accents and social backgrounds than it was 20-40 years ago. It would perhaps be natural, then, that the main characters whom the audience is supposed to identify and sympathize with, broadened their range of accents in the more recent series. Nevertheless, Disney seems to hold on to their preference for GA.

4.5 Alignment

Previous research has found patterns that indicate correlations between a character's ethical motivation and accent use. All characters in the present study were thus identified as either *good*, *bad* or *neutral*, in order to test hypothesis 5b, which states that there will be more accent diversity among the bad characters than the others. Hypothesis 5 also involves an expectation of less stereotypical accent use in the newer series, meaning that accents should be distributed more equally, regardless of alignment.

In total, 178 characters were identified as good, 130 as bad, and 182 as neutral. The distribution of characters in terms of alignment is relatively similar in the older and the newer series. However, in the old shows there are more good characters (39%) than neutral (33%), whereas in the newer shows it is the other way around, as neutral characters make up 42% and good characters 34%. The bad characters make up the smallest character group in both the old series (28%) and the new series (25%).

Below is the accent distribution with reference to alignment in the old shows presented in Table 4.10, and the percentages are visualized in Figure 4.9 below.

***Table 4.10**: Accent distribution in terms of alignment in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**					
	Good		**Bad**		**Neutral**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	65	67.0	31	44.3	46	56.1
RP	12	12.4	8	11.4	10	12.2
Non-standard Am.	14	14.4	16	22.9	16	19.5
Non-standard Br.	1	1.0	6	8.6	1	1.2
Foreign	4	4.1	9	12.9	9	11.0
Australian	1	1.0	-	-	-	-
Total	**97**	100	**70**	100	**82**	100

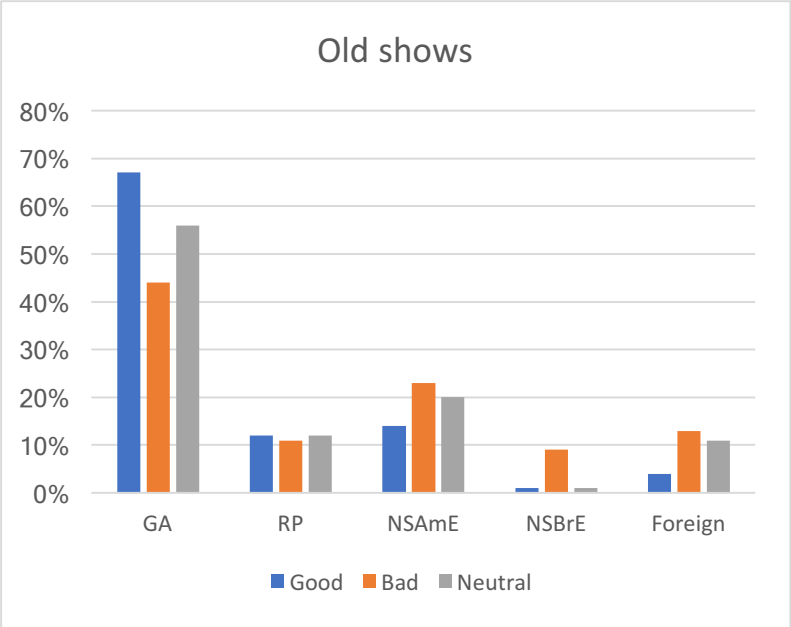

***Figure 4.9**: Accent distribution in terms of alignment in the old shows*

The results here show that, like in the previously discussed variables, GA is the dominating accent among all character groups. Nevertheless, there seems to be a form of hierarchy, where good characters speak 67% GA, characters categorized as neutral speak 56% GA, and the bad characters only 44%.

Looking at the distribution of RP, there is no notable difference among the various character groups. The lowest percentage of RP is actually shown among the bad characters (11%), which is a little surprising, since previous studies often have found high use of RP, particularly among sophisticated villains (see 2.5). My expectation was therefore to find a higher percentage of bad characters speaking RP than good ones. A possible explanation for the low number of evil RP speakers could be the strong correlation between RP and level of sophistication (see 4.8). In many of the older animated series, relatively few of the bad characters are categorized as sophisticated. The 'typical' villain in Disney's animated TV series seems to be either unsophisticated or neutral in terms of level of sophistication. A representative example is the three Beagle Boys from *DuckTales* (1987). Two of them are categorized as unsophisticated and the last one as neutral, and all three of them speak with NYC accents. Moreover, a large portion of the characters categorized as bad, are the villains' sidekicks or helpers, a group of characters who are seldom portrayed as particularly sophisticated. However, the older series also have some examples of sophisticated villains speaking in RP, e.g. a recurring villain from *Chip 'n*

Dale: Rescue Rangers (1989) named Fat Cat, and Lord Dragaunus who is the regular main villain in *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996).

The second most used accent category among all the character groups is again non-standard American English. The percentage is highest among the bad characters (23%), and the most used subcategory of non-standard American in this character group is by far NYC English, spoken by 13 out of 16 characters. Among the good characters, the subcategories of non-standard American accents are more equally distributed. These differences in distribution might be related to the different connotations of the various non-standard American accents. As discussed in 2.2.2, the Southern American accent typically has both positive and negative connotations, whereas the NYC accent is only linked to negative associations. In attitudinal research, NYC English scores low on social attractiveness, as the accent is associated with being impolite and gruff.

Bad characters also dominate the non-standard British accent category. If combined with RP, we can see that generally, British English accents often correlate with bad alignment in the older series. A similar pattern is found within the foreign-accented English category, where bad characters constitute 13%, and the good characters only 4%. This is in line with previous societal treatment studies (see 2.5), which have found that characters with foreign accents are often portrayed in negative ways. The most interesting finding in this study regarding the foreign accent category is the distribution of a subcategory of foreign accents called 'unidentified'. Four out of the nine bad characters speaking in foreign-accented English, speak with an unidentifiable accent, consisting of seemingly random foreign features. In contrast, all the good foreign-accented characters speak in different foreign accents, but none of them speak 'unidentified' foreign English. These results indicate that in some of the older shows, it did not necessarily matter what foreign accent was used, but the important thing was rather that 'foreign' equals 'bad', regardless of accent features.

The main observation in terms of alignment in the older shows is that bad characters dominate in all the non-standard accent categories, whereas good characters dominate in the standard accents. The results are thus largely in line with previous research, and with the expectations for this thesis.

Turning to the characters from the newer series, the distribution of accents in terms of alignment is shown in Table 4.11. The percentages are presented graphically below in Figure 4.10.

***Table 4.11**: Accent distribution in terms of alignment in the new shows*

Accents	**New shows**					
	Good		**Bad**		**Neutral**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	58	71.6	36	60.0	68	68.0
RP	7	8.6	7	11.7	12	12.0
Non-standard Am.	12	14.8	10	16.7	10	10.0
Non-standard Br.	1	1.2	3	5.0	2	2.0
Foreign	3	3.7	4	6.7	8	8.0
Australian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**81**	100	**60**	100	**100**	100

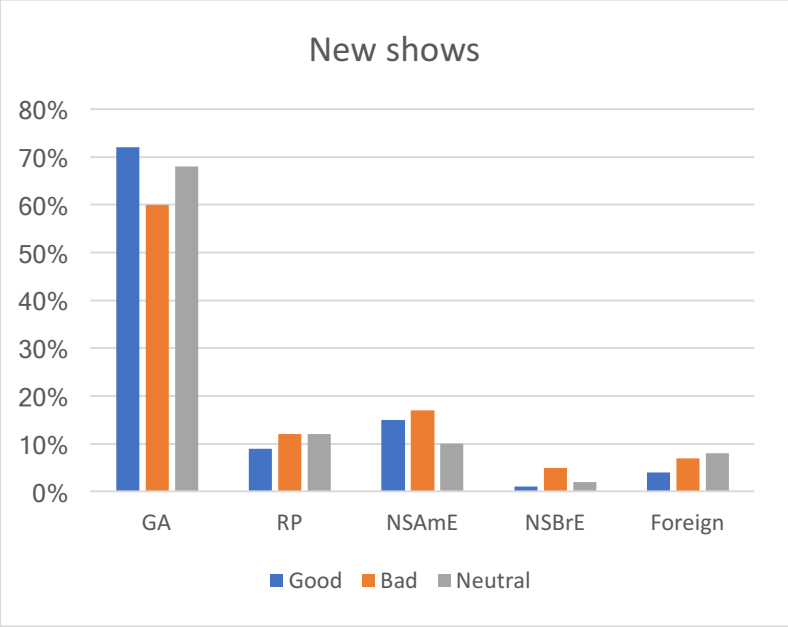

***Figure 4.10**: Accent distribution in terms of alignment in the new shows*

In the newer series, there is an increase of GA among all the character groups, but the largest increase is seen among the bad characters who go from 44% to 60% GA. The percentage of RP-speaking bad characters has also gone slightly up (from 11% to 12%), leaving the total percentage of bad characters speaking in standard accents to 72% in the new shows, compared to 56% in the older shows. The total percentage of good characters speaking in standard accents remains almost unchanged in the newer series compared to the old. The reason is that even though their use of GA has gone up, there has been a decrease in good characters speaking in RP.

In terms of non-standard American English, there has been a decrease among both bad and neutral characters, while the percentage of good characters is almost identical to the numbers

in the old shows. The largest subcategory among all character groups is now Southern American English, indicating that the stereotypical use of the NYC accent among bad characters in the old series has disappeared in the newer shows.

Bad characters still constitute the highest percentage of non-standard British speakers, although the representation is slightly lower than in the older series. A decrease is also shown in foreign-accented English among all character groups. The good characters still have the lowest percentage, but the bad characters now display a lower percentage than those characterized as neutral. Furthermore, there are no characters with an unidentified foreign accent in the newer series. These findings might be linked to globalization and the development of the internet, discussed in 2.3.1, which presumably have led to increased awareness among the audience, which affects their expectations to accent authenticity. Although globalization, combined with political correctness, seems to have decreased stereotypical use of accents to some extent, there are still differences among foreign accents used among good and bad characters. Three out of four bad foreign-accented characters speak with an Eastern European (more specifically Russian) accent, whereas none of the good characters use this accent. It is noteworthy that the majority of foreign-accented characters categorized as bad in the newer series use an accent that generally has been negatively evaluated in attitudinal research (see 2.2.2). However, because of the low number of characters in these character groups, it is not possible to make any generalizations.

Overall, the results give support to hypothesis 5b, as there is more accent diversity among bad characters than good characters in both old and new series, but the trend generally seems to be moving towards less stereotypical accent use in the newer series. The comparison between the characters in the old versus the new shows, reveals that the largest change in accent distribution has taken place among the bad characters. These diachronic changes might be connected to the growth of political correctness (see 2.3.1), and the decline of the NYC accent over the past decades, discussed previously in the present chapter (see 4.3).

4.6 Likability

Whereas a large portion of the characters in this study was categorized as neutral in terms of alignment, they turned out to generally be easier to classify as either sympathetic or unsympathetic. As mentioned in 3.4.5, not all good characters are sympathetic, nor are all bad characters unsympathetic. Many of the characters who are neutral in terms of alignment are very

clearly either sympathetic or unsympathetic. Only 25 out of the 490 characters were hard to identify in terms of likability, and these were categorized as 'mixed'. According to hypothesis 5c, the expectation was to find more non-standard accents among unsympathetic characters, but that accent differences related to likability would be smaller in the newer series.

The distribution of accents among sympathetic, unsympathetic and mixed characters in the old shows is presented in Table 4.12. Figure 4.11 shows the percentages graphically.

***Table 4.12**: Accent distribution in terms of likability in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**					
	Sympathetic		**Unsympathetic**		**Mixed**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	96	65.8	44	44.0	2	66.7
RP	16	11.0	14	14.0	-	-
Non-standard Am.	23	15.8	23	23.0	-	-
Non-standard Br.	-	-	7	7.0	1	33.3
Foreign	10	6.8	12	12.0	-	-
Australian	1	0.7	-	-	-	-
Total	**146**	100	**100**	100	**3**	100

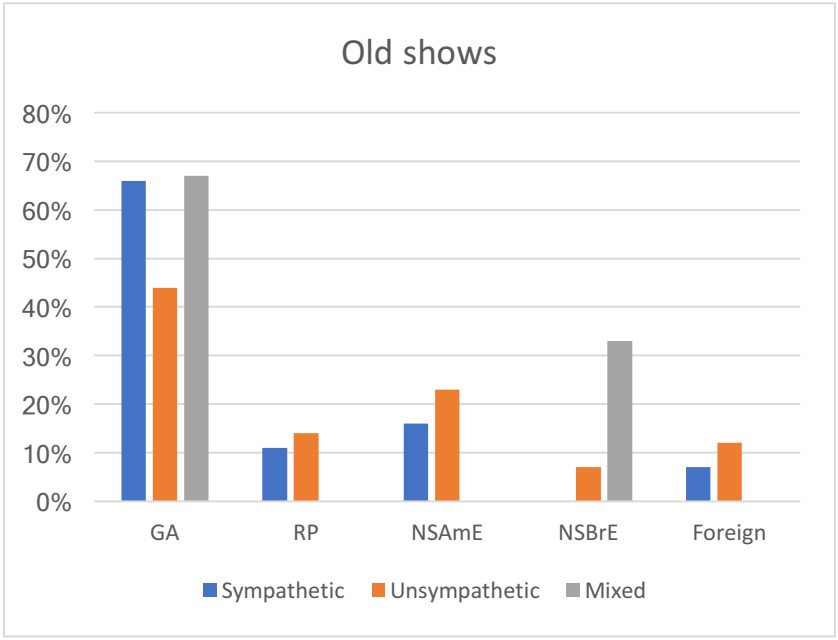

***Figure 4.11**: Accent distribution in terms of likability in the old shows*

First, it is important to note that the percentages of the mixed characters are a little 'out of proportion', as there are only three of them. The two speakers of GA therefore turn into 67%, and the one single mixed character speaking in non-standard British English makes up 33%. For the

rest of the characters in the old series, GA is spoken by 66% of the characters identified as sympathetic, but only by 44% of the unsympathetic ones. These results are reflected in the rest of the accent percentages, as unsympathetic characters dominate in all other accent categories. Hypothesis 5c, which anticipated more accent diversity among unsympathetic characters, is thus given support.

When it comes to RP, the unsympathetic characters show a slightly higher percentage (14%) than the sympathetic characters (11%). These results reflect that in attitudinal research RP speakers are sometimes perceived as 'snobbish', as the accent is typically not associated with solidarity and friendliness, but rather with prestige and status.

Within the non-standard American accent category, there are actually 23 characters among both the sympathetic and unsympathetic characters, but since there are more sympathetic characters overall, the percentage score is 7 points higher among the unsympathetic characters. Whereas most of the sympathetic characters with non-standard American accents speak either Southern American English (eight characters) or AAVE (11 characters), a considerable majority (16 out of 23) of the unsympathetic characters speak with a NYC accent. Contrastingly, only four characters categorized as sympathetic use a NYC accent. The use of these different subcategories of non-standard American English very much reflects existing stereotypes associated with the various accents. As mentioned above, NYC English is typically evaluated negatively in terms of social attractiveness, and the accent is often associated with being rude and loud (see 2.2.2). Southern American English on the other hand, typically scores high on social attractiveness, as the Southern American speakers are stereotypically portrayed as loyal and friendly, but also simple and slow.

Among the eight characters identified with a non-standard British accent, *none* are categorized as sympathetic. The accent category is represented by 7% of the unsympathetic characters, and the dominating accent among these characters is the Cockney accent. This non-standard British accent is associated with the lower working class in London, and can in this context perhaps be seen as the British equivalent of NYC English. Cockney is typically evaluated negatively on all dimensions in studies on attitudes towards varieties of English (see 2.2.2).

In the older shows, foreign-accented English is spoken by 7% of the sympathetic and 12% of the unsympathetic characters. In the sympathetic group, we find Spanish, Asian, German, French and Indian accents. The unsympathetic characters use some of the same accents as the

sympathetic ones, e.g. Spanish and French. However, like with the 'bad' characters in the alignment variable, the most used foreign accent among the unsympathetic characters is an 'unidentified' foreign accent. As discussed in 4.5, it seems that in some of the older shows, 'foreign' equals 'bad', or in this case 'unsympathetic', regardless of accent features.

In the newer shows, the group of 'mixed' characters in terms of likability is slightly larger than in the older series. Still, there are only 22 in this group, compared to 129 sympathetic and 90 unsympathetic characters. Table 4.13 shows the distribution of accents in relation to likability in the new shows, whereas Figure 4.12 below illustrates the data graphically.

***Table 4.13**: Accent distribution in terms of likability in the new shows*

Accents	**New shows**					
	Sympathetic		**Unsympathetic**		**Mixed**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	96	74.4	48	53.3	18	81.8
RP	6	4.7	17	18.9	3	13.6
Non-standard Am.	18	14.0	14	15.6	-	-
Non-standard Br.	-	-	5	5.6	1	4.5
Foreign	9	7.0	6	6.7	-	-
Australian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**129**	100	**90**	100	**22**	100

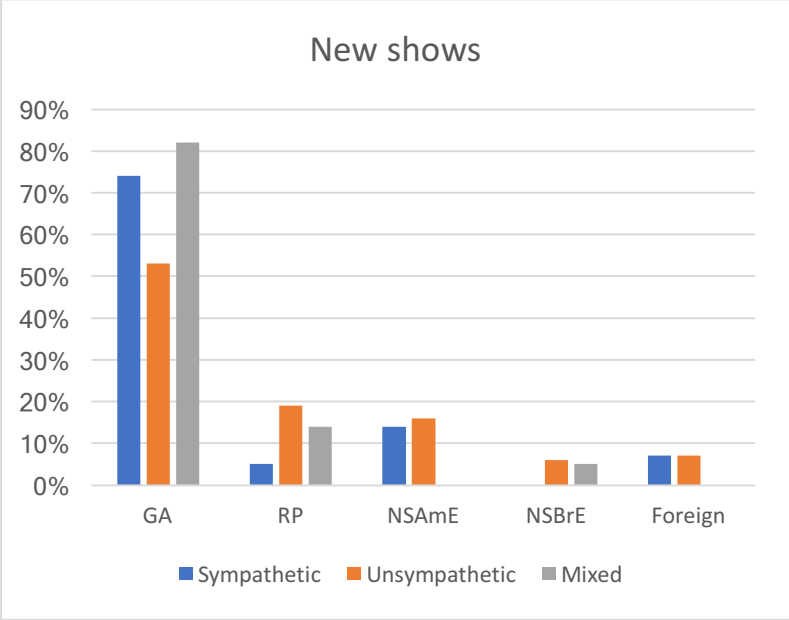

***Figure 4.12**: Accent distribution in terms of likability in the new shows*

Following the general pattern of the distribution of accents in old and new shows, there is an increase in GA among all character groups in this variable. Percentagewise, the increase among sympathetic and unsympathetic characters is very similar.

The results regarding RP in the newer series are rather interesting. While there is a clear decrease of RP among the characters categorized as sympathetic, there is actually an increase of RP-speaking unsympathetic characters from 14% to 19%. These findings indicate *more* use of 'snobbish' and cold standard-speaking British characters in the newer shows, compared to the old shows, which is the opposite of what was expected in hypothesis 5. Although RP-speaking villains seem to be less common in the newer series, unsympathetic RP-speakers are not uncommon. In fact, 65% of the RP-speakers found in the newer series are identified as unsympathetic, whereas only 27% are identified as 'bad' in terms of alignment.

In reference to non-standard American English, the results in the newer series are similar to those in the alignment variable (see 4.5). The use of NYC English has gone down among the unsympathetic characters, and the most used non-standard American accent in all character groups is Southern American English. There thus seems to be less stereotypical use of non-standard American accents with regard to likability in the newer shows compared to the old ones. However, non-standard British English still seems to be reserved for unsympathetic characters in the new series.

There is an equal distribution of sympathetic and unsympathetic characters speaking foreign-accented English in the newer series (7% of both character groups). This means that there has been a decrease in unsympathetic foreign-accented characters compared to the old shows, but the percentage of sympathetic foreign English speakers remains unchanged. The most used foreign accent among sympathetic speakers is Spanish, whereas Eastern European dominates among the unsympathetic characters. Like in the alignment variable, negatively evaluated accents (see 2.2.2) are once again more frequently used among 'negative' characters than among the likable ones.

The findings for likability are overall a little ambiguous when it comes to diachronic changes in stereotypical accent use. There is generally less accent diversity among all character groups in the newer shows, but there still seem to be correlations between the characters' accents and their likability, e.g. among the RP speakers. Note that there are no 'mixed' characters speaking in non-standard American English, nor with a foreign accent. This is perhaps an

indication that these two accent categories are particularly used in stereotypical ways to emphasize a character's likability. However, the relatively low number of 'mixed' characters in total makes it impossible to generalize these results.

4.7 Species

Characters in this study were also analyzed in terms of *species*, in order to see if the accent distribution is different among *human*, *non-human* and *human-like* characters. Hypothesis 5d states that there will be the most accent diversity among non-humans. In both the old and the new series, there are some shows that have exclusively non-human characters, e.g. the ones set in the universe of Donald Duck & co. Other shows have only human characters, e.g. *Recess* (1997). Overall, 200 characters are identified as human, 220 as non-human 68 as human-like. The two last characters are unidentified, because they are narrators who are never visible in any of the episodes. One narrator speaks GA, and the other speaks RP.

The distribution of accents among the different species in the older series is presented in Table 4.14, and is graphically presented in the following Figure 4.13.

***Table 4.14**: Accent distribution in terms of species in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**					
	Human		**Non-human**		**Human-like**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	86	63.7	54	49.1	1	33.3
RP	13	9.6	16	14.5	1	33.3
Non-standard Am.	24	17.8	21	19.1	1	33.3
Non-standard Br.	1	0.7	7	6.4	-	-
Foreign	11	8.1	11	10.0	-	-
Australian	-	-	1	0.9	-	-
Total	**135**	100	**110**	100	**3**	100

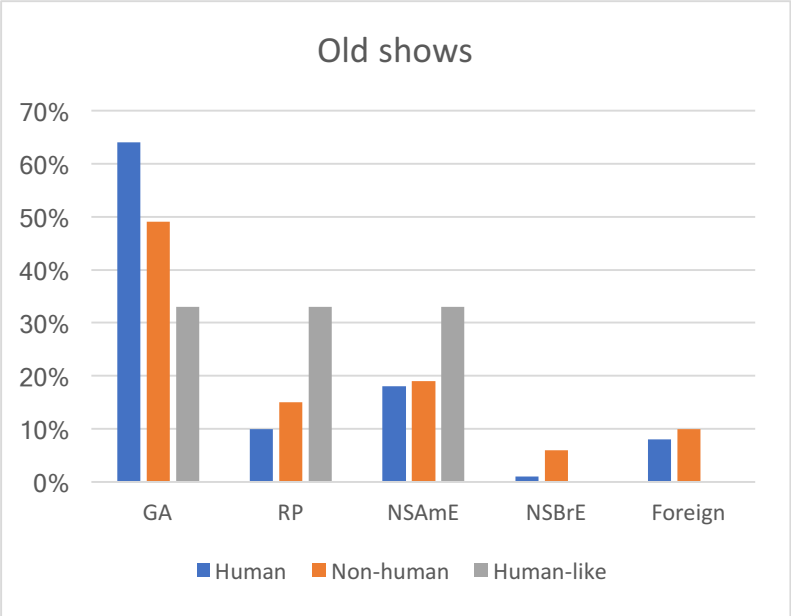

***Figure 4.13**: Accent distribution in terms of species in the old shows*

It is important to note that the percentages of the human-like characters are a little 'out of proportion', as there are only three such characters in the older series. Each speaker therefore makes up 33%, and they will not be included in the rest of the discussion of species in the older series. All three characters are from *Mighty Ducks: The Animated Series* (1996).

GA is the dominating accent both among humans and non-humans, but the distribution is considerably higher among the human characters (64%) than among the non-human characters (49%). Consequently, there is a higher percentage of non-humans than humans in all other accent categories. The findings thus show more use of non-standard accents among the non-humans, and support hypothesis 5d.

The accent categories where the non-human characters are most dominating are the two British categories RP and non-standard British English. In both these accent categories, non-humans constitute five percentage points more than humans. The use of British accents among non-humans might be related to a sense of 'otherness'. By speaking British English, characters appear more 'distant', but still speak a language that is understandable, to an American audience. An example of a non-human character speaking RP in the older series is a dragon from one of the episodes of *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). The other characters in the series do not believe that dragons exist anymore, so the RP accent is perhaps a way to underline the dragon's nature as a mythical creature associated with medieval-like fantasy worlds. British

English is often used in e.g. American fantasy films to signal 'otherness' and to indicate distance in time by creating associations to medieval Europe (Wheeler 2012).

The distribution of non-standard American English is relatively similar among human and non-human characters. However, most of the humans speak AAVE, whereas the most used non-standard American accent among non-humans is NYC English. In contrast to previous research, none of the non-humans in the older shows in this study speak AAVE. In Lippi-Green's (1997) and Urke's (2019) studies, all characters who spoke AAVE were non-human characters. Both these previous studies involved very few AAVE speakers, and were careful to draw any sweeping inferences. There are not very many speakers of AAVE in this study either, but it is a little interesting that my data from the older series show the exact opposite findings from those of Lippi-Green and Urke. Out of the 21 non-humans with non-standard American accents, 14 speak NYC English. It thus seems like the most negatively evaluated American accent is reserved for the non-human characters, just like it is most common among males, bad and unsympathetic characters.

With regard to foreign-accented English, the distribution is fairly similar among the human (8%) and the non-human (10%) characters. However, there is a note to be made regarding the distribution of subcategories of foreign accents. All but one of the aforementioned characters speaking with an unidentifiable foreign accent (see 4.5 and 4.6) are non-human characters. Some examples of these non-humans with unidentifiable foreign accents are the ogres found in *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). Their mix of foreign accent features and their incorrect syntax seem to be deliberate means of emphasizing the primitive nature of these non-human creatures. Otherwise, there are no notable differences between the foreign accents among humans and non-humans.

Overall, even though GA is the most used accent in the older series, the results show that some accents are a little more frequently represented among the non-humans than among human characters. Compared to Moltu's (2014) and Urke's (2019) findings related to *species*, the present study shows some similar results. The studies by Moltu and Urke found a much greater use of RP overall in their data, but they also both found that non-human characters showed the largest diversity of accents. The findings of the present study are thus in line with previous research and give some support to hypothesis 5d.

In the newer series, the number of human-like characters is considerably higher than in the old shows, making the three species categories more equal in terms of character numbers, and the percentages are thus more 'proportioned'. The analysis of the distribution of accents in terms of species in the newer shows is presented in Table 4.15, and the percentages are demonstrated graphically in Figure 4.14.

***Table 4.15**: Accent distribution in terms of species in the new shows*

Accents	**New shows**					
	Human		**Non-human**		**Human-like**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	50	76.9	66	60.0	46	70.8
RP	3	4.6	14	12.7	8	12.3
Non-standard Am.	6	9.2	18	16.4	8	12.3
Non-standard Br.	1	1.5	5	4.5	-	-
Foreign	5	7.7	7	6.4	3	4.6
Australian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**65**	100	**110**	100	**65**	100

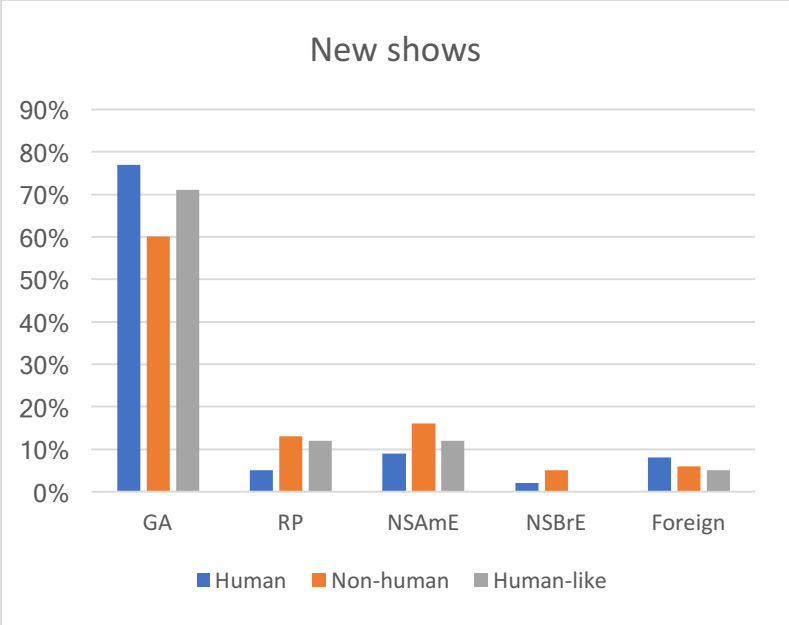

***Figure 4.14**: Accent distribution in terms of species in the new shows*

Like in almost all other character variables in this study, there has been an increase of GA among all the characters in the species variable in the newer series, compared to the old series. I expected to find that all character groups would have equal percentages of GA-speakers in the

newer series, but this is not the case. In the old shows, the use of GA among humans is around 15 percentage points higher than among non-humans, and in the new shows this difference has increased slightly to 17 points higher. This is not a very large difference, but the gap between GA-speaking humans and GA-speaking non-humans has nonetheless become bigger, rather than smaller. Although these television series are released no more than 6-7 years ago or later, there still seems to be a form of 'species hierarchy' here. The prestigious and socially attractive accent category GA (see 2.2.2), is spoken most by humans, second most by human-like characters and least by non-humans.

Human characters generally have the lowest percentage in all other accent categories, except in the foreign English accent category. Here, the character groups have 'switched places' compared to in the data from the older series. The foreign accent most commonly spoken by human characters is Spanish, whereas the most used accent among non-humans is Eastern European.

In the accent category non-standard American English, there has been an overall decrease for all characters compared to the old series, but the difference between humans and non-humans is actually bigger in the newer shows. The distribution was relatively equal in the old shows, but now 16% of the non-humans (previously 19%) speak non-standard American, whereas only 9% of the humans (previously 18%) do. There are no notable changes in the distribution of non-standard British English. In both sets of series, all but one of the characters who speak non-standard British accents are categorized as non-human.

The main observation for the species variable in the newer shows is that although there is generally less accent diversity among all characters compared to the older series, the differences between the accent use of human and non-human characters have in fact increased. Overall, non-standard accents are more frequently used among non-human characters than among human-like and human characters in both old and new animated series from Disney. These findings are in line with those of Urke (2019) who compared accent use of humans and non-humans in some of Disney's original films (released between 1950-1991) and their remakes (released between 2010-2018). In both sets of films, she found slightly more diversity among non-human characters than among the humans.

It is however important to note that in the process of analyzing the results from the present study, the *species* variable turned out to be perhaps the most difficult variable to draw

conclusions from. One reason for this is that some of the series only have human characters (e.g. *Recess* (1997) and *Milo Murphy's Law* (2016)), whereas others have exclusively non-human characters (e.g. *DuckTales* (1987/2017) and *The Wonderful World of Mickey Mouse* (2020)). A very clear 'species hierarchy' across all the series is therefore hard to identify. It would have been interesting to have a closer look at the series with only animals, to see what kind of accents the different animals have, and whether there is any species-internal hierarchy. Such an analysis is however beyond the scope of this thesis, but could be an interesting topic for further research.

4.8 Level of sophistication

This section looks at potential correlations between accent use and the characters' level of sophistication. The last part of hypothesis 5, predicts that there will be more use of non-standard accents among the unsophisticated characters than the sophisticated. Research has shown that speakers of standard accents are typically evaluated as more sophisticated than speakers of non-standard accents (see 2.2.2). These evaluations are based on existing stereotypical attitudes. Examining differences in accent use between sophisticated and unsophisticated characters could therefore potentially reveal whether characters in Disney's animated TV series reflect traditional stereotypes.

Table 4.16 shows the distribution of accents in terms of the characters' level of sophistication in the older shows. Figure 4.15 visualizes the percentages.

***Table 4.16**: Accent distribution with regard to level of sophistication in the old shows*

Accents	**Old shows**					
	Sophisticated		**Unsophisticated**		**Neutral**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	31	47.7	23	44.2	88	66.7
RP	25	38.5	-	-	5	3.8
Non-standard Am.	2	3.1	18	34.6	26	19.7
Non-standard Br.	1	1.5	5	9.6	2	1.5
Foreign	6	9.2	6	11.5	10	7.6
Australian	-	-	-	-	1	0.8
Total	**65**	100	**52**	100	**132**	100

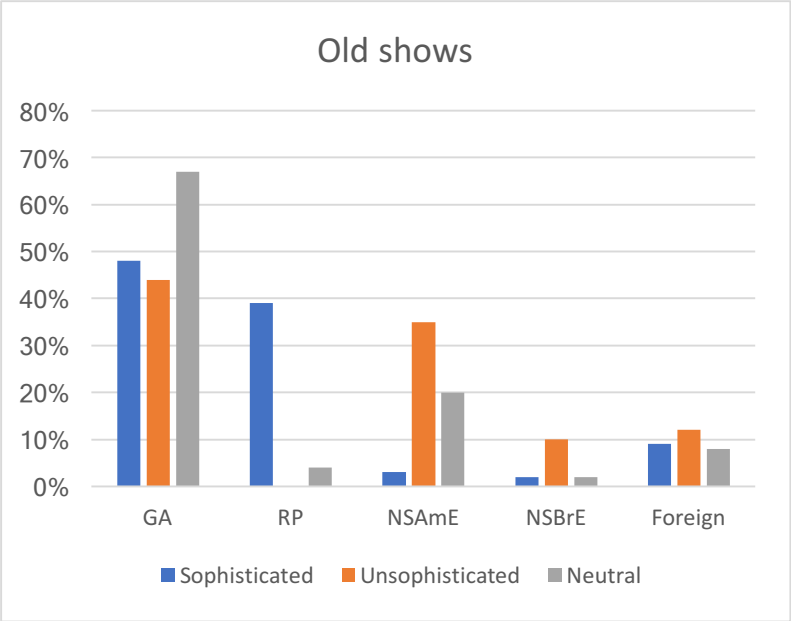

***Figure 4.15**: Accent distribution with regard to level of sophistication in the old shows*

In line with the overall pattern in this study, the most used accent among all characters is GA, particularly among the characters categorized as 'neutral' in terms of their level of sophistication. However, the results for this character variable stand out from the findings of all the other non-linguistic variables, as the percentage of RP among sophisticated characters is almost as high as that of GA. 39% of the sophisticated characters speak RP, which is the highest percentage of RP found in any of the variables. Moreover, the use of non-standard American English among unsophisticated characters is only 9 percentage points lower than the use of GA in this character group. Among RP-speakers, however, there is not a single character identified as unsophisticated. Thus, in total, 86% of the sophisticated characters speak with standard accents, whereas only 44% of the unsophisticated do. This tendency for sophisticated characters to use standard accents has been found in many previous studies (e.g. Sønnesyn 2011, Lundervold 2013, Moltu 2014, Urke 2019).

Among the unsophisticated characters 35% speak non-standard American. NYC English is the most commonly used non-standard American accent in this character group, closely followed by Southern American English. Both of these regional varieties of American English are typically negatively evaluated in terms of traits like intelligence and class (see 2.2.2). In contrast, none of the sophisticated characters speak Southern American, and only one speaks NYC English. The only sophisticated character with a NYC accent is a guest antagonist in *Goof*

Troop (1992) called Mr. Braxton; a male anthropomorphic cat in a purple suit. Although he is categorized as sophisticated, he is both unsympathetic and evil, once again reinforcing negative associations with NYC. The overall high percentages of non-standard American among the unsophisticated characters correspond closely with the findings of e.g. Dobrow and Gidney (1998). They found that 'comic' characters (presumably unsophisticated characters) in children's television generally used regional or social varieties of American English, or foreign accents like German or Slavic.

With regard to non-standard British English, 10% of the unsophisticated characters are placed in this accent category, whereas only one sophisticated character is categorized as having a non-standard British accent. Again, the results are in line with those of Dobrow and Gidney (1998), who discovered in their data that, unlike villains, none of the characters who functioned as 'comic reliefs' spoke with British English accents. The only sophisticated character speaking in non-standard British English in the present study is the Scottish Scrooge McDuck from *DuckTales* (1987). Contrastingly, none of the unsophisticated characters speak Scottish English. Instead, most of them speak with a Cockney accent, a variety that tends to get low scores on all evaluative dimensions in attitudinal studies. The Cockney accent has also often been found among many unsophisticated characters in previous societal treatment studies (e.g. Lundervold 2013, Moltu 2014, Urke 2019).

When it comes to foreign-accented characters, the differences in distribution among the various character groups in this variable are not very big. It is however noteworthy that none of the five characters with an unidentified foreign accent are identified as sophisticated. It appears these characters have been given seemingly random foreign accent features in order to appear less sophisticated. For example, some of these accents belong to the ogres who work for the villain Duke Igthorn in *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* (1985). These creatures are portrayed as very simple-minded, naive and clumsy, they speak with silly, gruff voices, and use various foreign accent features, as well as incorrect syntax. All in all, there is undoubtedly more use of non-standard accents among the unsophisticated characters than the sophisticated characters in the older series from Disney. Thus, so far, hypothesis 5e is strongly supported.

The distribution of accents in relation to level of sophistication in the newer series is presented in Table 4.17 and Figure 4.16.

***Table 4.17**: Accent distribution with regard to level of sophistication in the new shows*

Accents	New shows					
	Sophisticated		Unsophisticated		Neutral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	36	55.4	31	53.4	95	80.5
RP	21	32.3	1	1.7	4	3.4
Non-standard Am.	2	3.1	18	31.0	12	10.2
Non-standard Br.	1	1.5	3	5.2	2	1.7
Foreign	5	7.7	5	8.6	5	4.2
Australian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**65**	100	**58**	100	**118**	100

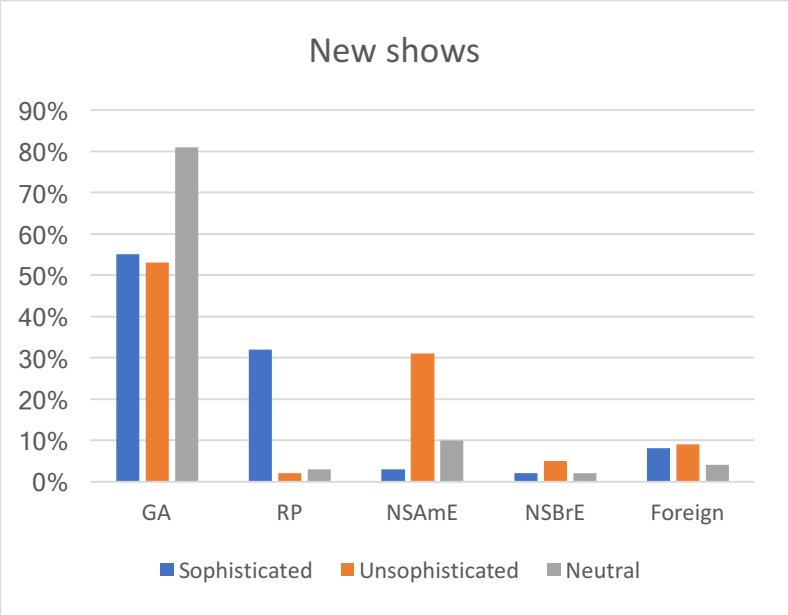

***Figure 4.16**: Accent distribution with regard to level of sophistication in the new shows*

Among all character groups in the newer series, we also see the trending pattern of an increase in GA, and a decrease in more or less all other accent categories. The exception is that unsophisticated RP-speaking characters have gone from zero to one character in the new shows. The only unsophisticated RP speaker in this entire study is a guest in *The Owl House* (2020) named Chris. He looks like a mix of a cat and a garden gnome, and turns out to be a bewitched puppet, enchanted by a villainous puppeteer demon called Adegast, a sophisticated guest who also speaks RP. The percentage of sophisticated RP-speakers is still strikingly high, despite the decrease of six percentage points from the older shows.

In the non-standard American accent category, the pattern is somewhat similar to the one in the older shows. Non-standard American English is still the second most used accent category among unsophisticated characters with 31%, while the distribution among the sophisticated characters remains stable at 3%. The percentage of neutral characters speaking in non-standard American has gone down from 20% to 10%, and seems to follow the general pattern of increase in GA at the expense of other accents. The most used non-standard American accent among the unsophisticated characters has changed from NYC to Southern American English in the newer shows. None of the unsophisticated characters speak AAVE, whereas this is the only non-standard American accent represented among the sophisticated characters in the new series. This tendency for AAVE to be linked to sophistication has not, to my knowledge, been found in previous societal treatment studies on films and television. The pattern has rather been the other way around, as e.g. Moltu (2014) found only unsophisticated AAVE speakers, and Lippi-Green (1997) found that AAVE-speaking characters often are e.g. non-human, unemployed male characters whose only purpose in life is to please themselves and play music (Lippi-Green 1997:94). The number of characters speaking AAVE in the newer series in this study is too low to draw any firm conclusions, but it is still an unexpected result to find more AAVE among sophisticated than among unsophisticated characters.

When it comes to non-standard British English, there are no notable changes from the older shows among the sophisticated and neutral characters, where the percentages are still very low. Among the unsophisticated characters speaking non-standard British, there is a decrease from 10% to 5%, but the most used accent in these 5% is still Cockney.

In the foreign English accent category, the character group who shows the largest decrease in percentage is the neutral characters. Note that there are five foreign-accented characters in each character group, but because of different total numbers, the percentages are different. The dominating foreign accent among the neutral and the sophisticated characters is Spanish, whereas four out of five unsophisticated characters have an Eastern European accent. Once again, there seems to be a correlation between negative character traits (here: being unsophisticated) and accents that are typically negatively evaluated. Use of Slavic accents among comic characters was also found in the study by Dobrow and Gidney (1998). It was, however, a little surprising to find stereotypical use of this kind of accent in the new series in the present study, as they are released relatively recently.

Overall, the distributions within each accent category look relatively similar in the newer shows compared to the older, apart from the general increase of GA and decrease of other accents. The findings regarding level of sophistication are a little unexpected, as the assumption was that the growth of political correctness and globalization would have led to much less stereotypical accent use in the newer shows than the results of this variable indicate. Hypothesis 5e is thus only partly confirmed. Although some diachronic changes can be detected, Cockney still seems to be reserved for the unsophisticated characters, and so do Southern American and NYC English. RP, on the other hand, continues to be an accent reserved for the prestigious and posh. Some of the character numbers here are too low to make any generalization, but these are still interesting findings which may potentially suggest that there have been, and still are, stereotypical portrayals in Disney's animated television series.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter contains a summary of the main results of the study, and a conclusion related to the research questions and hypotheses. Then, the contributions of this thesis are discussed, and finally, some suggestions for further research are given.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The present study has looked at language attitudes in Disney's animated television series by studying correlations between accent use and different character variables. The accents of 490 characters were analyzed, and placed in the following accent categories: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American, non-standard British, Australian, and English with a foreign accent. All characters were also categorized with regard to their *age, gender*, *character role*, *alignment*, *likability*, *species* and *level of sophistication*. Results from older series (released between 1985-2002) and newer series (released between 2015-2020) have been compared in order to detect any diachronic changes.

The first hypothesis of the present study stated that GA would be the most used accent overall in Disney's animated series, and the expectation was to find an increase of its dominance in the newer shows. This hypothesis was confirmed, as GA was by far the most used accent overall, and its prominence was even greater in the newer series than in the old. Increased use of GA means less use of other accents. Thus, hypothesis 2, which predicted less accent diversity in the newer shows, was also supported.

An interesting finding regarding the overall distribution compared to results from previous studies on Disney films was the extensive use of non-standard American and limited use of RP. An explanation for these unexpected distributions of RP and non-standard American could perhaps be that the main target audience for the animated series is American children, whereas Disney's feature films are aimed at a broader international audience.

The present study also found a decrease of NYC English in the new shows compared to the old, which might be linked to a decline of the NYC accent in society over the past decades. The total number of characters speaking NYC English is too low to make any sweeping inferences, but the finding appears to be the first of its kind among societal treatment studies on children's films and television.

With regard to the *age* variable, the third hypothesis predicted more use of standard accents among the child characters than among the adult characters, and no notable changes between older and newer series. This hypothesis was also supported, as over 80% of the children characters spoke GA, both in the older and the newer series, whereas the distribution of GA among adults was much lower. In addition, all accent categories were represented among the adult characters, but only three accent categories were represented among the children. Although there were no big changes between the old to the newer series in this variable, child characters were actually the only character group in the entire study who showed a (small) decrease in GA and a (small) increase in non-standard American English. The predominance of American accents among children can probably be linked to viewer identification, as the main target audience of these series is American children.

Hypothesis 4 concerned the *gender* variable. The expectations were to find an underrepresentation of female characters, that females would speak in more standard accents than males, and that gender differences would be smaller in the newer shows. All three expectations were confirmed by the results. Female characters were largely underrepresented in both the older series and the newer series, although the difference in gender representation was slightly smaller in the new shows. Gender differences in accent use were also smaller in the new shows than in the old. This was, however, due to a decrease in accent diversity among males, rather than increased accent diversity among females.

The fifth and final hypothesis predicted that there would be more stereotypical accent use in the older series than in the new series. More specifically, hypothesis 5 expected to find more use of non-standard accents among characters who were: a) less important in terms of character role, b) bad, c) unsympathetic, d) non-human and e) unsophisticated.

The *character role* variable showed a clear correlation between the characters' accents and their prominence. Overall, more important characters spoke more standard than the less important ones. This pattern was found in both sets of series, although the differences between

the various character groups were smaller in the newer shows. Compared to previous studies that have looked at character roles, the most striking finding in the present study was the high percentage of non-standard American English, and low percentage of RP, among regular characters. This finding could perhaps be linked to viewer identification, and the intention for the target audience, first and foremost American children, to identify with the regular characters.

The correlation between *alignment* and accents showed that bad characters dominated in non-standard accent categories, and good characters dominated in the prestigious GA accent. Examples of stereotypical accent use found were higher use of foreign, non-standard British, and the negatively evaluated NYC accent among the bad characters than the good ones. In addition, many of the foreign-accented bad characters in the older series had unidentifiable accents, consisting of random foreign features. None of the good characters had this kind of accent, indicating that 'foreign', regardless of origin, equals bad. The differences between good and bad characters were smaller in the newer series, and the trend generally seems to be moving towards less stereotypical accent use. However, there is still more accent diversity among bad characters than good characters in the newer series.

With regard to *likability*, the results were similar to those of alignment, as unsympathetic characters dominated in non-standard accent categories, whereas sympathetic characters dominated in GA. NYC English, non-standard British accents, and 'unidentified' foreign English were to a large extent reserved for the unsympathetic characters, both in the older and the newer series. Smaller differences among sympathetic and unsympathetic characters in the newer series indicate a trend going towards less stereotypical accent use on one side. On the other hand, the difference between sympathetic and unsympathetic characters regarding RP has *increased* in the newer series, making RP almost exclusively reserved for unsympathetic characters. In the likability variable, the RP accent, which is typically negatively evaluated in terms of social attractiveness, thus seems to be used in even more stereotypical ways in the new shows, compared to the older ones.

The characters' *species* showed that although there was, overall, less diversity in the newer shows, both sets of series seemed to have a form of 'species hierarchy'. Humans spoke most GA, non-humans spoke most non-standard, and human-like characters were placed somewhere in the middle. Furthermore, non-humans dominated in negatively evaluated accents like NYC English, non-standard British, Eastern European English, and 'unidentified' foreign

English. These findings are largely in line with results from previous studies using the species variable, as non-human characters generally have shown the largest diversity of accents, and are more commonly assigned accents with traditionally negative associations.

Lastly, for the *level of sophistication* variable, the findings indicated that accents to a large extent were used to imply whether a character was sophisticated or not. RP was reserved for the sophisticated, whereas unsophisticated characters clearly dominated in the non-standard American accent category. This pattern was still very clear in the newer series, despite the overall increase of GA. Especially the accents Cockney, Southern American and NYC English seemed to be reserved for the unsophisticated characters, in both newer and older shows.

Overall, it thus seems like Disney Television Animation has become more careful when it comes to stereotypical accent use, like hypothesis 5 expected. However, this thesis concludes that there are still traditional patterns when it comes to accent distribution in Disney's more recent animated series.

5.2 Contributions of this thesis

The present thesis has provided more data on language attitudes found in the media, and has hopefully contributed to increased awareness of accent use in Disney's animated television series. If the media content that children consume can contribute to shaping their attitudes and perspectives on the world, detecting stereotypical accent use found in children's television is crucial. In line with previous societal treatment studies on film and television, the results from the present study show several examples of stereotypical accent use. As society changes, accent use in the media also changes, and the trend seems to be moving towards less use of stereotypes in children's television. However, the reduction of stereotypical portrayals is due to a reduction of accent diversity overall.

There have been several attitudinal studies on language attitudes found in Disney's media products (Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011, Urke 2019). However, all these have focused on feature films. Although Dobrow & Gidney (1998) looked at dialect use in children's animated television programming, the present study is the first to focus exclusively on Disney's animated television series. It is also, to my knowledge, the only study with this time span, exploring animated series released over 35 years from 1985 to 2020. Compared to the studies on Disney films, the present study found a much larger distribution of non-standard American accents, and a

significantly smaller distribution of RP. Within the non-standard American accent category, this thesis also discovered some interesting results regarding the NYC accent that have not been found in other studies. Comparing the older and newer series, there is a very noticeable decrease of NYC English, which might be linked to a decline of the NYC accent in society in general.

This study has thus illuminated some new interesting areas of accent use in Disney's universe, in addition to giving further evidence that the company is moving towards less accent diversity overall. It is worth questioning how it affects young audiences to be exposed to one particular accent (GA) much more than all other varieties of English. With the great diversity of people living in the United States today, one could argue that children's television should have more accent diversity than ever. Moreover, thanks to the new streaming platform Disney Plus, productions from Disney have never been more available to a world-wide audience than they are today. Children all over the world have the opportunity to watch series and films from Disney every single day. As mentioned previously in this thesis, television is an arena where children can learn both about themselves and about others. Therefore, it is important to ask critical questions about how these children are affected by continuously consuming media content with minimal accent diversity and total dominance of GA.

5.3 Limitations and further research

During the research process of this study, certain choices had to be made, and some limitations were inevitable. Many of the accent categories were intentionally made quite broad, which prevented certain nuances from being included. Moreover, in the categorization of characters in the some of the non-linguistic variables, a certain level of subjectivity is hard to avoid, but I have tried to be as consistent as possible, and to describe the categorization criteria in a precise way.

The limited time and scope of an MA thesis makes it impossible to explore *all* interesting topics and factors related to the study. For example, it would not have been possible to analyze *every* show and *every* character that Disney Television Animation has created since 1985. Although it could have been interesting to include even more data material, 490 is still a higher number of characters than in most comparable societal treatment studies. Furthermore, the choices of which character variables to include have of course affected the results, and exploring other variables, e.g. physical attractiveness, would have highlighted other aspects. Another selection of animated television series could arguably also have generated different results.

Nonetheless, the present thesis can hopefully be a subject of inspiration and comparison for future societal treatment research on films and television series.

Moreover, the *species* variable in the present study was not optimal, as some shows involved only humans or only animals. An interesting area for further research could therefore be to look at series or films with only animal characters, and investigate whether different kinds of animals tend to use different accents.

Lastly, one of the most surprising and interesting findings in the present study was the large decrease of NYC English in Disney's animated television series. It would be interesting to further investigate whether the NYC accent is actually disappearing, both from society and from the world of films and television.

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