

The Power of Satire

An Analysis of Language Attitudes in South Park



Stian Gjerde



Master's thesis in English Linguistics
Department of Foreign Languages
University of Bergen
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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven har som formål å se på bruken av engelske uttalevarianter (accents) i den animerte TV-serien South Park, utgitt mellom 1997 og 2022. Totalt har 205 karakterer fra 6 ulike sesonger 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 sesongene, og om dette eventuelt kan knyttes til endringer og utviklinger 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 å 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. Studiene har fokusert på TV-serier og filmer rettet mot et yngre publikum, som skiller seg fra det voksne publikummet til serien diskutert i denne oppgaven. 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 kjønn, om karakterene var slem eller ikke, om de var usofistikert eller ikke og om de var mennesker eller ikke. Forventningen var også å finne forskjeller mellom de nye og de gamle sesongene. Siden samfunnet har utviklet seg mye over de siste 25 årene, var forventningen å finne mer stereotypisk språkbruk i de gamle sesongene, og mindre av dette i de nye.

Resultatene viser at det er korrelasjoner mellom uttalevarianter og karaktertrekk i South Park, men at noen endringer har skjedd over de siste årene. Den mest brukte uttalevarianten i både eldre og nyere sesonger var standard amerikansk, og andelen karakterene som snakket denne varianten av engelsk var enda større i de nye sesongene enn i de gamle. I analysen av språkbruk ble det funnet forskjeller mellom menn og kvinner, nøytrale og onde, nøytrale og usofistikerte og mennesker og ikke-mennesker.

Selv om forskjellene er mindre i de nye sesongene, viser resultatene i denne oppgaven at det fremdeles finnes stereotypisk språkbruk i animasjonsserien South Park.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the aim and scope of the present thesis and presents the research question and hypotheses. Furthermore, an overview of the structure of the thesis is offered.

1.1 Aim and scope

The present thesis studies language attitudes by looking at accent use in the animated TV series *South Park*. The main aim of the study is to find out if there are any systematic correlations between the characters' accent and their character traits. This study also looks at diachronic changes between older and newer seasons and discuss these in light of recent social changes. This thesis applies the societal treatment approach, which is an indirect approach to studying language attitudes which looks at language use in publicly available sources. Societal treatment studies infer language attitudes from the way language varieties are treated in society.

This study on the animated television series *South Park* was inspired by previous research on films and television series. Lippi-Green (1997), Sønnesyn (2011), Urke (2019) and Madland (2022) all studied accent use in animated Disney films and television shows from different time periods with the societal treatment approach. Giles (1970), Hewitt (1971) and Preston (1989) looked at language attitudes in Britain and USA. Lindemann (2005) looked at native speakers' attitudes towards foreign accents. Ladegaard (1998) and Trømborg (2019) studied non-native speakers' attitudes towards different native varieties of English. Lastly, Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan (2022) studied American's attitudes towards standard American English and nine non-Anglo foreign accents. The different results from these studies are relevant for the present thesis and will be presented in detail in chapter 2.

There have been conducted several attitudinal studies on accent use in animated television shows and films, but to my knowledge the present study is the first to examine language attitudes in South Park. The previous societal treatment studies mentioned above all focus on Disney, which is targeted towards children, while South Park on the other hand, is targeted for an adult audience. The findings from this study will thus provide insight into language attitudes presented to a mature audience, as well as attitudes in American society in general.

The data in the present study consists of six seasons of South Park released between 1997 and 2022. The first two seasons released in 1997 and 1998, and the newest four seasons at the time of writing released in 2019 to 2022. Since this study started one more season has been released, season 26, but this season will not be included in the analysis. In total, 205 characters have been analyzed in terms of their accents. 183 of these characters are from the original six seasons, while 22 extra characters were added to obtain more data on foreign accented speech. This is explained further in section 3.2.1. The accent categories included in this study are General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American (NST), Other native accents and English with a foreign accent. Central accent features are presented in section 3.3. Moreover, all characters are categorized with regard to gender, alignment, level of sophistication and species. Detailed information on the different character traits is presented in section 3.4. These categories are partly influenced by previous studies to enable comparisons with previous findings.

South Park has been, and still is one of the most popular TV series for young adults. Since its premiere in 1997, it has received many Emmy awards, and has been the top-rated comedy on cable for the seventh consecutive year in 2019. The show had 30 billion minutes of viewing time in 2019, not including online streaming. Studying language attitudes in such a popular TV series might provide some insight into what their audience are exposed to on a daily basis as well as how these attitudes might have changed over the past 25 years.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions and hypotheses in the present thesis are partly inspired by results from previous research, and partly inspired by my own observations of South Park, media in general and societal developments over the last decades. The research questions are as follows:

1. How are American speakers portrayed linguistically? Are there systematic differences between characters based on their gender, level of sophistication, alignment, or their species?
2. How are foreign characters portrayed linguistically? Are there systematic differences between characters based on their country of origin?
3. Has the linguistic portrayal of characters changed over time from the older seasons to the newer seasons?

The hypotheses for each research question are presented below:

- 1a. General American will be the most used accent.
- 1b. There will be more male characters than female characters, and male characters will use more non-standard accents than female characters.
- 1c. Unsophisticated characters will speak more non-standard accents than neutral characters.
- 1d. Bad characters will speak more non-standard accents than neutral characters. Foreign characters are more likely to be portrayed as bad than native characters.
- 1e. Non-human characters will speak more non-standard accents than human characters.

2. Foreign accents will vary in broadness from weak to strong. Characters from countries with similar cultural values and/or geographical position to the US will have milder accents than other foreign characters.

3. There will be less accent diversity and fewer accent differences between character groups in the newer seasons

1.3 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter outlines the aim and scope of the study and presents the research questions and hypotheses. The second chapter presents the theoretical background for the study. This includes an introduction of relevant concepts, a review of societal change over time and an outline of relevant details from previous studies on native and non-native attitudes towards different varieties of English as well as an overview of previous societal treatment studies comparable to the present thesis. Chapter three, Method and data, contains an overview of the main approaches used in attitudinal studies, as well as methodological details including the process of establishing character variables. The accents detected in the analysis will also be presented, as well as relevant accent traits. Chapter four consists of a presentation and discussion of the results of the analysis of the distribution of accents with comparisons with previous research. Lastly, chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings and some concluding remarks as well as a discussion of the contributions of the present study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 - THEORY

2.0 Theoretical background.

In this chapter I present some concepts relevant to the present thesis. Furthermore, I look at how the media can influence language attitudes as well as try to show that they are learned through media. As I look at South Park episodes released with a span of 25 years, I will also consider how society has changed since South Park started releasing episodes. I will also include some information on the TV series South Park, as well as discuss some changes and controversies in the series itself. After this, I turn to previous studies which focus on native and non-native attitudes to varieties of English, as well as foreign accent. The last section includes an overview of previous societal treatment studies that are comparable to the present thesis.

2.1 What are attitudes

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines “attitude” as “a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by this”. This is the general definition of what an attitude is, and it compares to what my understanding is as well. However, to provide a more comprehensive definition of what it truly means in linguistics we must look at how some scholars understand the term.

Over time, there have been several different definitions when it comes to the term attitude in linguistics and other related fields. One early definition comes from Thurstone (1931, in Garrett 2010, p. 19) who defined an attitude as “affect for or against a psychological object”. This definition limits the term to having feelings for or against something. Allport (1954) tried to develop the definition of an attitude and ended with “a learned disposition to think, feel and behave towards a person (or object) in a particular way”. This definition explains that attitudes are not based on affect alone but includes thought and behaviour as well. He also explains that these attitudes are not that someone is born with, but it is something that is acquired and learned. This means that the attitudes that we learn will be different and may vary a lot from person to person, but people with similar background often have similar attitudes which makes sense if they are learned. Oppenheim (1982) introduces a third, more

specific definition of attitudes. He defines an attitude as “a construct, an abstraction which cannot be directly apprehended. It is an inner component of mental life which expresses itself, directly or indirectly, through much more obvious processes as stereotypes, beliefs, verbal statements or reactions, ideas and opinions, selective recall, anger or satisfaction or some other emotion and in various other aspects of behaviour”. Furthermore, Oppenheim explains that the links between underlying attitudes and the expression of hostility towards someone are subtle and complex. E.g., a male chauvinist may seem to treat women as equals and may admire a “clever” woman for her achievements, but deeper down his orientation will remain sexist (Oppenheim 1982, p. 39). Oppenheim describes attitudes as inner constructs which affect our thoughts and feelings towards someone or something, but they will not be observed equally every time. The male chauvinist in the example above shows attitudes which do not correlate with being a chauvinist, but in other situations he may show different attitudes towards women.

Allport and Oppenheim agree that attitudes have three different components, cognition, affect and behaviour. Attitudes are cognitive as they contain or comprise beliefs about the world, and the relationships between objects of social significance, e.g., standard language varieties tending to be associated with high-status jobs. Attitudes are affective in that they involve feelings about the attitude object. This affective aspect of attitudes is a barometer of favourability and unfavorability, or the extent to which we approve or disapprove of the attitude object. Lastly, the behavioural component of attitudes concerns the predisposition to act in certain ways that are consistent with our cognitive and affective judgements. In terms of language, if we were considering a student’s attitudes towards Spanish as a foreign language, we could talk about a cognitive component (he believes that learning Spanish will give him a deeper understanding of Spanish culture), an affective component (he is enthusiastic about being able to read literature written in Spanish), and a behavioural component (he is saving money to enrol on a Spanish course) (Garett, 2010, p. 23). However, these three different components should not necessarily be regarded equally. They can instead be seen more in terms of causes and triggers of attitudes. Chlore and Schnall (2005) describe how priests of the medieval Catholic Church understood something about the relationship between affect and attitude. To instil the proper attitude in parishioners, priests dramatized the power of liturgy to save them from Hell in a service in which the experience of darkness and fear gave way to light and familiar liturgy (Scott, 2003, p. 227 in Chlore & Schnall, 2005).

The service started with darkness, followed by terrifying noises which mimicked the chaos of hell. After a prolonged period of this imitation of hell, the interior gradually became more filled with light, as light and divine order replaced darkness and chaos. This service was designed so that the parishioners should feel reactions of fear and confusion when contemplating Hell, and of hope and relief at the familiar sounds of liturgy. This is similar to Allport's definition of attitude which points to attitudes as being things that we learn – and that attitudes are a result of our personal experiences and our social environment, e.g., experiencing a weekly service in church.

2.2 Stereotypes

When studying language attitudes, stereotypes is one factor that we have to keep in mind. Everyone has their own stereotypes which will influence our lives in some way. If you see a very tall man, you might assume that he plays basketball, or if you see a very attractive woman, you might assume that she is a model. The same things happen when you hear a certain type of accent. If you hear someone speaking RP, you might assume that they are posh and snobby, while if someone speaks Southern American you might think that they are dumb and uneducated. These things do not necessarily correlate with one another, but they still may be our first thoughts when we encounter a person. Furthermore, stereotypes are also simplified categorizations, where we exaggerate differences between groups and similarities of members within a group. Bordalo et al. (2016) explains that stereotypes in social science have three broad approaches. The first approach in Bordalo et al. (2016), is the economic approach of Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973). They see stereotypes as a manifestation of statistical discrimination with rational formation of beliefs about a group member in terms of the aggregate distribution of group traits. This model, however, does not address that stereotypes are often inaccurate. The sociological approach to stereotyping views stereotypes as fundamentally incorrect and derogatory generalizations of group traits, reflective of the stereotype's underlying prejudices, meaning social groups which traditionally have been mistreated, such as racial and ethnic minorities. According to this model they continue to suffer due to the people in power's interest in maintaining these stereotypes to further keep these minorities suppressed. This model also explains that stereotypes against these minorities are rooted in history, e.g., stereotypes against blacks and their history of slavery. However, stereotypes are subject to change, so they are not entirely rooted in the past. Lastly, the social cognition approach views social stereotypes as special cases of planned thought or theories.

These theories are intuitive generalizations that are used every day. Stereotypes are also selective, as they are localized around group features that are the most distinctive and may be based on some empirical reality which also may entail exaggerations (Bordalo et al. 2016 p. 1753-1755). These three different approaches show that stereotypes are both a result of history, but also something that can change due to recent events. There will always be stereotypes, and even though people will have different stereotypes they are still relevant when encountering someone or something for the first time.

Stereotypes are also ubiquitous. Among other things, they cover racial groups (“Asians are good at math”), political groups (“Republicans are rich”), genders (“Men don’t cry”), demographic groups (“Norwegians are rich”), and situations (“Bagdad is dangerous”). Stereotypes also vary a lot in accuracy. A stereotype such as “the Dutch are tall” is very accurate, as they have the world’s tallest population whereas others are much less so (“Irish are red-headed”).

South Park embraces all kinds of stereotypes in its show. Among traditional stereotypical Jewish physical features in visual media are “large hook noses, straggly beards and side lock” (Lippi-Green 2012, p. 105). In South Park, Sheila Broflovski, the mother of Stan Broflovski, has a stereotypical large hook nose. Furthermore, the Chinese restaurant owner, Tuong Lu Kim is animated with squinty eyes and an extremely exaggerated accent with the most reoccurring example is him saying “shitty” instead of “city”, but this will be discussed in detail later in the thesis. The blatant use of stereotypes in general may be incorporated for satirical effect, but according to Lippi-Green stereotypes usually indicate lack of imagination, laziness, bias, or some combination of the three (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 105). It can be said for South Park that they fall under all these categories listed by Lippi-Green. However, they mostly use it for satirical effect, as one of their aims is specifically exaggerating stereotypes as will be further discussed when I take a closer look at South Park in section 2.5.

2.3 Media influence

Since the present study deals with television and TV series, an understanding of how the media can influence language attitudes is necessary. It is reasonable to assume that heavy consumption of mass media will shape people's attitudes to for example language and different groups. Allport's definition of attitudes points to attitudes as being learned, rather than innate. Garrett (2010) describes two important sources of attitudes which are our personal experiences and our social environment, including the media. Relating to the present thesis, the media is the most relevant source to consider, as I explore language attitudes in a TV series. Furthermore, one of the processes of our learning of attitudes is observational learning, which involves noticing the behaviour of other people and the consequences of that behaviour (Garrett, 2010, p. 22). It is reasonable to assume that heavy consumption of popular media will shape attitudes toward certain groups or languages, with young children easily impressionable (Lippi-Green 2011). According to the American Time Use Survey (ATUS, 2022) watching TV was the leisure and sport activity that occupied the most time (2.9 hours per day), accounting for over half of all the leisure time on average. In addition to watching TV, social media and other technological channels for entertainment have never been such a huge part of people's lives.

2.4 Societal changes in the last 25 years

South Park's first episode aired in 1997, and its newest episode was published on March 2, 2022, with the series still planning to publish future seasons. Since 1997 society has changed in many ways. The most important change is the rise of the internet. In 1998 only 41% of American adults were online, compared to 89% today (Abadi, 2018). Google had just launched back then, and today we have easier access to information, as well as entertainment, and social media like Facebook and Twitter.

New social issues have also sprung out, which were not in media's focus earlier, such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which seeks to highlight racism, discrimination and racial inequality experienced by black people with their main concerns being incidents of police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people. Other groups of people such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community are also pushing for increased rights and legal protections. Per 2015, gay marriage is legal in all 50 states in the

US. These groups all have in common that they yearn for change. One of the most common ways of promoting these changes today are through social media. If you look to create a group with a common interest on social media, there is a big chance that this group already exists. There are groups for all kinds of minor issues in people's daily life and it is easier than ever to find peers with similar interests to you. In 2000, less than 7% of the world was online and fewer than 1 million people were on Myspace, with Facebook not even launched. By 2018, Facebook had more than 2.26 billion users and per 2020 over half of the global population has access to the internet (Hillyer, 2020). These big online communities are great communication channels and gatherers of people, but they can also be used to spread misinformation and hate.

The effect of this explosion of social media is that everyone can express themselves and different hate groups have been formed. Twenty plus years ago there would be people with the same thoughts and the same need to express themselves, but due to the technological evolvment at the time they would not reach the same audience that is easily accessible today with the internet being flooded with forums online where you can find similar peers easily. Furthermore, the society has developed in a way that has increased equality, political correctness, and a higher tolerance of minorities. Some argue that the politically correctness movement has gone too far, and that people are too easily offended, while others think that this is a step in the right direction for society.

2.5 South Park

The media source in the present study is South Park. South Park is an American animated sitcom created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone and developed by Brian Graden for Comedy Central. The series revolves around the lives of four boys, Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman and Kenny McCormick and their adventures in and around the titular Colorado town. The series became infamous for its profanity and dark, surreal humour that satirized a wide range of topics aimed at an adult audience. Its first episode aired on August 13, 1997, and since then 319 episodes have been broadcast. The TV series is still producing episodes to this date. The series is included in various publications' lists of greatest television shows and has received numerous accolades including five Primetime Emmy Awards and a Peabody Award. On linear TV in 2019, the show had 30 billion minutes of watch time not including online streaming. To compare with other popular TV series, Netflix users watched 32.6

billion minutes of “Friends” and 52 billion minutes of “The Office” in 2018. South Park’s 23rd season also finished as the top-rated cable comedy among adults aged 18-49 for the seventh consecutive year (Porter, 2019). These statistics show us that South Park is one of the most popular series for young adults.

The creators of South Park, Trey Parker and Matt Stone met in 1992 while attending Boulder University in Colorado. They got to know each other in film class and instantly became best friends. Their main focus is making people laugh and creating entertaining episodes while satirizing society as they believe that it is their right. South Park has always been harshly satirical, but over time they have changed or modified their views on certain topics. For example, in 2006, they created an episode titled “ManBearPig”, where Al Gore comes to South Park and warns the children about the dangers of a mythical creature called “ManBearPig”. This creature is an allegory for global warming and the episode makes Gore look like an idiot that believes in global warming. Over a decade later they made two episodes discussing their wrongs by making fun of themselves and to make sure that everyone sees that “ManBearPig” is real. There are several other changes that they have made since the beginning of the show. One of them include Cartman not using catchphrases anymore. When South Park first premiered catchphrases were the big thing in the 90’s, whereas they are not very popular in the 21st century. Furthermore, Cartman’s voice has also changed over time. Parker found after a couple of seasons of voicing Cartman that it made his throat hurt, so he slowly phased out the harshness in it. Lastly, the humour is more current in newer episodes. The episodes are now produced the same week that they air, meaning the creators only have 6 days to produce the episodes. This means that the humour in every episode is very relevant to the current society, but also allows them to create episodes based on major events e.g., the presidential election or Bruce Jenner changing his gender.

2.5.1 Social issues in South Park

As mentioned previously, the South Park episodes are produced in real-time which allows them to satirize current social issues. For example, the politically correct movement was massively in the spotlight when Bruce Jenner changed his name to Caitlyn Jenner and had a gender alteration surgery. In the aftermaths of this, South Park aired an entire episode

dedicated to Caitlyn Jenner where they made a mockery out of everyone calling her “stunning and brave”, without necessarily thinking this was true. Parker and Stone also dedicated one episode to how white people cannot truly understand the depth of the “N-word”. In this episode, the character Randy Marsh used the word, leading to huge public backlash toward Randy in the episode. Over the course of the episode the N-word was used 42 times. Furthermore, Kovon and Jill Flowers, co-founders of the organization “abolish the N word” praised the show in an interview done by CNN; “this show in its own comedic way, is helping to educate people about the power of this word and how it feels to have hate language directed at you” (Hollywood.com staff, 2022). This means that South Park in its own way addresses social issues in a satirical way, while not necessarily hurting the groups involved in the process.

2.5.2 Controversies

When satirizing current events, the series creators are bound to end up in certain controversies. Parker and Stone usually respond to controversies by regarding themselves as “equal opportunity offenders”. Furthermore, they reject the notion of political correctness, and state that no group of people will be exempt from mockery and satire, out of fairness to any person or group of people who have been ridiculed before. This is important to keep in the back of your head when reading this thesis, as the accent use is presumably deliberate by the creators. In the beginning when the series became popular in the United States, several schools punished students for wearing T-shirts related to the series, while a group of school principals in New Jersey mounted a small campaign to notify parents of the show’s content. However, this was just the beginning. In Season 9, episode 14, Randy Marsh learns from an AA group that alcoholism is a disease he’s powerless to control. Meanwhile, in a nearby town, a statue of the Virgin Mary has begun bleeding out of its backside. The Catholic Church at first declares the bleeding a miracle with people lining up to experience this miracle by being bled in the face by the statue. When the statue sprays Pope Benedict in the face, he determines that the statue is menstruating and therefore not a miracle, because “chicks bleed out their vaginas all the time” (Kline, 2019). Adding to the blasphemous depiction of the Catholic iconography, the episode was timed to air on the eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a Catholic observance centered on celebrating the sinless lifespan and conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This led to the American watchdog group the Catholic League, as well as a handful of religious organizations in New Zealand demanding an apology and the

“permanent retiring” of the “vile” episode. Comedy Central partially agreed to their terms by cancelling the first scheduled re-run. However, in August the following year the network re-aired the episode, and it is also currently available to stream online. Worth noting is that there have been several similar controversies surrounding South Park, this is just one example.

2.6 Attitudes to varieties of English

When rating an accent, we must look at different dimensions. Relevant dimensions to the present study are status, social attractiveness, and linguistic quality. The status and dimension involve evaluation of a speaker’s perceived education, intelligence, and wealth. Social attractiveness involves traits like friendliness, helpfulness, solidarity, sense of humour and reliability. Lastly, linguistic quality means that accents are evaluated according to their correctness, aesthetic quality, and fluency.

2.6.1 Native attitudes

When looking at older studies in Britain on language attitudes, RP receives the highest ratings on all dimensions, especially in the status dimensions. Urban accents like Cockney, Liverpool and Birmingham score the lowest on all dimensions (Giles 1970, Giles 1971). Similarly, looking at older studies in USA on American English, GA normally rates the highest with the urban New-York accent and the rural southern accent placed at the bottom (Hewitt 1971, Preston, 1989). Some accents that typically score low on most dimensions often have a high score when it comes to social attractiveness. In Ladegaard’s (1998) study (section 2.6.2) the Scottish accent was rated higher than both RP and GA on social attractiveness. Furthermore, Southern American English also typically scores high on social attractiveness as these speakers are stereotypically portrayed as friendly.

In general, the presence of standard accents dominates. Most characters in previous studies speak some variation of a standard accent. Furthermore, good characters typically have standard accents, while non-standard and foreign accents are mostly used by bad characters. Furthermore, female characters are underrepresented, typically have standard accents and traditional gender roles whereas male characters are much more diverse, both in terms of roles and accents.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see which kind of attitudes native speakers have towards foreign accents. Stephanie Lindemann in her study *Who speaks "broken English"?* attempts to discover how native US English speakers construct social categories for people outside the US. Two tasks were given, one map-labelling task where they were asked to give descriptions of the English spoken in these countries, and a country-rating tasks where respondents were given a list of 58 countries and asked to rate the English of university students from each of these countries on how correct, friendly, and pleasant they found it on a scale of 1 to 10. Unsurprisingly, American accent was rated 10 on familiarity, with the second most familiar, Canadian ranked at 8.5. Most countries also have a correlating rating on all categories; however, some countries have a significantly lower rating for "pleasant" and "friendly" compared to "familiar". The Chinese English accent was rated as the 6th most familiar but rated as number 38 when it comes to pleasantness and 31 on friendliness. Even lower were the ratings for German and Russian who ranked 9th and 15th for "familiar", but only 31 and 49 for "pleasant", and 31 and 49 for "friendly" (Lindemann 2005, table 1 p. 192). Lindemann argues that the lower ratings on "pleasant" and "friendly" are consistent with stereotypes of Germans, associated with World War II films. On the other hand, Italy was rated the most positively overall, except for some negative comments referring to second-or higher-generation immigrants and not visitors or students from Italy which the focus was mainly on. Furthermore, Lindemann explains that reactions to some of the negatively evaluated groups are probably based on images of these groups in the popular media, as the respondents will most likely have fewer experiences with people from these groups. E.g., a person from Libya might only be associated with Muammar Gaddafi the same way someone from Iraq may be associated with Saddam Hussein. The less you know about a country and its residents, the less prejudice and evaluation you are likely to have – and it will be easier to adopt the attitudes presented to you in either social media or the news. Russian accent, although more familiar might be influenced by the turbulent US-Russia relationship, but also from the fact that bad guys in movies are often presented with a Russian-like accent.

2.6.2 Non-native attitudes

Trømborg (2019) explores Norwegian attitudes to six varieties of English: Received Pronunciation (RP), General American (GA), Scottish English (ScotEng), Australian English (AusEng), Indian English (InEng) and Southern American English (SAmEng). In Trømborg's study the students were evaluating six speakers, each representing one variety of English. All participants had Norwegian as their mother tongue to ensure the same nationality and similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, respondents lived in three different geographical areas in Norway which makes the study more representative for Norwegian students in lower secondary school. Each accent was given a score from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most positive and 5 the most negative rating.

Results show that RP has the best overall score with an average score of 2.14, while Scottish English receives the worst with 3.15. However, it is notable that 3 is a neutral score in this test, and only Scottish English received a score which was just below neutral – so the differences are not very big. When excluding the neutral answer 3, which for some participants might be equivalent to “I don't know” in the questionnaire results, ScotEng has a slightly more negative score and the other varieties slightly more positive scores. RP has the best score on both “status” and “linguistic quality” but is only ranked third when it comes to “social attractiveness”. Furthermore, GA has the worst, by far, score on SA with 3.4, and the next being Scottish English on 3.0. Overall, the result of this study differs from the consensus which is that standard English is preferred. RP received the best score overall, but GA were bested by both Australian English and South American English.

Ladegaard (1998) conducted a similar study with Danish students. The study included 96 participants where 73 were secondary-school students in their final year from three different city-schools with an average age of 19, and the other 23 participants were first, second or third-year Danish university students studying English. The five different speakers' accents were RP, Scottish, Cockney, Australian and GA.

Each variable is rated from 1 to 5 with 5 being the best result one can achieve. RP had the highest score on all five variables with a mean score of 3.82. Furthermore, GA was rated as the second-best accent on status with Scottish trailing last. Looking at the results from social attractiveness there is a clear difference from the status results. RP scores the lowest on every

variable except from identification, which they score as the second worst. Scottish on the other hand, is rated as the most socially attractive accent with a mean score of 2.89 with Australia trailing right behind with a mean score of 2.88. GA is rated in the middle with a mean score of 2.8.

The last five variables which measure the linguistic attractiveness of an accent once again rates RP highly. RP receive the best score on every variable with a mean score of 4.09. On this category they are rated way higher than everyone else with Scottish (3.1) being rated as the second best with GA (3.0) slightly behind. The results found in these studies prove that language attitudes can spread through the media, since Scandinavians are not part of the English-speaking community.

2.6.3 Attitudes to foreign accent

In the previous section I discussed Trømborg (2019) 's study on Norwegian attitudes as well as Ladegaard (1998) 's study on Danish attitudes on English accents. Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan's (2022) study examines Americans' attitudes towards standard American English and nine non-Anglo foreign accents. The relevant accents were Arabic, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Hispanic, Mandarin, Russian and Vietnamese. (Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan, 2022, p. 172). Participants rated the speaker on status and social attractiveness traits and indicated where they thought the speaker was from – as well as categorizing the language as originating from a stigmatized or nonstigmatized foreign group. A stigmatized foreign group means that the group is associated with more negative stereotypes whereas some national groups are non-stigmatized, associated with less negative stereotypes.

American's attitudes towards foreigners tend to be more negative than their stereotypes towards the national ingroup. Non-stigmatized groups in this study included Anglosphere (England, USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) and Western Europe, namely German and French accents.

There is some correlation between percentage of non-stigmatized foreign categorization and status and social attractiveness rating. German scores the highest on percentage of the nonstigmatized foreign categorization and has the highest rating on status. Hindi, however, scores the lowest on stigmatization, but has the second highest status rating. On social attractiveness ratings French scored the highest rating with German on second, corresponding quite similar with their nonstigmatized rating. Furthermore, German received the highest score on fluency as well, with Russian, Hindi & French following shortly after. The researchers show that foreign-accented speakers who were easier to understand or categorized correctly received more favorable ratings than foreign-accented users who were more difficult to understand or categorize as belonging to more stigmatized groups. These results are close to what was expected beforehand with the more stigmatized languages and accents, the lower ratings they would receive.

2.6.4 Societal treatment studies

The present thesis and previous societal treatment studies have several things in common. The studies I will discuss in this section all analyse accent use in film or TV and have character categories such as age, gender, and level of sophistication. Lippi-Green, who is a societal treatment study pioneer, in 1997 published a study where she looks at various accents in films released between 1937 and 1994. Furthermore, Madland (2022) look at accent use in Disney's animated TV series, and if there are any differences between older and newer shows in comparison to societal changes. Moreover, Sønnesyn (2011) looks at the use of accents in Disney animated films released between 1995 and 2009. Lastly, Urke (2019) investigates various English accents in Disney films with eight original films released from 1950-1951 and their remakes released between 2010 and 2018 and if changes are related to social changes.

In 1997, Rosina Lippi-Green published the first large study of language attitudes in animated films where she analysed language use and a set of other characteristics in 24 films by Disney. In the second edition of this book in 2011, she included 14 additional films released after 1997. As her research is so extensive, it shows the way that Disney uses different language varieties and accents, and which attitudes they convey to their primarily young audience. Even though South Park is intended for a more mature audience than Disney films, there are still some similarities. For example, both are hugely popular products that reach a huge audience.

The movies examined in 1997 included 371 characters, in which 69.8 percent were male and the rest were female. Additionally, female characters are rarely seen at work outside the home and family; and where they do show up, they are mothers and princesses. When at work they are waitresses, nurses, nannies, or housekeepers. Men often have higher status occupations such as doctors, advisors to kings, detectives, and pilots (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 114). These different gender roles primarily displayed to young children are very traditional when it comes to the woman's role in the family, which may influence young people's attitudes.

Of the 371 characters included, 43% speak SAE (Standard American English) and 22% speak Standard British English. These are the two main accents that Disney characters have. 72 of the characters are categorized as evil, or bad. Even though 85 percent of these are native speaker of English, with almost half speakers of US English, this amounts to about 20 percent of U.S. English speakers as bad characters. However, about 40 percent of non-native speakers of English are evil. In Disney they sometimes give the good characters from the same nationality as the bad characters an American or British accent. E.g., in *Aladdin*, where the good guys (Aladdin, Princess Jasmine and her father) talk like Americans while all the other Arab characters have heavy accents gives the message that people with a foreign accent are bad (Precker 1993b in Lippi-Green 2011, p. 107). Of the characters who speak American English, 78.5% of these have positive motivations, whereas "British or other English" characters include 57.6% with good motivations. Furthermore, 20% of the US English characters have negative motivations and 30.4% of "British or other English" speakers have negative motivations. "Foreign-accented English" characters score the lowest on positive motivations with 37%, and the highest on negative motivations with 40.7%.

Similar to Lippi-Green, Madland's (2022) different character variables include gender, level of sophistication and alignment. Her results show that the distribution of gender has changed from being 77.9% male in the old shows, to now being 68.9% male in the new shows with females surpassing 30%. There is now a higher number of female representatives among characters, although males still dominate. The overall percentage of GA and RP in the old shows compared to the new are 57% compared to 67.2% and 12% compared to 10.8%. Non-standard American has also been reduced from 18.5% to 13.3%. When looking at the gender distribution, in the old shows, 53.6% of males and 69.1% of females speak GA, with 12.4% of men and 10.9% of women speaking RP. In the new shows there is an increase in GA for both

genders, with 65% of men and 72% of women speaking GA. The use of RP has a slight decrease for men with 9.6% and a slight increase for women with 13.3%. These results show us that women are more likely to speak a standard accent than men with an 80% to 66% difference in the old shows and an 85% to a 74% difference in the newer shows.

Accent distribution in terms of likability, or being sympathetic or unsympathetic, in the old shows, show that 65.8% of sympathetic characters speak GA which is 9% points more than their overall percentage of characters. The new shows have mostly the same tendencies, with more GA characters and a higher percentage (74.4) of sympathetic characters speaking GA. However, in the new shows the percentage of sympathetic characters speaking RP is at only 4.7%. This is 6% points lower than the total RP representation which means that RP speakers are less likely to be sympathetic. However, unsympathetic characters in the old shows have a bigger variance with only 44% of unsympathetic characters speaking GA, and 23% speaking non-standard American. The new shows have similar tendencies with 53.3% of unsympathetic characters speaking GA, but unsympathetic non-standard American characters have decreased by 8% points with RP now being the second highest group being characterized as unsympathetic.

The difference between being sympathetic or unsympathetic might be closely linked to being categorized as good or bad – however, not all good characters are sympathetic and not all bad characters are unsympathetic. Madland therefore distinguishes these two categories from one another, and it is interesting to see the differences between these. 67% of the good characters in the old shows speak GA, which is more than 10% points above the total representation of GA. Only 44.3% of bad characters speak GA, with 22.9% of them speaking non-standard American, which is 7% points higher than their total representation. In the new shows 71.6% percent of good characters speak GA while 8.6% of them speak RP. Furthermore, there is a big difference in bad characters speaking GA with 60%. This is 15% points increase, while the total increase in GA characters is 10% points. This means GA speaking characters are more likely to be categorized as bad characters in the new shows compared to the old shows.

With the same character traits in focus, Sønnesyn's (2011) analysis show that 66% of characters in her study are male and only 23% are female, the rest are "undetermined". 64% of women speak GA and 16% speak RP – while only 57% of men speak GA and 15% speak RP, which show that females in general are more likely to speak a standard accent than males.

When disregarding gender, we can see that 61% of characters speak GA and 14.2% speak RP. 11.8% speak Regional AmE, or non-standard American while 3.5% speak non-standard British English. With the character trait sophistication in focus, almost 5% points more of the sophisticated characters speak RP. Furthermore, the standard varieties RP and GA equals 84% of total sophisticated characters and only 64% of unsophisticated characters. This gives a ca. 10% points difference between their sophistication and the total amount of characters speaking standard varieties with 75.2%.

Sønnesyn (2011) does not include the same category good/bad characters but has seven different categories. I will discuss the hero category, which can be seen as corresponding to “good”. 83.3% of heroes speak GA, and close to 10% speak RP. This shows that standard varieties dominate here as well with heroes being 93% likely to speak either GA or RP. To include “bad” characters, I will look at the categories “villain” and “unsympathetic” separately. Approximately 85% of villains speak GA or RP, whilst only approx. 53% of unsympathetic characters do the same. Sønnesyn’s results show that GA is by far the most used accent and the use of RP and Regional British English has decreased. Sønnesyn argues that this is due to Disney wanting to be politically correct, as standard varieties will make the characters sound mostly the same – however it might work against its purpose as political correctness is the effort to neutralize things so that no one is offended, and if the main characters from a middle eastern country e.g., the characters in Aladdin, speak American, (Lippi-Green) this is more likely to be offensive than if they were given an authentic accent.

Lastly, Urke’s (2019) study includes the character variables gender, level of sophistication and character role which is somewhat linked to good/bad when disregarding some roles. There is a higher representation of female characters in the remakes, however they are heavily outnumbered in both with respectively 30 and 38%. In the original films GA is the dominating accent with 46% with RP being the second most used with 35%. Contrastingly, in the remakes RP is by far the most used accent with 62%, while GA has decreased greatly to only 16%. However, this is in line with Urke’s expectations as many of the films in her material are set in England, thus making RP the most authentic accent.

The change in distribution of accents among the sophisticated characters in the originals versus the remakes is heavily in favour of RP and the Cockney accent, which is a regional British accent. In the originals 53.3% of sophisticated characters speak RP, while 38.3%

speak GA, with only 3.3% speaking Cockney. In the remakes however, 64.2% of sophisticated characters speak RP, while only 14.7% speak GA. Cockney has also risen to 10.5%. This correlates to the change in the usage of GA and RP with GA decreasing heavily from the originals to the remakes and RP almost doubling. The results from alignment, or good and bad characters in the originals, show that 48.2% of good characters speak GA while 32.9% speak RP. In the remakes, RP is the dominant good character accent with 58.2% and GA being reduced to 18.4%. There are similar results in the bad character category with GA being the highest in the originals with RP following closely. However, in the remakes 75% of bad characters speak RP with only 10% speaking GA. The results from these societal treatment studies will be compared to the findings in the present study (see chapter 4).

2.6.5 Societal treatment studies: typical findings

These four societal treatment studies have mostly similar results. All studies have more male than female characters, ranging from 66-78%. Furthermore, in all but one study GA is the dominant accent used by the characters, with the exception being the remakes that Urke studied, which are mostly situated in England. The standard accents GA and RP are used by the majority of characters, with Lippi-Green's results at 65% combined the lowest. Females also speak more standard accents, while there is more accent diversity among male characters. Moreover, results show that sympathetic characters are more likely to speak the standard varieties GA and RP. Contrastingly, unsympathetic characters are less likely to speak standard varieties with higher representation of non-standard accents such as "southern" and "cockney". As previously discussed in this section the categories "good vs bad" and "sympathetic vs unsympathetic" are not entirely similar, which is something the results show as well. Lastly, the studies show that a high percentage of bad characters speak the standard varieties. Contrastingly, a lower percentage of unsympathetic characters speak the standard varieties.

Chapter 3 – Method and data

This chapter will contain an overview of the main approaches used in attitudinal studies as well as the method in this study. Furthermore, data and methodological details will follow, including the process of selecting character variables relevant for studying South Park, as well as which accents were detected in the analysis. Moreover, challenges encountered in the analysis will also be addressed.

3.1 Methods

Language attitudes cannot be observed directly and are methodologically challenging to study. We can access them by asking people about their thoughts or feelings, or by observing language use. There are three broad approaches to studying people's attitudes towards language (c.f. Garrett 2010, Baker 1992). These are the direct approach, the indirect approach, and the societal treatment studies. These methods differ in the way that attitudes are observed, from direct observation to being more observing and subjective with the results being researcher dependent, as well as the first two using respondents and the third looks at language use in public sources. In this section I will take a closer look at the different methods and discuss their weaknesses and strengths.

3.1.1 The direct approach

The direct approach has been the most dominant method if one looks across the broader spectrum of language attitudes research. This method asks people directly what their attitudes are which applies the factor of subjectivity. The study can be designed in different ways, but questionnaires and interview surveys are among the most prominent methods. The main characteristic, however, is that the informants know what is being investigated. Language attitudes are typically measured on scales and with reference to evaluative dimensions.

One example of a direct study is the BBC voices study, an online survey of language attitudes in the UK. In this study, the informants evaluated various English accents across the UK, as well as some foreign accents such as North American, Spanish, French and German.

Furthermore, they were asked to rate accents on a scale from 1 (negative) to 7 (positive). This leads to every accent receiving a number score and makes it easy to rank the accents from top

to bottom. However, there are still some things you need to keep in mind when conducting a direct approach study, such as the *social desirability bias*. This bias is the tendency for people to give answers to questions in ways that they believe to be “socially appropriate”. They tell you about the attitudes they think they should have, rather than the ones they have (Garrett, 2010, p. 44). For example, if you have a negative attitude towards immigrants in your country, but you are a well-educated person with the desire to appear tolerant you could be inclined to answer dishonestly in a questionnaire or an interview. *Acquiescence bias* can be a further difficulty. This means that the informant will answer to gain the researcher’s approval, which again means that the attitudes do not reflect the actual attitude of the informant. This is more prominent in face-to-face interviews but may also occur in questionnaires. Even though the direct method allows you to rate for example different accents from best to worst, there will always be irregularities in the results due to these biases. Many people will disregard them and answer honestly, but you never know how many answered either with the objective to gain your approval, or to act socially appropriate.

3.1.2 The indirect approach

The indirect approach differs from the direct approach in that the informants does not know which kind of information the research wishes to investigate. This method involves using more subtle, even deceptive, techniques than asking straight questions about what people’s attitudes are to something (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). The main way of conducting an indirect approach study is via the matched guise technique (MGT) This method involves respondents hearing an audiotape recording of a single speaker reading out the same text a number of times, with each reading differing from the others in one aspect only (Garrett, 2010, p. 41). The speaker will read the text in several relevant accents. Respondents are told that they will be listening to several different speakers and after each speaker they will fill in attitude rating questionnaires. An attitude rating questionnaire will contain many ways of rating the speaker, but the respondent will not be told that the main focus of this study is the accent – in this way the earlier mentioned biases will not be as relevant in this type of study. However, using only one speaker brings up the *accent authenticity question* (Garett 2010, p. 58). Meaning if we really can trust that one speaker can accurately mimic many different accents. It is also problematic to keep all suprasegmental features constant, as accents often differ with regard to intonation and speech rate. A modified version of MGT is the verbal guise technique

(VGT), where the same text is read by different speakers with authentic accents. This method removes the issues concerning accent authenticity but adds the complication of different voice qualities and intonation patterns. One example of an indirect study is Hiraga (2005) where he investigates British respondents' attitudes towards six varieties of English in the UK and the USA, with the dimensions of solidarity and status were investigated by using the VGT.

3.1.3 The societal treatment approach

The third approach is called the *societal treatment approach* and is the method used in the present thesis. Societal treatment studies differ from the direct and the indirect approach in that it relies on data material from the society and infers attitudes from the way language varieties are treated in this society. Societal treatment studies tend to receive less attention in contemporary discussions of language attitudes research, and one common view of studies such as these is that they are too subjective and best regarded as preliminaries to more rigorous social psychological studies (Garrett 2010). However, it is certainly a significant approach for gaining insights into the relative values and stereotypical associations of language varieties. Furthermore, it has the advantage of allowing the researcher to infer language attitudes present in society. This gives the researcher the possibility to provide a broader impression of the varieties' status. Typically, societal treatment studies are studies of public sources, either written or spoken, for example the use of language in advertising, the use of dialects in novels, online comments complaining about language, educationally policy documents, or the use of accents in films and television.

When conducting a societal treatment study, the factor of respondents is removed. Unlike the first two approaches, you are not dependent on respondents, which is an advantage. However, this inevitably involves an element of subjectivity when interpreting your results. For example, when looking at accent use in films and TV series the thoughts and reasoning of the makers are not directly available to us, and subject to speculation. The researcher will have to infer attitudes and establish categories based on their own judgements. Moreover, an important underlying assumption in societal treatment studies that focus on films or television, is that the accent distribution is a result of deliberate choices made by the creators.

3.2 The present study

The present study is an example of a societal treatment study, focused on animated television series aimed at adults. In the rest of this chapter the different character variables in my study will be presented, as well as the process of data collection and accent features for relevant accents.

3.2.1 Data collection

The present thesis is based on an analysis of the TV series South Park, covered in depth in section 2.5. South Park is developed for Comedy Central. South Park was first released in 1997 and is still ongoing to this date with one season per year. In my analysis I chose season 1 and 2, as well as seasons 22-25. This is because it allows me to be able to compare older and newer episodes and look for evidence of change. Seasons 1 and 2 comprise 31 episodes, and the last 4 seasons comprise 32 episodes, with some being longer as they were specials created during the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, some extra characters were added to give a larger impression of which accents there are in South Park and will be included in relevant discussions in the next chapter. Where I compare older and newer seasons these characters will be omitted. Extra characters include 13 male and 9 female characters, who all speak English with a foreign accent.

For a character to be included in the analysis, some main criteria were used. The first criterion was that the character had sufficient speech time to identify his or her accent, the second criterion was that they had to speak English. Some characters appear only with one line while others just appear in the background, these were omitted and not included in the analysis, with some exceptions (see section 4.1). When encountering characters that were difficult to categorize, I rewatched their clips, and in some cases watched compilations of their highlights on YouTube. In total 205 characters have been analysed with 100 from the older seasons, 83 from the newer seasons and 22 extra characters. As the thesis aims to explore accent use in the show and look for systematic patterns, the characters were classified based on their accents as well as several character traits. Next, the various accent and characters categories will be presented in detail.

3.3 Accent categories

The current study operates with several accent categories that comprise several accents, as there are not enough speakers of particular accents to make each accent a separate category. Furthermore, this allows for easier comparison with previous studies mentioned in chapter 2. In depth phonetic analysis of the various accents observed in the series will not be included, but some knowledge of them is necessary to assign each character the correct accent. Relevant accent categories are General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American, other native accents and foreign English accents. The non-standard American category includes Southern American English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and New York City English. Other native accents include non-standard British and Australian English. Lastly, foreign English accents include Western European, Eastern European, American, Asian and Middle Eastern accents. The different accent categories will be presented below where central features of each accent are outlined. The presentations are based on descriptions in Melchers et al. (2019), Kretzschmar 2008, Cruttenden 2014, Gordon 2008, Thomas 2007 and 2008, Wolfram 2008, Tollfree 1999, Hickey 2008, and Burrige 2010.

Characters that are designated with for example a Southern American accent, and therefore put in the non-standard American accent category, will not necessarily have all the accent traits that are listed under that accent, and might not even use them consistently. However, characters will be classified as having a particular accent when enough features are present to make the accent markedly different from a standard variety. Accent authenticity is another factor to add to the equation. Meaning how well and convincingly the accents are performed by the characters. The present thesis will not differentiate accents as either authentic or inauthentic they are, but it will be a factor when deciding which accent the different characters have.

3.3.1 General American (GA)

GA is the variety that is referred to as the standard variety of American English pronunciation and is non-regional within the US. The main features for this accent are listed below

- GA is rhotic, which means that /r/ occurs in all positions
- Intervocalic /t/ is realized as a voiced tap [ɾ]
- /l/ is dark, meaning it is velarised in all positions
- The vowel in BATH is the open front [æ]
- The vowel in LOT is the long open back [ɑ:]
- The GOAT vowel has a diphthong with a back rounded starting point [oʊ]

3.3.2 Received Pronunciation (RP)

RP is an accent that is referred to as the standard variety of British English and is non-regional within England. It is an accent associated with status, prestige and power and its main features are:

- Non-rhotic accent. /r/ is only pronounced in prevocalic positions.
- The vowel in BATH, PALM and START is a long [ɑ:]
- Intervocalic /t/ is realized as a fortis plosive [t].
- The vowel in LOT is a short open back rounded [ɒ].
- The vowel in GOAT is a diphthong with a mid central starting point [əʊ].

3.3.3 Non-standard American English

3.3.3.1 Southern American English

Southern American English is a broad category that covers a large area of the US south. Some of the main features of this accent are listed below.

- Traditionally non-rhotic. Today variably rhotic.
- The vowel in PRICE: [a:] is a long open front monophthong
- The vowel in STRUT: [ə] is mid central – as in (“luv”)

- The vowels of BATH, TRAP, THOUGHT and CLOTH is often diphthongs: [æɪ] is a front-closing diphthong and a back-closing diphthong
- There is a diphthongisation in KIT, DRESS, TRAP: [ɪə], [ɛə], [æə]
- The vowel in DRESS is raised before nasals: [ɪ] close-mid front

3.3.3.2 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

AAVE is not located to any specific region in the US, as it is an ethnic variety. However, it originated in the plantations of the American South, where African people were enslaved to work, and it shares a number of phonological and grammatical features with southern dialects. Some of the main features are listed below.

- AAVE is non-rhotic, /r/ sound is not retained before consonants
- Vocalisation of non-prevocalic /l/, /r/ to [ə] mid central vowel – as in *feel* /fi:ə/
- TH fronting/stopping, /θ, ð/ realized to /f, v/ or /t, d/- as in *brother* //brəvə/, *nothing* /nətʌ/, *with them* /wɪðəm/
- Consonant cluster reduction, meaning deletion of one or more consonants. As in *left*/lef/, *risked* /rɪs/
- “Southern” vowels
- Copula deletion, as in “she nice”, “she a doctor”.
- Invariant be as in “they be working”, “he be tired”.
- Lack of subject-verb agreement: he stay there, we was at work.

3.3.3.3 New York City English

The New York City English accent is a regional accent spoken in the New York Area. The broadness of the accent is commonly associated with lower social class. Some of the main features of the accent are listed below.

- Variably rhotic. Broad or lower-class NYC English is typically non-rhotic.
- Centring diphthongs in NEAR: [ɪə], SQUARE: [eə], PALM, START: [ɑə] and THOUGHT, NORTH: [ɔə].
- The vowel is raised and diphthongized in BATH and TRAP to [eə] in certain contexts.

3.3.4 Other native accents

The other native accents include accents like London English (Cockney), Irish English and Australian English. The accents are from the native English speaking countries England, Ireland and Australia and will be discussed under the same accent category “other native accents” as there are few characters that have these particular accents. Below are some of their most prominent features.

London English (Cockney)

- T-glottalling: intervocalic /t/ is realised as a glottal stop [ʔ]
- TH fronting: the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are realised as labiodental fricatives [f, v]
- L-vocalisation: non-prevocalic /l/ is realised as a back vowel [ɔ]
- H-dropping: /h/ is dropped in lexical words
- Diphthong shift in the lexical sets FACE [æɪ], PRICE [aɪ], CHOICE [ɔɪ], GOAT [ʌɔ] and MOUTH [ɛʊ]

Irish English

- Rhotic
- /l/ is typically clear in all positions
- T-opening: /t/ has an incomplete closure finally and intervocalically
- TH-stopping: the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are realised as plosives [t, d]
- The vowel of LOT and THOUGHT is open back unrounded [ɑ:]
- The vowels of in FACE and GOAT are monophthongs [e:], [o:]

Australian English

- Non-rhotic
- /l/ is dark (velarised) in all contexts
- Intervocalic /t/ is realised as a voiced tap
- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START is open front [a:]
- The vowels of DRESS and TRAP are raised to [e] and [ɛ]
- Diphthong shift similar to London English

3.3.5 Foreign accent

The accents that are spoken by foreign English-speaking characters are put in the foreign accent category. Some of the foreign accents in the present study are Spanish, Chinese, German and Russian. These accents are in the same category because some foreign accents have as little as one speaker, and none of these foreign accents include many speakers. The most recurring foreign accent features are listed below:

- /r/ pronounced as an alveolar trill [r]
- Using plosives /t, d/ for the dental fricatives /θ, ð/
- Mixing /r/ and /l/
- Unaspirated /p, t, k/
- Extremely velarised /l/
- Consonant cluster reduction
- Syllable-timed rhythm, where every syllable has equal weight

As there are different foreign accents, there are more features included in this list. Different features indicate different foreign accents, but these were some of the features used when deciding that a character had a foreign accent. Which foreign accent the characters have will be included in the character list later in the thesis. In the overall analysis these accents will be in one category and compared with the native English accents, but they will also be included in another section where I discuss different non-native accents compared to one another.

3.3.6 Challenges concerning the accents

When I was categorising each accent, I encountered some problems along the way. One of the reasons for this is that the creators, Trey Parker, and Matt Stone, are the ones who are voicing the vast majority of characters. Of the main characters listed online only 10 of them are voiced by other voice actors, with 38 of the voices belonging to the two creators (Wikipedia, 2022). Also worth noting, is that they do not necessarily aim for authenticity, which means that characters might have traits from different accent categories. In instances where I was uncertain of which accent a character was supposed to have, I conferred with my supervisor, who helped me decide between for example GA and Non-Standard when a character had traits belonging to both accents. Some foreign characters were also difficult to determine with regard to accent. For example, the Canadians in South Park. Initially one would assume that Canadians would speak with a Canadian English accent. However, this was not the case in South Park as most of the Canadians speak with an accent which is very like RP. Other foreign accents like Spanish and Russian were mostly straightforward to identify as their accent traits were similar to those of the foreign languages and the characters were also easily identifiable as belonging to a Spanish-speaking country or obviously from Russia.

3.4 Character variables

For the present thesis another key aspect is looking at different character variables. Accent use and character traits will be discussed together later in the present study in order to look for patterns between them. Relevant character variables are gender, alignment, level of sophistication, and species. As presented in chapter 1, I have specific hypotheses related to the different character traits, which will also be discussed further later in the thesis. These variables have been chosen as they are relevant for the character in the series as they include most of the characters, as well as it enables comparison with previous research. The categories are operating with binary variables. For example, in the species variable, here all characters are categorized as either human or non-human. Even though some of the non-human characters have some human traits, they are still categorized as non-human as they are for example an animal. When looking at alignment I chose to include the obviously “bad” characters and omitting the “good” variable. Meaning that characters that could be put in the

“good” category would be placed together in a bulk with the characters that I could not decide whether they were good or bad, in the “neutral” category.

3.4.1 Gender

Gender is included in this study as one of the character variables. Previous societal treatment studies have shown that female characters more often than males speak a standard variety of the language as well as have gender specific roles. The inclusion of gender might be interesting as the present study looks at change over time, and characters introduced in the later seasons may be different than the female characters from the older episodes that have always been a part of the show. One of my hypotheses is that the show has changed over time, and analysing gender specifically may give us an insight into how the creators develop characters now compared to how they were presented in the beginning.

Distinguishing the gender of each character proved to be mostly straightforward. With most characters there is a clear indication of their gender, either when it comes to their name, how they are addressed or simply their appearance. There are some characters that are more difficult to determine in terms of gender, for example animal characters and supernatural characters such as ManBearPig. However, these characters are mostly not included in my analysis due to either their lack of screen time, or if they have little to no lines.

3.4.2 Alignment

The character trait alignment is also included as one of the variables in the present study. Alignment concerns the ethical motivation of a character and whether or not their moral and personal attitudes are good or bad. Few characters in my study are defined as either good or bad, as many of them are somewhere in the middle. And even though a character does something that would normally put them in the “bad” bracket, the same character might also act very kind and generous in other situations. Example of the “bad” category is Eric Cartman. He can act nice and be generous in certain situations, but when he does, it is for his own personal gain, he does not do it out of the goodness of his heart. Other times he is straight up evil, for example when he feeds an older boy his own parents in a chili dish as an act of

revenge. An example of the neutral category is three of the main characters, Kyle Broflovski, Stan Marsh, and Kenny McCormick. In certain situations, they act stereotypically very bad and do some awful stuff even though their inner moral throughout the show does not represent being bad. Good characters will not be used as a character variable on its own, it will be included in the neutral group as I work with binary character variables. There are some characters that have pure intentions throughout the series, but they are few in number and will be put in the neutral category. This will allow me to see if there are for example more non-standard accents among the markedly bad characters which previous studies suggest.

3.4.3 Level of sophistication

Furthermore, the level of sophistication of a character is another variable in the present study. This variable is also used in other societal treatment studies (see 2.6.4). Similar to alignment, a character can be categorised as either unsophisticated or neutral. When deciding whether a character is unsophisticated, there are different character traits to consider. An unsophisticated character is typically associated with clumsiness, simplicity, low intelligence, silliness, little world experience, naivety, and poor social skills (cf. Madland, 2022). An example of an unsophisticated character in South Park is Butters. He is a naïve, gullible, and innocent character who mostly follows the orders of Eric Cartman, who takes advantage of Butters' kindness and desire to be accepted in order to fulfil his own schemes. Traits that characterize the sophisticated character on the other hand are intelligent, socially apt, cultivated, elegant and worldly. Like alignment, level of sophistication will also be discussed as a binary category, with sophisticated and neutral characters put together in the "neutral" bulk. However, also worth noting here is that there are some sophisticated characters, for example Eric Cartman. Even though most of Cartman's actions are malicious and that he can sometimes be perceived as stupid, he often takes revenge very intelligently. He is also socially apt and can be seen taking the role as the leader of groups of people, either as the leader of a group of young boys, but also as a leader for adults. Characters that did not suit either of these definitions were also included in the neutral category. Two examples of this variable are Kyle and Stan. Their actions and behaviour can be considered as both sophisticated and unsophisticated at times, and arguments could be made for either side – but this again leads me to classifying them as neutral characters. Working with the binary variables

unsophisticated and neutral allows for comparing the unsophisticated category with the neutral category in terms of accent and other variables.

3.4.4 Species

The species of a character refers to whether it is a human or non-human. The species variable is determined mostly by visual clues and is a straightforward category. As South Park is an animated television show, the creators have every opportunity to make whichever character they want, and it is interesting to see how the different non-human characters are created in regards of the other character variables. The human characters are easily distinguishable, and a vast majority of characters belong to this category. Furthermore, the non-human characters are also easy to spot, either by watching how they are animated, or by how they are referred to. Most of the times they will both be referred to as something non-human and animated as something else. For example, Towelie, who is a friend of the boys and a business partner of Randy Marsh when he creates his weed company. He is animated as a towel and has the physics of a towel when he sometimes is blown away by the wind. However, he speaks and acts like a human being and his main interest is smoking weed and getting high.

3.5 Summary of variables

In total, four main accent categories and four character variables are applied in the present study. Table 3.5 shows an overview of all accent categories and all character variables included in the analysis.

Accent categories	Character variables
General American (GA)	Gender (male-female)
Received Pronunciation (RP)	Alignment (neutral-bad)
Non-standard American English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - African American Vernacular English (AAVE) - Southern American English - New York City English 	Level of sophistication (Unsophisticated-neutral)
Other native accents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - London English - Irish English - Australian English 	Species (human – non-human)
English with a foreign accent	

Table 3.5 Character variables

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the distribution of accents in the TV series South Park. Firstly, the general distribution of accents in South Park will be presented, with a comparison of accents in older and newer seasons. Next, the character traits presented in chapter 3 will be discussed in depth, while attempting to find correlations between accents and different character traits. Lastly, I will focus on foreign accents, and foreign characters' broadness of accent, as well as other character traits will be discussed here. In total this chapter will include a dissection of the 205 overall characters included in my analysis and will discuss some of them more thoroughly.

4.1 The general distribution of accents

As the different accents used in South Park is a vital part of this thesis, this section will first look at all accents included in the analysis, before comparing the accent use in the older and the newer seasons. The overall distribution of accents can be seen in table 4.1 below.

Numbers that are in brackets are the numbers from the seasons originally included in the analysis, while the numbers outside of the brackets apply to these characters, as well as the extra characters added (c.f. 3.2.1). The results are illustrated visually in figure 4.1.

Accents	Characters	
	n	%
GA	133 (133)	65.6% (74%)
RP	6 (6)	3.8% (3%)
Non-standard	30 (30)	14.4% (16%)
Other native accents	3 (3)	2.9% (2%)
Foreign accent	30 (8)	12% (4%)
No talking – no English	3 (3)	1.4% (1%)
Total	205 (183)	100% (100%)

Table 4.1 – The overall distribution of accents

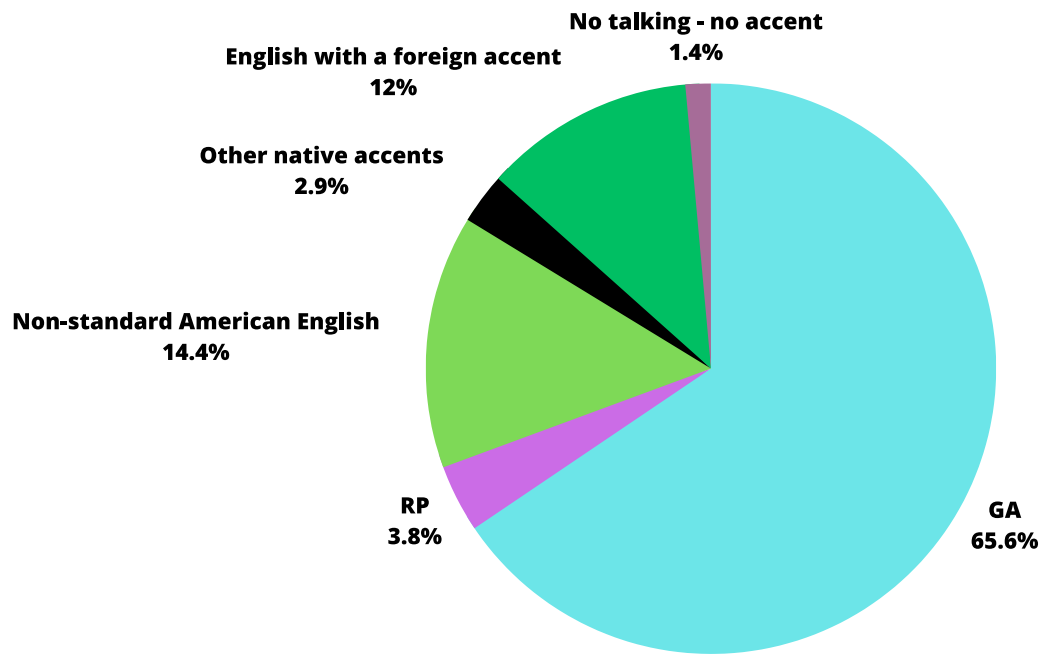


Figure 4.1 – The overall distribution of accents

There are 3 characters included in other character trait categories that are not given an accent due to them either not speaking, as Kenny McCormick, or because they are a creature with no talking. They are included in the overall analysis because they are included when looking at other character traits such as gender and species in order to give this analysis a complete overview of the characters included in South Park. One of these characters is also a main character in the series, Kenny McCormick. He plays a major role in the series and despite the audience not understanding what he is saying, the boys and other character can understand his mumbling.

The figure above shows that the most used accent in South Park is GA with 65.6% of characters speaking it. The second most used accent category is Non-standard American English with 14.6%. The third biggest category of accent is English with a foreign accent with 12.1%, and lastly RP with 3.9% and other native accents with 2.9%. Out of the 30 characters that speak Non-standard American English, 18 speak the Southern accent, eight speak an

unspecified non-standard accent, two speak AAVE and lastly, one has a Minnesotan accent and one a New York accent.

English with a foreign accent is represented with different nationalities. There are for example five Romanian characters, five Danish characters and five Chinese characters. Similar for all of these characters is that they only appear in a few episodes. For example, one episode has Romanian quintuplets that run away from the circus with their grandmother. Furthermore, there are four Chinese commentators that appear two and two together in different episodes. There are also some Danish characters that appear in a few episodes as they create an engine that can be used to trace internet trolls all over the world. These characters still appear enough for them to be included and analyzed. When I look at the core characters in the seasons included in my analysis that appear in the series regularly, the one standout character is Tuong Lu Kim. A Chinese character that is the owner of a restaurant called “City Wok”. He appears frequently throughout the series and even has an episode where he is the main character.

RP, or standard British English is only spoken by 8 characters. Ironically enough, most of these characters are supposed to be Canadian in the series, but their accent is very similar to the RP accent. They have one typical Canadian pronunciation, “aboot” for *about*, but mostly their accent correlates with traits of the RP accent (c.f. 3.3.2). Pip Pirrup and Terrance and Philip are the most prominent characters speaking with the RP accent. Pip is from England, but Terrance and Philip, are two famous Canadian comedians who mostly appear through the TV when the boys are watching their show. Lastly, Other native accents are the least represented accent group with only 2.9%. This group includes 3 characters, namely one Australian character, one Scottish character, one Irish characters with a non-standard British accent. The Australian character is called Steve Irwin in the TV series and is meant to be a replica of Steve Irwin the crocodile hunter. The Irish character is St. Patrick, and the Scottish character is an Amazon warehouse worker. Both appear in only one episode.

The percentage of characters speaking GA is similar to previous studies discussed in section 2.6.4. GA is the most used accent except in the Disney remakes that Urke (2019) studied, due to these mostly being set in England and RP being the most used due to authenticity. RP, however, is the second least used accent in South Park which is very different to the previous studies on Disney films and series, where RP is typically the second most used accent, or even the most used accent, as in the Disney remakes. One reason for this is that the main location for South Park is a small town in the US, whilst Disney movies are set in different countries and cities across the world, or in fictional worlds. It is therefore natural that the accents vary more in Disney's films and TV series. The Non-standard American English accent category, which included approximately 15% of characters correlate with results from previous studies. For example, Madland (2022) where 18.5% in the older shows and 13.3% in the newer shows speak non-standard, and Sønnesyn (2011) where 11.8% speak non-standard.

4.1.1 Comparison of the older seasons and the newer seasons

As one of my hypotheses includes comparing the older seasons (1+2) with the newer seasons (22-25), this section will look at the accent distribution of the characters in these seasons. Characters included in the older seasons are all the characters from season 1 and 2, but characters included in the newer seasons are only the new characters introduced in seasons 22 to 25. This means that these seasons also have many of the same characters that were introduced to us earlier, but for the purpose of looking at differences between the seasons there is no overlap between characters. This will give an overview of which accents new characters are more likely to have. The overall distribution of accents in the older and the newer seasons is shown in table 4.1.1 below. The results are illustrated visually in figure 4.1.1.

Accents	Characters			
	Older seasons (1-2)		Newer seasons (22-25)	
	N	%	n	%
GA	63	63%	70	85%
RP	6	6%	0	0%
NST	24	24%	6	7%
Other native accents	1	1%	2	2%
Foreign English accent	3	3%	5	6%
No talking – meaning no accent	3	3%	0	0%
Total	100	100%	83	100%

Table 4.1.1 – Overall distribution of accents in older and newer seasons

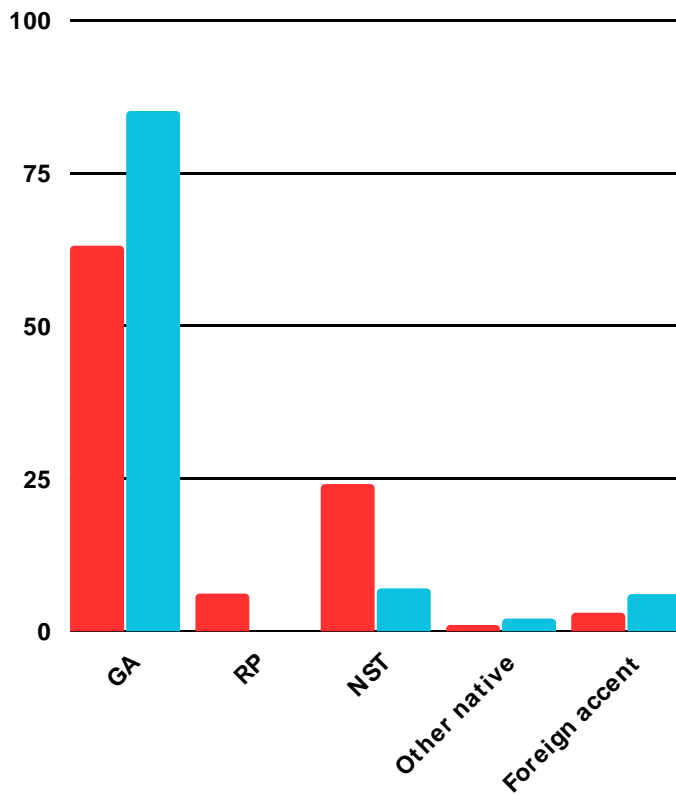


Figure 4.1.1 – Overall distribution of accents in older and newer seasons

As predicted, GA is the dominating accent in both the older seasons and the newer seasons. From 63% in the older seasons to 85% in the newer seasons. RP has been completely omitted in the newer seasons, going from 6% in old characters to 0% of the new characters. Furthermore, Non-standard American English include almost a quarter of all characters in the older seasons, whereas this number has sunken drastically in the newer seasons to only 7%. Other native accents have seen a slight increase from 1% to 2% in the newer seasons. Lastly, English with a foreign accent has also seen an increase by 3% points from 3% to 6%.

When looking at the accent percentages from the older seasons to the newer seasons we can see that there is a drastic change in the introduction of characters speaking GA. It has risen more than 20% points which means that when a new character is introduced there is a much higher chance that they will be speaking GA. Previous studies have also found that increase of GA over time is a normal evolution. Comparing Sønnesyn's (2011) results to Lippi-Green's (1997) results we can see that there has been a huge rise in percentage of characters speaking the standard American accent in Disney. In Lippi-Green's study (section 2.6.4.) 43% of characters speak GA, while in Sønnesyn this has risen to 61%. Madland's (2022) results also supports this change as she observes a rise in GA from 57% in the old Disney shows and 67% in the new Disney shows. Also, when looking at how the non-standard American English accent category has dropped significantly, it can be argued that the linguistic portrayal of new characters has changed, and is now leaning more towards new characters speaking a standardized variety, namely GA.

The increase of the standard variety and the decrease of other accent categories might be related to how society has changed over time. There is 25 years between season 1 and season 25, and as mentioned in section 2.4 society has moved towards being more politically correct. When you have fewer characters that are different and more characters which speak with the standardized accent, you are less likely to step on anyone's toes and offend someone. At the same time there are slightly more foreign accented characters, perhaps because non-standard native accents are more offensive than foreign accents. Foreign accented characters will be further discussed in section 4.6 in this chapter. One of my hypotheses is that there will be more differences between characters in the earlier seasons and fewer between the categories in the newer seasons. When looking at the accent distribution category this is confirmed, as the accents are more spread throughout the categories in the old seasons. The next section will discuss the correlations between accent use and different character traits.

4.2 Gender

The gender variable is included in this study because I want to see if there are any systematic correlations related to gender and accent distribution. Previous studies of films and TV series show that there are normally fewer female characters than male, and that female characters typically have traditional gender roles as well as are more likely to speak a standard accent. Characters in the gender category include characters introduced in the older seasons as well as characters introduced in the newer seasons. Extra foreign characters and other native characters added are excluded in this section. The overall distribution of gender in older and newer seasons is shown in table 4.2 below. The results are illustrated visually in figure 4.2, where the blue color is older seasons, and the red color is newer seasons. The Y axis shows percentage of characters.

Gender	Older seasons		Newer seasons	
	n	%	n	%
Male	79	79%	69	83%
Female	21	21%	14	17%
Total	100	100%	83	100%

Table 4.2 – Gender distribution in older and newer seasons

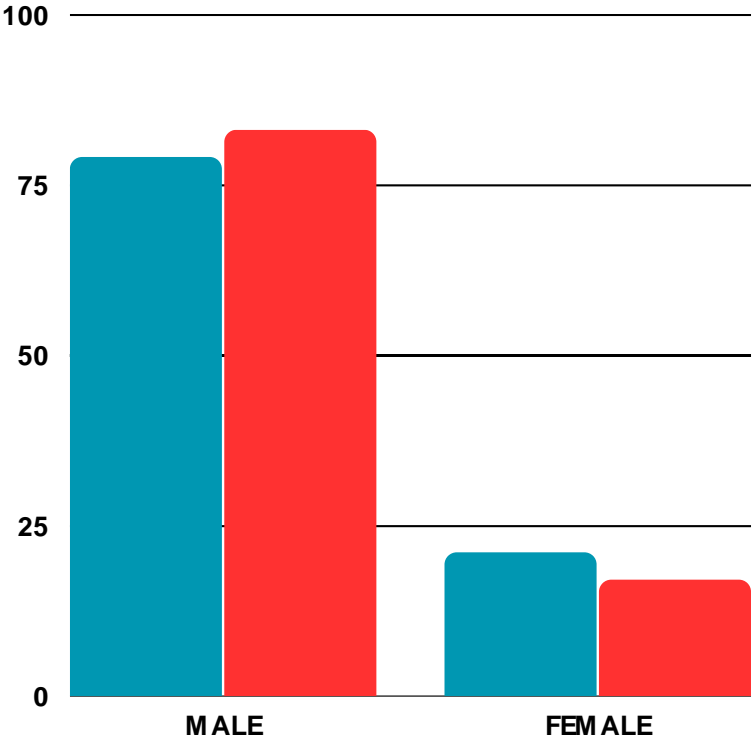


Figure 4.2 – Gender distribution in older and newer seasons.

Both the older and the newer seasons have in common that they have more men than women characters. The older seasons have 79% men and 21% women, and the newer seasons have 83% men and 17% women. Males outnumber females heavily, and one surprising difference is that in the newer seasons there are more male characters introduced than female characters. This goes against the societal change towards more equality and shows that the introduction of new characters has become even less gender equal in the newer seasons. Next, I will take a look at the gender differences in terms of accents, first in the older seasons, then in the newer before I will compare these results. The overall distribution of gender accents in the older seasons is shown in table 4.2.1.

Accents – Older seasons	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
GA	48	64%	15	71%
RP	5	6%	1	5%
Non-standard American English	19	25%	5	24%
Other native accents	1	1%	0	0%
English with a foreign accent	3	4%	0	0%
Total	76	100%	21	100%

Table 4.2.1 – Accent distribution in the older shows

In the older seasons, 64% of males and 71% of females speak GA. Furthermore, RP is represented with 6% of male characters and 5% of female characters. Similar to RP, there is only one percentage point difference between males and females who speak Non-standard American English, with 25% male and 24% female. Other native accents are almost non-existent in the older seasons with only one character being included in this category, which makes up for 1% of male characters. Lastly, English with a foreign accent includes 4% of male characters and no female characters. As expected, and in accordance with one of my hypotheses, females are more likely to speak a standard variety of English, GA, though the difference is not great. 76% of females, and 70% of men speak the standard varieties.

Slightly unexpected however, is that 24% of females speak Non-standard American English. Only one percentage point behind the male number in the same accent category. Out of these 5 females, there is two Southern accents, one Minnesotan accent, one New-York accent and one unspecified non-standard accent. Among the men, however, 9 of the 19 speak with a Southern accent, with the rest being either uncategorized, which is mostly Cartman’s family, but also Mr. Hankey and Saddam Hussein, or they speak AAVE, as Fat Abbott and his friend does. Mr. Hankey is a Christmas “poo”, a non-human character that appear mostly in

Christmas specials and is Kyle’s friend. Fat Abbott and his friend are two African American characters that appear in a TV series in the show, that the boys sometimes watch on TV. Overall, male characters are more likely than female characters to speak the Southern accent, which by some is considered the most stigmatized Non-standard American accent. Overall, both genders are highly represented in the non-standard accent category, however they do not speak the same variety with most men speaking Southern, while women’s non-standard is diverse.

There are only three characters in the older seasons speaking English with a foreign accent, one Iraqi student, Hakeem, and two Chinese commentators that appear in one episode where the boys play against a Chinese volleyball team in China. As all accent categories except Non-standard American English show that women are more likely than men to speak the standard varieties, the accent distribution in the older seasons largely supports the hypothesis. Next, the accent distribution in the newer seasons in terms of gender will be discussed, and I will look at potential differences between the older and the newer seasons. The overall distribution of gender accents is shown in table 4.2.2 below.

Accents – Newer seasons	Male		Female	
	n	%	N	%
GA	57	83%	12	86%
RP	0	0%	0	0%
Non-standard American English	4	6%	2	14%
Other native accents	2	3%	0	0%
English with a foreign accent	5	8%	0	0%
Total	69	100%	14	100%

Table 4.2.2 – Accent distribution in the newer seasons

In the newer seasons, there is less accent variation among characters. GA is by far the most represented accent with 83% of males and 86% of females. As there is no overlap between characters in the analysis, there are no RP speaking characters introduced in the newer seasons. The Non-standard American English percentage has drastically decreased as well, with 19% points for male and 10% points for female. Other native accents have a 3% representation for male and 0% for female, and English with a foreign accent includes 8% newly introduced males and 0% females.

Similar to the older seasons is that there is a higher than expected number of females speaking a Non-standard accent. Although this might be a result of few female characters, it is still interesting to discuss. Percentage wise, there are more than twice the number of female characters in this category, meaning that female characters introduced in the newer seasons are more likely than male characters to speak Non-standard American English. This result does not correlate with previous studies and is an anomaly in this study's result. However, the numbers are very low which means that that no conclusion will be drawn, however there is a notable tendency. All Non-standard American English speaking characters in the newer season speak with a Southern accent. This further suggests that there is much less variation between accents, as 100% of females and 89% of males either speak GA or Southern.

There are five characters in the newer seasons speaking English with a foreign accent. Two Chinese commentators, one Nazi-German news reporter, one adopted boy from Mexico and Tuong Lu Kim, a Chinese restaurant-owner. Out of these five characters, only Kim appears frequently throughout the seasons, while the other characters are in one or a few episodes. The characters included in the other native accents are St. Patrick who speaks with an Irish accent and an Amazon worker who speaks with a Scottish accent. St. Patrick appears as a reincarnation of himself, almost like a ghost when the residents are celebrating St. Patrick's Day, while the Amazon worker appears in a few episodes where Jeff Bezos establishes a fulfillment center in South Park and the workers strike. The overall distribution of male accents in the older and newer seasons is shown in table 4.2.3 below.

Male accents	Older seasons		Newer seasons	
	n	%	N	%
GA	48	64%	57	83%
RP	5	6%	0	0%
Non-standard American English	19	25%	4	6%
Other native accents	1	1%	2	3%
English with a foreign accent	3	4%	5	8%
Total	76	100%	69	100%

Table 4.2.3 – Male accent distribution in the older and newer seasons

The older seasons have a total of 76 male characters and the newer seasons have 69 new male characters. One of my hypotheses is that there will be fewer differences between categories in the newer seasons. Looking at society, there is also a change from the beginning of South Park till now in terms of equality and political correctness (section 2.4). If South Park has changed in this way, then one would expect more characters in the standardized accent categories and fewer in the other categories. Important to keep in mind is that male characters in the newer seasons are those that are not introduced to the viewer in seasons 1 and 2, and not including those that appear in both older and newer seasons. The standard American accent, GA has risen in representation with 19% points. RP, which is the standard British accent, however, has decreased from 6% to 0%. Regardless of this, male characters are more likely to speak a standard accent in the newer seasons.

Non-standard American English male characters have decreased markedly. In the older seasons 25% of characters speak NST, while in the newer seasons 6% speak it. This correlates with previous studies (section 2.6.4) although not as drastic numbers as in South Park, with 19% points decrease. Although there are a lot fewer NST speaking male characters introduced in the newer seasons, 100% speak the Southern accent, further proving the point that there is less variation. One discrepancy is that there are more characters speaking English with a foreign accent in the newer seasons, although the difference is not vast with 4% points. The overall distribution of female accents in the older and newer seasons is shown in table 4.2.4 below.

Female accents	Older seasons		Newer seasons	
	n	%	N	%
GA	15	71%	12	86%
RP	1	5%	0	0%
Non-standard American English	5	24%	2	14%
Other native accents	0	0%	0	0%
English with a foreign accent	0	0%	0	0%
Total	21	100%	14	100%

Table 4.2.4 – Female accent distribution in the older and newer seasons

In the older seasons there are 21 total characters while the newer seasons have a total of 14 new characters. The accent evolution in female characters is similar to male characters, but not as markedly. 71% of female characters in the older seasons, and 86% of female characters in the newer seasons speak GA, which is an increase of 15% points. There are similar patterns when looking at RP and NST as well, though not as obvious due to the numbers being low for both. There is one female speaking RP in the older seasons and none in the newer. NST speaking female characters have also decreased from 24% to 14%, and there is also more

diversity between the accents in the older seasons. Both NST speaking characters in the newer seasons speak the Southern accent, whereas in the older seasons there is a Minnesotan accent, a New York City accent, an undefined accent and two Southern accents. As previously discussed, older seasons have more variety, while the newer seasons have fewer females speaking NST, and both of them speak the same NST accent. This also correlates with previous studies, (2.6.4) which show that as TV series or films develop over a time period, the standardization of females increases.

There are no female characters speaking English with a foreign accent in the older or newer seasons. It seems like when introducing a foreign accented character, the series creators lean towards making them male. There can be several reasons for this, one reason might be that the two main voices for South Park are male, and that it is easier for them to recreate a foreign male accent. Another reason may be that they follow the underlying pattern visible in previous studies and series that female characters are more likely to speak a standard accent. However, there are some female characters in this study that speak with a foreign accent, and these characters will be further discussed in section 4.6.

4.2.5 Gender results summarized

As mentioned previously, the gender results are based on time of introduction from when characters were introduced, so they do not paint the whole picture of all characters in South Park's older and newer seasons. However, these numbers show how the creators think when introducing new characters with regards to accent and gender. Summarized, female characters are more likely than male characters to speak a standard variety in South Park. There has also been an evolution over time, with characters introduced in the newer seasons being more likely than before to speak the standard varieties. In the older seasons there are more NST speaking characters, and a broad variety of accents, while in the newer seasons there are fewer NST speaking characters and less variety. Furthermore, there are many female NST speaking characters with 24% in the older seasons. This number was higher than expected in light of previous studies typically have an even lower score for female non-standard accent use. When looking at the newer seasons this number has decreased by 10% points, which makes the numbers more similar to my expectations and previous studies. Somewhat less expected was the disappearance of RP for both genders which is also a standard variety. The main pattern is that females are more likely to speak GA in both the older and the newer seasons. Male

accents, however, were more diverse in the older seasons but in the newer seasons they are almost as likely as females to speak the standard varieties, meaning that the show may be moving towards more uniformity, possibly related to political correctness and equality. As South Park is highly satirical and not afraid to step on anyone’s toes, this is possibly just an unintentional development in accordance with society in general. Next, I will look at the character trait alignment, and see if there are any patterns between alignment, accent, and gender.

4.3 Alignment

Alignment refers to the ethical motivation of a character and whether their moral and personal attitudes are good or bad (cf. section 3.4.2). Previous studies typically find correlation between alignment and accent. Characters with a Non-standard accent and characters with a foreign accent are more likely than characters with standard accents to be “bad”. For example, in Lippi-Green (1997), 40% of non-native speakers of English were “evil”, while their total percentage was only 20%. This section will look at correlations between accent and alignment to see if there are any differences or similarities between South Park and previous studies discussed in chapter 2. In the present thesis, this character variable is binary, meaning that a character is either categorized as bad or neutral. Good characters will be included in the neutral category and not discussed any further. The overall distribution of neutral and bad characters in the older seasons is shown in table 4.3.1 below.

Older seasons	Neutral		Bad	
	n	%	N	%
GA	59	66%	4	57%
RP	5	6%	1	14%
Non-standard American English	22	24%	2	29%
Other native accents	1	1%	0	0%
English with a foreign accent	3	3%	0	0%
Total	90	100%	7	100%

Table 4.3.1 Alignment in older seasons

In total there are 7 characters categorized as “bad” characters with 5 male and 2 female characters in the older seasons. The older bad characters are Eric Cartman (NST), Shelly Marsh (GA), Mayor McDaniels (GA), Damien (GA), Scott the Dick (RP), Saddam Hussein (NST) and Dr Adams (GA). 4 out of the 7 bad characters speak with the GA accent, two with NST accent and one with the RP accent. 57% of bad characters speak GA, which is surprising, both in light of the hypothesis that bad characters will use more Non-standard accents, and previous studies which often show a decrease in the use of GA for bad characters (cf. section 2.6.4). In my study this number is only separated by 9% points, as 66% of neutral characters and 57% of bad characters speak GA. Of the bad GA characters included, Shelly Marsh is a recurring character. She is the sister of one of the main characters, Stan Marsh. She constantly bullies him throughout many episodes and most of her actions are done with bad intentions, which also leads to Stan fearing her.

RP is also overrepresented in terms of bad characters percentage wise. In the older seasons only 6% of neutral characters speak with an RP accent, while 14% of bad characters does it. However, these 14% represent only one character which shows that there are low numbers discussed here. What separates this character from the other bad characters is that this character is supposed to be Canadian. His name is “Scott the Dick”, and he is a character that dislikes everybody and constantly throws out racial slurs towards different groups such as Inuits, as well as constantly trying to sabotage Terrance and Philip’s success. Lastly, 29% of bad characters speak with a Non-standard American accent, namely an unidentified non-standard accent. This is slightly higher than the total representation of NST with 5% points more, but this is in correlation with previous studies and my own hypothesis that bad characters will speak more non-standard. These two characters include Eric Cartman and Saddam Hussein. Eric Cartman is one of the main characters in the show and appears frequently in almost every episode. Most of his actions are motivated by bad intentions and he tries his best to manipulate everyone he can to get his will. His main victims for this manipulation are his mother and his friend Butters. He constantly cries and complains to his mother for example to get the newest technology, or just to eat something unhealthy. With Butters, he mostly tells him lies in order for Butters to do things that he finds hilarious. For example, in one episode he convinces Butters that he is in a virtual reality, when he is just walking around wearing goggles and headphones. This leads to Butters punching his father,

stealing a car, assaulting a prostitute, and eventually getting stabbed. These evil actions are just a few of many that Eric Cartman does in the show. Slightly unexpected, and perhaps due to the low number of foreign accents, is that none of the bad characters speak with a foreign accent. The main pattern in the older seasons is that even though GA is the most used for bad characters, the number has decreased, while for non-standard accents the percentage has increased. This means that the results are similar to previous research. The overall distribution of neutral and bad characters in the newer seasons is shown in table 4.3.2 below.

Newer seasons	Neutral		Bad	
	n	%	N	%
GA	66	85%	3	60%
RP	0	0%	0	0%
Non-standard American English	6	7%	1	20%
Other native accents	1	1%	1	20%
English with a foreign accent	5	7%	0	0%
Total	78	100%	5	100%

Table 4.3.2 Alignment in newer seasons

In the newer seasons there are 5 “bad” characters. These characters include the Denver Archbishop (GA), a regular bishop (GA), Mickey Mouse (GA), Ms. Swanson (Southern) and St. Patrick (Irish). In the newer seasons, 60% of bad characters speak GA, while 85% of neutral characters speak GA, which is a 25% points difference. There is a big decrease in the percentage of GA characters being categorized as bad compared to their total representation. Mickey Mouse is the most frequent character out of the GA characters here. He appears in different episodes, and he is the evil CEO of the Walt Disney company. One of his main appearances is when he and Randy Marsh goes to China and has sex with a bat and pangolin, which in turn leads to the covid pandemic. Furthermore, he constantly threatens his employees to get his will. He also sends a death threat to Randy Marsh after their China visit when he threatens to expose the truth.

Moreover, 20% of bad characters speak NST. These 20% represents only one character, as there are not many new bad characters in the newer seasons. This character, Heather Swanson, has a Southern accent and has the appearance of a male, but is identifying as a woman to compete in a strong woman competition, and wins all the events she competes in. She does this to exact revenge on vice principal Strong Woman, which is her ex-girlfriend. The increase of NST in bad characters is 13% points, from 7% of neutral characters speaking NST, to 20% of bad characters speaking NST. The fact that there are more bad characters speaking non-standard English, is expected and in accordance with my hypothesis and previous studies. Lastly, there are two characters speaking with other native accents in the newer seasons, and one of them is categorized as bad: St. Patrick. He has an Irish accent and appears as a ghostlike version of himself in a St. Patrick's Day episode. He is bad because he is a pervert who harasses women. He is obviously a parody on the real St. Patrick, who is known as the "Apostle of Ireland" but is nonetheless ticking the boxes of a bad character. As there are so few other native accents in the newer seasons, one bad character being among these means that there is a 20% point increase in bad characters speaking other native accents. The main observation in terms of alignment in the older seasons is that there is a marked reduction in the number of bad GA characters. Furthermore, non-standard speaking characters are more like than standard accented speakers to be categorized as bad. These results are expected and largely correlates to previous studies. However, the lack of RP representation among bad characters is a difference, as this is the second highest represented accent in several previous studies like Sønnesyn (2011) and the originals Urke (2019) studied.

Because GA is the most used accent in both the older and newer seasons, I expected many bad characters to speak GA as well. However, both the older and newer seasons shows that there is fewer bad GA character than the total number of GA speaking characters. Even though patterns can be recognized in this part of the analysis, it is worth noting again that these numbers are very small. Furthermore, I expected Non-standard American accents to have a high representation among bad characters, and this correlates with my findings.

4.4 Level of sophistication

In this section I will discuss the unsophisticated characters in South Park and their accent to see if there is any correlation between the accent of the characters and the character level of sophistication. Furthermore, I will include at the divide between genders in terms of percentage of unsophisticated characters. As previously mentioned, “sophisticated” and “neutral” characters will be together in the “neutral” category, and not discussed in this section. Previous studies show that unsophisticated characters are less likely to speak the standard varieties and have a higher representation of non-standard accents such as Cockney and Southern. As South Park is set in a small town in USA, I expected to find a high percentage of American non-standard accents among the unsophisticated characters. Furthermore, I expected a majority of the unsophisticated characters to be male, because male characters are traditionally more likely to speak NST which I expect most of the unsophisticated characters to do. The overall distribution of unsophisticated characters sorted by accent is shown in table 4.4.1 below.

Accent	Unsophisticated characters	
	n	%
GA	2	20%
RP	0	0%
NST	7	70%
Other native	0	0%
Foreign English accent	1	10%
Total	10	100%

Table 4.4.1 – Unsophisticated characters in South Park season 1-2 and 22-25

The character trait “unsophisticated” also includes a low number of characters, with only 10 out of 186 total characters having this trait. As established in section 3.4.3, some character traits associated with an unsophisticated character are clumsiness, simplicity, and low intelligence. A character that is simpleminded, and perhaps easily manipulated, like Butters Stotch. Butters and Towelie are the only characters that are unsophisticated and speaking with a GA accent. Towelie is unsophisticated because he only wants to get high on weed all the time. He mostly appears out of nowhere to give towel advice to the citizens of South Park or

getting high. He also talks slowly and has a hard time understanding things due to him constantly being intoxicated.

The majority of unsophisticated characters, 70%, speak with a Non-standard American accent. Of these, there are a few recurring characters; Veronica Crabtree who is the school-bus driver, officer Barbrady who is the local police officer, Jimbo who is Stan's uncle and Mr. Mackey who is the school's guidance counselor. All unsophisticated NST accented characters speak with a Southern accent. Meaning that seven of the total 18 "southern" speaking characters are categorized as unsophisticated. This correlates to studies mentioned in section 2.6.1 where the Southern accent is rated joint-bottom with the New-York accent on the status dimension. Previous studies also show that the Southern accent is rated fairly high for social attractiveness and friendliness, but low on status traits, meaning that Southerners often are viewed as less intelligent and with little world experience.

The last unsophisticated character speaks with a foreign English accent. This is Tuong Lu Kim, the Chinese restaurant owner. As discussed in section 2.6.3, foreign-accented speakers who are more difficult to understand are more likely to receive more negative ratings than foreign accents that are easier to understand. This correlates with the way that Tuong Lu Kim is presented, as unintelligent and gullible. However, Chinese stereotypes often revolve around them being very academically smart, which is not the case for Kim. In one episode the boys convince him to fly them to Canada for very little money. They haggle the price down, and when the price is very low, he is convinced that he got a good deal even though he got scammed.

What separates South Park from previously studies films and series is that the difference between the total percentage of GA characters and the percentage of unsophisticated GA speaking characters is drastically reduced, from 65.6% total representation to only 11% of unsophisticated characters. Most studies see a decline in GA representation, but not as significant as the decrease seen in South Park. As the creators of South Park are more inclined to give unsophisticated characters the "southern" accent, this might imply that there is some stereotypical portrayals involved. The overall distribution of accent spoken by unsophisticated characters is shown in table 4.4.2 below.

Accent	Unsophisticated characters		
	Male	Female	Total
GA	2	0	2
RP	0	0	1
NST	6	1	7
Other native	0	0	0
Foreign English accent	1	0	1
Total	9	1	10

Table 4.4.2 – Unsophisticated characters sorted by gender

In total there are 9 male and 1 female unsophisticated character in South Park. The one unsophisticated female character is Veronica Crabtree, who is the school-bus driver. She is characterized as unsophisticated due to her crassness and gullibility towards the boys. They constantly say rude things to her, and she always responds angrily saying “what?”, then they say something else that sound similar which is not rude, which she accepts. One time she is also fooled as the boys convince her that an elephant is a new student. The remaining 9 unsophisticated characters in South Park are male. The number of unsophisticated female characters is lower than might be expected. Furthermore, there is little correlation between speaking NST and being unsophisticated, however the correlation is a bit higher for male characters. The main observation is that there are almost no unsophisticated characters. This is perhaps linked with results from previous studies which show that men have more diverse roles in TV series and shows, while women have more traditional gender roles. The next section will look at the non-human characters in South Park.

4.5 Species

South Park is an animated television show, meaning that all characters are animated and not real people. However, most of the characters in South Park are supposed to be people. As previously established, this category is binary, meaning that a character is either human or non-human. There were no characters that had to be reassessed as it is very clear whether a character is supposed to be human or not. In the older and newer seasons combined there are five characters that are “non-human”. The overall distribution of the character traits “accent”, “alignment” and “sophistication” is shown in table 4.5.1 below.

Characters	Character traits		
	Accent	Alignment	Sophistication
Scuzzlebutt	X	Neutral	Neutral
Mr. Hankey	NST	Neutral	Neutral
Underpants gnome	GA	Neutral	Neutral
Towelie	GA	Neutral	Unsophisticated
Mickey Mouse	GA	Bad	Neutral

Table 4.5.1 Non-human character’s character traits

There is some variation in the “non-human” characters traits. Scuzzlebutt has an “X” for accent as he does not speak in the series, he only has one cameo in an episode. Mr. Hankey is shaped like feces, and mostly appears in Christmas episodes to visit those who have a lot of high fiber in their diets and is Kyle’s friend. He speaks with an unspecified non-standard accent. There are three “non-human” characters that speak with a GA accent, and they are all different on other relevant character traits. The underpants gnome is “neutral” in both alignment and sophistication, Towelie is “neutral” for alignment and “unsophisticated” for sophistication, and Mickey Mouse is “bad” for alignment and “neutral” for sophistication. The accent use for non-human characters reflect the general trend in South Park, and the numbers for non-human characters means that it is impossible to draw any further conclusions.

4.6 Foreign characters

In this section I will look at all the foreign characters in the newer and older seasons, as well as extra characters that I have included for this section only. The selection process for the extra characters was based on them speaking English with a foreign accent, as well as having enough screen time to properly analyze the broadness of their accent as well as the other character traits introduced in chapter 3. In total there are 8 foreign characters from the older and newer seasons, as well as 22 extra characters. These characters are selected at random by doing online research on foreign characters from different parts of the world that appear in South Park and speak with a foreign accent. I also thought to myself if I could think of any foreign characters that appear in South Park that could be useful for this study as I have watched every season of South Park several times. Combining these two methods led to the extra inclusion of 22 foreign accented English characters, and a total number of 30 foreign accented characters which was a number I was satisfied with.

In this section I will look at where the character is originally from based on their accent, together with broadness of accent as well as alignment and sophistication to see if there are any patterns. An example of a common pattern found in similar studies is that Asian characters will speak with a broader and more stereotypical accent than European characters. First, I will introduce all foreign characters in a table, moreover, these will be divided into different groups based on their country of origin with additional discussion. The overall distribution of foreign accented characters with the character traits “gender”, “nationality” and “accent” is shown in table 4.6.1 below.

Characters	Character traits		
	Gender	Nationality	Accent
Hakeem Korashki	Male	Iraqi	Arabic
Chinese commentator 1	Male	Chinese	Mandarin
Chinese commentator 2	Male	Chinese	Mandarin
Chinese security guard 1	Male	Chinese	Mandarin
Chinese security guard 2	Male	Chinese	Mandarin
Tuong Lu Kim	Male	Chinese	Mandarin
Alejandro	Male	Mexican	Spanish
Nazi news reporter	Male	German	German
EXTRA CHARACTERS			
David Rodriguez	Male	Mexican	Spanish
Baahir Hassan Abdul Hakeem	Male	Pakistani	Urdu
Danish man 1, troll trace board	Male	Danish	Danish
Danish man 2, troll trace board	Male	Danish	Danish
Danish man 3, troll trace board	Male	Danish	Danish
Vladimir Stolfsky	Male	Russian	Russian
Christian Wulff	Male	German	German
Jennifer Lopez (handpuppet)	Female	Puerto-Rican	Spanish
Jennifer Lopez (human)	Female	Puerto-Rican	Spanish
Freja Ollegard	Female	Danish	Danish
Lennart Bedrager	Male	Danish	Danish

Cesar Millan	Male	Mexican	Spanish
Cristophe	Male	French	French
Nicolas Sarkozy	Male	French	French
Matti Vanhanen	Male	Finnish	Finnish
Hu Jintao	Male	Chinese	Chinese
Quintuplet 1	Female	Romanian	Romanian
Quintuplet 2	Female	Romanian	Romanian
Quintuplet 3	Female	Romanian	Romanian
Quintuplet 4	Female	Romanian	Romanian
Quintuplet 5	Female	Romanian	Romanian
Grandmother of quintuplets	Female	Romanian	Romanian

Table 4.6.1 Foreign characters and traits

As we can see in table 4.6.1 there are characters from many different nationalities represented in South Park. To discuss these characters further I will divide them in groups based on where their country of origin is located. For example, Tuong Lu Kim, a Chinese commentator will be put in the category “Asian characters”. Furthermore, European characters will be separated in two different categories with “Western Europeans” and “Eastern Europeans” as these often are differentiated when it comes to the stereotypical use of accents with “Eastern Europeans” often being given broader and more comedic accents while “Western European” often have less exaggerated and more authentic accents. Furthermore, the “American” group includes characters with a Mexican and Puerto-Rican accent. Lastly, the “Middle Eastern” group includes characters from countries associated with the Middle East. The overall distribution of characters in each foreign accent group sorted by gender is shown in table 4.6.2 below.

Foreign accent group	Gender			Character traits	
	Male	Female	TOTAL + %	Bad	Unsophisticated
Western European	9	1	10 – 33%	0	0
Eastern European	1	6	7 – 23%	0	0
American	3	2	5 – 17%	0	0
Asian	6	0	6 – 20%	0	1 – 20%
Middle Eastern	2	0	2 – 7%	0	0
TOTAL + %	21 – 70%	9 – 30%	30 – 100%	0	1 – 3%

Table 4.6.2 Foreign accent groups

There are 30 total foreign characters included in the current thesis, with 70% of these male and 30% female. Western European (WE) is the most represented group with 33% of characters from this region. The second largest group is the Eastern European (EE) group with 23%. Asian is the third largest group with 20%, while American is the second least represented group with only 17%. Lastly, the Middle Eastern (ME) group with 7% representation. There are no characters that has the character trait “bad” for alignment among foreign accented characters. There is only one unsophisticated character among foreign characters, he is from the Asian group and is called Tuong Lu Kim. He will not be discussed in detail here as he is discussed in section 4.4. Next, I will discuss the character broadness of accent. The overall distribution of broadness of accents is shown in table 4.6.3 below.

Foreign accent group	Broadness of accent				
	Mild	%	Broad	%	Total
Western European	9	90%	1	10%	10
Eastern European	0	0%	7	100%	7
American	4	80%	1	20%	5
Asian	2	33.3%	4	66.6%	6
Middle Eastern	1	50%	1	50%	2
Total	16		14		30

Table 4.6.3 Broadness of accent

What separates a broad accent from a mild accent is that a broad accent includes more of the accent traits common for this foreign accent than a mild one, for example, the traits listed in section 3.3.5. What might also lead to an accent being characterized as broad is that the characters will speak with more features and use them more frequently, while a mild accent might have some of the same features but use them less and not as frequent. Tuong Lu Kim is the most prominent example of a “broad” accent. He speaks with a Chinese-English accent, and some of his accent traits include mixing /r/ and /l/, mixing /s/ and /ʃ/, as well as consonant cluster reduction.

In total there are 16 characters that has a mild foreign accent, while 14 characters have a broad foreign accent. However, there are some differences between how many characters of each accent group have a broad or a mild accent. 90% of WE characters speak with a mild accent, while 10% of them speak with a broad accent. This result is similar to what I expected, because USA and Western Europe are culturally closer, and Americans have less knowledge of America and Asian people, and base more of their information on these countries on media.

Among the 7 EE speaking characters, all of them speak with a broad accent. One of these is Vladimir Stolfsky, a Russian terrorist who appears in one episode. The Russian English accent is typically rated poorly on traits such as “pleasant” and “friendly” (c.f. 2.6.1). This, in combination with the turbulent US-Russia relationship in recent years may be a reason for why he is given a broad and exaggerated Eastern European accent. All six Romanian characters also speak with a broad accent. As Romania is a country unfamiliar for many Americans, they are more likely to be portrayed with a broad accent. Moreover, 80% of American characters speak with a mild accent which correlates to the geographical positioning of characters in this group which is closely linked to the US which is also an American country.

67% of Asian characters have a broad accent and 33% have a mild accent. The two Asian characters who are Chinese security guards on the airport that have a mild accent, appear in season 23, while the two Chinese sports commentators who have a broad accent appear in season 2. These two pairs of Chinese characters appear in similar roles and have similar amount of screen time, but they are represented with different broadness of accent. One reason for this might be that there are many years between the creation of these episodes. The characters that were given a broad, exaggerated Chinese accent appear in the second season while the characters given a mild accent appear in season 23, which aired 21 years later. However, Tuong Lu Kim’s accent has not changed over time. His accent is still the very broad, extremely exaggerated Chinese accent that he’s had since he was first introduced. He is the only one out of the six Asian characters that is characterized with the “unsophisticated” character trait. It could be argued that the two Chinese commentators in the early seasons belong in this category as well as all they do is speak negatively about the American characters as well as yell out unclever, base insults. Overall, the Asian characters are not portrayed as very smart. This is not how stereotypes against Asian people usually are, as they are often thought of as very intelligent, high achieving people.

There are no African accented characters included directly in my analysis. However, I will discuss and include one character and describe him here. His name is “Starvin’ Marvin”. He is a thin little boy from Ethiopia who was accidentally shipped to the boys, and they took custody over him. He is not included in the initial analysis as he only has some lines where he impersonates Cartman and not his own words or accent. However, he speaks a language which solely consists of “clicking” sounds. This is perhaps because of the association with

Ethiopia is non existing, forcing them to give him a made up, borderline racist language. It is also a very stereotypical way of thinking of how Africans speak, that they communicate through making noise with their mouth that do not resemble the “normal” way of communicating in civilized societies. Some African languages have some inclusion of clicking sounds, but the language given to Starvin’ Marvin is not a real language, only a parody.

Lastly, the ME group consists of two characters, Baahir Hassan Abdul Hakeem, and Hakeem Korashki. Korashki is an Iraqi police officer that arrested the boys’ substitute teacher because of her involvement with Saddam Hussein, and Baahir is a Middle Eastern fourth grader who appeared in one episode where he went to the boys’ class. Korashki is the one with a broad accent, and he is from Iraq. This is coherent with Americans’ attitudes and thoughts, as well as closely linked with how media influences attitudes. For example, Iraqi people, or more specifically Muslims are very often playing the role of terrorists in American movies. This again would make Korashki’s accent more likely to be broad, which is also the case. Baahir on the other hand, is from an undisclosed Middle Eastern country and given a mild accent. In the episode, Eric Cartman accuses him of being a terrorist, which proves to be wrong. Similar to the Asian characters, there are many seasons between the introduction of these ME characters. Korashki starred in a season one episode, while Baahir starred in a season eleven episode. A pattern that appears here is that the creators are more likely to give foreign accented characters who appear in early seasons a broad foreign accent, while characters who star in later seasons are more likely to be given a mild foreign accent.

The overall results of broadness of accent compared to where the characters are from, is that the characters from countries that are closely linked with the US either geographically, like Puerto Rico and Mexico, or culturally like Western countries are more likely to be given milder foreign accents. This familiarity, either culturally or geographically, are linked with Lindemann’s (2005) observations, where she found that some groups are often rated negatively due to images of these groups in media, as respondents have fewer experiences with people from these groups. This geographical and cultural distance leads to characters typically having broad accents. Hakeem Korashki, who is from Iraq and given a broad accent might be a result of this as USA and Iraq also have had a turbulent relationship, and US people’s views on Iraq are highly influenced by the media.

5 CONCLUSION

This final chapter will summarize my findings as well as conclude my thesis in relation to the research questions and hypotheses. Furthermore, the contributions of this thesis will be discussed, and lastly, suggestions for further research are presented.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The present study has looked at language attitudes in the TV series South Park, by studying correlations between accent use and different character variables. The accents of 205 characters were analyzed and placed in the follow accent categories: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), non-standard American (NST), Other native accents and English with a foreign accent. All characters were also categorized with regard to their gender, alignment, level of sophistication, and species. Foreign accented characters were also categorized according to broadness of accent. Results from the older seasons (released 1997-1998) and the newer seasons (2019-2022) have been compared to detect any diachronic change. Before summarizing the results in correlation with my hypothesis, it is worth mentioning again that characters in the older and newer seasons do not overlap. This means that characters included in the analysis of the older seasons are not included in the analysis of the newer seasons.

The first hypothesis is divided into five parts. Hypothesis 1a stated that General American will be the most used accent, there will be more male characters, and that male characters will use more non-standard accents than female characters. The first part of this hypothesis is confirmed, as General American is the most used in South Park. Furthermore, there are many more male than female characters which confirms part “1b” of the hypothesis. The usage of RP, which is also a standard accent, is lower than expected. GA is the dominating accent, and this is possibly because South Park is set in an American town, and that the main audience for South Park is people from the US. An unexpected result was that female are slightly more likely than male characters to use non-standard American English in South Park. However, looking at which non-standard accents are used we can see that male characters are more likely to speak Southern American English and AAVE. Female characters have more accent diversity among the non-standard accents.

Hypothesis 1c states that unsophisticated characters will speak more non-standard accents than neutral characters. This is supported in the findings, but there are not as many unsophisticated characters in South Park as expected, which opens for further research. There are more male unsophisticated characters than female, and since many unsophisticated characters speak with a non-standard accent, this correlates to hypothesis 1b which states that male characters speak more non-standard than females. There is not a given that speaking non-standard means that the character is unsophisticated, but there is an increase with the usage of NST among unsophisticated characters. Almost half of the Southern accented characters are unsophisticated which also correlates with previous studies where the Southern accent is rated low for status.

Hypothesis 1d states that bad characters will speak more non-standard accents than neutral characters, and that foreign characters are more likely to be portrayed as bad than native characters. Bad characters usage of non-standard American English correlates to their overall accent representation in South Park. The main finding here is that the usage of GA is reduced in both older and newer seasons for bad characters. There is no correlation between speaking English with a foreign accent and the character trait “bad”, meaning the second part of 1c is refuted. Hypothesis 1e states that non-human characters will speak more non-standard accents than the human characters. The correlation between species and accent showed the same trends as the overall accent representation, with a majority of characters speaking GA, thus refuting this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 states that foreign accents will vary in broadness from weak to strong. Furthermore, countries with similar cultural values and/or geographical position to the US will have fewer accent differences between character groups. Foreign accents do vary from weak broadness to mild broadness. The two foreign accent groups Western European and American have mostly mild accents, while the accent groups Eastern European and Asian have more broad accents than mild. This correlates with the hypothesis that culturally and geographically distant characters are more likely to have a broader accent, and the hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 states that there is less accent diversity and fewer accent differences between character groups in the newer seasons. Looking at the numbers in the analysis this is confirmed. The usage of GA has increased, non-standard accent has decreased and there is more uniformity among character accents.

5.2 Contributions of this thesis

The present thesis provides an insight in how language attitudes are reflected in popular media, and hopefully it has contributed to increased understanding of accent use in South Park. As the media shapes people's attitudes, it is important to understand which attitudes are presented. The results for the present thesis are mostly in line with previous studies which show a great deal stereotypical accent use. Even though previous studies discussed in this study revolve around television series and films for children, the results are very similar. There is an increased use of General American and keeps moving towards less use of stereotypes and even more standardization. However, where the majority of previous research show that male characters are more likely to speak the non-standard varieties, South Park does not follow this pattern as they have a higher representation among female characters in the non-standard category. This might be because of the female characters are less "traditionally feminine" compared to for example Disney characters.

To my knowledge, this is the only study of its kind where language attitudes are explored in South Park with a focus on diachronic change between the oldest two seasons and the four newest seasons. Furthermore, this study focuses on foreign characters from the entire South Park universe and how they are portrayed in sense of broadness of accent related to their country of origin, which is an important contribution to the field of language attitudes and specifically societal treatment studies. This thesis might also inspire new aspiring linguists to study language attitudes in TV series aimed at an adult audience, because even though they are not as easily influenced by language attitudes as children they will still be influenced in some ways. Moreover, South Park is a satirical show which means that they do not refrain from being offensive, which is quite unique for studying this type of television series.

5.3 Limitations and further research

During the process of conducting this study, I soon figured out that this would have to be a small-scale study. As South Park has released a new season every year since 1997, it would require far too much time to analyze every season and it would not have been possible due to the limited time and scope of MA thesis. I also made the choice of making the older and newer characters not overlap, which made the analysis good from a diachronic perspective, but limited the overall results due to recurring characters being omitted. It would be interesting to dive deeper into the South Park universe, including all characters from all seasons to get a clearer view of the bigger picture. Furthermore, separating foreign characters in South Park into two categories similar to my thesis, just on a larger scale, would be fascinating if every foreign accented character was included. Including “non-human” characters from all seasons would also be interesting to look at, as South Park has very many characters in this category. I was a bit disappointed when I learned through my analysis that there is so few non-human characters included in the seasons evaluated, as I am well aware of the potential in this category. Some episodes even have a majority of non-human characters, and it would be interesting to analyze these in light of other character traits and accent. Moreover, it would be fascinating to get insight into the creative process and how choices are made regarding character traits and accents.

Further research might also include comparing South Park with other TV series with a similar audience, to see if there are any differences in terms of language attitudes and foreign characters. One of the most interesting findings of the present thesis is that characters linked either culturally or geographically with the US are presented similarly, but distant characters are portrayed as more obscure and foreign and with a broad accent. Hopefully the present thesis can inspire other studies on foreign-accented characters and the correlations between accents broadness and social-geographical factors.

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