A "Whole" New World of Accents:

A Societal Treatment Study of Accent Use and Stereotyping in Disney's Originals and Remakes

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Summary in Norwegian

Formålet med denne masteroppgaven har vært å se på bruken av engelske uttalevarianter ("accents") i originale animasjonsfilmer fra Disney og i nyinnspilte utgaver av disse filmene. Mellom 2019 og 2023 lanserte Disney åtte realfilmer ("live-action") av animerte klassikere utgitt mellom 1940 og 1998. Flere av originalfilmene undersøkt i oppgaven er omdiskuterte. Dette tydeliggjøres ved at Disney på sin strømmetjeneste Disney+ erkjenner tilstedeværelsen av stereotypier knyttet til ulike minoriteter i samfunnet. Et av målene med oppgaven har derfor vært å undersøke hvordan og i hvilken grad endrede holdninger i samfunnet blir gjenspeilet i de nyinnspilte filmene. Oppgaven har videre forsøkt å identifisere systematiske korrelasjoner mellom karaktertrekk og karakterenes bruk av ulike engelske uttalevarianter, da dette kan gjenspeile eksisterende språkholdninger i samfunnet. Totalt ble 331 karakterer klassifisert etter deres alder og kjønn, viktigheten av deres rolle i filmene, deres moralske ståsted, om de var sofistikerte, og om de var mennesker, menneskelignende vesen eller dyr.

Resultatene fra oppgaven blir sammenlignet med tilsvarende studier som har sett på bruk av engelske uttalevarianter innen film og TV. Dette inkluderer blant annet Rosina Lippi-Green sin studie fra 1997, som tar for seg Disney sine animasjonsfilmer utgitt mellom 1937 og 1994. Oppgavens funn blir i tillegg sammenlignet med andre masteroppgaver hvor hennes studie er brukt som et utgangspunkt for videre forskning.

Analysedelen av oppgaven viser at det har skjedd en endring i hvordan ulike uttalevarianter fremstilles i karakterene. Mens originalfilmene bygger på stigmatiserende stereotypier knyttet til karakterer som snakker afro-amerikansk engelsk dagligtale eller engelsk med utenlandsk aksent, er slike fremstillinger helt fraværende i de nye versjonene. I de opprinnelige filmene dominerer dessuten standard amerikansk, mens de nyere utgavene generelt viser mer representative fremstillinger av filmenes omgivelser, og har derfor en større andel karakterer som snakker engelsk med utenlandsk aksent. Likevel er det fremdeles forskjeller i måten kvinnelige og mannlige, så vel som yngre og voksne karakterer snakker på. Karakterer med regionale engelske uttalevarianter fremstilles dessuten som mindre sofistikerte og i større grad som onde. De innehar i tillegg mindre viktige roller enn karakterene som snakker standard amerikansk eller standard britisk. Med andre ord er det fremdeles systematiske korrelasjoner mellom bruk av engelske uttalevarianter og karaktertrekk, selv om realfilmene unngår stereotypibruk som direkte omhandler spesifikke kulturer eller minoriteter. Disney sine realfilmer gjenspeiler altså endringer i samfunnet, men måten ulike uttalevarianter brukes i disse filmene kan fremdeles bidra til å opprettholde stereotypier.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Aim and scope

The portrayals of various language varieties in the entertainment industry play a vital role in shaping the way children perceive different groups of people. Rosina Lippi-Green's (1997) seminal study highlights how children learn from industries that produce entertainment, such as film and television, to be skeptical of people who diverge from the majority culture, and her study focuses on how minority groups and marginalized people are stigmatized through stereotypical language portrayals. Similarly, Towbin et al. (2004) highlight that certain Disney films convey the idea that characters need to share mutual beliefs and principles to achieve harmony in their lives (cf. section 2.2.1). This means that children learn early in life to associate with people who are similar to them and to distrust those who diverge from their own culture, i.e., what is being shown on television as the superior culture. Furthermore, Dragojevic et al. (2016: 77) highlight how the different linguistic varieties as presented in the media, for example through film or television, are crucial in forming people's attitudes toward different language varieties. However, in real life, the problem lies in the fact that various media have tended to show stereotypical language portrayals, which can ultimately lead to prejudiced associations toward marginalized groups of people being permanently stored in people's minds (cf. Dragojevic et al. 2016: 77 in section 2.4.4). Consequently, what children are shown through entertainment media in their formative years is likely to affect how they, as adults, perceive other cultures and groups of people.

Taking this into account, this master's thesis will investigate how different English accents are portrayed in eight Disney classics released between 1940 and 1998 and eight live-action remakes of these films released between 2019 and 2023. This thesis will try to uncover systematic correlations between character traits and the use of different English accents. Several of these films are particularly interesting since they have generated substantial profits, which means that they have been watched by many people. Many societal changes such as political correctness and increased gender equality have occurred since the original films were made, which can be illustrated by Disney+ putting a warning sign to the viewer before playing *Dumbo* (1941), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), and *Aladdin* (1992). This study will therefore try to elaborate on how societal changes are incorporated into the remakes and, hence, discuss the differences between the older and the more recent set of films. Given that Disney is

currently one of the most successful film studios globally (see section 2.3.1), one might expect this studio to show a greater initiative in staying aligned with the societal changes that have occurred since the release of its original films. Thus, as the title suggests, this thesis will explore whether we encounter a whole new world of accents, i.e., a new way of portraying accents in the remakes.

The study at hand can be characterized as a societal treatment study, which the language in question is looked at in terms of how it is mediated to the public. These studies can thus provide information about how the public perceives various language varieties, such as accents (see section 3.1.3). To successfully elaborate on these assumptions, the characters in the films will be classified in terms of the following character variables: *gender*, *age*, *character role*, *alignment*, *level of sophistication*, and *species*, as well as a variable related to *accent realism*, that is, whether they use accents that reflect the setting of the films. To study systematic correlations between accents[1] and character variables, the following accent categories have been included in the thesis after the data collection was finished: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), Regional American English (Reg. AmE), Regional British English (Reg. BrE), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and English with a foreign accent. Based on the results, this study will analyze whether the Walt Disney Company has incorporated societal change in the remakes, by exploring to what extent stereotypes, prejudices, and racism have been an issue concerning the accents of the characters in the older versions and discuss to what extent that is still the case in more recent films.

This master's thesis has been inspired by Lippi-Green's (1997) pioneer study on language attitudes that focuses on animation films by Disney released between 1937 and 1994. Furthermore, this study constitutes a follow-up study of various other master's theses that have also been inspired by Lippi-Green (1997). One of them is Urke (2019), who analyzed correlations between characters' use of different English accents and their character traits in Disney's originals and remakes, which precede those treated in the present study. Furthermore, other studies that are instrumental in shaping the research interest of this master's thesis include Sønnesyn (2011), who investigated the portrayal of different English accents in Disney's animated feature films released in the years after Lippi-Green (1997), and Madland (2022), who analyzed Disney's animated TV shows.

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[1] The terms *accent* and *dialect* refer to different aspects of language. A general definition of *dialect* is provided by Trudgill (2000: 5), who states that this term refers to "differences between kinds of language which are differences of vocabulary and grammar as well as pronunciation". In contrast, *accent* is employed when referring only to "differences of pronunciation" (Trudgill 2000: 5). This thesis focuses on the language features related to the characters' accents.

1.2   Research questions and hypotheses

The study will be guided by the two research questions listed below. These have been chosen to investigate systematic correlations between the characters' accents and their character traits in the films. The research questions for this study are also largely inspired by previous studies that share the same research interest (see section 2.4). The following are the research questions for this study:

RQ1: Are there systematic correlations between accents and character traits in Disney originals released between 1940 and 1998 and live-action remakes released between 2019 and 2023?

RQ2: Have there been changes in the accent portrayals in the remakes that may be connected with currently ongoing societal changes?

The hypotheses for this thesis are linked with several of the character variables that aim to give answers to the two research questions listed above. Furthermore, these are largely inspired by previous societal treatment studies, such as Sønnesyn (2011), Urke (2019), and Madland (2022). Because political correctness has changed our attitudes toward language when it comes to stereotypical accent portrayals (cf. sections 2.2 and 2.3.2), the remakes are generally expected to show smaller variations within the character variables between different groups of characters. The hypotheses for this thesis are listed below:

H1: Standard accents will predominate among the characters in the originals, while there will be more accent diversity in the remakes.

H2: Female characters will be underrepresented and use standard accents to a greater extent than male characters in the originals, while the remakes will have smaller differences in accent use between genders.

H3: Young characters will speak in a more standardized manner than adult and old characters in the originals, whereas the remakes will have smaller differences in accent use between the various age groups.

H4: The originals will display more stereotypical use of accents than the remakes.

Hypothesis 4 is divided into the following sub-hypotheses.

a) In the originals, main characters will use standard accents to a greater extent than supporting and peripheral characters. The remakes will have smaller differences in accent use between the different character roles.

b) Good characters will use GA or socially attractive accents to a greater extent than bad and neutral characters in the originals, whereas the remakes will have smaller differences in accent use in terms of alignment.

c) Sophisticated characters will speak in a more standardized manner than unsophisticated characters in the originals. The remakes will display smaller differences in accent use in terms of level of sophistication.

d) Human and humanlike characters will speak in a more standardized manner than animal characters in the originals. The remakes will display smaller differences in accent use amongst the various species.

e) The originals will draw on stigmatizing accent portrayals with respect to characters speaking AAVE and English with a foreign accent. The remakes will avoid such stigmatizing portrayals.

H5: Characters will have accents that to a greater extent reflect the setting of the films in the remakes than in the originals.

1.3   The structure of this thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Following this brief introduction, Chapter 2 will outline the theoretical framework. The methodology of this thesis is then presented in Chapter 3. After that, the results of my data will be shown and discussed in Chapter 4, before a summary of the findings and a conclusion to the master's project is provided in the fifth and final chapter of this thesis. A more detailed description is given at the beginning of each chapter.

2.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis is sketched. Section 2.1 first provides a definition of attitudes and discusses language attitudes, including the differences between standard and nonstandard varieties of English and how they relate to language attitudes. Section 2.2 shifts the focus of this chapter toward stereotypes and the media, focusing on how these stereotypes are incorporated into the films and television shows that children watch. Furthermore, this section includes a segment on adaptations since half of the films in this study are remakes of animated Disney classics. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the Walt Disney Company, and the ethical responsibility of Disney in a time of political correctness is discussed. Finally, section 2.4 presents previous studies on language attitudes that are important to the study at hand.

2.1   Background on language attitudes

Research on language attitudes contributes to the broader field of sociolinguistics, which is centered around the interplay between society and language (Trudgill 2000: 21). According to Hudson (1996: 1), there has been a great increase in sociolinguistic studies since the 1960s. During that period, William Labov (1966), who is considered by many as one of the pioneers of modern sociolinguistic studies, conducted research on social stratification in some of New York's department stores (Bayley & Lucas 2007: 1). Labov's study was crucial for subsequent studies on language attitudes as it showed that the stratification of /r/ was "clear and consistent" across the three department stores Saks, Macy's, and S. Klein (Labov 2006 [1966]: 46). Furthermore, Wardhaugh (2015: 1) states that sociolinguistic research centers around the study of people's daily lives and how language works in their informal conversations and within the media they consume. Similarly, Meyerhoff (2011: 3) highlights that part of sociolinguistic research is about uncovering how social factors can be linked to various language varieties and the different components of language itself. As that aim also applies to the present study, this section will discuss human attitudes and their relations to language in more detail.

2.1.1 Attitudes and language

Although many researchers have attempted to define attitudes, it has proven difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of this concept. One of the first definitions of attitudes is that presented by Gordon Allport (1935) in his chapter on attitudes in the book *A Handbook of Social Psychology.* In this chapter, Allport discusses how attitudes are "never directly observed". Still, if we do not recognize and infer the presence of attitudes as part of our humanity, it will be difficult to provide a satisfactory explanation for the patterns in how individuals behave and the overall cohesion of a society (Allport 1935: 839). In a later publication, Allport states that attitudes can be viewed as "a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way" (Allport 1954 in Garrett 2010: 19). This definition shows that our attitudes have to do with the thoughts and the way we act toward others, and human attitudes are therefore not restricted to our feelings toward something or someone. Oppenheim (1982) provides another influential definition when discussing attitudes:

> An attitude is a construct, an abstraction which cannot be directly apprehended. It is an inner component of mental life which expresses itself, directly or indirectly, through such more obvious processes as stereotypes and beliefs, verbal statements or reactions, ideas and opinions, selective recall, anger or satisfaction or some other emotion; and in various other aspects of behaviour. (Oppenheim 1982: 39)

Oppenheim suggests that our attitudes have been *constructed* by human beings. By viewing attitudes as "constructs", it becomes clear that human attitudes develop as we socialize and are surrounded by others. While some attitudes are inherited culturally through our family and friends, others are inflicted upon us by society since they are partly construed by the media, i.e., they are first shaped and then often reshaped at a later point. Oppenheim also draws a line between human attitudes and our beliefs and stereotypes, which are an important part of research on language attitudes (see sections 2.1.4 and 2.2.1). Furthermore, Sarnoff (1970: 279 qtd. in Garrett 2010: 20) suggests that attitudes can be defined as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects". Garrett (2010: 20) notes that this definition is important for subsequent definitions, due to its simplicity. Based on this definition, Garrett (2010: 20) concludes that we can assume that "an attitude is an evaluative orientation to a social object of some sort", which can be a language or a new protocol or initiative by a government. Moreover, he maintains that an attitude can be understood as a "disposition" that contains a level of stability that makes it recognizable (Garrett 2010: 20).

Oppenheim's (1982) and Allport's (1954) definitions can be said to have laid the foundation for Garrett (2010: 23) arguing that language attitudes have been considered by many to consist of three central components. These three components include *cognition*, *affect*, and *behavior*. Attitudes may be considered *cognitive* because they encompass beliefs concerning our world and the connections between socially significant entities (Garrett 2010: 23). For instance, certain accents like Cockney in the UK and the New York accent in the US have often been associated with the working classes in the respective countries (cf. sections 3.3.3.1 and 3.3.4.5). In addition, attitudes are considered *affective* as they include sentiments regarding the object that is evaluated (Garrett 2010: 23). One may therefore consider the affective component of our attitudes as a measure of "favourability and unfavourability" (Garrett 2010: 23). Finally, the last component of our attitudes is related to *behavior* and has to do with our tendency to act in particular ways. This may involve acting in ways that are in line with our judgments, which are either emotional or cognitive in nature (Garrett 2010: 23). For instance, students with regional accents who attend a prestigious university might try to reduce their accents when they begin to enroll in their studies for fear of confusing their classmates and to avoid encountering stereotypes or prejudice toward their way of speaking. Consequently, *cognition*, *affect*, and *behavior* are all integral components of human attitudes.

When conducting research on language attitudes, researchers are concerned with the types of evaluations that people give to different varieties of a language (Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan 2022: 168). In their article looking at previous studies on language attitudes and what the future looks like for this type of research, Dragojevic et al. (2021: 61) state that the central component of studies on language attitudes has been to study *evaluative beliefs*. These beliefs can be separated into two main parts which are beliefs concerning the various varieties of language themselves as well as those that specifically center around the speakers of these varieties (Dragojevic et al. 2021: 61). In addition, Dragojevic et al. (2021: 61) point out that that there are three primary evaluative dimensions that language-related beliefs have in common, including *structure* (e.g. whether there is logic to language), *value* (e.g. whether language is perceived as pleasing to the ear) and *sound* (e.g. whether the sounds of a language are perceived as soft). At the same time, *status* and *solidarity* are two essential evaluative dimensions that merge with those perceptions regarding speakers (Dragojevic et al. 2021: 61–62; Edwards 1999: 102). Edwards (1999: 102) argues that the way speakers are evaluated typically has to do with either their level of competence as speakers (whether they are seen as intelligent), their own integrity (whether they seem helpful or trustworthy), or to what extent they appear socially attractive (whether they seem friendly or value a sense of humor).

Furthermore, an important aspect of these evaluative dimensions is how they correlate with each other. As pointed out by Dragojevic et al. (2021: 62), beliefs regarding the structure of language are strongly correlated with how speakers' status is viewed, while the beliefs about the sounds of language are strongly correlated with how speakers' solidarity is evaluated. Thus, people's evaluations are the core element of any attitudinal study regarding language.

Garrett (2010: 2) states that our attitudes extend to all the different levels of language such as pronunciation, grammar, accent and dialect, and spelling. One explanation as to why people associate different feelings with various accents might be that each accent possesses distinctive qualities in its sound patterns. Edwards (1999: 102), for instance, points out that accents can be different in terms of their aesthetic qualities, although this should not be seen in terms of being superior or inferior, which can cause those accents that sound more appealing to the ear or that are harmonious or melodious to attract more positive reactions from listeners. A different perspective is provided by Milroy (2001: 532), who argues that the prestige associated with different linguistic varieties is not inherent, because this prestige is only acquired when those that use these varieties are seen as important in society. This is because people attribute prestige to certain groups of people or types of objects. In addition, regarding pronunciation and prestige, Montgomery (2008: 74) emphasizes that certain sounds are considered "pleasant" or "correct", while others are stigmatized as "ugly" or "incorrect". However, Coggle (1993: 86) states that the perceptions that people have about a linguistic variety are unique to each person, which explains why some people may consider an accent as "elegant", while another group of people may consider the same variety as "elitist and exclusive." Consequently, the sounds of accents can play an important role in how accents are being evaluated, even though each person perceives these sounds differently.

2.1.2   Previous studies on attitudes toward different English accents

People who have participated in language attitude studies have evaluated English accents differently. Some systematic patterns seem, however, to have been established. Regional accents are, for instance, often considered less prestigious and socially attractive than standard accents. One of the first studies to point this out is Howard Giles's (1970) study. In Giles's study, the matched-guise technique is used to investigate how teenagers in the United Kingdom evaluate various regional accents of British English as well as foreign accents based on their perceived "aesthetic", "communicative" and "status" qualities (Giles 1970: 211). In this study, important components of students' evaluations of accents include factors related to the respondents' sex, their ages, the social classes to which they belong, as well as their regional

origins and affiliations (Giles 1970: 211). Because Giles's study has often been cited in subsequent articles on accent evaluations, the BBC decided to replicate his study in the early 2000s by creating the *Voices* survey (Bishop, Coupland & Garett 2005: 131). Bishop, Coupland & Garett (2005: 132 and 139) highlight that the *Voices* survey shows that in terms of social attractiveness people tend to favor accents that match their own, while RP is rated most favorably in Giles's (1970) study. Looking at the same data from the *Voices* survey, Coupland & Bishop (2007: 85) state that the respondents consider "their own accents […], plus *Southern Irish English*, *Scottish English*, *Edinburgh English* and *New Zealand English*" to be more socially attractive than "*Queen's English*". This marks an interesting change from Giles's (1970) study where Queen's English and accents generally associated with RP dominate. However, Coupland & Bishop (2007: 80 and 84–85) find that urban varieties, especially those from Birmingham, Glasgow, and Liverpool, are ranked most poorly in terms of both social attractiveness and prestige. Thus, even though many people have favored accents that sound similar to their own accent, RP speakers have traditionally been favored in the UK compared to speakers of other accents.

In the United States, Standard American English (SAE[2]) has often been considered the most prestigious accent in the country. Moreover, while Southern American English has often been linked to social attractiveness, the New York accent has been poorly rated by both people living within the New York area and people from other areas of the US (see section 3.3.3.1). Heaton & Nygaard's (2011) study analyzes how 64 university students evaluate the Standard American English accent and the Southern American English accent in terms of prestige and social attractiveness. In their study, passages are read aloud to students in these two accents. The results of their study show that the resondents consider those who have a Southern American English accent to sound friendlier, more amusing, and nicer, as well as sounding more polite than those who speak Standard American English. In comparison, those who speak Standard American English are seen as more educated, smarter, intelligent, and arrogant (Heaton & Nygaard 2011: 206–207). Thus, as with British English accents, the most prestigious American English accent, that is, the standard accent, is not necessarily the one considered most friendly or attractive.

Studies have also indicated that those speaking English with a foreign accent are rated lower in terms of social attractiveness and prestige compared to speakers of Standard American English. In their 2022 study, Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan examine the attitudes of American

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[2] Standard American English (SAE) corresponds to General American (GA) in this thesis.

people toward nine non-Anglo foreign accents in comparison to Standard American English. These accents include Arabic, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Hispanic, Mandarin, Russian, and Vietnamese (Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan 2022: 167). Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan's study shows that Americans consider speakers with foreign accents to be more difficult to interpret than speakers of Standard American English. Furthermore, speakers with a foreign accent are rated as having lower solidarity and status than SAE speakers (Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan 2022: 167). Like Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan (2022), Coupland & Bishop (2007: 80) note how English with an Asian pronunciation in the BBC's *Voices* survey is among the lowest-rated accents in terms of both prestige and social attractiveness. Thus, foreign English accents are typically rated more poorly than standard English accents when it comes to prestige and social attractiveness.

2.1.3   Language and standardization

An important question within sociolinguistics is what the relationship is between the standard and nonstandard forms of a language. Typically, a linguistic variety of the language has emerged and later dominated in different sectors of society, thus becoming the standard variety. According to Lippi-Green (2012: 59), standard language varieties represent the most cultivated forms of speech typically associated with people working in professional fields who have attained high proficiency in the written language. Furthermore, Milroy (2001: 542) points out that the English language over time has become increasingly standardized, due to cultural changes concerning language ideologies and standardization that have become gradually more accepted by people. Received Pronunciation, for example, became prestigious historically since it was "the speech style characteristic of the commercial and political center (London)" (Malmstrom 1967 in Giles, Bourhis & Davies 1979: 591). This prestige made RP superior to the regional varieties spoken throughout the country. Mugglestone (2003: 279–280) highlights that as RP gradually became more associated with prestige, people generally began to equate "talking proper" with "talking posh". Therefore, the elites of British society were able to impose their accent on others throughout the country because they were the ones in power. This illustrates that any group, perceiving themselves as the majority, can monopolize an accent as the standard, and thereby influence those that are in the minority.

Even though standard varieties like RP and GA have traditionally been considered the most prestigious, this does not mean that they have been considered the most socially attractive accents. Hodson (2014: 33) states that standard varieties of English tend to score lower on social attractiveness than prestige and that speakers of nonstandard varieties are rated as more reliable,

approachable, and friendlier. In some cases, it can even be disadvantageous for someone to acquire a refined accent since the people and communities who use various regional forms of English find these regional varieties to be an important part of their identities (Hodson 2014: 32). Thus, for numerous communities, their regional accent is a way to express a sense of belonging. Hodson even argues that many call centers can be found in places where local accents[3] prevail for this reason (Hodson 2014: 33). Therefore, nonstandard varieties serve as an important way of bringing communities together, which could explain why some of these accents score higher than standard ones for social attractiveness.

As standard accents have traditionally been those used on the most important television networks in several countries (see Honey 1991: 99; Montgomery 2008: 84), they have had a great advantage in reaching more corners of the world. Therefore, the media of the last century have contributed greatly to the spread of standard accents in different places within English-speaking countries, especially in those areas where local varieties prevail (Honey 1991: 99). Milroy & Milroy (2012: 25) emphasize that although the media cannot affect the rate at which people begin to use a standard variety of a language, the media has effectively raised awareness about the spoken variety most accepted by society, which has come to be known as BBC English or RP. Montgomery (2008: 84) states that it was unusual for the BBC to include any other accent than RP in their broadcasting until the 1960s, which led to RP being known as BBC English. This meant that the channel's presenters and those reading the news or conducting the interviews had to master this English accent, because they were seen as having "institutional" voices (Montgomery 2008: 84). Yet, as societal changes that encouraged more diversity within broadcasting were happening within the UK, regional accents began to be heard on television and radio more frequently (Montgomery 2008: 84). Therefore, although the media has been an influential contributor to the standardization of English, recent changes in attitudes toward this language have led to more diverse representations.

However, this does not imply that the media now functions as an impartial institution when it comes to enforcing the standard accent, especially when considering the accents portrayed on television. With respect to American primetime television being dominated by Standard American English, Dragojevic et al. (2016: 75) argue that the media gives the impression that standard accents are not only the "best" ways of speaking but rather should be seen as the "NORM". Moreover, if someone insists on using nonstandard accents, they are usually perceived as either "lacking in mental capacity" or to be affected by "some inherent

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[3] Hodson (2014) applies the term *dialect*, which in North America is often used synonymously with accent (see Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2012: 3).

flaw in character" (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 75). The media has therefore a clear role in deciding which linguistic variety will be considered dominant or mainstream within a country. It also shows which forms of speech are not considered appropriate or educated, even if this is not done purposefully. However, as Hodson (2014: 25) argues, one must keep in mind that when a standard form develops in a language, other varieties that are not meant to have the same role often start being more stigmatized, which ultimately leads to decay. An example of this is how other varieties that were not chosen to serve as the standard form began to be seen as less attractive and prestigious after society's elites chose "London English" (Hodson 2014: 25). Therefore, major platforms like media outlets and film producers play an important role in standardizing language, and this contributes to nonstandard forms of language being less used.

2.1.4 Language and stereotypes

As mentioned in the section on attitudes and language (2.1.1), stereotypes play into the way we evaluate other people's way of speech. In the chapter "Stereotypes in our culture", Allport (1954: 191) states how "a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category" regardless of whether it is perceived as "favorable or unfavorable". Since exaggerated beliefs are often used negatively toward a group of people, they often become a justification for people to act in a certain way toward others (Allport 1954: 191). Hughes (2010: 41) reaffirms this belief by saying that the stereotypes we have implemented about a specific group of people are usually influenced by prejudice. Furthermore, Hughes explains humans' habit of stereotyping others as follows:

> Usually the "home" nationality sees itself in positive terms, stereotyping outsiders and foreigners by negative characterizations such as idleness, dirtiness, inefficiency, stupidity, meanness, cowardice, aggressiveness, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and perversion. (Hughes 2010: 41)

Hughes (2010) emphasizes that people generally tend to favor themselves and others who share a similar history or culture. This definition also indicates that people add negative characteristics to other people who do not meet their criteria as a way of creating distance to what they consider to be foreign to their culture and lives. Furthermore, Garrett (2010: 33) discusses how diverse styles and varieties of language can evoke different assumptions about the person speaking and their social status in society. These beliefs are thought to be affected by language ideologies, which Garrett says can lead to prejudiced presumptions about other groups of people (Garrett 2010: 33). Similarly, Honey (1991: 65) states that there is a human

tendency to attribute broad presumptions about the common values and characteristics associated with specific groups of people to different accents, and that the stereotypes linked to different people determine how speakers' accents are evaluated. In other words, when people speak a specific linguistic variety, certain beliefs will be triggered toward their way of speaking which can lead to stereotyping.

If an accent is generally perceived as harder to understand and contains sounds absent from one's own phoneme inventory, people might think more poorly of this variety than of an accent they are more familiar with. For instance, Lippi-Green (2012: 186) argues that stereotypes relating to speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) have been created mainly by the industries that produce people's entertainment. Indeed, these industries made people believe that "Black speech was the lingo of criminals, dope pushers, teenage hoodlums, and various and sundry hustlers, who spoke in 'muthafuckas' and 'pussy-copping raps'" (Smitherman 1988: 84 qtd. in Lippi-Green 2012: 187). Therefore, language-related stereotypes are a way for people to distance themselves from others who are different in one or more ways.

The stigma associated with certain accents might explain why standard forms of English tend to be used more frequently by women than by men. Labov (1990: 210) argues that nonstandard accents are more typically associated with men, as they are not expected to sound as prestigious when speaking, while women tend to feel more obligated to do so. Similarly, Coupland & Bishop (2007: 81) state that "[i]t is very well known that women tend to use 'more standard' speech than men do for a given social class and speaking context." However, their study indicates that although women do not consider their own speech form to be prestigious or socially attractive, they usually regard regional accents as such (Coupland & Bishop 2007: 81). Meyerhoff (2011: 219) argues that women could simply be more aware of the differences between standard and nonstandard accents, and this might affect their speech as they tend to focus more on overall appearance. In general, because women tend to focus more on how other people judge them, they strive more frequently for standard English accents.

2.2 Shaping and reshaping language attitudes in the media

2.2.1 The impact of language stereotypes in children's films

The language used in films has proven to be an important way to potentially perpetuate stereotypes in our society. Kozloff (2000: 82) states that rather than being aware of whether those accents that diverge from the chosen standard are accurate, film producers have generally

misused nonstandard accents[4] in films to portray characters as "silly, quaint, or stupid." Furthermore, Lippi-Green (1997: 81) points out that "film uses language variation and accent to draw character quickly" since this kind of media expands upon ingrained preconceptions linked to people from various ethnic, regional, economic, or racial backgrounds. Consequently, the use of various language varieties in animated films may evoke either favorable or unfavorable associations toward different groups of people (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 85). We can thus assume that film studios may strategically apply a particular accent to provoke reactions from their viewers.

Several studies have been carried out that have looked at how language from various groups of people has been depicted in films and television series, with those referring to films that have children as their primary target being particularly interesting. One reason for this is that children are more easily affected by attitudes toward language than adults. Lippi-Green (1997: 81) argues that children's views of different racial groups and of people who have different places of origin than themselves are restricted to what they are shown on television and through films by dominating entertainment companies like Disney who produce most of this material. Furthermore, Lippi-Green (1997: 103) states that the language used in different forms of entertainment influences children's perceptions and attitudes toward different language varieties. Moreover, since they learn "to be comfortable with the *same* and to be wary about *other*" while watching different forms of entertainment, they are given a lesson in what types of people they can safely approach and which ones should rather be avoided, which is reinforced and revisited through continued exposure to the media and entertainment industries as they become adults (Lippi-Green 1997: 103, author's emphasis).

Without a doubt, the media plays an important role in learning children to distinguish different groups of people based on the way they speak. Towbin et al. (2004: 20) argue that while it is true that children learn about age, gender, race, and sexual orientation from various sources, there is no denying that the media is an important tool through which children acquire knowledge and learn to adapt to society's expectations. For instance, they note a distinct pattern in many of the Disney films where the characters need to have corresponding beliefs and principles if they desire to live in harmony (Towbin et al. 2004: 33). Consequently, when heroic characters predominantly feature standard accents and villainous characters are often portrayed with regional accents, foreign accents, or accents perceived as socioeconomically inferior, children are more likely to develop stereotypes about individuals who do not belong to

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[4] Kozloff (2000) applies the term dialect, which in North America is often used synonymously with accent (see Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2012: 3).

dominant social groups. Such portrayals can contribute to associating negative characteristics with certain types of people, given their frequent depiction as villains (see sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2).

In recent years, there has been a lively discussion surrounding stereotypical accent portrayals of queer characters in films and series made for children. Lynn Reinacher (2016: 72), who examines animated films produced by the Walt Disney Animation and DreamWorks studios in her master's thesis, argues that Disney's newly released animated films continuously send "messages supporting […] traditional views on family, parenting, and marriage", and that this is also the case in the films produced by DreamWorks. In addition, Reinacher (2016: 44) states that while Oaken in Disney's *Frozen* appearing to be homosexual is a substantial shift, the way this character is portrayed should make people question how forward-thinking the producers' decision to include this character is. Reinacher highlights the fact that Oaken is the only individual who speaks with a Scandinavian accent, even though the film is set in Scandinavia. Furthermore, she criticizes how this character lives alone in the mountains, far away from the human settlements and neighboring castle, and draws parallels with how same-sex couples have previously been restricted to practicing their sexuality on the periphery of society (Reinacher 2016: 44). Therefore, Reinacher (2016: 44) assumes that Disney could risk imposing preexisting stereotypes of homosexuals on children as someone fundamentally alternative and dissimilar from the rest of civilization, even if the intention to include a character that was queer in the film is considered positive.

2.2.2 Background on adaptations

Given that half of Disney's original films in this study contain a warning sign about stereotypical character portrayals, it is relevant to look at how recent Disney adaptations have handled this stereotypical portrayal of characters speaking AAVE or English with a foreign accent. Sanders (2016: 23) argues that adaptations regularly provide commentary or analysis on a primary text. Furthermore, Sanders (2016: 23) maintains that a commentary is achieved when a new point of view of the original work is included in which either "hypothetical motivation" is introduced or what is being concealed or downplayed in the text is now foregrounded. Hutcheon (2012: 20) argues that regardless of which film the adapter intends to adapt, "adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging", and that this involves a two-step process in which the producer first interprets and then innovates, providing a new element to the original source.

However, production companies like the Walt Disney Company face challenges regarding how their viewers will react to changes in the characters or plot. For example, if characters have been particularly appreciated by viewers because of their specific accent, film studios might feel more compelled to have those characters maintain a similar accent in an adaptation. Hutcheon (2012: 4) argues that "[r]ecognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation", and that this can explain any alterations made. Giving characters certain accents is therefore an essential part of how creators of film and television tell stories. These choices about how to best narrate a story are usually elaborated on in detail by those who produce the scripts for these kinds of media. As can be seen in Hodson (2014: 3), those who produce films draw on the way people speak in their daily lives when they sketch the backgrounds of the characters or places in the films, since the different linguistic varieties provide information about their social belonging, educational background, and origins.

According to Hutcheon (2012: 7), what separates new adaptations from the originals on which they are based is that the different elements of the original storyline are not replicated even though they may be reused. Additionally, there may be several reasons why someone would want to create an adaptation of an original work. Hutcheon (2012: 7) points out that the inclination to "consume" and wipe away the memory of the original text, or to cast doubt upon it, can be as strong a motivation for a producer as the motivation to honor the original work through imitation. Furthermore, Hutcheon states that there is a tendency among film adapters to select notable works in society for adaptation because these are likely to generate revenue, and to choose material where the copyright has run out to avoid being prosecuted (Hutcheon 2012: 29). Finally, Hutcheon argues that the best adaptations have a tendency not only to persist but to thrive, and that those that are successful generally have adapted to their new environments in a manner similar to how genes "*by virtue of* mutation" [5] adapt to new surroundings[6] (Hutcheon 2012: 32).

2.3   Zooming in on Disney

2.3.1   Background on the Disney Corporation

The Walt Disney Company has arguably become one of the most influential film and television producers. The company's animated films have been widely successful, and the continued

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[5] The notion of mutations draws on Richard Dawkins's meme theory. For a more detailed description, see Dawkins (1976: 203–209).
[6] This emphasizes Oppenheim's (1982: 39) argument that our attitudes are constructs and, being non-inherited, they evolve in response to societal changes, just like how adaptations adjust to their surroundings.

importance of these films can be illustrated by how Disney has turned several of its classics into live-action remakes. Wills (2017: 131) states that Disney's influential role in people's daily lives in the 21st century is due to this company having "a truly global business model and worldwide multimedia presence." This is demonstrated by how several of the most influential TV channels that people watch, as well as major television franchises, are in the possession of the Walt Disney Company. Since all the films discussed in this thesis are produced by this film studio, an overview of the Disney Corporation will be provided.

Walt Disney created The Walt Disney Company in the fall of 1923 when he founded the Disney Brothers' Studio in California (Wills 2017: 14). Although Walt Disney's company made solid revenues from the Alice Comedies, which could be seen as "[a]n intriguing mix of cartoon and live action", problems with distribution rights affected the company's initial success (Wills 2017: 14). As the character Oswald the Lucky Rabbit was owned by Universal, Disney lost the rights to use this character after subsequent renegotiations (Wills 2017: 15; The Walt Disney Company 2023). Consequently, Walt Disney made it a policy that the company have full ownership of the characters used in his company's productions, to prevent a repeat of the Oswald case. The first character he was able to claim full ownership of was Mickey Mouse, who became very popular in the early 1930s. Later, Steamboat Willie and the Silly Symphonies helped establish Disney as an influential entertainment producer in the United States, and this success continued when Disney decided to release feature films of European classics such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 and *Pinocchio* in 1940 (Wills 2017: 15–16). However, because World War II prevented Disney from accessing international markets, the Walt Disney Company was unable to recover the high production cost of its feature films *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Fantasia* (1940) (Official Disney Fan Club 2023). Furthermore, with the failure of *Bambi* (1942), Disney would have to wait several years before producing technologically advanced films (Official Disney Fan Club 2023).

However, Disney's success culminated in the years after World War II because the company began producing nature films, standard TV broadcasts and live-action films as well as opening amusement parks, which included Disneyland in California in 1955 and later Walt Disney World in Florida in 1971 (Wills 2017: 17 and 19). Wills states that the company's great success in this period can be explained by clever marketing, musical prowess, and technological proficiency, particularly since the Disney Company focused on humor and producing content with emotional depth (Wills 2017: 18). Although Walt Disney died in 1966, his legacy continued to expand throughout the world and the Disney Company decided to release the animated films *The Jungle Book* in 1967 and *The Aristocrats* in 1970, which both showed that

animated films continued to generate revenue for the company (Official Disney Fan Club 2023). In addition, The Walt Disney Company's launch of The Disney Channel in 1983 became a huge success along with the DVD releases of animated films. Disneyland Paris also opened in 1992 and attracted 11 million visitors in its inaugural year (Official Disney Fan Club 2023).

Entering the 21st century, the Walt Disney Company continued its expansion with the opening of new theme parks in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and the company found success in various television series for teenagers on the Disney Channel such as *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical* (Wills 2017: 20). In the 2010s, the company released several live-action remakes of its classics, and this has continued into the current decade. As fewer people were watching linear television in the 2010s and more people instead began using streaming services like Netflix and HBO, the Disney Corporation chose to launch the Disney+ streaming platform in 2019. On this platform, all the series and movies produced by the company could be watched at any time (Official Disney Fan Club 2023). At present, the Disney+ streaming service ranks third after Netflix and Prime Video among the most used streaming services, and the service has acquired more than 150 million subscribers (Durrani 2024).

2.3.2   Disney's ethical responsibility

Disney has a unique way of making its films appealing to different age groups and entire families. Harrington (2015: 6) emphasizes that the Disney Company "provides a perfect example of how media can interact with society and influence culture." Towbin et al. (2004: 24) proposed back in 2004 that the animated films produced by Disney were one of the rare media forms that could be shared between different generations, and that these films were part of the lives of most children in the United States. In addition, the success of Disney films and series can be explained by how these productions facilitate an "escape". Also, part of the Disney magic lies in its ability to remove people's everyday struggles temporarily as these people are transported to unique realms and locations (Wills 2017: 37). As Disney films and series generally take place in fictional locations, where "good" people, led by a hero, fight against "bad" people, usually led by the main antagonist, these productions are well-suited for investigating people's attitudes toward language (Madland 2022: 16). One reason for this is that the characters' accents do not necessarily reflect a specific geographical location, but are chosen based on the attitudes that the general society has toward language (see Lippi-Green 2012: 103 and 113). However, several Disney classics have received criticism for racial stereotypes, as mentioned in the introductory chapter and discussed in Lippi-Green (1997) and Towbin et al. (2004). People who have a minority culture or background have seen their legends and stories

being taken, or interpreted in a new way without proper acknowledgment by Disney (Lippi-Green 2012: 103).

For this reason, it can be interesting to analyze how well the remakes of these classics have adapted to societal changes. These societal changes involve the necessity for a film studio such as Disney to consider whether its new adaptation is politically correct with respect to the time of release as well as its target audience before releasing a remake of an original film. Garrett (2010: 5) states that *political correctness* includes language that is not considered harmful toward other racial groups, genders and sexes, or sexualities. One would therefore expect Disney's newer films to avoid language that could be considered harmful to different ethnicities or races and to specific genders or sexualities. Hughes (2010: 40) emphasizes this expectation when he states that an important part of political correctness is how it makes us engaged in modifying our language and altering deeply rooted attitudes, which he explains often derive from stereotypes that stem from folklore, group prejudices or a general lack of knowledge.

In more recent years, political correctness has gained even greater momentum as the term *woke* has become increasingly popular in the United States and beyond. According to Atkins (2023: 321), a *woke* person is "aware of social injustices and oppression". Furthermore, Atkins points out that a woke person tends to not easily believe or accept that people who are oppressed in groups have negativity in their personae or have acted contrary to society's expectations and desires (Atkins 2023: 322). Consequently, entertainment producers such as the Walt Disney Company may risk being *canceled* by audiences if they include characters that have a stereotypical nature that is particularly offensive to specific groups of people. According to the Cambridge Dictionary*, cancel culture* can be defined as "a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject and stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you" (*Cambridge Dictionary* 2024). Thus, the rise of wokeness has made companies more aware of the extent to which they are perpetuating stereotypes.

However, Atkins also claims that the press representing the voices of people regarded as right-wing has often negatively used the term "woke" to refer to progressive policymaking (Atkins 2023: 321). This statement is reflected in how some Disney fans have criticized that Disney has altered some of the stories from the originals in the remakes and have therefore been accused of becoming "too woke" (Power 2023). These changes include Disney casting the black actress Halle Bailey in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) remake to play the protagonist, Ariel, who is white and redhead in the original Disney film. They also involve Rachel Zegler, who descends

from Poland and Colombia, to play Snow White in the upcoming *Snow White* (2025) remake as well as a discussion related to the depiction of the seven dwarves in this film, both as magical creatures of various genders and ethnicities and, more recently, as CGI figures (Power 2023, Brazier & Lawes 2023). Power (2023) also notes how other fans consider older Mickey Mouse House content to be "outdated" and "offensive" and that they, therefore, suggest that instead of revisiting its timeless works, the Walt Disney Company should focus on making new programs. Consequently, the ongoing debates regarding Disney classics and remakes highlight the importance for a company like Disney to stay connected with societal developments and prevent negative fan reactions that could potentially have consequences for the company.

2.4   Previous research on language attitudes

This section summarizes a selection of societal treatment studies focusing on Disney, including Lippi-Green (1997/2012), as well as a number of influential studies on language attitudes in different entertainment areas such as children's animation series on television (Dobrow & Gidney 1988) and American primetime television (Dragojevic et al. 2016).

2.4.1   Lippi-Green (1997/2012): "Teaching children how to discriminate"

One of the most influential societal treatment studies[7] on language attitudes was conducted by Rosina Lippi-Green in 1997 when she published the book *English with an Accent*. This book draws parallels between the traits of Disney characters and their accents in animated films released between 1937[8] and 1994. More specifically, her book takes a critical approach toward the stereotypical portrayal of accents and raises concerns about how these films contribute to discriminatory perceptions about race and culture. In 2012, Lippi-Green released an updated edition that included 14 new animated films released after the publication of the original book. The idea that "children are systematically exposed to a standard language ideology by means of linguistic stereotypes in film or television entertainment" is the premise of Lippi-Green's study (Lippi-Green 2012: 101). In addition, Lippi-Green (1997: 86) chose to focus on animated films produced by the Disney Corporation, as it was the biggest producer of these types of films when she conducted her research. Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2012: 111) finds the study of animated films particularly interesting, as they "offer a unique way to study how a dominant

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[7] Lippi-Green's study (1997) was one of the first studies to be later classified as a societal treatment study. The concept is defined and elaborated upon in section 3.1.3.
[8] Lippi-Green uses the US release date for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938), whereas 1937 is the initial year of release for this film.

culture reaffirms its control over subordinate cultures and nations by re-establishing […] their preferred view of the world as right and proper and primary."

In her 1997 study, Lippi-Green (1997: 87) finds that Mainstream US English (MUSE[9]) accounts for approximately 43 percent of the total accent distribution among the 371 characters that are contained in her study. Additionally, the characters' ethical motivations are tied to their accents. Compared to characters with positive ethical motivations, where American English, particularly GA is dominant, the results show a higher percentage of British English accents, as well as characters speaking English with a foreign accent among characters with mixed or negative ethical motivations (Lippi-Green 1997: 92). Lippi-Green (1997: 87) also notes a tendency to include more characters who speak English with a foreign accent in films that are set in non-English locations, such as France and Germany, than those set in English-speaking countries or mythical kingdoms. However, although 91 of the 371 characters may have foreign accents naturally due to the films' setting, only 34 characters speak English with a foreign accent. *The Lion King* (1994) is criticized particularly by Lippi-Green for making the "wise and eccentric baboon" Rafiki the only character who speaks English with a foreign accent, even though the film is set in Africa (Lippi-Green 1997: 87–88).

Furthermore, male characters represent a clear majority, with 69.8 percent of them, while female characters only represent 30.2 percent (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). Not only do they represent a clear minority, but female characters are rarely depicted working outside the household or with people who are not part of the family circle. If they show up in other places they are usually shown as maternal figures and princesses and in other cases, they are shown as daughters dedicated to their families or occasionally as daughters with a defiant nature (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). Regarding their place of work, the traditional roles between men and women are made clear with male characters generally taking on roles often associated with traditional masculinity such as pilots, doctors, or thieves, or serving as the king's advisor. In contrast, the female characters clean other people's homes or take care of their children, some of them work at restaurants and others are employed as nurses (Lippi-Green 1997: 87).

The disparity found in the representation of gender also applies to different races and cultures, and Lippi-Green (1997) focuses especially on the distribution of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Although the total number of characters who speak AAVE is low, Lippi-Green points to the fact that no humanoid characters speak this variety, as it is only found with animal characters (Lippi-Green 1997: 93). Furthermore, preexisting stereotypes about

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[9] Lippi-Green applied the term Mainstream US English (MUSE) in her 1997 study and Standard American English (SAE) in her 2012 study. This thesis uses the corresponding term General American (GA).

African Americans can easily be traced back to characters who speak AAVE, as male animal characters generally seem to "show no purpose in life beyond the making of music and pleasing themselves" (Lippi-Green 1997: 94). Characters who fit this character description include the Crows in *Dumbo* (1941), who all speak AAVE, and King Louie, the Orangutan King from *The Jungle Book* (1967) (Lippi-Green 1997: 94).

A section of Lippi-Green's (1997) study is also centered around the question of how stereotypes related to French people come across in the films *The Aristocrats* (1970), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). More specifically, French people's attention to delicacy and cooking is emphasized in these films (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 98–100). Lippi-Green (1997: 100) finds that "the truly French […] are those persons associated with food preparation or presentation, or those with a special talent for lighthearted sexual bantering." In addition, she argues that in those cases when viewers get to know their personalities, these characters are shown to others as "irascible", i.e., as someone who has a hot temper and gets easily irritated, or as "the sensual rascal", that is, someone who has a flirtatious and charismatic personality with a hint of mischief (Lippi-Green 1997: 100).

2.4.2 Dobrow & Gidney (1998): "The Use of Dialect in Children's Animated Television"

Dobrow & Gidney's (1998) study on language attitudes has often been cited in subsequent research on the same topic. Different animated television programs for children are analyzed as well as how accents[10] and characters are portrayed in these series (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 105). The material consists of 12 different animated television series, which include a total of 323 characters (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 109 and 112). Furthermore, their results show that 69 percent of these characters can be classified as male and 27 percent as female, while the rest of the characters are not classifiable (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 112). Together with Lippi-Green (1997), this study is one of the first to point out the unequal representation between genders in children's animated series and films. In terms of ethnicity, Dobrow & Gidney (1998: 113) find that nonwhite characters only represent 16.7 percent of the total number of characters. Based on their results, Dobrow & Gidney (1998: 114) conclude that language plays a crucial role in marking the personalities of the characters on television made for children. This might illustrate how language and accents are used to highlight characters' inner qualities or personalities, that is, whether they are villains or heroes and whether they are comic reliefs or respectable

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[10] Dobrow & Gidney (1998) applies the term dialect, which in North America is often used synonymously with accent (see Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2012: 3).

characters (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 114–115). In fact, in animated television made for children, all the American English accents that can be correlated with a character's villainous status are found to be linked with being socioeconomically inferior (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 115). Several villains also speak English with a foreign accent, e.g. English with a Slavic accent, and British English accents predominate in the antagonistic characters on primetime television. Thus, villains do not speak Standard American English[11], which instead appears to be reserved for characters who have a heroic role (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 115).

Based on their results on the distribution of accents between villains and heroes, Dobrow & Gidney (1998: 115) conclude that "the majority of shows used dialect stereotypes to indicate a character's personality or status as a hero or villain or as serious or comic." This belief is underscored by the fact that those characters that can be characterized as having a comical nature do not use standard varieties of American or British English, but rather socioeconomically inferior and regional varieties of American English and foreign English accents such as German and Slavic (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 116). Consequently, their results provide reasons to claim that characters who are considered intelligent and educated speak standard accents and villains are often given British English accents or foreign English accents. At the same time, unsophisticated characters are limited to using regional American or foreign English accents. This great variety of accents among unsophisticated characters makes them more diverse than those who are sophisticated. However, Dobrow & Gidney (1998: 117) note that, although most of the characters are "still young, male, and Anglo-Saxon," there seems to be a consistent trend for newer programming to show more diversity regarding ethnicity. In addition, a character's skin color is not associated with having a bad nature in the newer series as is the case in older programming (Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 114). Still, this diversity does not apply to the general distribution of accents.

2.4.3   Sønnesyn (2011): "The use of accents in Disney's animated feature films 1995-2009"

Janne Sønnesyn's master's thesis (2011: 45) investigates systematic correlations between accents and character traits in 18 animated Disney feature films released between 1995 and 2009. Her study analyzes 372 characters and is a direct continuation of Lippi-Green's (1997) study on language attitudes regarding Disney (Sønnesyn 2011: 51). Like Lippi-Green,

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[11] Dobrow & Gidney (1998) uses the term SAE (Standard American English), while this thesis employs the corresponding term General American (GA).

Sønnesyn assumes that it is possible to detect systematic correlations between accents and character traits. However, Sønnesyn hypothesizes that societal changes lead to different results because the animated feature films she analyzes have been released in more recent years, while Lippi-Green's study consists of films released in previous decades (Sønnesyn 2011: 1).

One of Sønnesyn's (2011: 51–52) main findings is that most of the characters speak GA (61 percent), while the number of characters who speak RP (14.2) or Regional British English (3.5 percent) is smaller than in the study by Lippi-Green (1997: 88). Furthermore, Sønnesyn (2011: 58) finds that 64 percent of the female characters speak GA and 16 percent RP, while the numbers are 57 percent GA and 15 percent RP for male characters[12]. Therefore, in line with what previous studies had indicated, more female characters than male characters speak with a standard accent, and GA is the dominant accent for both sexes.

Sønnesyn's master's thesis analyzes the *level of sophistication* of characters to investigate possible systematic correlations between characters' accents and their overall appearance. This variable has inspired subsequent studies that have focused on correlations between the use of different English accents and character traits (e.g., Eken 2017, Urke 2019 and Madland 2022). In terms of level of sophistication, Sønnesyn (2011: 72) reveals that most characters who are characterized as sophisticated speak standard varieties of English, with GA accounting for 65 percent and RP accounting for 19 percent of the total distribution. Although GA remains the predominant accent among unsophisticated characters, RP (8 percent) is replaced by Regional American English (18 percent) as the second most spoken accent category (Sønnesyn 2011: 73). As a character's level of sophistication is generally considered in terms of intelligence, educatedness and well-spokenness (see section 3.4.5), Sønnysyn's study gives indications that regional accents are considered less educated than standard accents with the number of the unsophisticated characters speaking regional varieties of American English and the low percentage of RP among these characters.

Finally, although Sønnesyn hypothesized there would be great variety in the accent portrayals of characters, her findings show that this diversity seen in previous animated films has been reduced, since regional accents, especially those related to British English, have been replaced by standard varieties, primarily GA (Sønnesyn 2011: 54). Additionally, ethnic characters, i.e., nonwhite characters, rarely speak RP (Sønnesyn 2011: 89). Sønnesyn (2011: 91) speculates that one explanation for this could be that Disney was worried about going too

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[12] 11 percent of the characters in Sønnesyn's study are classified as *undetermined*, while 66 percent are classified as male and 23 percent as female (Sønnesyn 2011: 57).

far, because giving ethnic characters "authentic" accents could be seen as too quick a change for the audience.

2.4.4 Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink (2016): "A content analysis of accent portrayals on American primetime television"

Dragojevic et al. (2016: 80) analyze how accents are distributed over 89 primetime television programs in the United States. In total, they identify 1,252 characters whose accents are characterized into one of the following four accent groups: *Standard American (SA)*, *Nonstandard American (NSA)*, *Foreign-Anglo (FA)*, and *Foreign-Other (FO)*. Furthermore, variables related to status, solidarity and appearance are used in the classification to shed light on correlations between character traits and accents (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 72–73). Their study shows that 84.3 percent of all characters appearing on primetime television in the US speak Standard American English (SA[13]) (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 72). Regarding character roles, their results show that the main characters generally speak standard varieties of English, primarily Standard American, and that the Foreign-Other speakers rarely represent these types of characters (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 74).

Based on their results, Dragojevic et al. (2016: 74) argue that portrayals of accents on American primetime television are highly "biased", as they reflect the generalized stereotypes related to accents that can be found in the US. This *bias* is reflected in both the way the accents are represented and the way these characters are portrayed to their audience on primetime television (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 74). Their results on the nature of the characters are also in line with previous studies focusing on attitudes toward language, which showed multiple times that when it comes to attributes related to position or rank, speakers with standard accents receive higher ratings than the speakers who speak regional and "ethnic native" accents (Fuertes et al. 2012 in Dragojevic et al. 2016: 76). However, their results do not show any differences in terms of solidarity that can be attributed to the characters' accents. Therefore, unlike previous studies, their results show no substantial differences between American English speakers and those who speak English with a foreign accent (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 76). Still, the accent and physical appearance of a character are correlated, as for example Standard American and Foreign-Anglo speakers generally have thinner body figures and appear as more appealing than Nonstandard American speakers (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 76). Based on their findings, Dragojevic et al. (2016: 77) conclude that the media is an important institution in shaping

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[13] This thesis uses the similar term General American (GA).

language attitudes. Moreover, they highlight how repeated and prolonged exposure to stereotypical representations can lead to language stereotypes being maintained or reinforced since these stereotypes are easily stored in someone's long-term memory (Mastro et al. 2007; Mastro 2009 in Dragojevic et al. 2016: 77).

2.4.5   Urke (2019): "An Attitudinal Study of the Use of Accents in Disney's Originals and Remakes"

Inspired by Lippi-Green (1997) and Sønnesyn (2011), Åsa B. S. Urke (2019) analyzes how Disney's newly released live-action adaptations differ from the original films on which they are based. Like previous studies on language attitudes, Urke (2019) aims to uncover systematic correlations between accents and character traits, as well as diachronic changes from the original films to the more recent adaptations. Her thesis consists of eight originals and eight live-action remakes, and from these films 234 (112 originals and 122 remakes) characters are classified and analyzed in terms of their accents and with respect to several character variables (Urke 2019: 42–43). The character variables for her study include *gender*, *character role*, *alignment*, *level of sophistication*, and *species* (see Urke 2019: 35).

In terms of accent distribution, Urke (2019: 43–44) finds that GA is the dominant accent in the original films with 46 percent speaking this variety, while RP accounts for 62 percent of the accent distribution in the new adaptations. Urke hypothesizes that this increase in RP can be related to the fact that many of the films take place in England and to a "growing trend of British accents in fantasy films and series" (Urke 2019: 17–18 and 45) (see also Eken's 2017 master's thesis on *Game of Thrones*). In general, standard accents predominate among characters both in the originals and remakes, and there is a smaller percentage of characters speaking nonstandard accents than what Lippi-Green (1997) and Sønnesyn (2011) found in their studies (Urke 2019: 45). Regarding the gender variable, Urke finds that female characters are underrepresented in Disney films since females represent 30 percent of the characters in the originals and 38 percent in the remakes (Urke 2019: 46). Additionally, more female characters speak RP in the remakes (69.6 percent) than male characters (57.9 percent), and this gap has increased compared to the original films (Urke 2019: 47–48). Her results also show an increase among female characters speaking English with a foreign accent with 8.7 percent in the remakes compared to 3 percent in the originals, whereas the distribution of foreign accents stays the same for male characters.

Inspired by Sønnesyn (2011), Urke (2019: 55) analyzes the level of sophistication of characters in the originals and remakes and finds that there is a greater number of standard

accents among sophisticated characters than among unsophisticated ones, an observation that is in line with Sønnesyn's research. Regarding character roles, Urke (2019: 64) finds a clear tendency in the originals for supporting characters to speak GA, and much fewer of these characters speak RP compared to both main characters and peripheral characters, where the distribution of GA and RP do not differ substantially. Furthermore, many supporting and peripheral characters speak with a Cockney accent in both film sets, while no main characters use this accent (Urke 2019: 64 and 66). In terms of the characters' alignment, which has to do with the nature of the characters and their ethical motivations (see section 3.4.4), Urke's results show less diversity in accent distribution among the "bad" characters in contrast to the "good" ones. For instance, characters who speak English with a foreign accent are only found among the good characters in the remakes (Urke 2019: 57–58). Regarding the species category, Urke finds that RP is widely more common both for humans and nonhumans in the remakes compared to the original films and that GA is less used in the remakes than in the originals (Urke 2019: 60–62).

Urke (2019) also compares the authenticity of the accents of the original films with their recent adaptations both in terms of accent realism and how authentically the accents are spoken. The accent realism variable investigates whether characters speak with accents that reflect the setting of the films, which reveals that 95% of characters speak an accent that naturally reflects the setting in the remakes compared to 64% in the originals (Urke 2019: 71). Regarding authentic accent performances, Urke analyzes whether the actor voicing a character uses an accent's main features and whether there is a consistent use of these features by that actor (Urke 2019: 41–42). While approximately 19 percent of the characters have inauthentic accents in the original Disney films, this only represents roughly 3 percent of all characters in the remakes (Urke 2019: 72). Urke argues that a possible explanation for the greater authenticity of the accents is that the world has become increasingly more homogeneous due to globalization, which may attract a larger international audience to Disney films (Urke 2019: 74). Furthermore, she suggests that the global spread of the World Wide Web and more people becoming accustomed to traveling abroad contributes to societal changes that make different language varieties being used more frequently than before (Urke 2019: 74). Urke (2019: 45 and 74) also assumes that these changes lead to greater expectations from viewers as to how real and authentic accents are expected to be in newer films.

2.4.6 Madland (2022): "Accent Use in Disney's Animated Television Series 1985-2020"

Unlike the studies by Lippi-Green (1997), Sønnesyn (2011) and Urke (2019), all of which investigate Disney films, Kristin Madland' (2022: 32) study analyzes the distribution of English accents in 14 animated TV series released by Disney between 1985 and 2020. Her study consists of 490 characters and one of Madland's goals is to uncover whether any changes that may be explained by recent changes in society are reflected in the more recent TV series (Madland 2022: 45 and 47). Like previous attitudinal studies, Madland classifies characters into different character variables such as *gender*, *alignment*, *character role*, *species,* and *level of sophistication*. Her thesis also includes the character variables *age* and *likability* (Madland 2022: 39).

One of Madland's (2022) main findings is that the overall percentage of GA has increased from 57 percent in the older TV shows to 67.2 percent in the more recent TV shows and that nonstandard American English[14] has decreased from 18.5 percent to 13.3 percent (Madland 2022: 48). Compared to the films produced by Disney (Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011, Urke 2019), the animated series have a lower proportion of characters speaking RP and nonstandard British English, as well as English with a foreign accent. Additionally, the animated series have a higher number of characters speaking nonstandard American English compared to those films (Madland 2022: 47). Madland (2022: 85) suggests that the higher prevalence of nonstandard American and the lesser use of RP in Disney's TV shows, compared to their films, can be attributed to the fact that the TV shows primarily target an American audience, whereas the films tend to have a more global audience.

Regarding the gender variable, Madland (2022: 55) finds that more females are represented in the newer series than in the older TV shows, although male characters continue to dominate as they make up 68.9 percent of the more recent shows' characters. Standard accents dominate among both genders, with female speakers using these more often than male characters (Madland 2022: 58). Madland also finds that "bad" characters do not have a stereotypical New York accent in the newer TV shows, as is the case in the older series (Madland 2022: 69). In addition, the New York accent appears less often with characters in the newer shows compared to older shows, a decrease that, according to Madland, can be explained by the general reduction in the number of people speaking this variety in the US (Madland 2022: 86). Regarding the species category, human characters are found more likely to speak GA than nonhuman and humanlike characters in both sets of TV shows (Madland 2022: 74 and 77).

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[14] Non-standard American (NSAmE) and Non-standard British (NSBrE) in Madland (2022) corresponds to Regional American English (Reg. AmE) and Regional British English (Reg. BrE) in this study.

Madland (2022: 69–70) investigates *likability*, since this will make it easier to identify characters who are considered neutral in terms of their alignment as "either sympathetic or unsympathetic". A reason to include this variable is that characters are not necessarily sympathetic even though their ethical motivations are good, and, at the same time, not all bad characters are unsympathetic (Madland 2022: 69). In terms of likability, GA increases among both sympathetic and unsympathetic characters in the more recent TV shows compared to the older shows, whereas RP turns out as lower for sympathetic characters and higher among unsympathetic characters in newer shows compared to older shows. Furthermore, nonstandard American and foreign English accents appear less frequently in the unsympathetic characters of the newer television shows compared to the older ones (Madland 2022: 70 and 72). Consequently, in terms of likability, RP seems to be used more frequently among unsympathetic characters in the more recent TV shows, while there is an overall increase in GA for both types of characters.

2.4.7 Summary of previous studies

From the previous studies listed in section 2.4, five tendencies can be spotted regarding how accents are used in different forms of media, which include film and television. First, male characters continue to be overly represented (around 70 percent), although newer films and series tend to include more female characters than previously. The studies also indicate that female characters use standard forms of English more often than male characters and that male characters therefore are portrayed as more diverse linguistically. Second, the standard forms GA and RP prevail with good characters, children and adolescents, human characters, sophisticated characters and among characters with main roles. If a character fits into several of these labels, it is even more likely that a standard English variety is used. Third, while standard accents dominate across various character types, regional forms of British and American English and English with a foreign accent are more frequently associated with bad characters than with good characters. Fourth, these accents are more commonly heard among adult or old characters than with children, nonhuman characters as opposed to human or humanlike characters, unsophisticated characters in contrast to sophisticated characters, and supporting or peripheral characters rather than main characters. Finally, these studies all find systematic correlations between several character variables and the accents that the characters are given in the films and television that children watch. Moreover, they show that the way accents are distributed across characters is based on stereotypes and preestablished assumptions in our society.

3.   DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of this thesis and describes the accents and character variables that make up the present study. More specifically, section 3.1 of this chapter describes the different research approaches typically used when studying language attitudes and focuses specifically on societal treatment studies. After that, section 3.2 presents the two sets of films contained in this thesis and details the data collection process. In section 3.3, the different accents that the characters of the films in this study have presented and the difficulties in correctly categorizing these accents are explored. Finally, the character variables for the present study are presented in section 3.4, as well as the *accent realism* variable in section 3.5, and an overview of the accent categories and the character variables is provided at the end of this chapter.

3.1   Approaches to the study of language attitudes

When researching people's attitudes toward language, sociolinguists have generally relied on one of three options. These include the direct approach, the indirect approach as well as societal treatment studies. Given that the present study does not rely on informants and that the research goal is to detect systematic correlations between character traits and how accents are portrayed in Disney films, only one of these approaches is suitable. For this reason, the direct and indirect approaches are explained more briefly in this section, whereas societal treatment studies are looked at in more detail.

3.1.1   The direct approach

The direct approach is, according to Garrett (2010: 159), the method that has been most frequently used to investigate people's attitudes toward different linguistic varieties. When studying language attitudes using a direct approach, the researcher typically asks his or her respondents directly about their preferences and how they evaluate different dialects, accents, or languages (Garrett 2010: 39). In this way, respondents can clearly express their attitudes toward different aspects of language. Although there are advantages to studying language attitudes using this approach, there are also certain challenges in applying it. While the direct approach might be an effective way to investigate how people view different language varieties,

these evaluations will only relate to their prior perceptions about language, which may be biased. Therefore, if a researcher seeks to evaluate a set of accents, the respondents will need to have prior knowledge and be familiar with all the accents.

3.1.2   The indirect approach

Studies in which the indirect approach is used will often employ different techniques, such as the matched-guise technique, to uncover respondents' attitudes toward a linguistic variety (Garrett 2010: 41–42). In matched-guise studies, respondents are given a sample of an audio recording in which they will hear a person read out a text passage several times, and where each reading is distinguished from the other readings in one respect solely, that is, the different language varieties being read out, to the greatest extent possible (Garrett 2010: 41). Since the respondents are unaware that the same individual is behind all the recordings and are not informed that they are evaluating different language varieties, such as accents, specifically, the researcher must ensure that the person in the audio recording displays language features that remain consistent across the recordings, which include the speaker's speech rate, hesitations, and pauses (Garrett 2010: 41). An advantage of these studies is that any personal or unique characteristics of the speaker that might influence how the listener of the recording evaluates the language is avoided since all recordings are made by the same speaker (Edwards 1999: 103). At the same time, a disadvantage of these studies is that not all recordings might count as authentic portrayals of the different linguistic varieties recorded. For instance, the person reading the passage might pronounce American English accents more authentically than British English accents if that person originates from the US. For this reason, employing the verbal guise technique instead is one way to ensure accent authenticity. While the same speaker interprets accents in the matched guise studies, different speakers will represent different linguistic varieties when the verbal guise technique is employed (Garrett 2010: 42). However, the results derived from such studies may suffer from limitations and challenges related to each speaker's unique linguistic characteristics, including the ones listed above, which might potentially affect the way listeners evaluate the recordings.

3.1.3   Societal treatment studies

According to Garrett (2010: 142), societal treatment studies have not received the same popularity in the field of language attitudes research as the direct and indirect approach. However, as Garrett comments, these studies should not be discarded, as they are an effective

way to gain knowledge about the kinds of values and stereotypes that can be linked to different linguistic varieties (Garrett 2010: 142). Furthermore, these studies are a way to obtain a view of how our society treats various languages and linguistic varieties (Garrett 2010: 51). Garrett states that societal treatment studies generally include observational and ethnographic studies. Furthermore, investigations of various publicly available sources are other examples of such studies (Garrett 2010: 142). Studies using this approach are also typically considered qualitative, and a content analysis is often carried out (McKenzie 2010: 41). In addition, the attitudes related to language are usually *inferred* from the different sources and behaviors that are observed by the person carrying out the research in these studies, unlike in the direct approach, where the respondents' language attitudes are directly reported by themselves (Garrett 2010: 52). Examples of such sources that are in the public domain of people are film and television, radio clips, newspapers, letters, songs, and books.

One of the greatest advantages of societal treatment studies is that they can give us insight into the kinds of attitudes people have shown previously to certain social questions because the researcher can explore sources that have existed in earlier periods (Garrett 2010: 151). Furthermore, some of these sources could come from critical periods within human history, e.g., how Jewish people were portrayed in the public domain both in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War. Garrett highlights therefore how being able to rely on data that has existed over a larger time span can allow insights into how ideologies within a population change and how certain languages and the people using these, may experience more favorable or more unfavorable attitudes as time passes (Garrett 2010: 151). For this reason, the societal treatment approach is particularly suitable for the present study, as it allows the identification of earlier prejudices through the stereotypical portrayal of accents in characters, while it also explores whether recent adaptations are more diverse and politically correct.

However, because the researchers themselves bear attitudes based on the material they have analyzed, societal treatment studies run the danger of subjectivity. Without having discussed their results with others, researchers may run the risk of the results being biased and influenced by personal viewpoints. One way to make them more reliable is therefore to have someone competent in the same field of study validate or discount these results. Thus, by for example observing what types of characters are portrayed with foreign or regional accents in films, the researcher can make assumptions about possible correlations between character traits and accents at the time the material was created, as was seen in Lippi-Green's study (1997),

which was not labeled as a societal treatment study initially, but has later become one of the most influential studies in this respect.

3.2   Film selection

This master's thesis analyzes 16 films released by the Walt Disney Company. Half of these films consist of original Disney films released between 1940 and 1998, while the second half were released between 2019 and 2023 and are live-action remakes of those original films. The films included in this study are listed below in Table 3.1. The original films are listed chronologically according to their year of release, while their remake counterparts appear on the right.

Table 3.1: *The Disney films used in this study*

Originals	Remakes
Pinocchio (1940)	*Pinocchio* (2022)
Dumbo (1941)	*Dumbo* (2019)
Peter Pan (1953)	*Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023)
Lady and the Tramp (1955)	*Lady and the Tramp* (2019)
The Little Mermaid (1989)	*The Little Mermaid* (2023)
Aladdin (1992)	*Aladdin* (2019)
The Lion King (1994)	*The Lion King* (2019)
Mulan (1998)	*Mulan* (2020)

3.2.1   Data collection

The 16 Disney films analyzed in this thesis yielded 331 characters that have been analyzed both in terms of their accents and a set of character variables. In total, the original films comprise 149 characters, while the corresponding number for the remakes is 182. Of these, 73 characters can be said to directly overlap, and there are also some cases where a character speaks in the original and not in the remake and vice versa, e.g., the Chinese dragon Mushu is only part of the original *Mulan* (1998) film and the seagull Sofia is only part of the *Pinocchio* (2022) remake. This means that these characters are only present in one of the classification sets for

this study.[15] After having seen all the films once, there were more characters in the remakes than in the original films. One explanation for this relates to the fact that many of the remakes have a screen time of approximately two hours, while most of the original films are one and a half hours long.

To be included in the analysis, the characters needed to have enough speech time so that I could safely place them in one of the accent categories. This usually meant that they would have to speak at least more than one sentence, provided that sentences did not consist of merely single-word utterances. This is the same approach that Lippi-Green decided to take in her study (Lippi-Green 1997: 86). Another requirement was that their faces had to be shown clearly, to ensure that the characters did not merely serve as background fill-ins. They also needed to have accents that were identifiable and distinct. Additionally, in order to avoid having too many categories of specific accents, it was deemed more efficient to make a distinction between those who spoke standard varieties of English (RP or GA) from those who spoke regional British or American English accents. If a significant number of characters exhibited a particular regional accent, that accent would be designated its own category. To be represented in the analysis, characters also had to be classifiable with respect to the character variables employed in this thesis.

All films, both originals and remakes, were watched in their entirety twice. Some films were investigated in more detail than others, due to the abundance of peripheral characters in these films, many of whom were often difficult to properly classify. I also wrote down the linguistic features of characters routinely while watching the films, which would make it easier to classify the characters correctly. Because the Disney films in this thesis together contained more than 300 characters, I saw this as an important way to gain clarity. Some accents of main and supporting characters in the original Disney films were accessible online and through sources like Lippi-Green (1997/2012), but I always made sure to look for the linguistic features characterizing that specific accent to see whether I agreed with these previous analyses before classifying the accent of each character. For the Disney remakes, there was not a lot of information available online on most characters' accents, and these classifications were therefore mostly based on my interpretations alone. While the auditory analysis relies solely on my interpretations, which could be considered a limitation of this study (see section 3.1.3), my competence in the accents became increasingly advanced over the course of the study. Besides,

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[15] Although their names differ in the two films, Si and Am and Devon and Rex in the *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) films are classified as overlapping characters, as they play exactly the same role as Aunt Sarah's two mischievous cats.

several challenging characters were discussed with my supervisor in terms of how I had chosen to classify their accents. For some characters, this also applied to the character variables. Thus, I am confident that both the auditory analysis and the analysis related to the character variables can be seen as reliable.

3.3 Accents in Disney originals and remakes

Since this thesis investigates systematic correlations between different accents and character variables in the films, the descriptions below provide a list of the most salient characteristics rather than providing an extensive list of characteristics. The Disney characters featured in my data material speak a wide range of American and British English accents as well as English with a foreign accent. The description of accents is based on Wells (1982), Hughes, Trudgill & Watt (2012), Elmahdi & Khan (2015) and Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist (2019). It is also based on different authors contributing Kortmann & Upton's (2008) book *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*, including Beal (2008), Hickey (2008), Penhallurick (2008), Stuart-Smith (2008), and Upton (2008), and several authors in Schneider's (2008) collected volume *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean,* including Edwards (2008), Gordon (2008), Kretzschmar (2008), Thomas (2008), and Wolfram (2008).

3.3.1 General American (GA)

Although in the United States there is no standard variety equivalent to the standard variety RP in the United Kingdom, most speakers in the US speak General American (GA), which, as Honey (1991: 71) comments, "comprises that majority of accents which do not show strong eastern or southern characteristics, or features associated with the vernacular speech of Blacks or Hispanics." Honey (1991: 99) defines GA as "Network English" because GA is the accent that has generally been used on major US television networks, such as CNN and Fox, just as the BBC has traditionally had news presenters who speak RP. Furthermore, Kretzschmar (2008: 38) emphasizes that the pronunciation found in GA[16] differs by geographical location and between different groups of people, as certain regional or social characteristics will be part of the pronunciation. Still, there are several features that hold across the majority of people who speak GA. Regarding these characteristics of GA, a list based on Wells (1982: 123, 146, 248–250 and 490) and Kretzschmar (2008: 48) is provided below:

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[16] Kretzschmar (2008) uses the term Standard American English (StAmE), whereas Wells (1982) employs the term General American (GenAm).

- GA is a rhotic accent, which implies that the phoneme /r/ is realized in all positions, even post-vocalically.

- /l/ is generally velarized in every position.

- The phoneme /t/ is a tapped intervocalic [ɾ] in words like *city* and *latter*, while it is a flapped [ɾ] in the word *ladder*. This leads to a considerable degree of homophony since GA speakers often pronounce word pairs like *latter* and *ladder* identically as [lærɚ][17].

- The vowels in the lexical sets LOT and BATH are realized as /ɑ/ and /æ/ respectively.

- The GOAT vowel is often realized phonetically as the diphthong, [oʊ].

- The lexical sets CURE, SQUARE have a short vowel, which is pronounced as /ʊr/, and /ɛr/ respectively.

3.3.2 Received Pronunciation (RP)

Received Pronunciation (RP) is the standard English accent used in the United Kingdom and has historically been placed at the top of a hierarchy of accents in the UK because it has been associated with prestige and social attractiveness (Honey 1991: 58). Unlike other British English varieties, RP is non-regional, which means that it can be heard throughout the UK (Wells 1982: 14). The following characteristic features are listed in Wells (1982: 123, 218–219 and 258) and Upton (2008: 241–242, 247 and 249):

- RP is a non-rhotic accent, which means that /r/ is only articulated when it is prevocalic or between vowels, and never when it comes after a vowel. This means that the word *letter* in the lexical set lettER is transcribed phonetically as [ˈletə] without the [r] following the schwa. Furthermore, there are the phenomena of linking /r/ and intrusive /r/. Linking /r/ refers to cases where /r/ is retained between vowels, making the phrase *far away* be realized as [fɑːr əˈweɪ]. Intrusive /r/ is common when /r/ is inserted between words that end and begin in vowel sounds to avoid a hiatus. For example, the phrase *law and order* may be realized as [lɔːr ənd ˈɔːdə].

- /l/ is realized as a velarized /l/, except before vowels where it is a clear /l/.

- The vowels in the lexical sets LOT and BATH are realized as the open back rounded /ɒ/ and the long open back /ɑː/ respectively.

- The lexical sets SQUARE, GOAT and CURE have centering diphthongs, which are realized as /ɛə/, /əʊ/, and /ʊə/ respectively.

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[17] Many dictionaries do not use the allophones [ɾ] and [ɚ], making [lædər] an equivalent realization of these words (see Kretzschmar 2008: 48).

- The phoneme /t/ is usually realized phonetically as [t], and glottal stops [ʔ] are not found intervocalically within words.

3.3.3 Regional American English (Reg. AmE)

3.3.3.1 New York English

The New York accent is often associated with the working classes of New York City, particularly those who historically have resided in the Brooklyn neighborhood (Gordon 2008: 69). Along with the Southern American English accent, this accent is one of the most easily recognized accents by people throughout the US. However, people who live outside the New York area have often associated the New York accent with "lack of education" and "toughness" (Gordon 2008: 69). Below is a summary of the traits that characterize the New York accent found in Wells (1982: 503–505 and 510) and Gordon (2008: 70–71 and 73–74):

- The New York accent has largely been seen as a non-rhotic accent, involving the loss of /r/ when it occurs post-vocalically. However, in recent decades, rhoticity has become increasingly more common.
- This accent features centering diphthongs as the phonemic realizations in various lexical sets, including CURE, SQUARE, NEAR, PALM, which may be pronounced as /ʊə/, /ɛə/, /ɪə/, and /ɑə/ respectively, as well as THOUGHT, CLOTH, and NORTH which are all often realized as /ɔə/.
- The vowels in the lexical sets BATH and TRAP are often realized as the diphthong /ɛə/.

3.3.3.2 Southern American English

The Southern American English accent is characteristic of the southernmost states in the US bordering Mexico, excluding the southern areas of Florida, and is also typically found in Maryland, Kentucky and in parts of Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico (Thomas 2008: 87). The following traits characterize the Southern accent and are listed in Wells (1982: 529–531, 537, 540 and 542) and Thomas (2008: 91, 93, 95, 100 and 107):

- The Southern accent is traditionally considered to be non-rhotic, although it is becoming increasingly rhotic in the younger generations. For many speakers, the Southern accent can therefore be variably rhotic.
- The vowel in the lexical set KIT is often raised and realized phonetically as the diphthong [iə].

- For several speakers, primary stress may be placed on the first syllable of certain words, such as *July*, *insurance*, *Detroit*, and *December*.
- The vowel /ai/ in PRICE and PRIZE is frequently realized phonetically as the long monophthong [aː].
- Before nasals, the vowels in KIT and DRESS are merged in words like *pin* and *pen*, resulting in both words being realized phonetically as [pɪn].
- Several lexical sets include diphthongal realizations, such as /æɪ/ for both BATH and TRAP.

3.3.3.3 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Unlike other English accents, AAVE has often been associated with dialect-related features such as grammar rather than accent, which, strictly speaking, comprises only phonological features. Moreover, this accent is not directly tied to a specific area in the United States. Still, AAVE is often linked to the southern states of the US due to the country's former history with slavery (Edwards 2008: 181–182). AAVE is also heard more frequently in highly populated areas of the US and among African Americans from working-class backgrounds (Edwards 2008: 181). Below is a list of the pronunciation features associated with AAVE, which are described in Wells (1982: 557) and Edwards (2008: 185–187):

- AAVE is traditionally a non-rhotic accent.
- The vowels in several lexical sets such as PRICE and KIT are the same as for Southern American English, and the vowels in KIT and DRESS are merged (see 3.3.3.2).
- Many lexical sets have vowels realized as diphthongs, including CURE (/ʊə/), NORTH (/ɔə/), THOUGHT (/ɔʊ/), SQUARE (/æə/), FORCE (/ɔə/), BATH (/æɛ/), and TRAP (/æɛ/).
- In consonant clusters, it is common for the second consonant not to be realized, causing the word *desk* to be pronounced as [dɛs].
- The voiced dental fricative /ð/ and voiceless dental fricative /θ/ are realized as stops [d], as in *those* [doz], and [t], like in *thing* [tiŋ], respectively. In addition, /ð/ is often realized as [v] internally in a word and in the final position and /θ/ is realized as [f], like in the words *mother* [mʌvə] and *bath* [bæf].

In addition to these pronunciation features, the following grammatical – and in this respect dialectal features are strongly linked with AAVE and are listed in Wolfram (2008: 517–518 and 523–524):

- *Ain't* is frequently used in this accent as a substitute for negated forms of *be* (*am not/ are not/ is not*) in the present tense.

- AAVE often includes multiple negations, like in the sentence "*I ain't hungry no more.*"

- For contractible forms of *is* and *are*, it is common to have an absence of the copula and auxiliary, meaning that for instance the phrase "he's nice" becomes *he nice*.

- Invariant *be*, which is often referred to as habitual *be*, is one of the most common grammatical features of AAVE, e.g. *He be here every Sunday*.

3.3.4 Regional British English (Reg. BrE)

3.3.4.1 Scottish English

The Scottish English accent is the standard English variety found in Scotland. Within Scotland, there are not many differences between the phonology of Scottish English across different regions (Stuart-Smith 2008: 48). Below is a list of features typical of this accent, which are found in Wells (1982: 133 and 399–400), Stuart-Smith (2008: 55, 58–60 and 63–65) and Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist (2019: 60):

- The Scottish English accent is rhotic, which results in centering diphthongs not being present in this accent. Thus, NEAR and SQUARE are realized as /ir/ and /er/.

- Velarized /l/ (dark /l/) may be found in every position within a word.

- The vowel in BATH, PALM, and TRAP is typically pronounced as /a/.

- In the Scottish English accent, most vowels are long, except for /ɪ/ and /ʌ/. The vowels /u/, /i/, and /ai/ are long when they are positioned prior to /r/, when they precede a morpheme boundary, or when they are positioned in front of fricatives that are voiced. This is known as the Scottish Vowel Length Rule.

- The phonemes /ð/ and /θ/ are voiceless dental fricatives, which means that both *think* and *those* are pronounced with /θ/.

- There is no opposition between /ʊ/ vs. /u/, like in the word pairs *bull* and *boot* and *foot* and *goose*, since the FOOT and GOOSE vowels have been merged, which is why the /ʊ/ phoneme is not found in this accent.

3.3.4.2 Irish English

The Irish English accent is the standard variety spoken throughout Ireland. Within Ireland, Dublin English is considered the most prestigious accent of any British variety (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2012: 141). Regarding the features that are typical of the standard Irish English

accent, Wells (1982: 74, 419–420 and 428–429), Hickey (2008: 85–86 and 92), Hughes, Trudgill & Watt (2012: 142) and Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist (2019: 68) list the following:

- The Irish English accent is traditionally considered to be rhotic, but exceptions do occur in Dublin speech which is more influenced by British English accents. However, the /r/ sound is consistently retained in the final syllable, resulting in realizations such as /iːr/ for the NEAR lexical set and /eːr/ for the SQUARE lexical set.
- The alveolar /1/ occurs in all positions.
- Fricatives have dental stops in the south of Ireland. For instance, /ð/ and /θ/ are pronounced as [d̪] and [t̪] respectively, which are dental plosives.
- The vowel in lexical sets FACE and PALM is realized as the monophthong /eː/ and the open front unrounded /aː/ respectively.
- The vowel in the lexical sets LOT, NORTH, FORCE, and THOUGHT is usually unrounded, giving [a] and [aː] as typical phonetic realizations.

3.3.4.3 Welsh English

Welsh English is the accent spoken mainly in Wales. This accent is usually divided into two subcategories, where one is typically associated with the north-west and the other is associated with the mid-south of Wales (Penhallurick 2008: 106–107). Regarding the features that frequently occur in this accent, Wells (1982: 378, 380 and 387–388), Pehallurick (2008: 118–120) and Melchers, Shaw & Sundkvist (2019: 54) list the following:

- The Welsh English accent is generally considered to be non-rhotic.
- This accent is often considered to sound melodious, as it often switches between low and high pitches and makes unstressed syllables more prominent.
- [a] is the most common realization in BATH words, although there is competition with long [aː].
- Velarized /l/ is typical of the northern regions of Wales in all environments, whereas clear /l/ is characteristic of the midlands and the south of Wales.
- Medial consonants, like /d/ in *ready* or /v/ in *ever*, are typically longer in duration in Welsh English than other English accents.

3.3.4.4 Northern English

The northern English accent is spoken throughout the northern parts of England and has, according to Beal (2008: 122), traditionally included areas such as Humberside, Yorkshire, Teesside, Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, Cumbria, Merseyside, and

Lancashire. Included in these areas are therefore areas bordering Scotland, as well as larger urban areas such as Liverpool, Leeds, and Manchester, which are all located further south. Regarding the common traits of this accent, a summary based on Wells (1982: 196–197, 349, 351, 353 and 364–365), Beal (2008: 130–133 and 138) and Hughes, Trudgill & Watt (2012: 112 and 116) is provided below:

- No phonemic split has occurred affecting the two vowels /ʊ/ and /ʌ/, which means that words such as *put* and *putt* are homophonous pairs since they all contain the vowel /ʊ/. This is known as the absence of the "FOOT–STRUT Split", a distinction that is a common feature of the accents found in the south of England.
- Like in the lexical set TRAP, the BATH vowel is realized as the short open /a/ vowel. Since there is an absence of broadening in BATH, words like *gas* and *glass* can be said to rhyme, [gas] and [glas], and a word like *bad* has the pronunciation [bad] instead of [bæd], which would be the typical realization for southern English accents.
- Glottal stops are common for speakers of this accent living in urban areas.
- The vowel in the lexical sets GOAT and FACE is pronounced as the monophthong /o:/ and /e:/ respectively.

3.3.4.5 Cockney

As mentioned in section 3.2 on RP, there is a social hierarchy in the UK where RP is generally placed at the top, while the urban and regional varieties are found further down. One of those urban varieties is the Cockney accent, which is characteristic of the London area and has historically been associated with the working classes there (Hughes, Trudgill & Watt 2012: 75). Regarding which linguistic features are typical for this accent, the following are listed in Wells (1982: 253–254, 260–261 and 322–324) and Hughes, Trudgill & Watt (2012: 75):

- The Cockney accent features H-dropping where /h/ is mostly nonexistent except in stressed positions, such as in the word *happened*.
- TH-fronting is a characteristic feature of the Cockney accent which means that dental fricatives /θ/ are not distinguished from labiodental ones /f/. In addition, the distinction between the voiced dental fricative /ð/ and the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is often missing with Cockney speakers.
- L-vocalization is characteristic of this accent, which means that /l/ is articulated as a vowel when it is positioned either after a vowel, prior to a consonant within the same syllable or when it constitutes its own syllable.

- Glottal stops, represented by the phonetic symbol [ʔ], are usually found with Cockney speakers, which means that the plosives /p t k/ are usually glottalized in the final position. Glottal stops are also frequently observed alongside the /p/ phoneme when it occurs intervocalically. Additionally, glottal stops indicate the /t/ sound when situated intervocalically, like in the word *butter* [ˈbʌʔə], or when they precede a pause.

3.3.5 English with a foreign accent

In cases of English with a foreign accent, interlingual interference from one's native language is a decisive factor. In my study, the English with a foreign accent category represents speakers with French, Italian, Spanish, German, Arabic, and Scandinavian origins as well as speakers deriving from various Asian countries, such as Chinese English speakers. Furthermore, accents that resemble Caribbean English, like the Jamaican English accent, have been grouped within this category rather than as individual accent categories. This also applies to Indian English and to English accents that are native to the African continent, such as Nigerian and Swahili English speakers. Some varieties, such as Jamaican and Indian English are official languages. However, I considered it appropriate to include them in the English with a foreign accent category for the purpose of this study and to avoid having too many accent categories. Although it is difficult to provide a complete list of the typical characteristics of this accent category, many features that were observed in several of these characters are shown below and some of these were also observed in Urke (2019: 34) and Madland (2022: 37):

- The stress patterns and intonations in these accents are generally different from native speakers.
- Pronouncing certain vowels like a native English speaker can be a challenge for speakers of these accents since they have a different vowel system in their native languages. For instance, for Arabic speakers, /ʌ/ may be replaced by the /u/ sound since the /ʌ/ phoneme is not found in Arabic languages (Elmahdi & Khan 2015: 88–89)
- Vowels are often nasalized when they appear together with nasal consonants for some speakers, such as those with a French English accent. Furthermore, vowels may be added to the end of words.
- The phoneme /r/ is often realized as a trill or a uvular fricative.
- These speakers often have difficulty with pronouncing consonant clusters, like pronouncing /gr/, /sp/, /spl/, or /str/. For Arabic speakers, a short vowel is often inserted to break up the consonant clusters to make the pronunciation easier (Elmahdi & Khan 2015: 86)

3.3.6 Challenges of correctly identifying accents

When it came to identifying the characters' accents in the Disney originals and remakes, certain accents were easier to identify than others. While it was easy to distinguish nonstandard accents from standard ones in most cases, some characters required more inspection to classify each character's accent correctly. An example is Jafar in the *Aladdin* (2019) remake, who appears to speak a mix between RP and English with a foreign accent. This is probably because the actor who plays Jafar is of Dutch origin. However, since Jafar in the remake for the most part sounds like he speaks with a standard British English accent, he was classified as an RP speaker. A similar classification was applied to the character Dalia in this film, who was categorized as a GA speaker rather than as someone who spoke English with a foreign accent. This decision was based on the fact that her accent closely resembled a standard American accent, in contrast to the speakers of English with an Arabic accent in the film. Another example is the gannet Scuttle in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) remake, who has a unique way of speaking and is voiced by Awkwafina. This character appeared to speak a social variety of standard American English and was therefore placed in the Regional American English category[18]. Additionally, Pumbaa in the remake of *The Lion King* (2019) is classified as a GA speaker even though the actor impersonating him, Seth Rogan, originally has a Vancouver English accent. Although his voice was different in one instance where Pumbaa, in contrast to his GA-speaking friend Timon, produces the t-sound in the word *warthog*, I found no other indications of a Canadian English accent in Pumbaa's voice.

3.4 Character variables

For the present study, various character variables have been chosen that can provide information on possible systematic correlations between character traits and accents in the original Disney films and their remakes. The 331 characters analyzed are classified according to their *gender*, *age*, *character role*, *alignment*, *level of sophistication*, *species*. These variables are expected to show systematic correlations that can determine whether the Disney remakes have adapted to societal changes. They are also chosen because they are often included in other studies on language attitudes that analyze correlations between character traits and accents, which allows this thesis to be compared with previous studies. Additionally, these variables can reveal differences among the various films themselves, as well as disparities between the originals and

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[18] In Lippi-Green (1997) the social accents of American English are defined as their own group, while in Sønnesyn (2011) and Urke (2019) they are part of the Regional American English accent category, which also applies to this thesis.

remakes specifically. While character variables such as gender and species are relatively easy to determine, others may be more challenging to classify objectively. Even though subjectivity is inevitable in some of these categories, the best effort has been made to be as consistent as possible in the categorization process. This section therefore aims to describe in detail how the different character variables are evaluated.

3.4.1 Gender

Multiple previous studies have shown differences in the accents given to male and female characters. A clear tendency has been that female characters tend to speak in a more standardized manner than male characters (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997, Sønnesyn 2011, Urke 2019, Madland 2022). This distribution between male and female characters can be linked to the general trends in society for women to apply more standard forms than men as they are more aware of the different stigmas associated with certain speech forms (see section 2.1.4). For this reason, every character that forms part of my study has been distinguished based on its gender. One reason to include the gender variable is to analyze whether diachronic changes have occurred between the original films and recent adaptations. Like previous attitudinal studies, characters are classified as male or female, allowing for easy comparison with Lippi-Green (1997/2012) and other studies. Overall, the characters were categorized into one of the two genders, and my thesis did not require further gender distinctions within this category. The classifications were based on the names and pronouns of the characters, their appearance (e.g. how they were dressed), as well as their general hobbies and interests. The tone of the voice was also important, and a clear tendency was that those characters that were dressed in a stereotypically feminine fashion also had more feminine and warm voices. Most characters that were present in both sets of films did not change gender in the remake, although certain characters like Scuttle in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1998/2023) and Aunt Sarah's cats in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) switched from male to female, and female to male respectively.

3.4.2 Age

Since Disney films tend to have children as their primary audience (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.4.1 on Lippi-Green 1997/2012), an interesting observation will be to study the way children learn how characters are supposed to act across all age groups. Although many of the films have a clear majority of adult characters, it is interesting to analyze the kinds of accents that are given to young and old characters. As an example, characters classified as children speak mostly GA

(83.6 percent) in Madland's (2022: 50) study[19], while adult characters speak a greater variety of accents overall, and the percentage of GA speakers among adults is 46 percent. The *age* variable for the present study is ternary, and each character was placed into either the young, adult, or old category. Characters placed in the young category are children and adolescents or young animals, while the adult category is broad and therefore includes both young and older adults. As for the characters placed in the old category, these are older people and animals that are often distinguished from adults by their appearance (gray hair and wrinkles) or their tone of voice (rustier). Similarly, characters classified as young are usually portrayed as children or young animals in terms of their overall appearance (height, body, and clothing) and tone of voice (more childlike).

Classifying characters in terms of age was also based on the behavior and way of life of the characters. For example, the Darling children in *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) were easily placed into the young category, Mulan's grandmother was categorized as old (*Mulan* 1998), and the parents in these films were naturally classified as adults. Other characters were more challenging to classify. Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989/2023) is somewhat difficult to classify as she eventually marries Prince Eric. Moreover, she serves as a guiding figure for Flounder, and her voice is not typically that of a child. However, as the film emphasizes several times her immaturity and that she is the youngest of the mermaid sisters and therefore needs the guidance of the crab Sebastian, Ariel is classified as an adolescent and placed in the young category. There were also cases where characters had a different age in the remake compared to the original film. For example, Aunt Sarah appears as an elderly woman in the original version of *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), but is portrayed as an adult in the remake.

3.4.3 Character role

One reason to include the character variable *character role* in this study is that this variable could be a way to indicate whether the amount of screen time and importance of each character to the story is correlated with the accents they are given. In the present study, the following three labels are used for this category: main, supporting, and peripheral. A similar classification has been used in other studies focusing on language attitudes in Disney (e.g., Urke 2019), thus allowing for easy comparison. Regarding the classification, the main characters are generally the protagonist and antagonist of the story. This suits Disney films well, where good people often tend to battle against evil forces. Thus, in the *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films, both Aladdin

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[19] Madland (2022) uses the term *child* in her study, whereas the present study employs the term *young*.

and Jafar are classified as main characters, and each of these characters represents "good" and "bad" qualities respectively (see section 3.4.4). The supporting characters, however, are a more diverse category, although this category is typically related to the aides of either the villain or the hero. Furthermore, characters with several speech lines and those that are shown multiple times throughout the films are placed into this category.

As for peripheral characters, these include all characters who are typically shown only once or twice, but who have enough speech time so as not to be discarded from the analysis. Characters who are not important to the plotline generally fall into this category as well, since they are usually not given many lines of speech. A clear trend, as mentioned in section 3.2.1, is that the Disney remakes contain many characters that have one or a few lines of speech and do not serve an important function for the progression of the story and, therefore, are placed in the peripheral category. For certain films, this is more evident, as *Dumbo* (2019) comprises 31 characters, *Lady and the Tramp* (2019) comprises 28 and *Mulan* (2020) comprises 26 characters, whereas Disney's *Pinocchio* (2022) only comprises 13 characters to the general analysis. Therefore, *Pinocchio* (2022) does not have many peripheral characters compared to the other three films.

Regarding the distribution of main characters, it should also be clarified that Mulan is counted twice, both as a young character (child) and as an adult in the *Mulan* (2020) remake, but only once, as an adult, in the original *Mulan* (1998) film. Aside from Mulan, there are no other characters that are counted more times in either of the two film sets. Due to differences in accents between the adult and young versions of certain characters, I decided to include both versions of the characters that appeared in more than one age group in the analysis. This contrasts with Urke (2019) who chose to count these characters as a single character, that is, the adult version, since they spoke the same accent (see Urke 2019: 40).

3.4.4 Alignment

The alignment variable concerns a character's ethical motivations throughout the story and the intentions behind the behavior that is shown in the film. Accordingly, the characters in the Disney originals and remakes are labeled as either good, bad, or neutral. Good characters tend to be reasonable and show kindness toward all other characters. These characters generally have the best intentions and strive to confront injustice, evil actions, or bad intentions. In contrast, bad characters tend to display selfish and dishonest behaviors toward others as well as bad intentions. For instance, Ursula is a purely evil character in *The Little Mermaid* (1989/2023) films, as she tries to lure merfolk into signing agreements that are impossible to fulfill. Indeed,

while Ariel is about to kiss the prince, Ursula has her two companions, Flotsam and Jetsam, ruin their romantic moment, proving that she even cheats to get her way. Regarding characters classified as neural, these do not show a clear leaning toward being either good or bad. Characters that appear outside the main plot, such as the market vendors in the *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films and in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) remake are therefore placed into this category.

In some cases, characters exhibited both behaviors. What became important in terms of the alignment of these characters was the development they showed throughout the films regarding their ethical motivations. For instance, in *Dumbo* (2019), Mrs. Colette Marchant appears at first to collaborate and support the antagonist, Mr. Vandevere, who initially appears to be her romantic partner. However, early on, Colette begins to sympathize with the elephant Dumbo and tries therefore to correct Mr. Vandevere's dangerous behavior, albeit without any success. When Colette realizes this, she early on begins collaborating with the other characters behind Mr. Vandevere's back and ends up being an important person in saving the jobs of the people who work at the circus and in freeing Dumbo and his mother. For this reason, Colette is characterized as a good character.

3.4.5 Level of sophistication

The way characters have been classified as sophisticated or unsophisticated in previous studies has shown interesting systematic correlations in terms of accent portrayals and character traits (see Sønnesyn 2011, Eken 2017, Urke 2019, Madland 2022). Sønnesyn's (2011) master's thesis employed this variable and inspired the other theses listed above. According to Merriam-Webster, a sophisticated person is someone who people think has "a refined knowledge of the ways of the world cultivated especially through wide experience" (*Merriam-Webster* 2023). This definition can be linked to how Sønnesyn (2011: 44) argues that a character's level of sophistication depends on whether a character encompasses certain qualities or not, like intelligence and social adaptability. A person's level of education can therefore be linked to this variable, as education is often used interchangeably with intelligence.

Furthermore, Sønnesyn (2011: 44) distinguishes characters of a serious nature, who are typically classified as sophisticated, from those who are considered unsophisticated and who bring humor to the story by being portrayed as "comic reliefs". The same approach is adopted in the present study, with characters being classified in most cases as either sophisticated or unsophisticated. Many characters can easily be classified in terms of sophistication as they unequivocally fit one of the descriptions outlined above. All the pirates in Disney's *Peter Pan*

(1953) and *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) display unintelligent and clumsy behavior and appear unkempt, so they are consequently classified as unsophisticated characters. Captain Hook, especially in the remake, does not display these qualities to the same extent, although Peter Pan continues to trick him. Hook is classified as sophisticated in the remake nonetheless because he appears intelligent and has an eye for details. This is clearly seen when the pirates enter a cave where they encounter the Darling children and the "Lost boys". While shouting "No children in Neverland", which refers to one of the rules Hook and his pirates have established in Neverland, Peter Pan, in disguise, tricks the pirates into shouting "No one but children in Neverland". This "error" is only noticed by Hook out of all the pirates (see *Peter Pan and Wendy* 2023, 35:10–36:20). Another example is the Sultan of Agrabah, who is classified as unsophisticated in the *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films. Even though he governs Agrabah, he is easily manipulated by Jafar and fails to question Jafar's intentions and loyalties until Jafar's true nature is revealed. In comparison, Aladdin is classified as a sophisticated character since for the most part he makes wise decisions, like when he tricks Genie into giving him an extra wish.

However, in cases where there is not enough background information on a character to classify them as either, the characters are labeled as *undetermined*. For instance, some of the films feature many peripheral characters, and not all of these characters could be safely placed into one of the two subcategories due to them not having enough speaking time or not being shown in enough scenes. For this reason, these characters are labeled as undetermined to avoid speculation. For example, the different market vendors in the remake of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) are classified as undetermined since they have little speech time and do not play an important role in the film other than offering goods to Ariel and Prince Eric.

3.4.6   Species

One of the hypotheses of this thesis is that standard English accents will prevail to a greater extent in human and humanlike characters than in animal characters in the originals, while the remakes will display smaller differences in accent use amongst the various species. After watching the Disney originals and remakes once, it became clear that all characters could be classified as either human, humanlike, or animal characters. The only exception is the Cave of Wonders in Disney's *Aladdin* (1992/2019), which would have to be classified as nonhuman. The Cave of Wonders was excluded from the analysis since this character was given a fictive English accent that transgresses typical accent features found with other English accents. Additionally, it would not be possible to classify this character in terms of several of the character variables due to the nature of this character. Regarding human characters in the films,

these were easily identified. Furthermore, the humanlike characters were generally merfolk or magical beings with a human appearance such as Xianniang in the remake of *Mulan* (2020), Genie in *Aladdin* (1992/2019) and Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989/2023). Although human and humanlike characters represent a clear majority in the dataset, animal characters were present in all original films and in most remakes. Four films center around animals as the main and supporting characters. These include *The Lion King* (1994/2019) films and *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) films.

3.5   Accent realism

The *accent realism* variable is inspired by both Lippi-Green's (1997) study and that of Urke (2019). One reason to include this variable is to analyze whether the characters speak English accents that are representative or appropriate to the place and time in which the films take place. Lippi-Green's (1997) study examines whether characters in animated Disney films speak a linguistic variety that is typical of the setting of the films. More specifically, she classifies films according to whether they are set in English- and non-English-speaking locations, or in mythical kingdoms (Lippi-Green 1997: 89). However, many of the characters in her films do not speak English with a foreign accent even though this would be representative of the setting of the films (see section 2.4.1). In her 2012 study, Lippi-Green (2012: 113) points out that giving the red dragon Mushu an AAVE accent in *Mulan* (1998) does not seem logical since the film is set in ancient China, where this accent is not naturally found, which means that it is a planned choice by the film's producers and scriptwriters. Similarly, the accent realism variable in this thesis takes into consideration whether the accents given to the characters are *accurate* or *inaccurate* to the setting of the Disney originals and remakes both in terms of time and location. Since hypothesis 5 of this thesis states the characters will have accents that to a greater extent reflect the setting of the films in the remakes than in the originals, the variable concerning accent realism provides data on how each original film compares to its remake counterpart in the application of accents that are realistic to the setting.

While classifying characters in terms of accent realism was easy for the most part, I had to make a distinction between the films that were set in real places and those that were set partially or entirely in mythical locations. For instance, Atlantica is a mythical kingdom located beneath the ocean in *The Little Mermaid* (1989/2023) films, and Neverland is a mythical island in the *Peter Pan* (1953) *and Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) films. In these films, all characters residing in places that are not set in the real world have been classified as having accurate accents in terms of the setting. Furthermore, while the location of Prince Eric's castle is not

indicated in the original film, the remake specifies that the castle is set somewhere in the Caribbean Islands. Those living inside the castle or within its surroundings are therefore expected to speak with accents resembling Caribbean English in the remake. This means that the RP accents of Prince Eric, Grimsby, and the Queen are classified as inaccurate since the film tells us nothing about them originating from the British Isles. In contrast, Ariel's helping friend Lashana, as well as several of the market vendors, who all speak with accents resembling Caribbean English, are classified as accurate in terms of accent realism. Moreover, in cases where the human characters do not have an accent that is typical of the film's setting, but their accent can be explained logically, e.g., the Italian accent of the two Italian chefs in the *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) films, I decided to classify the characters as accurate in terms of accent realism.

3.6   Overview of accent categories and character variables

All in all, this thesis operates with six accent categories and six character variables. Table 3.4 below provides an overview of the accent categories and character variables that apply to this study

Table 3.2: Overview table of parameters

English accents	Character variables
General American (GA)	**Gender**
Received Pronunciation (RP)	o Male/Female
Regional American English (Reg. AmE)	**Character role**
o New York English	o Main/Supporting/Peripheral
o Southern American English	**Alignment**
African American Vernacular English (AAVE)	o Good/Bad/Neutral
Regional British English (Reg. BrE)	**Level of sophistication**
o Scottish English	o Sophisticated/Unsophisticated/ Undetermined
o Irish English	
o Welsh English	**Age**
o Northern English	o Young/Adult/Old
o Cockney	**Species**
English with a foreign accent	o Human/Animal/ Humanlike

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis regarding the distribution of accents and character traits in both Disney originals and remakes. Section 4.1 shows the overall distribution of accents in the originals and remakes and compares the two film sets. In sections 4.2–4.8, the different character variables that were introduced in Chapter 3 are analyzed and the possible correlations between these variables and the use of accents are discussed. Furthermore, discussions on linguistic stereotypes related to ethnicities, races and genders are integral to these sections. The final section of this chapter (section 4.9) specifically examines the use of English with a foreign accent in the Disney originals and remakes. In total, this chapter analyzes the 331 characters included in my study, with some of these characters being examined in more detail than others, depending on their importance within the analysis.

4.1   The general distribution of accents

In this section, the general accent distribution of all characters in both the Disney originals and the remakes will be given. Hypothesis 1 of this thesis states that the standard accents GA and RP will predominate in the originals, while there will be more accent diversity in the remakes due to societal changes. In total, the originals comprise 149 characters, while the remakes comprise 182, making up a total of 331 characters for the present study. As noted in section 3.2.1, the fact that Disney remakes contain more characters overall than the original films is due to these films being generally longer and including more peripheral characters.

The general distribution of accents in Disney originals and remakes is shown in Table 4.1 below and is presented visually in percentages in Figure 4.1.

Table 4.1: *The general distribution of accents in Disney originals and remakes*

Accents	Characters			
	Originals		Remakes	
	n	%	n	%
GA	74	49.7	59	32.4
English with a foreign accent	34	22.8	64	35.2
RP	14	9.4	20	11.0
Reg. AmE	12	8.1	20	11.0
Reg. BrE	8	5.4	15	8.2
AAVE	7	4.7	4	2.2
Total	**149**	100	**182**	100
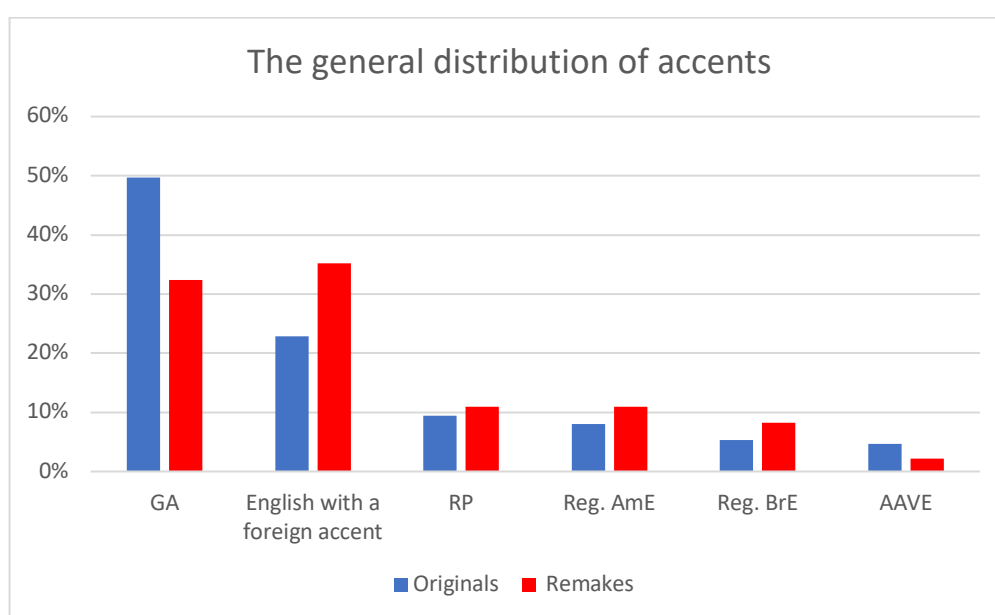
Figure 4.1: *The general distribution of accents in Disney originals and remakes*

As seen in Figure 4.1, GA and English with a foreign accent stand out as the most dominant accents in both film sets. In the original films, approximately 50% of the characters speak GA compared to around 32% of the characters in the Disney remakes. A clear trend from the original films is that GA is the most used accent in all but one film, which is *Aladdin* (1992). In *Aladdin* (1992), 11 of the 20 characters that are part of this study are classified as speaking English with an Arabic accent, that is, English with a foreign accent. In the remakes, English with a foreign accent has surpassed GA as the most used accent since around 35% of the characters speak this accent.

In the present study, the remake of *Mulan* (2020) stands out in particular for its use of English with a foreign accent. All but one of the characters in this film have been classified as

speaking English with a foreign accent. This character is the Esteemed Guest who makes an appearance at the end of the film when she introduces Mulan to the Emperor of China. Unlike the other characters, she speaks GA rather than English with a foreign accent. Interestingly, this character is played by Ming-Na Wen, who voiced the animated Mulan character in the original film (*Mulan* 1998). Therefore, although this character stands out in terms of her accent compared to the other characters, the producers of this film probably had an idea of bringing back previous memories of the animated Mulan character from the original film in the remake by including this actress in the cast. This assumption is corroborated by how Jodi Benson, who voiced the animated Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), plays one of the market vendors in the remake (*The Little Mermaid* 2023). However, unlike most other characters, Benson's character does not speak with a Caribbean English accent, but instead has a GA accent. Thus, featuring actors who portrayed major characters in the original film could serve as a means of evoking a sense of "pleasure" for audiences when experiencing some of these new Disney adaptations (see section 2.2.2).

Moving on to the distribution of RP in the Disney originals and remakes, we can see that there has been a slight increase from around 9% in the original films to 11% in the remakes. The same pattern can also be observed for Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE, which both show an increase of approximately 3% in the remakes compared to the originals. The only nonstandard accent that appears less frequently in the remakes is AAVE, which is spoken by approximately 2% of the characters in these films, compared to almost 5% in the originals. Thus, in accordance with hypothesis 1, standard accents prevail in the original Disney films, primarily because GA is widely distributed in the characters. In the remakes, many characters speak GA, but English with a foreign accent has surpassed GA as the most used accent. Compared to Madland's (2022: 48) study, where there is a lower percentage of English with a foreign accent in the newer television series compared with the older series, my study has thus seen the opposite trend, since there is a high increase in this accent. Consequently, the remakes generally show greater accent diversity compared with the originals, particularly because they include various foreign accents within the English with a foreign accent category (see section 3.3.5). In the following sections, the distribution of accents will be examined more closely in terms of the various character variables.

4.2   Gender

The gender variable is included in the study to detect what the general distribution of male and female characters is like in the Disney originals and remakes and to analyze whether certain

accents appear more frequently with one of the two genders. Hypothesis 2 of this thesis states that female characters will have a higher proportion of the standard accents GA and RP compared to male characters in the originals, whereas there will be smaller differences in accent use between genders in the remakes.

Of the 149 characters in the originals, 110 (74%) are classified as male and 39 (26%) as female. In comparison, 122 (67%) characters are classified as male and 60 (33%) as female of the 182 characters in the remakes. Although the number of female characters has increased percentage-wise in the Disney remakes compared to the original films, there is still a clear tendency for male characters to be overrepresented in the adaptations. Furthermore, the findings of the present study regarding the overall distribution of male and female characters echo those of previous research, such as Lippi-Green (1997), Sønnesyn (2011), and Urke (2019). These studies have consistently indicated a ratio of approximately 70% male to 30% female characters.

The distribution of accents among male and female characters in the originals is shown in Table 4.2 below and visualized in Figure 4.2 that follows.

Table 4.2: *Accent distribution among male and female characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals			
	Male		**Female**	
	n	%	n	%
GA	44	40.0	30	76.9
RP	11	10.0	3	7.7
English with a foreign accent	30	27.3	4	10.3
Reg. AmE	11	10.0	1	2.6
Reg. BrE	8	7.3	-	-
AAVE	6	5.5	1	2.6
Total	**110**	100	**39**	100
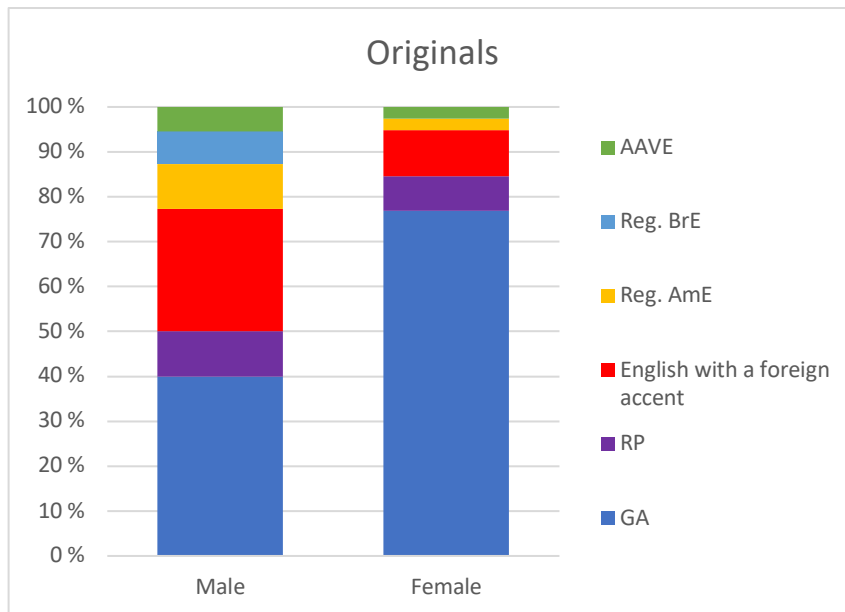
Figure 4.2: *Accent distribution among male and female characters in the originals*

The distribution of accents among male and female characters confirms hypothesis 2 of this thesis, i.e., that there are differences in the way male and female characters speak in the original Disney films. GA generally dominates with both male and female characters in the originals, but there are around twice as many female characters (76.9%) speaking GA in the originals compared to male characters (40%). For RP, 7.7% (3 characters) of female characters and 10% (11 characters) of male characters are classified as speaking this accent. Therefore, unlike GA, the accent distribution of RP does not show a clear difference between male and female characters. As for regional accents of American and British English, there are contrasts with respect to how male and female characters speak. While 10% of the male characters speak Reg. AmE, there is only one female character, who falls within the same accent group. Additionally, 8 (7.3%) male characters speak Reg. BrE. In comparison, not a single female character speaks Reg. BrE in the original films. Furthermore, the results of the accent distribution show that AAVE is generally used more by male characters than by female characters. More specifically, six male characters, accounting for 5.5% of the male accent distribution, speak this accent, compared to a single female character, representing 2.6% of the female accent distribution.

As mentioned above, there is a higher percentage of female characters in the remakes compared to the originals. However, there is a greater number of male characters overall in the remakes compared to the Disney originals, because the remakes consist of more characters than the originals. The distribution of accents among male and female characters in the remakes is shown in Table 4.3 below and is presented graphically in percentages in Figure 4.3.

Table 4.3: *Accent distribution among male and female characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes			
	Male		**Female**	
	n	%	n	%
GA	33	27.0	26	43.3
RP	13	10.7	4	11.7
English with a foreign accent	43	35.2	21	35.0
Reg. AmE	16	13.1	7	6.7
Reg. BrE	13	10.7	2	3.3
AAVE	4	3.3	-	-
Total	**122**	100	**60**	100
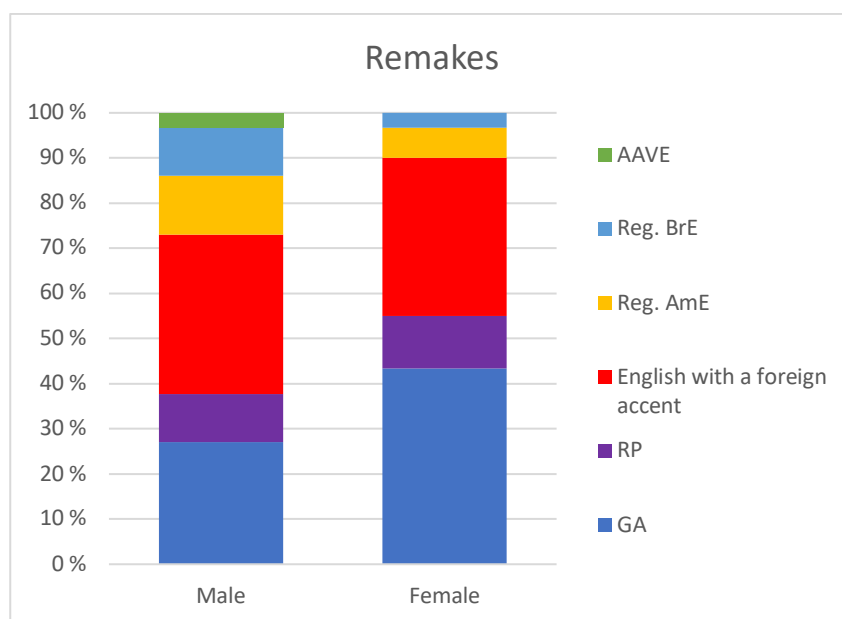
Figure 4.3: *Accent distribution among male and female characters in the remakes*

In the remakes, differences remain in the prevalence of certain accents among female and male characters, although these differences are smaller between the two genders compared to the originals. Like in the original Disney films, more female characters (43.3%) than male characters (27%) speak GA in the remakes. In addition, there are more female characters than male characters in percentages that speak RP in the remakes, whereas the opposite is the case in the originals. However, in both film sets, the discrepancies in the prevalence of RP between male and female characters are not particularly substantial when compared to GA and other English accents. For instance, regional accents of American and British English are more often spoken by male characters than by female characters in the remakes. Consequently, the remakes show a clear pattern regarding the distribution of Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE across the two

genders, albeit with smaller variations in percentages compared to the originals. It is still worth noting that there is a clear tendency for regional accents to be more prevalent among male characters compared to female characters in the Disney remakes. More specifically, nearly twice as many of the male characters speak Reg. AmE, and more than three times as many speak Reg. BrE compared to the female characters. Moreover, AAVE is spoken exclusively by male characters in the remakes, whereas one character, the lioness Shenzi, speaks this accent in the originals. However, making broad generalizations about possible correlations between the AAVE accent and gender is problematic, since only four characters are classified as speaking this accent.

Moving on to English with a foreign accent, it is evident that the remakes do not show differences in the distribution of this accent between the male and female characters, in contrast to the originals. In the remakes, approximately 35% of both genders speak English with a foreign accent, while approximately 27% and 10% of the male and female characters respectively speak this accent in the originals. Therefore, it can be safely argued that there is a clear tendency for speakers of English with a foreign accent to be male rather than female in the original Disney films, whereas the remakes do not show such differences between genders when it comes to this accent.

Along with the greater prevalence of female characters in the remakes, it appears that these new adaptations have addressed some of the gender stereotypes that were present in several of the original films. In both *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994), the antagonists Jafar and Scar have RP accents, whereas most of the other characters speak GA or English with a foreign accent (*Aladdin* 1992). Interestingly, these male characters are not only depicted as "evil" within the films, but they are also portrayed in a more feminine way compared to the "good" characters. This is evident in both their speech patterns and body movements. Consequently, the endowment of these male antagonists with female character traits could be interpreted as a suggestion that femininity, coupled with a "foreign" accent in males, hence the RP accent, equals being "bad". This presents a problem because children watching these films might associate negativity with men displaying feminine characteristics. Furthermore, in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the sea witch Ursula was inspired by a drag queen, who was commonly known by the name Divine (Zornosa 2023). Unlike other female characters in the original Disney films, Ursula is powerful, authoritative, and manipulative, which are characteristics typically associated with the male villains in these films. Moreover, Ursula's physical appearance, with her large size and deep voice, contrasts with the traditional representation of important female Disney characters, such as the Disney princesses, e.g., Ariel in *The Little*

Mermaid (1989) and Jasmine in *Aladdin* (1992). Thus, even though Ursula is female, she is given character traits and behaviors that are traditionally associated with masculinity. However, unlike Jafar and Scar, Ursula's accent does not differ from that of the other characters since most of the characters in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) have a GA accent. Consequently, while Jafar and Scar's femininity potentially could be associated with their RP accent, which differs from that of most other characters in the *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994) films respectively, Ursula's masculinity is not notably related to her accent in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) film.

When comparing Jafar, Scar and Ursula to their counterparts in the Disney remakes, it is evident that these characters in the remakes do not exhibit behaviors typically associated with the opposite sex. For instance, in *The Lion King* (2019) remake, Scar maintains his RP accent from the original film but is depicted as equally masculine as Mufasa, which contrasts with the original film. In this film, Scar also shows an interest in the lioness Sarabi, Mufasa's partner, whereas in the original film, he shows no romantic interest in either Sarabi or any other female lioness. Consequently, Scar in the original film can easily be associated with homosexuality, whereas in the remake, he appears to be portrayed as heterosexual. Similarly, in the remake of *Aladdin* (2019), Jafar maintains his RP accent and does not have a feminine voice like in the original film. He also shows an interest in marrying Jasmine, although this perceived interest may have more to do with legitimizing his claim to Agrabah than indicating any real romantic interest. Furthermore, in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) remake, Ursula's voice is not as deep, and her exaggerated masculine traits are toned down compared to the original film. However, as noted by Reinacher (2016: 44), while it is important to avoid stereotypes related to identity or sexuality, such as depicting the Queer character Oaken as living on the outskirts of society and being the only character with a Scandinavian accent (see section 2.2.1), it is worth considering that the characters in the original Disney films contributed to the films' diversity in terms of gender identity and sexuality. Thus, by depicting Jafar and Scar as heterosexual in the remakes, these films become less diverse than the originals, although they refrain from imposing stereotypes concerning sexuality on their viewers. Still, as shown in the portrayals of Scar, Jafar, and Ursula, the remakes seem to be more cautious about avoiding reinforcing gender stereotypes in their viewers.

Seeing Disney adapt to societal changes when it comes to gender portrayals in terms of accent use also extends to the language used in the dialogue between characters. This is shown when comparing the original *Peter Pan* (1953) film with its remake, *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023). In the original film, Peter Pan mocks Wendy for being a girl and gives the impression

that this makes her weaker as a person. For example, Peter Pan remarks that "Girls talk too much" and says "Well, get on with it, girl" to Wendy when she continues speaking (see *Peter Pan* 1953, 13:00–13:30). Also, when Wendy remarks that her name is "Wendy Moira Angela Darl..." after Pan's previous comment, Peter Pan interrupts her and says that "Wendy's enough" (see 13:15–13:30), which can be seen as a reduction of her name and correlating the diminishment of her sex. In this Disney classic, Wendy does not voice any real objection to Pan's degrading comments regarding her sex. In contrast, when confronted with a comment by Captain Hook addressing the inferiority of her sex in the remake, specifically stating that Wendy possesses "the boy's magic" (i.e., the pixie dust of Tinkerbell), Wendy promptly corrects Hook's statement, asserting that "No. This magic belongs to no boy" (see *Peter Pan and Wendy* 2023, 1:12:30–1:12:45). Interestingly, this is also the first Disney film to feature a character with Down syndrome in a prominent supporting role, namely the "Lost Boy" Slightly (Maloney 2023). This marks a stark contrast to how people commonly marginalized were treated in the original *Mulan* (1998) film, where one of the ancestors in stereotypical Chinese-accented English (see section 4.7) mocks another ancestor for having a great-granddaughter who became a "cross-dresser" (see *Mulan* 1998, 22:00–22:15). Therefore, in line with evolving attitudes toward gender equality, the *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) film appears to have been adapted to be more appealing to modern audiences. This illustrates how attitudes are constructed and shaped by people and how rapidly these attitudes change (see section 2.1.1), meaning that something that was accepted 26 years ago would not be accepted today.

Overall, the gender variable in the present study shows a change between the Disney originals and remakes in terms of the distribution of accents among male and female characters. While the originals indicate that GA dominates among female characters compared to male characters, the remakes show smaller differences. Furthermore, unlike the originals, there are no differences in the use of English with a foreign accent between male and female characters in the remakes. However, the accent distribution of both film sets indicates that GA is more common for female characters and that these characters have a lower proportion of Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE compared with the male characters. Thus, hypothesis 2 of the present study is largely refuted concerning the remakes, with the exception of the use of English with a foreign accent in the remakes. Furthermore, as shown in the examples provided above, the remakes appear to avoid stereotypes concerning gender, which contrasts with the original films. This indicates that the more recent Disney films appear to have adjusted to societal changes concerning gender equality and political correctness.

4.3   Age

The age variable is split into three sub-variables which include *young*, *adult*, and *old* characters. Hypothesis 3 of the present study states that young characters will speak in a more standardized fashion than adult and old characters in the originals. Furthermore, like for other character variables, these differences are anticipated to be less pronounced within the various age groups in the Disney remakes.

The overall distribution of characters in terms of age for the originals and remakes shows that the remakes contain a greater percentage of young characters and a smaller percentage of old characters compared to the original films. Furthermore, the percentage of adult characters is about the same within the two sets of films. Within the general accent distribution, the remakes have 14.3% young characters compared with 10.7% in the originals, 79.7% adult characters compared with 79.2% in the original films and 6% old characters compared with 10.1% in the originals.

The distribution of accents among the different age groups in the originals is shown in Table 4.4 below and is presented graphically in Figure 4.4.

Table 4.4: *Accent distribution among young, adult, and old characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals					
	Young		Adult		Old	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	13	81.3	54	45.8	7	46.7
RP	2	12.5	9	7.6	3	20.0
English with a foreign accent	-	-	31	26.3	3	20.0
Reg. AmE	1	6.3	11	9.3	-	-
Reg. BrE	-	-	6	5.1	2	13.3
AAVE	-	-	7	5.9	-	-
Total	**16**	100	**118**	100	**15**	100
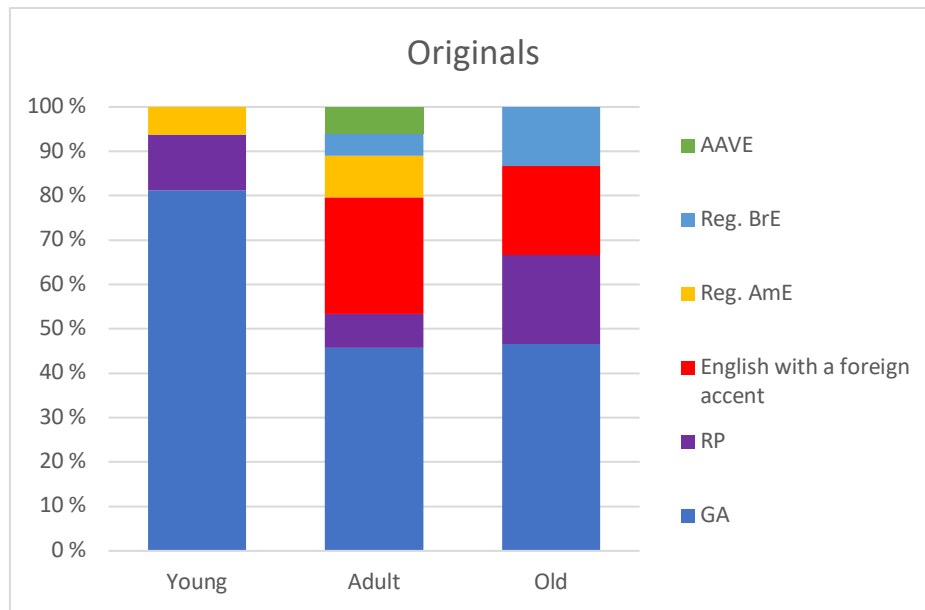
Figure 4.4: *Accent distribution among young, adult, and old characters in the originals*

In the original Disney films, the general distribution of accents among the different age groups shows that GA predominantly represents the accent of young characters, since approximately 81% of these characters speak this accent. Combined with RP, standard accents account for roughly 94% of the accent distribution of the young characters in the originals. In addition, Table 4.4 shows that only one young character speaks with an accent that is not GA or RP. That character is Lampwick in *Pinocchio* (1940) who speaks with a New York accent.

For adult and old characters, it is notable that the percentage of characters speaking GA is approximately the same within both age groups – 45.8% of the adult characters compared with 46.7% of the old characters. Additionally, a slightly higher proportion of the adult characters compared to the old characters speak English with a foreign accent. Furthermore, RP has a greater distribution among old characters in the original Disney films compared to young and adult characters. However, it is worth noting that the percentages are based on a considerably smaller number of old and young characters compared to the adult characters who make up the majority of the characters in the Disney originals.

As noted above, there are generally more young characters in the Disney remakes compared with the originals, and fewer old characters in the remakes than in the originals. For the adult characters, the representativeness of the characters is similar between the two film sets. The distribution of accents among the different age groups in the remakes is presented in Table 4.5 below and is shown visually in Figure 4.5.

Table 4.5: *Accent distribution among young, adult, and old characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes					
	Young		Adult		Old	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	15	57.7	44	30.3	-	-
RP	5	19.2	13	9.0	2	18.2
English with a foreign accent	2	7.7	56	38.6	6	54.5
Reg. AmE	1	3.8	18	12.4	1	9.1
Reg. BrE	3	11.5	10	6.9	2	18.2
AAVE	-	-	4	2.8	-	-
Total	**26**	100	**145**	100	**11**	100
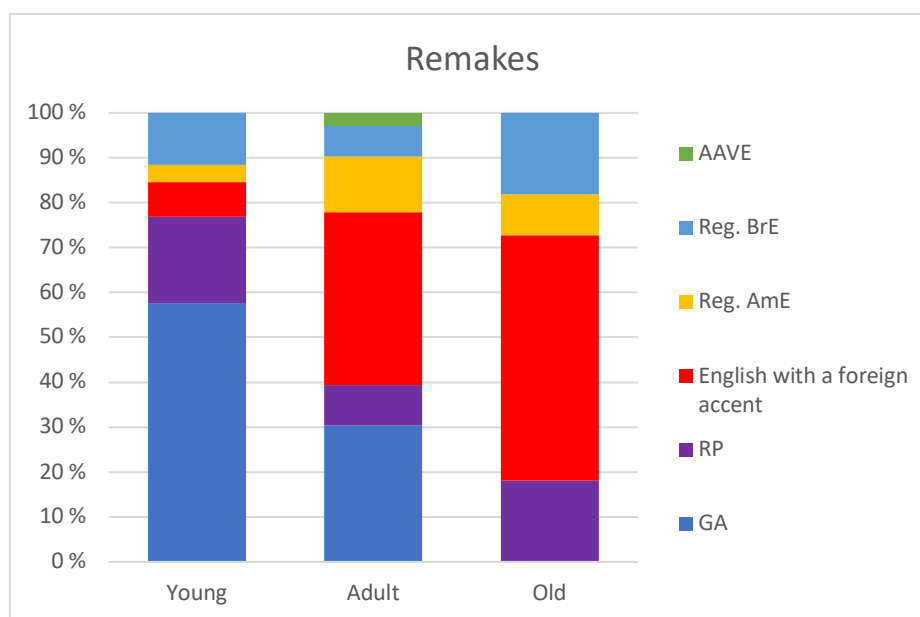
Figure 4.5: *Accent distribution among young, adult, and old characters in the remakes*

In the remakes, the distribution of accents among the different age groups shows that GA remains the most used accent among the young characters. Compared to the original Disney films, the remakes feature a lower percentage of young characters that speak GA, with figures of 81.3% in the originals and 57.7% in the remakes. Furthermore, in the remakes, two young characters, Mulan and her sister Xiu in *Mulan* (2020), speak English with a foreign accent. In comparison, no young characters speak English with a foreign accent in the originals. However, it is important to note that the original films feature fewer young characters compared to the remakes in general.

Fewer adult characters speak GA in the remakes compared to the originals. Instead, more adult characters speak English with a foreign accent in these films. Additionally, it is

notable that among the old characters in the remakes, there is not a single character who speaks GA. However, it is important to emphasize that this could be attributed to the small sample size, as only 11 (6%) characters are classified as old in these films. Furthermore, Figure 4.5 shows that British English accents are often spoken by old characters in the remakes, since RP and Reg. BrE combined comprise 36.4% of the accent distribution of this age group. The percentage of British English accents in the remakes is therefore similar to that of the original films, where RP and Reg. BrE combined account for 33.3% of the overall accent distribution of the old characters. In addition, English with a foreign accent is the most dominant accent among both adult and old characters in the remakes, with 38.6% of adult characters and 54.5% of old characters speaking this accent. Thus, the old characters mainly speak English with a foreign accent or British English accents in the remakes, whereas the young characters predominantly speak GA and RP. Regarding the adult characters, the distribution of accents in the Disney remakes indicates that this group is the most linguistically diverse in terms of accent use since it is the only group in which all accents are represented. However, the large sample size of these characters could explain this diversity. Moreover, it is noteworthy that old characters speak in the least standardized manner in the remakes, while they have higher use of GA and RP combined compared to the adult characters in the originals. However, young characters have the highest use of standard accents in both film sets, meaning that hypothesis 3 is confirmed regarding the originals and refuted in terms of the remakes.

Moving on to analyzing the remakes more specifically, it becomes evident that certain films exhibit discrepancies in the accents spoken by young characters compared to their parents. Additionally, there are noticeable differences between the accents of some young characters and the adult versions of those characters. For instance, in *Dumbo* (2019), the accent of Holt Farrier does not match that of his children. While Holt Farrier, the father of Milly and Joe Farrier, speaks with a Southern American English accent, which is representative of the setting of this film, his children both speak GA. For young viewers especially, it is not unreasonable to assume that Milly and Joe might be those characters that they most readily identify themselves with, as the two siblings play a crucial role in saving the elephant Dumbo's mother, Mrs. Jumbo, from being sent away. In addition, the Farrier children play a crucial role in allowing Dumbo to escape from the circus at the end of the film. It is therefore interesting to see that these children speak GA instead of Reg. AmE which is spoken by their father as well as most of the characters that are linked to the setting of this film. Similarly, in *Peter Pan* (1953), Michael Darling speaks GA, while the rest of his family speaks RP (see section 4.8). However, in the *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) remake, the entire Darling family speaks RP, which is representative of their

place of residence being in London, England. Thus, whereas the original film had one of the Darling children speak GA possibly as a way to reach out to an American audience, the remake seems to be more focused on providing the characters with accents that seem authentic to the film's environment.

In *The Lion King* (2019) remake, the two cubs Nala and Simba both speak GA, whereas the adult Simba and Nala speak GA and Southern American English respectively. Having the adult version of Nala speak Reg. AmE seems illogical when the child version of this character speaks GA. This is especially strange considering that none of the other lions of this film speak an accent that is not GA (see section 4.7). Therefore, instead of choosing an accent that naturally matches the accents of the other lions in the film, Disney probably cast Beyoncé in this role, due to how easily recognizable her voice is to others and the fan base that she has for being one of the most popular artists worldwide. By casting a famous person as the person voicing the lioness Nala, one could assume that more viewers would be interested in watching the film which would lead to a better performance of this film economically. For this reason, some characters, such as Nala, may speak with an accent that is more authentic of the person voicing them than the setting of the film. Therefore, just as Hutcheon (2012) argues that film adapters often select well-known works for adaptation due to their past profitability (see section 2.2.2), opting for famous actors to voice main characters could be a strategy to attract larger audiences to movie theaters.

4.4   Character role

The variable concerning the role of characters investigates whether the distribution of accents varies based on the characters' importance to the story. In line with hypothesis 4a, GA and RP are expected in the originals to dominate the accent distribution of main characters, while greater percentages of Reg. AmE, Reg. BrE, and English with a foreign accent are generally expected to be found among the supporting and peripheral characters. Furthermore, these differences in accent use are expected to be smaller between the various character roles in the remakes.

In total, 23 (15.4%) characters are classified as main characters, 84 (56.4%) as supporting characters, and 42 (28.2%) as peripheral characters in the originals. In comparison, 29 (15.9%) characters are classified as main characters, 92 (50.6%) as supporting characters, and 61 (33.5%) as peripheral characters in the remakes.

The distribution of accents among the different character roles in the originals is shown in Table 4.6 below and is presented visually in Figure 4.6.

Table 4.6: *Accent distribution among main, supporting, and peripheral characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals					
	Main		Supporting		Peripheral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	14	60.9	36	42.9	24	57.1
RP	5	21.7	7	8.3	2	4.8
English with a foreign accent	2	8.7	18	21.4	14	33.3
Reg. AmE	1	4.3	11	13.1	-	-
Reg. BrE	1	4.3	5	6.0	2	4.8
AAVE	-	-	7	8.3	-	-
Total	**23**	100	**84**	100	**42**	100
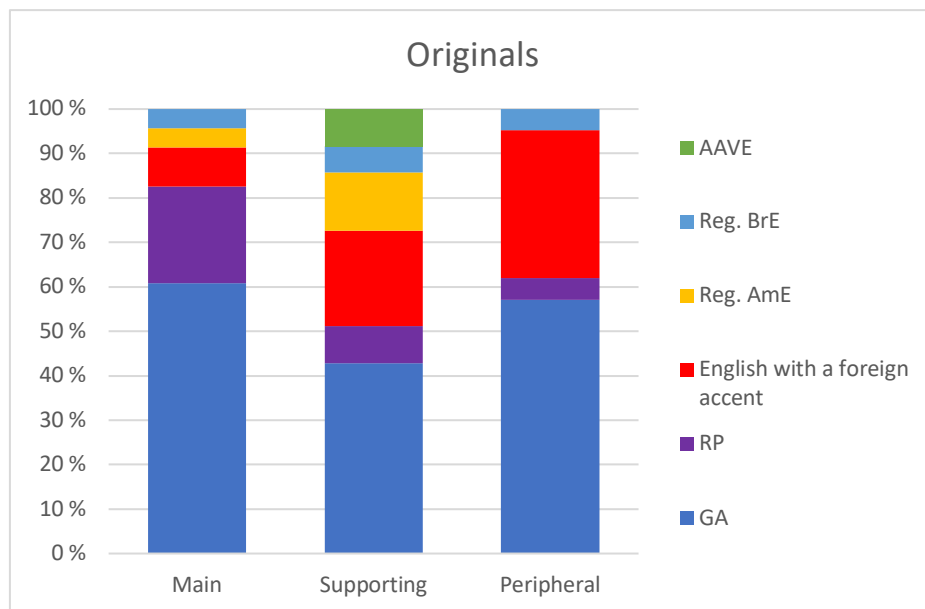
Figure 4.6: *Accent distribution among main, supporting, and peripheral characters in the originals*

The distribution of accents among the various character roles shows that GA is the most used accent among the main characters with 60.9% of them speaking this accent. Furthermore, 21.7% of the main characters speak RP, which means that GA and RP combined account for 82.6% of the overall accent distribution of the main characters in the originals. Thus, the main characters in the original Disney films tend to speak standard accents, in accordance with hypothesis 4a of this thesis.

A possible explanation for giving standard accents to the main characters might be that these characters are the ones most frequently shown to the viewer and, therefore, that people

who watch Disney films will more easily identify themselves with these characters. Furthermore, compared to the original Disney films in Urke's (2019) study, where RP and GA combined account for 90.9% of the accent distribution among the main characters (see Urke 2019: 64), there is more accent diversity in the main characters of the original films in the present study. Moreover, a difference between the original Disney films of this study compared to Urke's study is that the main characters of her study often speak RP instead of GA. The high prevalence of RP with these characters in Urke's study is due to the fact that several of the original films in her study are set in places where one would generally expect to find British English accents, e.g., *Mary Poppins* (1964), which is set in London in England, or in fantasy worlds, e.g., *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), where British English accents tend to thrive (see Urke 2019: 78).

Compared to the main characters, the results show that GA is not as dominant for the supporting and peripheral characters in the original Disney films in the present study. However, GA does have the highest percentage of all accents for these characters as well. In addition, Reg. AmE is more common among supporting characters than among the main and peripheral characters in the original films. While 13.1% of the supporting characters speak Reg. AmE, the corresponding percentage for the main characters is just 4.3%. In addition, there is not a single peripheral character who speaks this accent in these films. In general, there seems to be a tendency for several of the protagonists' closest allies to speak Reg. AmE. Examples of such characters include Yao, who speaks with a New York accent in *Mulan* (1998), Jiminy Cricket, who has a Southern accent in *Pinocchio* (1940), and the seagull Scuttle, who speaks with a New York accent in *The Little Mermaid* (1989). In addition, when it comes to the distribution of AAVE, Figure 4.6 shows that this accent is only used by supporting characters in the Disney originals. Regarding the distribution of Reg. BrE and English with a foreign accent in the originals, Figure 4.6 shows no clear differences in the use of Reg. BrE between the different types of character roles, while English with a foreign accent appears to be more prominent in characters who have less importance to the story, i.e., the peripheral characters.

As previously stated, the remakes contain more peripheral characters, fewer supporting characters, and approximately the same number of main characters percentage-wise compared to the originals. The distribution of accents among the different character roles in the remakes is presented in Table 4.7 below and is shown visually in Figure 4.7.

Table 4.7: *Accent distribution among main, supporting, and peripheral characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes					
	Main		Supporting		Peripheral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	14	48.3	22	23.9	23	37.7
RP	6	20.7	12	13.0	2	3.3
English with a foreign accent	4	13.8	31	33.7	29	47.5
Reg. AmE	4	13.8	10	10.9	6	9.8
Reg. BrE	1	3.4	14	15.2	-	-
AAVE	-	-	3	3.3	1	1.6
Total	**29**	100	**92**	100	**61**	100
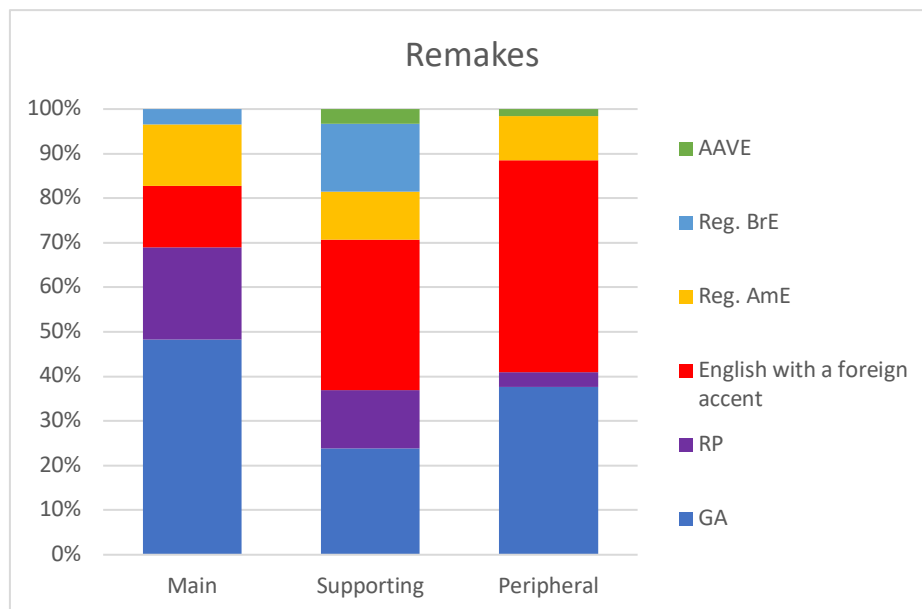
Figure 4.7: *Accent distribution among main, supporting, and peripheral characters in the remakes*

In the Disney remakes, GA and RP continue to be the most dominant accents for the main characters. Combined, the two accents account for around 69% of the overall accent distribution of these characters. Furthermore, 13.8% of the main characters speak English with a foreign accent in the remakes compared with 8.7% in the originals. Examples of main characters speaking English with a foreign accent include the puppeteer Stromboli in the *Pinocchio* (1940/2022) films, who speaks English with an Italian accent in both the original and the remake. Furthermore, in *Mulan* (1998), the protagonist Mulan speaks GA, whereas both the young and adult Mulan speak English with a Chinese accent in the remake (*Mulan* 2020).

Additionally, the Ringmaster in the original *Dumbo* (1941) film speaks English with a German accent, while Max Medici, who closely resembles the role of the original Ringmaster and is the owner of The Medici Brothers' Circus in the *Dumbo* (2019) remake, speaks with a Southern American English accent. Providing Max Medici with a Southern accent instead of the German accent as seen in the original *Dumbo* (1941) film, can be seen as an example of how societal changes have influenced the expectations modern audiences have regarding the characters' accents being representative of their environments. Without a proper explanation of the origins of the character, giving Max Medici a German English accent could easily be interpreted as illogical for the film's setting. It could also be seen as stereotyping if this character showed the same attention to detail and focus on following orders as the original character, as these characteristics have often been attributed to German people in general (cf. Baur 2020). For example, the elephants in *Dumbo* (1941) mock the Ringmaster for spending too much time getting to the point when he presents the show to the circus showgoers (see *Dumbo* 1941, 31:10–31:20). Since the Ringmaster is the only character who speaks with a non-American accent in this film, the mockery of his persona can easily be linked to his accent, which would probably not be the case if he spoke with an accent that matched the other characters. By giving Max Medici a Southern accent in the *Dumbo* (2019) remake, this character integrates naturally into the film's environment since a large proportion of the characters also have a Southern accent. In addition, the film does not run the risk of imposing stereotypical associations on the viewers. Therefore, the shift to a Southern American English accent in *Dumbo* (2019) could be seen as a conscious choice of wanting to align this character more closely with the film's setting to avoid perpetuating stereotypes associated with German people.

Moving on to Reg. BrE, the accent distribution shows a clear tendency for the accents falling under this accent category to be distributed more frequently among the supporting characters than among the main and peripheral characters in the remakes. As seen in Table 4.7, 14 characters, together representing 15.2% of the overall accent distribution of the supporting characters, speak Reg. BrE. By comparison, five supporting characters (6%) speak Reg. BrE. Therefore, as shown in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, there are more supporting characters speaking Reg. BrE in the remakes compared to the original films. However, when looking at the overall accent distribution of the main characters' accents in Disney originals and remakes, it is evident that in both film sets, only one character speaks Reg. BrE. This character is the Coachman, who is classified as one of the three antagonists in both versions of *Pinocchio* (1940/2022). He speaks with a Welsh English accent in the remake compared to a Cockney accent in the original version. Even though the *Pinocchio* (1940/2022) films are set in Italy, the Coachman speaks

with a regional British English accent in both films that does not reflect the setting of the story. Consequently, the decision to give the Coachman a regional British English accent in both versions appears to support previous studies on the general association of British English accents with villainous characters (see sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2).

Regarding the accent distribution of Reg. AmE, the remakes do not indicate any real differences between the various character roles, as is the case in the originals. In the remakes, the percentage of supporting characters speaking Reg. AmE is lower than in the originals, whereas there are more main characters who use this accent in the remakes. For certain characters, it seems that having the same accent is more important than the accent being representative of the setting. For instance, the supporting character Jiminy Cricket maintains his Southern American English accent in the *Pinocchio* (2022) remake. Maintaining Jiminy Cricket's Southern accent in the remake, despite the accent not being representative of this film's environment, could thus be considered an example of how film producers like the Walt Disney Company choose to tell stories (see section 2.2.2). If Cricket had a completely different accent in the remake than in the original film, it is plausible to think that this character would not trigger the same nostalgia that has been felt in the original film. One could argue that his friendly Southern accent makes him ideal as Pinocchio's mentor, as this accent makes him seem trustworthy (see section 2.1.2). This is especially true considering that the name Jiminy Cricket was a polite euphemism for Jesus Christ when the original film was made (Foster 2017). Therefore, assigning specific accents to characters, as illustrated by Jiminy Cricket, becomes a vital aspect of achieving the desired outcome in the film's storytelling.

When looking specifically at the accent distribution of the peripheral characters in Disney remakes, it is notable that RP appears to be less common in these characters compared with the other character roles. Rather, a greater percentage of the peripheral characters speak English with a foreign accent compared to the main and supporting characters. The higher prevalence of English with a foreign accent among peripheral characters aligns therefore with the distribution of these characters in the Disney originals. As an example, both *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films have many peripheral characters who speak English with a foreign accent, e.g., the street vendors in Agrabah. Furthermore, the *Mulan* (2020) remake has several peripheral characters who speak English with a foreign accent, while the original *Mulan* (1998) film has only one peripheral character who speaks this accent (one of Mulan's ancestors). Therefore, the total predominance of English with a foreign accent in *Mulan* (2020) could explain part of the overall increase in this accent among the peripheral characters in the remakes compared to the originals.

Overall, the accent distribution among the various character roles in the Disney originals and remakes shows that the standard accents GA and RP are used more frequently by those characters who play important roles in the films, i.e. main characters, compared to those who have supporting or peripheral roles within the films. Furthermore, English with a foreign accent continues to be less spoken by the main characters compared to supporting and peripheral characters. This is shown in the remakes through the main characters Aladdin and Jasmine in *Aladdin* (2019) as well as Pinocchio in *Pinocchio* (2022), all of whom speak GA rather than English with an Arabic accent and English with an Italian accent respectively, which would be representative of their environments. Therefore, the findings align with the predictions of hypothesis 4a regarding a predominance of standard accents in the main characters in the originals, while the expectation of a more balanced accent distribution across the different character roles in the remakes is mostly not borne out except for Reg. AmE.

4.5   Alignment

The alignment variable refers to a character's ethical motivations and is divided into *good*, *bad*, and *neutral* characters (see section 3.4.4). Hypothesis 4b of this thesis states that good characters will use GA or socially attractive accents more frequently than bad characters in the originals, while the remakes are expected to show smaller differences in accent use in terms of alignment.

In the original Disney films, approximately 62% of the characters are classified as good, 24% as bad, and 14% as neutral. In comparison, roughly 65% are classified as good, 18% as bad and 17% as neutral in the remakes. Even though the percentages do not differ substantially, there are more characters classified as good and fewer as bad in percentages in the remakes compared to the originals. In addition, the percentage of neutral characters is approximately the same within the two film sets.

The accent distribution in terms of the characters' alignment in the originals is shown in Table 4.8 below and is presented visually in the following Figure 4.8.

Table 4.8: *Accent distribution among good, bad, and neutral characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals					
	Good		**Bad**		**Neutral**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	59	63.4	13	37.1	2	9.5
RP	8	8.6	5	14.3	1	4.8
English with a foreign accent	11	11.8	10	28.6	13	61.9
Reg. AmE	11	11.8	1	2.9	-	-
Reg. BrE	3	3.2	5	14.3	-	-
AAVE	1	1.1	1	2.9	5	23.8
Total	**93**	100	**35**	100	**21**	100
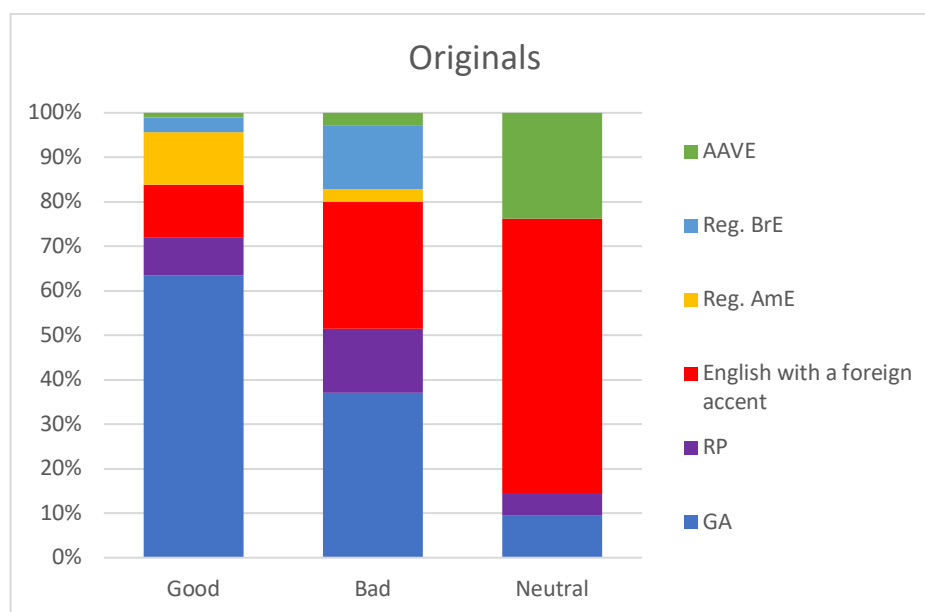
Figure 4.8: *Accent distribution among good, bad, and neutral characters in the originals*

In terms of the alignment of characters, the accent distribution of the original Disney films shows that GA is used more frequently by good characters compared to bad characters. In the original films, around 63% of the good characters speak GA, whereas the corresponding figure for bad characters is approximately 37%. Consistent with previous studies (Lippi-Green 1997: 92, Dobrow & Gidney 1998: 115), the Disney originals that are contained in the present study display a higher proportion of bad characters speaking RP or English with a foreign accent compared to good characters. Furthermore, like in the present study, Madland's (2022: 65 and 68) study shows that foreign English accents account for a higher percentage of the bad characters' accents compared with the accents of the good characters in both newer and older

TV shows by Disney, whereas there are no bad characters speaking foreign accents in either film set in Urke's (2019: 58) study.

Moving on to the distribution of Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE in terms of alignment, it is evident that Reg. AmE is more prevalent among good characters (11.8%) than among bad characters (2.9%). In contrast, Reg. BrE is more common among bad characters (14.3%) than among good characters (3.2%). In general, there is a trend in the original films for many of the protagonists' aides, i.e., the heroes' allies, to speak with either a Southern or New York accent. Examples of such characters include Jiminy Cricket, who speaks with a Southern accent and serves as Pinocchio's mentor and conscience, as well as Simba's caretakers Timon and Pumbaa, Ariel's friend Scuttle and Dumbo's protector and mentor Timothy Q. Mouse, all of whom are classified as speakers of the New York accent (*Pinocchio* 1940, *Dumbo* 1941, *The Lion King* 1994, *The Little Mermaid* 1989). In comparison, many of the aides of the respective villain speak Reg. BrE. For instance, in *Peter Pan* (1953), Captain Hook's pirate aides generally speak Reg. BrE or English with a foreign accent. However, unlike the other pirates, Mr. Smee is depicted as kind-hearted, as he often shows sympathy and concern for Peter Pan and the Lost Boys. Interestingly, he speaks with an Irish English accent in this film. In contrast to most other regional accents of British English, this accent has been considered socially attractive (see section 2.1.2). This accent aligns consequently well with the personality of Mr. Smee who appears as the only sympathetic pirate in the *Peter Pan* (1953) film. Therefore, since previous studies have indicated that most regional accents of British English are considered less socially attractive and prestigious than RP and that the Southern American English accent has been considered socially attractive in the United States (cf. section 2.1.2), the results of the alignment variable for the Disney originals in this study support these previous findings. In the Disney originals, good characters appear thus to speak with more standardized and socially attractive accents compared to bad characters.

The distribution of accents in the original Disney films shows that AAVE and English with a foreign accent dominate among neutral characters compared to good and bad characters. Regarding the distribution of AAVE in terms of alignment, it is important to note that the five characters classified as neutral are the crows from *Dumbo* (1941). They are considered neutral in terms of alignment because their behavior does not naturally fit into either the "good" or "bad" categories. For example, while the crows on the one hand seem to want to help Dumbo believe in himself that he can fly, they also question his ability to do so and mock him for his appearance. This behavior can therefore call into question their true intentions. Thus, despite their unsympathetic behaviors toward Dumbo, the crows were classified as neutral characters

due to the ambiguity surrounding their intentions within this film. The last two AAVE speakers, the hyena Shenzi in *The Lion King* (1994) and Mushu in *Mulan* (1998), are classified as bad and good respectively. Therefore, when looking at the distribution of AAVE in terms of the alignment of the characters, no clear patterns seem to emerge. For English with a foreign accent, it can be pointed out that the street vendors in *Aladdin* (1992) are generally thought to not belong to either the good or bad side of the plotline. They are therefore classified as neutral characters. Furthermore, in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Chef Louis, who speaks English with a French accent, is classified as neutral, since he shows no evil intentions and is not connected in any way to the antagonist Ursula or the protagonist Ariel. Similarly, both the Indian Chief and his wife in *Peter Pan* (1953) speak English with a foreign accent[20] and are classified as neutral characters, as they are not central to the conflict between Peter Pan and Captain Hook.

As mentioned above, there is a higher proportion of good characters and a lower proportion of bad characters in the Disney remakes. The distribution of accents in terms of the characters' alignment in the remakes is shown in Table 4.9 below and is presented graphically in percentages in Figure 4.9.

Table 4.9: *Accent distribution among good, bad, and neutral characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes					
	Good		Bad		Neutral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	43	36.1	6	18.8	10	32.3
RP	15	12.6	4	12.5	1	3.2
English with a foreign accent	42	35.3	9	28.1	13	41.9
Reg. AmE	10	8.4	3	9.4	7	22.6
Reg. BrE	8	6.7	7	21.9	-	-
AAVE	1	0.8	3	9.4	-	-
Total	**119**	100	**32**	100	**31**	100

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[20] The Indian Chief and his wife in *Peter Pan* (1953) both speak Hollywood Injun English, which is discussed in more detail in section 4.9.
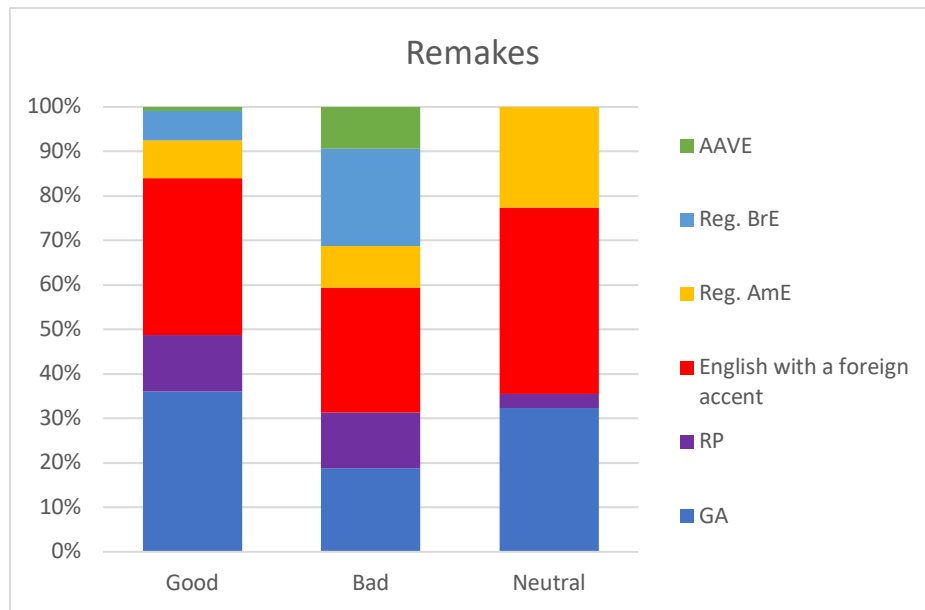
Figure 4.9: *Accent distribution among good, bad, and neutral characters in the remakes*

In the Disney remakes, the results of the accent distribution show that GA continues to be used more frequently by good characters than by bad characters. This gap has widened percentage-wise in the remakes compared to the originals, with almost twice as many good characters (36.1%) speaking GA compared to bad characters (18.8%) in the remakes. Furthermore, among the good and bad characters in the remakes, RP is spoken roughly the same in percentages, whereas a higher proportion of bad characters speak this accent in the originals. In addition, like in the original films, Reg. BrE has a much higher prevalence in the remakes among the bad characters (21.9%) compared to the good characters (6.7%). However, it is worth noting that five of the seven bad characters that are classified as speaking Reg. BrE are the pirates in Disney's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023). Thus, the pirates in *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) contribute greatly to the overall distribution of Reg. BrE in each film set. However, exceptions do occur, with characters like the bulldog Bull in the *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) films, who speaks with a Cockney accent in the original film and with a Northern English accent in the remake and is classified as a good character in the remake since he helps save Lady from the dogcatcher, Elliot. Similarly, the Scottish terrier Jock, who plays a similar role to Bull in the films, speaks with a Scottish English accent in both films, which has been linked to social attractiveness. Therefore, the decision to provide the tidy, innocent Scottish terrier with a Scottish English accent, and the rougher, less refined bulldog with a regional British accent that is generally perceived as more socially "unattractive" in both films, appears to be a planned choice by the producers of these films to evoke reactions from the viewers (cf.

sections 2.1.2 and 2.2.2). Moreover, the overall distribution of Reg. BrE among villainous characters indicates that this accent continues to be associated with bad characters.

Regarding the distribution of Reg. AmE being so high among the neutral characters in the remakes, it is worth noting that six of these eight characters are peripheral characters from the *Dumbo* (2019) remake. These characters include the mean teenager, as well as several audience members, all of whom are not directly linked to either the bad or the good characters of the film. Although they are unsympathetic characters judged by how they display harmful and prejudiced behavior toward the elephant Dumbo, they are not directly associated with the story's antagonist Mr. Vandevere in any way, nor do they show evil ethical motivations during the film. For this reason, these characters have been classified as neutral in terms of alignment.

Looking at the distribution of English with a foreign accent in the remakes, it can be pointed out that this accent category is found less frequently with bad characters than with good characters. Moreover, a substantial proportion of the antagonistic characters speaking English with a foreign accent appear in the *Mulan* (2020) remake. However, this makes sense considering that the characters predominantly use this accent in this film, as it naturally aligns with the film taking place in ancient China. Interestingly, the foreign accents of the hyena Shenzi in *The Lion King* (2019) as well as Stromboli in *Pinocchio* (2022) also seem to match the environments of those films. Only in *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) do we encounter an antagonistic character (the pirate Scrimshaw Sam) who speaks English with a foreign accent in the remake, which is not typical of the setting. However, since Neverland is an imaginary world, no specific accent would naturally be expected. Therefore, the decision to have a pirate speak English with a foreign accent might be motivated by a desire to enhance the general accent diversity of the characters.

As for the distribution of AAVE in the remakes, these only include four characters, three of which are classified as bad and one as good. Bad characters with AAVE accents include Aunt Sarah's two cats, Rex and Devon, in *Lady and the Tramp* (2019) and one of the hyenas who appears briefly in one of the final scenes of *The Lion King* (2019). By contrast, Genie in *Aladdin* (2019) speaks AAVE and is classified as a good character. However, because there are generally few characters that speak AAVE in the remakes, it is difficult to make generalizations about systematic correlations between characters' alignment and the use of an AAVE accent in these characters.

Overall, the alignment variable shows that good characters speak in a more standardized manner than bad characters in both the Disney originals and remakes. Furthermore, good characters appear to speak accents perceived as socially attractive to a larger extent than bad

characters, which is seen in the lower distribution of Reg. BrE in the characters of the two film sets. However, while the original films show a higher proportion of bad characters speaking English with a foreign accent, the remakes indicate the opposite. This suggests that Disney has become more cautious of assigning accents that are representative of other cultures and ethnicities to bad characters. Therefore, these findings of the alignment variable support hypothesis 4b in this thesis concerning the originals, although this hypothesis is refuted with respect to the remakes for the most part.
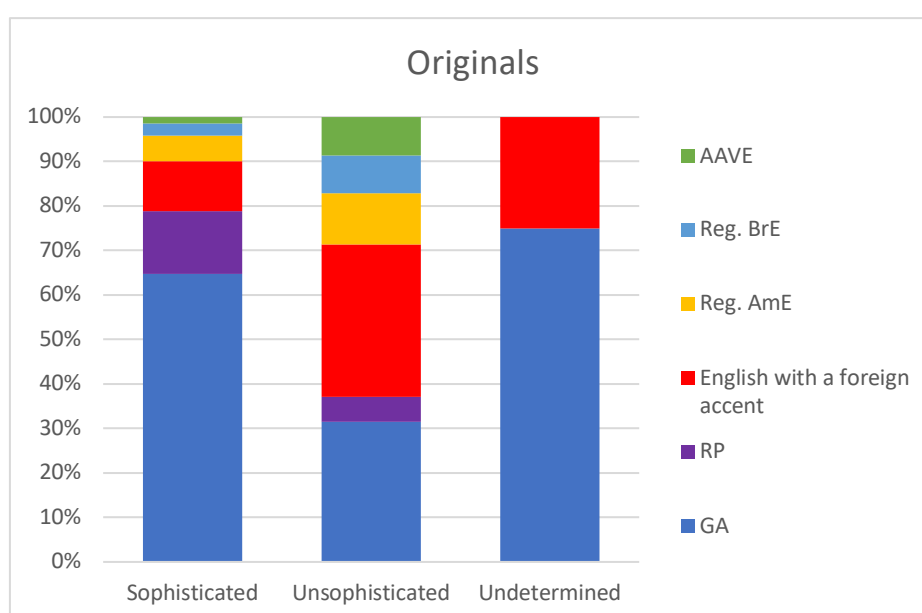
4.6   Level of sophistication

The level of sophistication variable is divided into three sub-variables that include *sophisticated*, *unsophisticated,* and *undetermined* characters. In line with hypothesis 4c, sophisticated characters are expected in the originals to speak GA or RP more frequently than unsophisticated characters, which means that unsophisticated characters in general are expected to have a greater use of Reg. AmE, Reg. BrE and English with a foreign accent. Furthermore, the remakes are expected to show smaller differences in accent use in terms of sophistication. As discussed in section 3.4.5, some characters are classified as "undetermined" to avoid speculation because they often have a marginal role within the films, which means that they do not display any type of sophisticated or unsophisticated behavior. Since the objective of the present study is to investigate the correlations between character traits and accents, less attention will be paid to the undetermined characters in this section.

The accent distribution of the Disney originals and remakes in terms of the level of sophistication shows that there are more characters classified as sophisticated in the remakes than in the originals. More specifically, approximately 48% of the characters are classified as sophisticated, 47% are classified as unsophisticated and the remaining 5% are classified as undetermined in the Disney originals. In comparison, around 64% of the characters in the remakes are classified as sophisticated, 20% are classified as unsophisticated and the remaining 16% are classified as undetermined in the Disney remakes. Thus, there are more characters classified as undetermined in the remakes compared to the original films, which can partly be explained by the greater number of peripheral characters in the remakes (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.4.3).

The distribution of accents in the originals in relation to the level of sophistication of the characters is shown below in Table 4.10 and visualized in Figure 4.10 that follows.

Table 4.10: *Accent distribution among sophisticated, unsophisticated, and undetermined characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals					
	Sophisticated		**Unsophisticated**		**Undetermined**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	46	64.8	22	31.4	6	75.0
RP	10	14.1	4	5.7	-	-
English with a foreign accent	8	11.3	24	34.3	2	25.0
Reg. AmE	4	5.6	8	11.4	-	-
Reg. BrE	2	2.8	6	8.6	-	-
AAVE	1	1.4	6	8.6	-	-
Total	**71**	100	**70**	100	**8**	100

Figure 4.10: *Accent distribution among sophisticated, unsophisticated, and undetermined characters in the originals*

In the Disney originals, the level of sophistication variable shows that GA and RP dominate among sophisticated characters compared to unsophisticated characters, which is in line with hypothesis 4c. Altogether, around 79% of the sophisticated characters speak GA or RP, which shows that standard accents tend to be associated with intelligence and cleverness in the original films. In contrast, there is a higher prevalence of English with a foreign accent, Reg. AmE, Reg. BrE and AAVE among the unsophisticated characters compared to the sophisticated characters. This contributes to a clearer distinction between these two groups of characters in these films. For instance, while 34.3% of the unsophisticated characters speak English with a foreign accent,

the corresponding percentage for sophisticated characters is just 11.3%. Furthermore, almost twice as many unsophisticated characters (11.4%) speak Reg. AmE compared to sophisticated characters (5.6%). Additionally, close to three times as many unsophisticated characters (8.6%) speak Reg. BrE compared to the sophisticated characters (2.6%) in the Disney originals. The same can be seen for AAVE, although this is mainly because the large majority of the crows, except for the leader Dandy Crow, are classified as unsophisticated characters. While the other crows are portrayed as comic reliefs, with exaggerated and stereotypical accents and lacking depth to their personalities, Dandy Crow stands out as a type of leader who displays intelligent behavior. For example, he advises Pinocchio on how to capitalize on his weaknesses, particularly his long ears. For this reason, Dandy Crow is classified as a sophisticated character.

As mentioned earlier, the remakes contain a higher percentage of sophisticated and undetermined characters, while there is a lower proportion of unsophisticated characters compared to the originals. The distribution of accents in the remakes in relation to the level of sophistication of the characters is shown below in Table 4.11 and is presented visually in Figure 4.11.

Table 4.11: *Accent distribution among sophisticated, unsophisticated, and undetermined characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes					
	Sophisticated		Unsophisticated		Undetermined	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	40	34.5	6	16.2	13	44.8
RP	19	16.4	-	-	1	3.4
English with a foreign accent	42	36.2	14	37.8	8	27.6
Reg. AmE	7	6.0	7	18.9	6	20.7
Reg. BrE	5	4.3	10	27.0	-	-
AAVE	3	2.6	-	-	1	3.4
Total	**116**	100	**37**	100	**29**	100
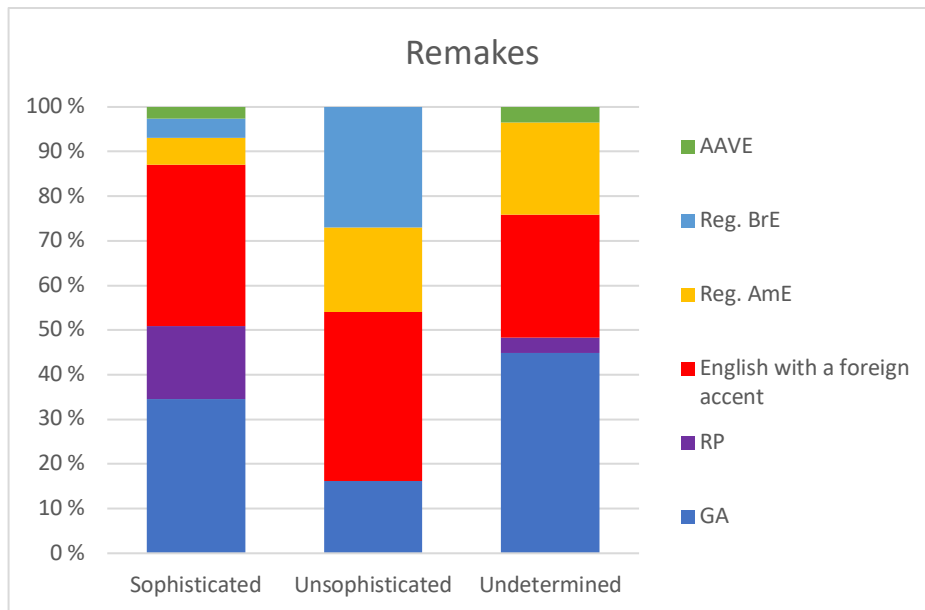
Figure 4.11: *Accent distribution among sophisticated, unsophisticated, and undetermined characters in the remakes*

In the Disney remakes, there are almost no differences between sophisticated (36.2%) and unsophisticated (37.8%) characters in the use of English with a foreign accent. This contrasts with the Disney originals that associate English with a foreign accent with unsophisticated characters. Furthermore, there remains a clear tendency in the remakes for GA to be used more frequently by sophisticated characters (34.5%) than by unsophisticated characters (16.2%), as approximately twice as many percent of the sophisticated characters speak GA compared to the unsophisticated characters.

Another interesting observation when comparing the remakes and the original Disney films is that RP is exclusively spoken by sophisticated characters in the remakes, unlike in the originals. In the Disney originals, 4 unsophisticated characters have an RP accent. These include the Sultan of Agrabah in *Aladdin* (1992) and Mr. Darling and his son John Darling as well as Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* (1953). As for the level of sophistication and use of accents in these characters, it can be noted that like in the original film, the Sultan is classified as unsophisticated in the *Aladdin* (2019) remake (see 3.4.5). However, the Sultan speaks English with a foreign accent in the remake. When it comes to Mr. Darling, John Darling and Captain Hook in *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023), these characters all speak RP in this film but are portrayed in a different way than in the original film and have therefore all been classified as sophisticated characters in this remake (see the classification of Captain Hook in section 3.4.5). Additionally, one RP speaker is classified as undetermined in the remakes. This character is one of the diners at

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Tony's restaurant in *Lady and the Tramp* (2019), who points out that the restaurant claimed that they had run out of meatballs and spaghetti, the special dish of the day, which later appears on the plate of Lady and the Tramp. Although Tony's patron appears elegant to the viewer and could easily be considered intelligent and educated, she is labeled as undetermined in terms of sophistication due to her very minor role in the film. This classification of her character aims to minimize personal bias, given that she only appears in one scene and has limited dialogue in the film.

In the remakes, Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE both have a greater distribution among the unsophisticated characters compared to the sophisticated characters. For instance, 18.9% speak Reg. AmE and 27% speak Reg. BrE of the unsophisticated characters in these films. In contrast, only 6% speak Reg. AmE and 4.3% speak Reg. BrE of the sophisticated characters. Although a similar pattern in terms of level of sophistication can be observed in the original films, the tendency for regional accents to be spoken more frequently by sophisticated characters is greater in the accent distribution of the remakes. This trend is especially noticeable for Reg. BrE. As noted in section 4.5, there is a tendency for the pirates to speak Reg. BrE in the Disney originals. However, Captain Hook in Disney's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) as well as Prince Eric (the captain on his ship) in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) both speak RP. These two characters display more wise and intelligent behavior compared to the other pirates working on Hook's ship and the crew members working on Prince Eric's ship, who all generally speak Reg. BrE. Unlike the other men working on Captain Hook and Prince Eric's ships, Hook and the Prince are classified as sophisticated characters. This shows that RP tends to be found in the characters who have a greater importance within the films and who are perceived as more intelligent.

Overall, the level of sophistication variable shows that the standard accents GA and RP dominate in percentages among the sophisticated characters compared with the unsophisticated characters in the Disney originals. Conversely, Reg. BrE, AAVE, and English with a foreign accent predominate among the unsophisticated characters in these films. Furthermore, like in the originals, the remakes show a tendency for Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE to appear more frequently with the unsophisticated characters. However, English with a foreign accent and AAVE do not show such differences between the two types of characters in the remakes. Still, the abundance of regional accents among the unsophisticated characters in these films results in a lower proportion of characters speaking standard accents. Interestingly, around 16% of the unsophisticated characters speak GA in the remakes, while not even one of them speaks RP. Thus, the remakes show that RP continues to be associated with intelligence and educatedness, as previously mentioned in section 2.1.3. Consequently, the findings of this study are consistent

with previous studies. For example, in Urke's (2019) study, unsophisticated characters have a much lower proportion of RP and a higher percentage of GA and Cockney[21] compared to sophisticated characters in both the Disney originals and remakes (see Urke 2019: 52–53). Therefore, like Urke's study, the present study shows that sophisticated characters speak in a more standardized fashion than unsophisticated characters and that Reg. BrE is generally more associated with being unsophisticated rather than being sophisticated. Moreover, for the present study, this also applies to Reg. AmE.

4.7   Species

The species variable is divided into three sub-variables that include *human* characters, *animal* characters, and *humanlike* characters. In line with hypothesis 4d, GA and RP are expected to be used more frequently by human and humanlike characters compared to animal characters in the Disney originals. The remakes are also expected to show smaller differences in accent use amongst the various species.

In total, the remakes feature 129 (71%) human characters compared to 83 (56%) in the originals, 38 (21%) animal characters compared to 48 (32%) in the originals, and 15 (8%) humanlike characters compared to 18 (12%) in the originals. Thus, the remakes have more human characters and fewer animal and humanlike characters compared to the originals.

The distribution of accents among the different species in the original films is shown in Table 4.12 below and the percentages are visualized in Figure 4.12.

Table 4.12: *Accent distribution among human, animal, and humanlike characters in the originals*

Accents	Originals					
	Human		**Animal**		**Humanlike**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	40	48.2	17	35.4	17	94.4
RP	11	13.3	3	6.3	-	-
English with a foreign accent	24	28.9	9	18.8	1	5.6
Reg. AmE	2	2.4	10	20.8	-	-
Reg. BrE	6	7.2	2	4.2	-	-
AAVE	-	-	7	14.6	-	-
Total	**83**	100	**48**	100	**18**	100

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[21] The Cockney accent is singled out as its own accent category in Urke's (2019) study due to its high representativeness, whereas it is included under the Reg. BrE category in the present study.
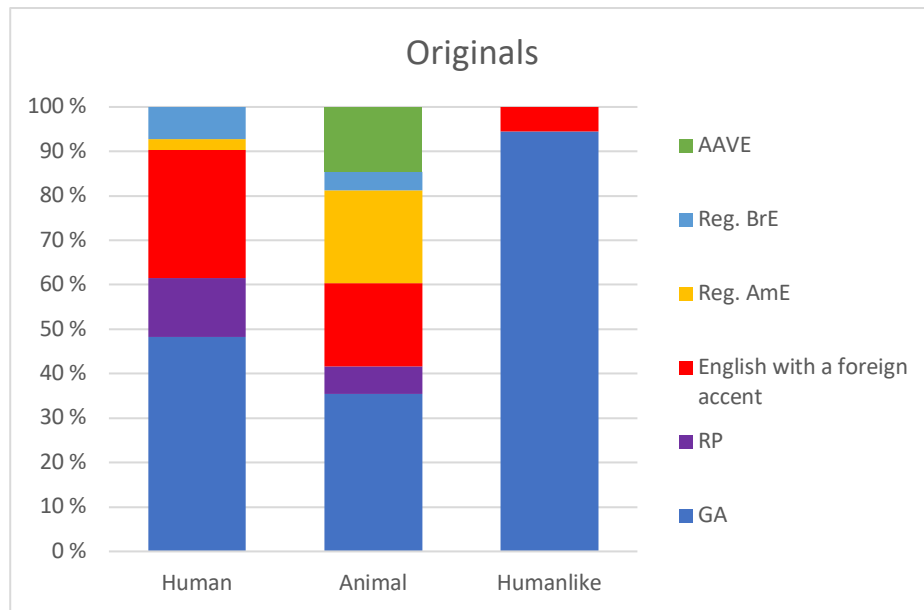
Figure 4.12: *Accent distribution among human, animal, and humanlike characters in the originals*

Based on the accent distribution of the original Disney films, it is evident that GA is the most used accent across all species types. This is particularly true for humanlike characters where only one character speaks with a different accent than GA. This character is one of Mulan's ancestors who, along with the other ancestors, appears as a ghost-like character (*Mulan* 1998). Although she is not portrayed authentically, her accent is a clear imitation of stereotypical English with a Chinese accent, and she is therefore classified as a character speaking English with a foreign accent.

When comparing human and animal characters, it becomes clear that GA is more common in the originals among human characters, since approximately 48% of these characters speak this accent compared to around 35% of the animal characters. Additionally, there is a clear difference in the types of species that speak Reg. AmE and AAVE. Indeed, only 2.4% of the human characters speak Reg. AmE compared to 20.8% of the animal characters. Animals are also the only type of species that employ AAVE in the originals. These include the five crows in *Dumbo* (1941), the hyena Shenzi in *The Lion King* (1994), and the Chinese dragon Mushu in *Mulan* (1998). Therefore, the findings from the original films corroborate Lippi-Green's (1997: 93) argument about how AAVE is only spoken by animal characters and not by humanoid characters. However, making inferences about AAVE should be made with caution since the number of characters speaking this accent is rather small, both in Lippi-Green's (1997) study and in the present study. Regardless, Lippi-Green (1997: 94) criticized the fact that the

hyena Shenzi, who is voiced by Whoopi Goldberg, was the only character in whom AAVE could be observed in *The Lion King* (1994), although African Americans voiced many of the animals in this film. Thus, even though several of the lions were voiced by African Americans, they all spoke GA, whereas the unsophisticated hyena Shenzi slipped "in and out of AAVE for comic and dramatic effect" (Lippi-Green 1997: 94). When AAVE is predominantly portrayed by animal characters who exhibit more playful or unsophisticated character traits, this should raise concerns. One reason for this is that such depictions risk influencing children to primarily associate African Americans with these particular character types. What makes this assumption even more interesting is that Lippi-Green (1997: 93) points out in her study that the Southern American English accent, which has similarities with AAVE in terms of its phonology (see sections 3.3.3.2 and 3.3.3.3), is exclusively spoken by animal characters as well. The same can be seen in the present study, where the two human characters speaking Reg. AmE both have a New York accent. Thus, this study corroborates Lippi-Green's (1997) findings concerning the Southern American English accent and AAVE only being used by animal characters in the Disney originals.

As previously stated, there is a greater presence of human characters in the remakes compared to the original films, whereas the number of animal and humanlike characters is lower in these films. For humanlike characters, the number is almost the same, with 15 appearing in the remakes compared to 18 in the original films. The distribution of accents among the different species in the Disney remakes is shown in Table 4.13 below and is presented graphically in Figure 4.13.

Table 4.13: *Accent distribution among human, animal, and humanlike characters in the remakes*

Accents	Remakes					
	Human		Animal		Humanlike	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	34	26.4	21	55.3	4	26.7
RP	17	13.2	2	5.3	1	6.7
English with a foreign accent	52	40.3	3	7.9	9	60.0
Reg. AmE	13	10.1	7	18.4	-	-
Reg. BrE	13	10.1	2	5.3	-	-
AAVE	-	-	3	7.9	1	6.7
Total	**129**	100	**38**	100	**15**	100
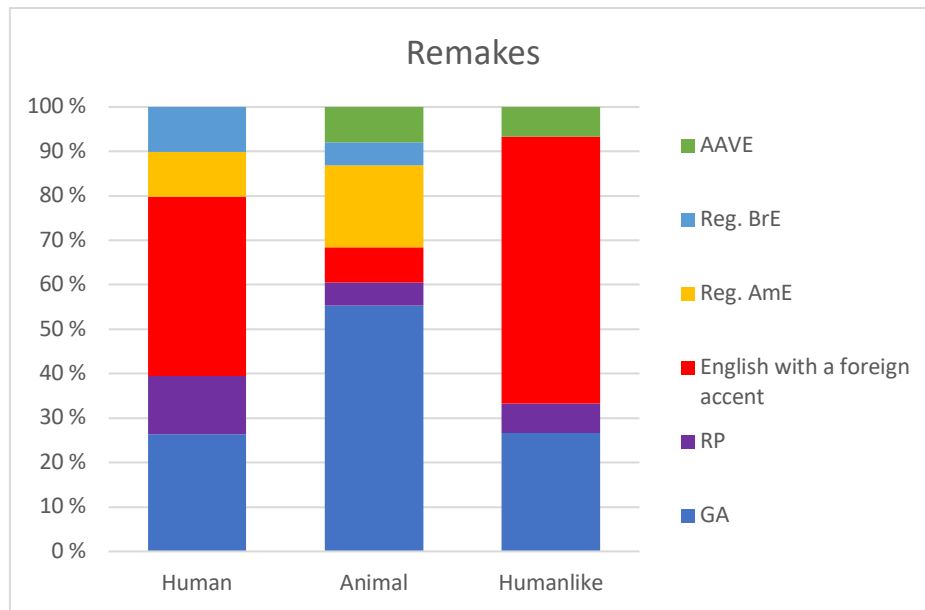
Figure 4.13: *Accent distribution among human, animal, and humanlike characters in the remakes*

Compared to the original films, standard accents appear less frequently among both human and humanlike characters in the Disney remakes. For animal characters, the opposite is seen, as roughly 55% of these characters speak GA in the remakes compared to around 35% in the originals. Furthermore, the most common accent for both human and humanlike characters in the remakes is English with a foreign accent with approximately 40% and 60% of these characters speaking this accent respectively. It is worth mentioning that the *Aladdin* (2019)[22] and *Mulan* (2020) remakes do not have any animal characters that speak and are both set in locations where English with a foreign accent would be naturally spoken, which could influence the general distribution observed in the remakes. However, since the original Disney versions of these films only contain two animal characters with one speaking AAVE (Mushu in *Mulan* 1998), and the other having a New York accent (Iago in *Aladdin* 1992), the accent distribution of these characters does not affect greatly the overall accent distribution of the species variable. Rather, whereas the Russian Wolfhound Boris, who speaks with a Russian English accent, the chihuahua Pedro, who speaks with a Spanish English accent, and the dachshund Dachsie, who speaks with a German English accent, speak foreign accents that are reflective of their dog breed in the original *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) film, the remake lacks this diversity as the

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[22] In *Aladdin* (2019), the parrot Iago speaks like his counterpart in the original *Aladdin* (1992) film. However, because his voice could not be linked to any specific accent in the remake and often consisted of single-word utterances, Iago was excluded from the analysis.

dogs in the pound are fewer in number and speak American English accents. Thus, the change in this adaptation might explain why English with a foreign accent appears less often among the animal characters overall in the remakes. Overall, the accent distribution of the originals and remakes shows that English with a foreign accent appears to be used less frequently by the animal characters in the remakes compared with the originals.

Regarding the distribution of RP within the species variable, it can be noted that there is a higher distribution of this accent among human characters compared with humanlike characters and animal characters in both the originals and remakes. Therefore, the results of the present study align with the results of the species variable in Urke's (2019: 60–62) study, where human characters speak RP more frequently than nonhuman characters both in the Disney originals and the remakes. In addition, like in my study, Urke's study finds no clear changes concerning the use of RP among the various species in the Disney remakes compared to the original films. Within the remakes, the species variable also shows a higher proportion of human characters speaking Reg. BrE than among animal characters, whereas Reg. AmE is more common for animal characters than human characters. Therefore, when it comes to Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE, the results are somewhat similar to the originals, although human characters speak Reg. AmE more frequently in the remakes.

Unlike in the Disney originals, AAVE and Southern American English are not limited to animal characters but are also found with humanlike characters (i.e., Genie, who speaks AAVE in *Aladdin* 2019) as well as with human characters, including several of the human characters in *Dumbo* (2019) and several of the animal characters in *Lady and the Tramp* (2019) all of whom have a Southern accent. Thus, there are no human characters who speak AAVE in the remakes, which is also true for the Disney originals. However, the Disney remakes do not indicate a tendency for the Southern accent or AAVE to only be associated with certain species, compared with the Disney originals. Rather, AAVE seems to be used in the remakes as a way to develop the character's personality.

For example, Aunt Sarah's two cats, Rex and Devon, both speak AAVE and have mischievous and cunning personalities in the *Lady and the Tramp* (2019) remake. This is evident when they engage in harmful behavior toward Lady, such as attempting to blame her for destroying the furniture that they themselves ruined in Jim Dear and Darling's house. Rex and Devon's behavior therefore resembles that of the Siamese cats, Si and Am, of the original film (*Lady and the Tramp* 1955). However, compared to the original film, the cats in the remake are not portrayed in a stigmatizing way. In the original film, Si and Am are given voices that sound inauthentic and attempt to imitate English with a Chinese accent. This choice of accent

seems to be trying to align with the specific species of cat these characters represent, i.e., the Siamese cat breed. However, Disney has received a lot of criticism for the way these cats were portrayed, because the accents could be considered offensive and insensitive to other cultures, which might lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes. For instance, Towbin et al. (2004: 32 and 37) highlight how negative stereotypes toward people of Asian origin are promoted in the *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) film because the Siamese cats of Aunt Sarah are "dangerous" in nature and "are portrayed with slanted eyes and buckteeth […] and speak with poor grammar and accents". In comparison, although Rex and Devon demonstrate the same mischievous and cunning behavior in the remake, the accent of these cats is not explicitly associated with a particular breed. This way, the portrayal of the two cats does not risk stereotyping and offending specific groups of people. In addition, there is no comical or unsophisticated outer appearance to these cats, which for instance could lead to stereotypes of African Americans. Therefore, AAVE contributes to shaping the personalities of the cats in *Lady and the Tramp* (2019), without portraying them in a manner that could be harmful to other ethnicities or cultures, as seen with the stereotypical foreign accent in the original film.

Similar to the stereotypical accent portrayal in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), English with a foreign accent is portrayed stereotypically in *The Lion King* (1994). The same pattern is also evident for AAVE in this film. In *The Lion King* (1994), the hyenas, Shenzi and Banzai, who speak AAVE and English with a Spanish accent respectively, have a questionable appearance and behavior as well as a darker color compared to all the lions, all of whom speak GA. Additionally, one of the hyenas, Ed, is depicted as non-verbal and communicates solely through laughter and giggles, which is often done in a very eccentric way. According to Towbin et al. (2004: 33), the hyenas in this film are socioeconomically inferior to the lions and are constantly hungry. Additionally, they exhibit negativity through their lack of power in determining the future of the Pride Lands, especially when contrasted with the lions who perceive them as a "stupid" species (Towbin et al. 2004: 33). Although the hyenas in *The Lion King* (2019) remake continue to be hungry and display negativity due to their social rank in the Pride Lands, the hyenas stand up to Scar and question his sovereignty in this film. For this reason, the hyenas of the remake appear to have a more serious nature compared to the original film. This is especially true for the leader, Shenzi, while the two hyenas Kamari and Azizi have a more comedic nature. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Shenzi speaks with a foreign English accent that reflects naturally the film's environment, whereas Kamari and Azizi both speak GA. Thus, the two hyenas with less serious personalities speak standard accents, whereas the sophisticated hyena speaks English with a foreign accent. All of these observations allow us to conclude that

the filmmakers behind this remake seem to have become more cautious about how characters with foreign accents are portrayed to viewers.

When comparing the *Lady and the Tramp* (1955/2019) and *The Lion King* (1994/2019) films to the *Dumbo* (1941/2019) and *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films, we can see that there are different approaches to how AAVE is portrayed in the characters. The original *Dumbo* (1941) film was for instance criticized for how the comical portrayal of the crows could lead to perpetuating stereotypes about African Americans. In this film, most characters speak GA except for the Ringmaster, who speaks English with a German accent, and Timothy Q. Mouse, who speaks with a New York accent. Additionally, all five crows in this film speak AAVE. Aside from being portrayed as annoying and comical, the depiction of their accents is problematic due to the species of these crows. This is shown when Timothy Q. Mouse criticizes the crows for mocking him and says, "Fly up a tree, where you belong" (see *Dumbo* 1941, 52:00–53:00). Furthermore, one might question whether the all-black color of the crows has been a motivation for giving these characters an AAVE accent. In comparison, in the *Dumbo* (2019) remake, there are no talking animal characters like in the original film, which includes the elephants. The other types of animal characters that were part of the original film are also completely left out of this adaptation. Because this remake differs substantially from the original film both in terms of plot and in terms of the types of characters that are part of the film, it is not possible to draw conclusions about how the remake has approached the stereotypical portrayals of the original film. Still, by completely excluding the crows from the remake, we can assume that these characters were not an important part of the story, but instead were originally included for comical effect. This is similar to how the Chinese dragon Mushu was dropped in the remake of *Mulan* (2020). Instead, Mushu has been replaced with a non-verbal red phoenix, who serves the same protective and helpful role that Mushu had in the original film.

When comparing the *Aladdin* (1992/2019) films to the *Mulan* (1994/2020) and *Dumbo* (1941/2019) films, a different approach becomes apparent in the former. While the humanlike jinn Genie speaks GA in the original film, the Genie in the remake, who is played by Will Smith, speaks AAVE. In the original film, Genie can be described as a witty and comical character, for instance when he speaks in different languages while demonstrating his magical powers. Furthermore, he proves to be loyal, loving, and compassionate toward Aladdin in this film. The same can be said in the remake, and his AAVE accent could be a way to emphasize his comical and loving nature. Moreover, by having the actor Will Smith use this accent, which he has previously employed in films and television, and which appears to be representative of his Philadelphian background, Genie could appear as more authentic to viewers compared to if he

spoke English with an Arabic accent. Consequently, although the AAVE accent is not representative of the setting in any way, this accent becomes an important element of Genie as a character. In contrast to earlier portrayals of characters speaking AAVE in the Disney originals, the Genie in the *Aladdin* (2019) remake does not carry stereotypical associations commonly linked with African Americans. Still, one might question whether Genie would speak this accent if he was a human character and not a jinn with a humanlike appearance. Interestingly, Will Smith also plays the Mariner at the beginning, who, however, is classified as speaking GA. For this reason, both the choice of actor and the voice for Genie in *Aladdin* (2019) seem to enhance the uniqueness of this character and evoke earlier memories of the animated version. For example, Genie maintains a blue color in the remake similar to that of the original *Aladdin* (1992) film while appearing as a jinn in the Cave of Wonders. In this way, recognizing and remembering traits of a character becomes part of the "pleasure" of experiencing a new film version (see Hutcheon 2012: 4 in section 2.2.2). Thus, while the *Dumbo* (2019) remake omitted the AAVE-speaking characters in the original film and the *Mulan* (2020) remake replaced Mushu with a non-speaking red phoenix, the remake of *Aladdin* (2019) has included AAVE in one of its characters as a means of developing that character. Therefore, these examples confirm hypothesis 4e of this study, indicating that stigmatizing accent portrayals involving characters speaking AAVE are present in the originals but absent in the Disney remakes.

4.8   Accent realism

The *accent realism* variable is divided into two sub-variables, which include accents considered *accurate* and those considered *inaccurate* in terms of the setting of the films. Hypothesis 5 of this thesis predicts that the remakes will have accents that are more representative of the setting of the films compared to the originals. In line with what Lippi-Green (2012) writes about how illogical it is to give a character an AAVE accent in a film set in ancient China (see section 3.5), English with a foreign accent is expected to be more prevalent in certain films, while GA is expected to be less common. These films include *Aladdin* (2019), *Mulan* (2020) and *The Little Mermaid* (2023)[23]. At the same time, British English accents are expected to dominate the characters in *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023), since part of the story is set in London, England.

Of the 149 characters classified in the Disney originals, 72 have accents that are accurate of the films' environments, while 77 have inaccurate accents. Furthermore, of the 182 characters

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[23] See the classification of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) regarding accent realism in section 3.5.

in the Disney remakes, 125 characters have accurate accents and 57 have inaccurate accents in terms of the setting. The distribution of accents in terms of accent realism is presented in Table 4.14 and is shown visually in Figure 4.14.

Table 4.14: *The distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents in Disney originals and remakes*

Accent realism	Characters			
	Originals		Remakes	
	n	%	n	%
Accurate	72	48	125	69
Inaccurate	77	52	57	31
Total	**149**	100	**182**	100
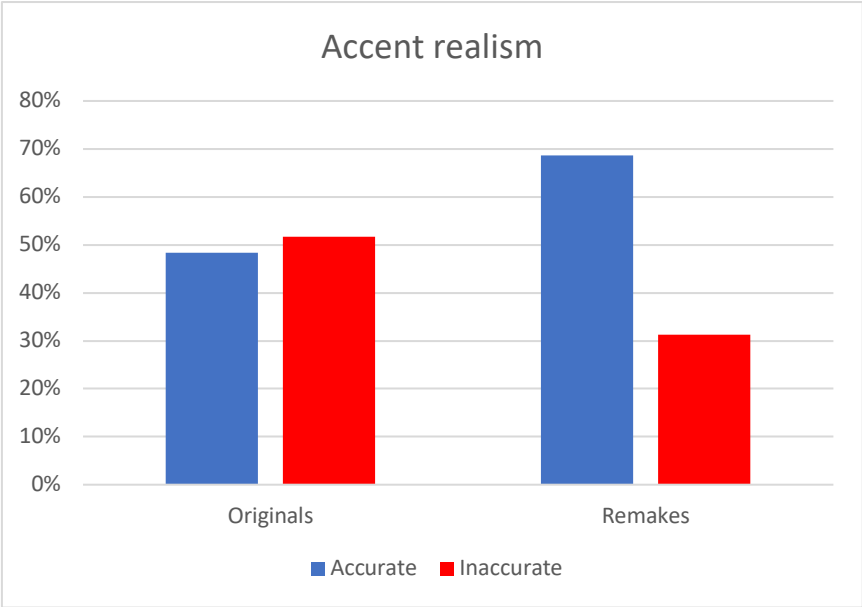
Figure 4.14: *The distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents in Disney originals and remakes*

As expected, the results of the accent realism variable show that the characters in the Disney remakes have a higher percentage of accurate accents in terms of the setting compared to the original films. While 48% of the characters in the Disney originals have accents that align well with the setting of the films, this figure increases to 69% in the remakes. Additionally, 52% of the characters have inaccurate accents with respect to the setting in the originals, whereas 31% have inaccurate accents in the remakes. This shows that, overall, there have been changes in the accent distribution in the remakes compared to the original films. To delve deeper into accent

changes in relation to the setting, the distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents across various Disney films is presented below. Whereas Figure 4.15 refers to the accent distribution of each original Disney film, Figure 4.16 shows the distribution of their remake counterparts.
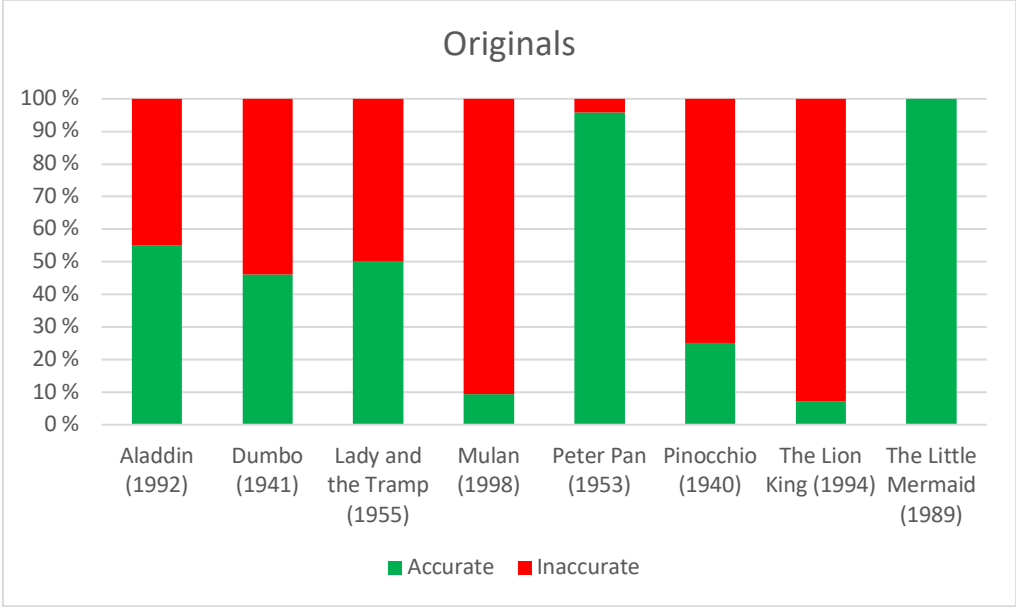
Figure 4.15: The distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents in the different Disney originals
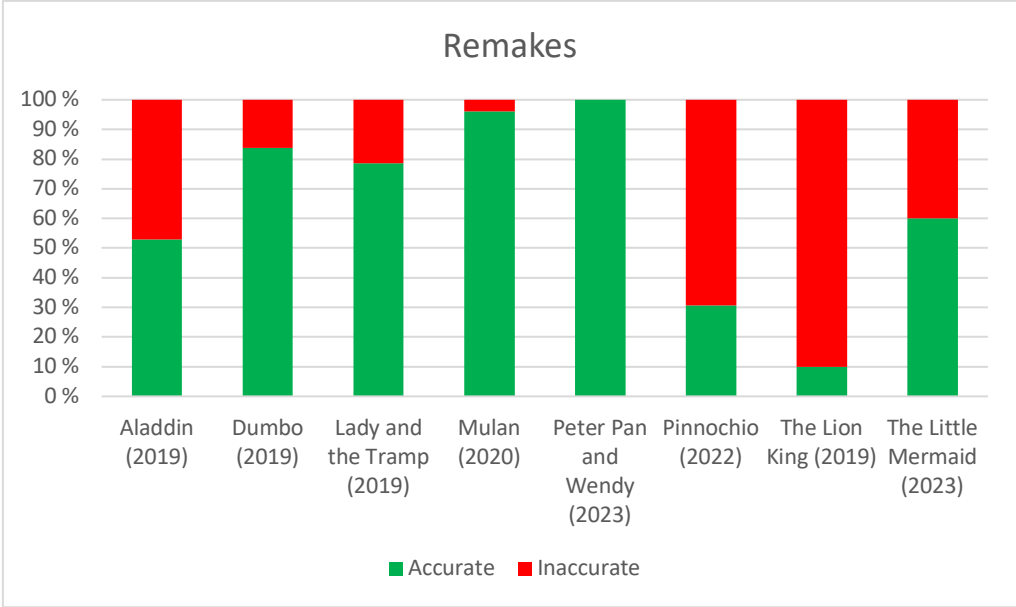
Figure 4.16: The distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents in the different Disney remakes

As shown in Figures 4.15 and 4.16, there are substantial differences when it comes to how the different films score in terms of accent realism. For instance, the *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) films both score high in terms of accent realism. As mentioned earlier in this section, most of the characters in these films are classified as accurate because the majority of them reside in Neverland, where, due to the entirely fantastical location, no particular accent is expected to represent the characters. However, Michael Darling, whose accent is GA in the original *Peter Pan* (1953) film, has been classified as inaccurate, both because the rest of his family speaks RP and since they reside in London, where GA would not naturally be found. One might question Disney's motivation for giving this character a GA accent while all the other members of his family speak RP. However, seeing that Peter Pan and all the Lost Boys in this film speak GA, we can assume that this accent is chosen because the film is primarily aimed at an American audience. This is also the case for the *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) remake, where, for example, Birdie and Nibs as well as the two female twins from the "Lost Boys" speak GA, while most of the pirates, including Captain Hook and Mr. Smee, as well as Peter Pan and the entire Darling family, have British English accents. On the other hand, one could argue that including different accents among these characters makes them more diverse linguistically. Therefore, these two films illustrate that there seems to be a tendency to include American English accents to ensure that Disney films appeal to their target audience, and in doing so these films become more linguistically diverse.

When considering films in which English with a foreign accent is expected to be found naturally, a different pattern emerges. For example, the distribution of accurate and inaccurate accents has remained virtually the same percentage-wise in the original films of *Pinocchio* (1940), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994) compared to the *Pinocchio* (2022), *Aladdin* (2019) and *The Lion King* (2019) remakes respectively. By contrast, the original *Mulan* (1998) film has a very high proportion of inaccurate accents, while the *Mulan* (2020) remake is overwhelmingly accurate in terms of accent realism. Since the original *Mulan* (1998) film was criticized for having accents that were not representative of ancient China (see section 3.5), those who produced the remake of *Mulan* (2020) might have particularly focused on casting actors who speak English with a Chinese accent to make this adaptation seem more authentic to its ancient time and location. Interestingly, this does not seem to apply to other films where one would expect a dominant representation of English with a foreign accent. For example, while Mulan speaks GA in the original film and English with a Chinese accent in the remake, Aladdin and Jasmine, two of the most important characters in *Aladdin* (1992/2019), both speak GA despite the Middle Eastern setting of the fictional city Agrabah. Furthermore, *The Lion King*

(2019) remake comprises only animal characters like in the original *The Lion King* (1994) film and is set in the Pride Lands of Africa where foreign English accents representative of that setting are expected to be used. This remake largely resembles the original film in accent use, however, where most of the lions speak GA and where Scar and Zazu are the only characters speaking RP. Moreover, only 2 out of 20 characters speak English with a foreign accent in *The Lion King* (2019) remake. These include the mandrill Rafiki, who also speaks English with a foreign accent in the original *The Lion King* (1994) film, as well as the leader of the hyenas, Shenzi, who speaks AAVE in the original film. Therefore, while some remakes have accents that are representative of the setting, others continue to have characters speaking with standard accents. This means that hypothesis 5 is only partially confirmed if we focus on each remake specifically.

4.9   Stereotypical accent portrayals of English with a foreign accent

This section discusses accent portrayals of English with a foreign accent in the Disney originals and remakes. Hypothesis 4e holds that the originals will draw on stigmatizing accent portrayals with respect to characters speaking AAVE and English with a foreign accent, whereas the remakes will avoid such portrayals. As noted in section 4.7, the remakes do not contain stigmatizing accent portrayals with respect to characters speaking AAVE, which contrasts with the originals. This section analyzes some of the stereotypical accent portrayals specifically concerning the characters speaking English with a foreign accent in the Disney originals and discusses how they are addressed in the remakes.

In general, there seems to be a tendency for the remakes to have characters speak foreign English accents that sound authentic. Whereas most of the characters in the Disney originals have foreign English accents that sound inauthentic to the viewer, the opposite is seen in the remakes. In the originals, Mulan's father Fa Zhou in *Mulan* (1998) and the red crab Sebastian in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) are two of the few characters speaking foreign English accents that sound authentic. In comparison, the original *Aladdin* (1992) film generally features exaggerated and stereotypical Arabic English accents in its characters (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 80), see, e.g., the various street vendors and palace guards in Agrabah. By comparison, although most characters seem to have foreign English accents that sound authentic in the remakes, Prince Anders in *Aladdin* (2019) and Geppetto in *Pinocchio* (2022) are two exceptions. For example, although the Prince is originally from Scandinavia in the remake, his accent sounds more similar to a German English accent. In addition, the actor Tom Hanks, who voices Geppetto in the Pinnochio remake, has mixed success in carrying out an Italian English accent.

Some have noted that as the film progresses, Geppetto's accent becomes increasingly American (Leigh 2022). Consequently, while the majority of the remakes appear to have authentic accent portrayals that may not run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes, the accents of Geppetto and Prince Anders, particularly, are two exceptions.

Compared to the originals, the remakes have made several changes concerning the characters and plot of the films to avoid the risk of offending different groups of people. For example, in the original *Peter Pan* (1953) film, the indigenous people are portrayed in such a poor way that they can easily be seen as naïve and foolish. This film even includes the term "Injuns" in the song's line "We're out to fight the Injuns" in the song "Following the Leader", which is an inappropriate term to refer to Native Americans. Furthermore, Meek (2006: 117) argues that the Indian Chief's speech style in the film is "both paragon and parody of Hollywood Injun English." According to Meek, Hollywood Injun English (HIE) has been used in film and television to show "American Indians as different, even foreign" (Meek 2006: 110). Screenwriters have therefore used this accent[24] to mark someone as inferior to the majority culture. However, in the *Peter Pan and Wendy* (2023) remake, Tiger Lily alone represents the indigenous population of Neverland, except in a scene where her grandmother and some other natives are shown. Tiger Lily mixes between speaking GA and her native language and is brave and intelligent, unlike the Native Americans of the original film who are seen as unsophisticated characters. This demonstrates how Disney has adapted this film in accordance with increased awareness concerning political correctness.

As mentioned in section 2.4.1, French people have often been portrayed stereotypically in film and television, concerning, e.g., their attention to delicacy and cooking (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 98–100). In *The Little Mermaid* (1989), one of the comic reliefs is Chef Louis, who speaks English with a French accent. He intends to kill the crab Sebastian when he discovers that the crab is still alive while he is about to put it into the boiling water. However, the chef becomes a laughingstock when he fails to catch the crab and instead displays clumsy and aggravated behavior which leads to chaos when both the food and the kitchen equipment are broken. However, in *The Little Mermaid* (2023) remake, Chef Louis has been completely omitted from the film, although Sebastian reminisces about the original scene at one point. Therefore, this could be a way for Disney to avoid imposing stereotypes on its audience, especially children, who are the main target of its films.

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[24] See Meek (2006) for more details on the stereotypical characteristics typically employed in characters who speak HIE.

As discussed in section 4.7, the more recent Disney films appear to have adapted the portrayal of their characters to political correctness in terms of accent use. This was seen in this section through the stereotypical Chinese English accent of Aunt Sarah's Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), and the subsequent shift to AAVE in the remake. Besides, section 4.5 highlights that English with a foreign accent appears to be used solely with antagonistic characters in films where this accent aligns with the setting. Consequently, the remakes appear to avoid employing accents in ways that could perpetuate harmful stereotypes toward specific groups of people or cultures. This suggests that influential film producers, like the Walt Disney Company, have become increasingly cautious about how certain accent portrayals may contribute to harmful stereotyping. Therefore, since the remakes do not show stigmatizing accent portrayals of characters speaking English with a foreign accent, hypothesis 4e of this thesis is confirmed.

5.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter serves as a summary and conclusion of the master's thesis. Section 5.1 summarizes the findings of the present study and readdresses the hypotheses, whereas section 5.2 readdresses the research questions for this thesis. Section 5.3 delves into limitations, while section 5.4 explores the future avenues of research.

5.1   Summary of the findings

This thesis has analyzed accent portrayals within eight animated Disney films released between 1940 and 1998, along with their remake versions released between 2019 and 2023. In total, the analysis covered 331 characters, who were examined both in relation to their accents and different character variables. The thesis categorized accents into six distinct accent categories, including General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), Regional American English (Reg. AmE), Regional British English (Reg. BrE), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and English with a foreign accent. Six character variables were also included in the study, including *gender*, *age*, *character role*, *alignment*, *level of sophistication*, and *species*, as well as one variable related to *accent realism*.

Hypothesis 1 of this study focused on the overall accent distribution in the original Disney films and their remakes. It proposed that the standard accents GA and RP would predominate among the characters in the original films, whereas the remakes were expected to have more accent diversity. This expectation was based on evolving attitudes toward language due to societal changes. This study has found a clear predominance of GA in the originals, which is consistent with the findings of Lippi-Green (1997), Sønnesyn (2011), Madland (2022), and the original Disney films in Urke's (2019) study. However, a change in the accent portrayals is evident in the remakes. While RP surpassed GA and was the dominant accent in the remakes in Urke's (2019) study, English with a foreign accent has surpassed GA as the most used accent in the remakes in this study. Thus, due to increased accent diversity in the remakes, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

The gender variable investigated the correlations between the use of accents and gender. Hypothesis 2 predicted that female characters would be underrepresented in the originals. Additionally, it anticipated a greater use of the standard accents GA and RP among female

characters compared to male characters. These differences between genders were, however, predicted to be smaller in the remakes due to societal changes. In the originals, hypothesis 2 is confirmed based on the overall distribution of the genders, with 74% male characters and 26% female characters in these films. In the remakes, the hypothesis is refuted, with 67% male and 33% female characters in these films. Thus, although there are indications of an increased number of female characters, male characters continue to dominate in the remakes. Regarding the use of accents among male and female characters, this thesis shows a clear tendency for GA to be spoken more frequently by female characters in both film sets. However, there are smaller differences in the more recent adaptations between the male and female characters as predicted in hypothesis 2. Furthermore, Reg. AmE, Reg. BrE and AAVE have a much higher presence in the male characters compared to the female characters in both the originals and the remakes. However, while the accent distribution of English with a foreign accent in the originals mirrored the accent distribution observed for Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE, the remakes do not show differences between genders in the use of this accent. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed in the originals and is partially refuted in the remakes.

Hypothesis 3 concerned the age variable and predicted that young characters would speak in a more standardized manner than adult and old characters in the originals, while there would be smaller differences in accent use between the various age groups in the remakes. The results of the age variable show a strong tendency for young characters to speak GA or RP in both the originals and remakes. Furthermore, the percentages of these accents are much higher in this age group compared to the other two age groups, which is similar to the findings of the age variable in Madland's (2022) study. Thus, hypothesis 3 is confirmed concerning the originals and refuted when it comes to the remakes.

Hypothesis 4 of this study predicted that the originals would display more stereotypical use of accents than the remakes. This hypothesis was divided into five sub-hypotheses in total where four of them were related to the character variables *character role*, *alignment*, *level of sophistication*, and *species*, while the last one zoomed in on the portrayals of AAVE and English with a foreign accent in the two film sets.

Hypothesis 4a concerned the character variable relating to the role of the characters, which aimed to investigate whether there were correlations between the accents of the characters and their importance within the films. This hypothesis predicted that main characters would have a greater use of GA and RP compared to the supporting and peripheral characters in the originals, while there would be smaller differences in accent use between the various character roles in the remakes. The character role variable shows a clear tendency for standard

accents, particularly GA, to feature in the voices of the main characters. However, while the originals have a much higher accent distribution of Reg. AmE among the supporting characters than the other character roles, the remakes have a closer distribution between the main, supporting, and peripheral characters. Therefore, hypothesis 4a of this study is largely confirmed regarding the use of accents in the originals. However, it is refuted when it comes to remakes, as they show a similar accent distribution across the various character roles, except for the use of Reg. AmE.

The goal of Hypothesis 4b was to investigate whether the characters' ethical motivations were correlated with their accents. More specifically, good characters were predicted to speak GA or socially attractive accents to a greater extent than bad and neutral characters in the originals, whereas the remakes were expected to show smaller differences in accent use in terms of alignment. The alignment variable shows that good characters use GA to a much greater extent than bad and neutral characters in both the originals and remakes. Moreover, RP and English with a foreign accent are more frequently associated with bad characters than with good characters in the original films, which is consistent with previous studies (Lippi-Green 1997, Dobrow & Gidney 1998). However, in the remakes, English with a foreign accent is only associated with bad characters where this accent represents the films' environments. Both the originals and remakes indicate that Reg. BrE is generally more typical among the bad characters compared to the good characters. In comparison, Reg. AmE, is more common among the good characters in the originals, while the remakes indicate no differences in the use of this accent. Thus, consistent with hypothesis 4b, good characters speak in the most standardized fashion in the originals. Since that is also the case in the remakes, this hypothesis is only partially confirmed concerning the use of standard accents. Similarly, regarding social attractiveness, this hypothesis is confirmed in the originals but is partially refuted in the remakes since Reg. BrE has a much greater distribution among bad characters compared to the good characters.

The level of sophistication variable aimed to investigate whether there were correlations between the accents of the characters and their levels of sophistication. In line with hypothesis 4c, sophisticated characters were predicted to speak GA and RP to a greater extent than unsophisticated characters in the originals, while the remakes were expected to show smaller differences in accent use in terms of level of sophistication. The results of the sophistication variable show that sophisticated characters use GA and RP much more frequently than unsophisticated characters. Furthermore, the accent distribution of Reg. AmE and Reg. BrE is even greater among the unsophisticated characters in the remakes than in the originals. However, English with a foreign accent is not associated with being either sophisticated or

unsophisticated in the remakes, which contrasts with the original films. Consequently, hypothesis 4c is confirmed concerning the originals but is refuted when it comes to the remakes, except for in the use of English with a foreign accent in the latter.

The species variable investigated whether there were differences between how human characters, humanlike characters, and animal characters spoke in the films. Hypothesis 4d predicted that human and humanlike characters would speak in a more standardized manner than animal characters in the originals, whereas the remakes were expected to show smaller differences in accent use between the various species. The results of the species variable show that GA and RP are more frequently used by human and humanlike characters than animal characters in the original Disney films. In contrast, animal characters speak in a more standardized manner than human and humanlike characters in the remakes. Hypothesis 4d is therefore confirmed with respect to the originals, but refuted in terms of the remakes since animal characters speak more standardized in these films.

Hypothesis 4e predicted that the originals would draw on stigmatizing accent portrayals with respect to characters speaking AAVE and English with a foreign accent, whereas the remakes would avoid such stigmatizing portrayals. While the originals show multiple times stigmatizing accent portrayals of AAVE and English with a foreign accent in the characters, the remakes do not have stigmatizing accent portrayals that could risk perpetuating harmful stereotypes toward other races or cultures. Therefore, hypothesis 4e is confirmed.

The accent realism variable investigated whether the accents were representative of the films' environments. Hypothesis 5 predicted that characters would have accents that reflected the setting to a greater extent in the remakes than in the originals. The results of this variable show that the remakes portray accents more realistically in terms of the setting compared to the originals, which is in line with the findings of Urke (2019). However, several of the remakes, such as *Aladdin* (2019), *Pinocchio* (2022), and *The Lion King* (2019), show roughly the same percentages of accent realism as their original versions. Only in *Mulan* (2020) do we see a substantial difference as this remake reflects the setting in contrast to the original film. Consequently, hypothesis 5 is confirmed, although there are major differences between the different remakes, and compared to Urke's (2019) study, there is less accent realism in the remakes contained in the present study.

5.2 Conclusions

At the beginning of this thesis, it was noted that children learn from producers of entertainment to be skeptical of people who diverge from the majority culture. At the same time, it was argued

that what children are shown through entertainment media in their younger years is likely to affect how they perceive other cultures and groups of people as adults. This study aimed therefore at analyzing how accents were portrayed in newer adaptations of original Disney films by conducting a societal treatment study to investigate whether societal change had played a role in the accent portrayals, since this might tell us something about attitudes toward language. Although it needs to be emphasized that the findings of this study are limited to the material in this thesis only, the study does provide some insight into language attitudes as well as certain implications.

This thesis has operated with two research questions. The first of these investigated whether there were systematic correlations between the use of accents and character traits in Disney's originals and remakes, while the second analyzed whether there had been changes in accent portrayals in the remakes that could be connected with currently ongoing societal changes. As seen in the previous section, this thesis has documented systematic correlations between character variables and the use of accents in Disney originals and remakes. More specifically, GA and RP are generally spoken to a larger extent in the two film sets by characters who have character traits that we would consider positive, such as being sophisticated or good. In contrast, regional accents are more dominant in characters with personality traits that we might consider negative, like being unsophisticated or bad. However, for English with a foreign accent, the latter only seems to be the case in the originals and not in the remakes.

This leads to the second research question, where the new adaptations, as hypothesized, appear to avoid linguistic stereotypes that can be directly linked with marginalized people and people who represent minority groups or cultures. After Lippi-Green (1997) published her initial study, there have been several societal changes happening, such as the increased awareness of political correctness, and more recently *wokeness* (see section 2.3.2). The results of the remakes suggest a deliberate avoidance of linguistic stereotyping associated with minorities or marginalized people. Rather, several films feature accents that more accurately reflect the characters' environments, such as the increased use of English with a Chinese accent in *Mulan* (2020). Because this study includes live-action films, it differs substantially from those studies that have solely analyzed animated films. Indeed, the results of the present study and Urke's (2019) study suggest that characters speak with accents that are more representative of the setting in films played by real people. However, other films seem to be more focused on maintaining a narrative that does not differ greatly from the original films from which they were adapted, which means that some characters maintain their accents from the original films despite their unrealistic nature. Although the accents of some characters may be illogical in

terms of the setting of those films, the need to attract large crowds to movie theaters seems to have trumped the need to be realistic. Consequently, in several films, celebrities have voiced animated characters or played human or humanlike characters using their own accents rather than accents that reflect the environments of the films potentially to attract greater audiences.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that children still learn to distinguish groups of people based on the way they speak and that certain speech forms are considered inferior to others in the remakes. More specifically, children are given the impression that women are expected to speak in a more standardized manner than men, as prestigious accents continue to dominate the speech of female characters in the remakes. One could also argue that by continuing to have male characters dominate the gender distribution in these films, the impression that is given to those watching the films, particularly children, is that women's voices are marginalized compared to men's. It might also suggest that the stories and narratives concerning men are more interesting to pay attention to than those of women, which ultimately means that the perspectives of women are more easily overlooked. Additionally, by having young characters speak predominantly with standard accents in the remakes, language diversity is undermined, and the impression is given that standard accents should be considered ideal because changes in a language typically begin within the younger generations. Moreover, these representations could affect how children perceive their own linguistic identities, which can cause those who speak regional accents to feel devalued and marginalized both by themselves and others. This means that standard varieties in a sense become the norm for how future generations are to speak.

Similarly, by having the main characters speak primarily GA or RP in the Disney remakes, while other regional and foreign English accents are distributed more frequently in the supporting and peripheral characters, the impression given is that important people should speak standard accents, while nonstandard accents are fine as long as they represent people who do not have important voices. This means that nonstandard accents are included on the surface to make the films seem more inclusive, without providing any meaningful exploration of those who speak these accents.

Furthermore, with respect to the alignment variable in this study, the implication given is that good people should ideally speak GA and avoid speaking regional accents at all costs unless they are socially attractive. In this context, a "foreign" accent could be perceived as equivalent to being considered evil. Therefore, speakers with nonstandard or socially "unattractive" accents are effectively marginalized, as their accents are presented as markers of inferiority or villainy. This is even more pronounced in the remakes concerning the level of sophistication

variable, which largely conveys the idea that sophisticated people, i.e. educated people, are to speak GA or RP, while those who have regional backgrounds, and thus speak regional accents, should be considered unsophisticated, i.e. as people lacking education and intelligence. Consequently, what is implied is that nonstandard accents are indicative of lower intelligence or social standing, which means that those speaking either GA or RP are seen as superior to others.

In summary, the remakes avoid stigmatizing accent portrayals associated with specific groups of people. In contrast, the original films repeatedly ridiculed characters speaking AAVE and foreign English accents and associated them with African Americans and individuals of foreign origin respectively. This indicates that the Disney Company is generally more aware of how its accent portrayals can affect how its viewers view other groups of people, and that Disney, therefore, avoids putting negative labels on marginalized people and minority groups in more recent films. However, regional accents continue to be used in stereotypical ways, which means that standard accents are still treated as the "norm", hence, as the title of this thesis suggests, as viewers we do not encounter a completely 'whole new world' with respect to how accents are portrayed in the remakes. Therefore, as observed in this study, children continue to learn to attach negative labels to individuals who do not speak with a standard accent. To conclude, there have been changes in the accent portrayals of the characters that can be directly linked with increased awareness surrounding political correctness and gender equality. This shows us that language attitudes are constantly evolving since they are constructed by human beings, and that this can happen within a short period.

5.3   Limitations of this study

Throughout this master's project, certain limitations have been inevitable, and I have had to make some decisions both in relation to the accent categories and the character variables. Regarding the accent categories for this study, it can be pointed out that some of them are quite broad, meaning that some nuances could potentially be lost from the analysis. For example, the regional accents of American and British English were classified into two distinct accent categories, and no single accent was singled out in the tables and figures within the data analysis. Similarly, English with a foreign accent was kept as a single accent category, rather than having English with a Chinese accent and English with an Arabic accent as separate categories. Even though both accents have a strong presence in the remakes, their high occurrence is related to the *Aladdin* (2019) and *Mulan* (2020) films.

Certain character variables that were included in other studies have intentionally been excluded in this study. These include *ethnicity*, which was investigated by Dobrow & Gidney (1998) and Sønnesyn (2011), and *likability*, which was investigated by Madland (2022). Regarding ethnicity, I chose to stick to character variables that would apply to all the characters, i.e., the ethnicity variable would not apply to the animal characters. Moreover, even though this study discusses the likability of some characters, including it as its own character variable was considered too much work, due to the high number of character variables already introduced in the thesis. Besides, the alignment and level of sophistication variables were predicted to provide interesting data on possible systematic correlations and could be compared with more previous studies. However, I was conscious not to conflate these variables with characteristics related to being either sympathetic or unsympathetic. Furthermore, the accent realism variable was not ideal with respect to *The Little Mermaid* (1989/2023) films, as the actual location of Prince Eric's castle was only specified in the remake. I chose to distinguish these films, however, rather than classify all the characters as speaking accurately in both films because that could take away valuable information about the use of accents in the remake.

Including films such as *The Jungle Book* (1967/2016) could have been interesting, since the original film warns its viewers about stereotypical portrayals like half of the eight original films in this study. However, from the beginning, I decided to focus only on films released after those in Urke's (2019) study, as this allows me to compare the accent distribution of my remakes with those of her study. This way, my study may provide more information concerning how Disney's live-action films differ from the classics they are based on.

Some films were more suitable than others for a direct comparison. For instance, the *Dumbo* (2019) remake was completely different from the original *Dumbo* (1941) film in many aspects. Since this new adaptation only contains three of the characters in the original film, where two of them do not speak, a direct comparison between the characters of the two versions is possible only to a limited extent. Even more so since the remake does not have animal characters that speak, whereas the original film mostly consisted of animal characters. However, the plot has many similarities with the original film and the remake continues to focus on the non-verbal "flying" elephant Dumbo. Thus, it was probably necessary to change the remake in several aspects due to the many societal changes that have occurred since the original film was released in 1941, which means that excluding these two films from the data analysis could potentially leave out important insights.

Due to the limited time frame of this master's thesis, certain decisions not relating to the accent categories or the character variables had to be made. For example, statistical tests could

have been included in the project to determine whether the remakes differed substantially from the originals. However, the distribution of accents and the changes from the originals to the remakes are quite clear based on the percentages of these accents in the two film sets. Moreover, since this thesis yielded 331 characters to the analysis, it can easily be compared with previous studies on language attitudes, as these have typically analyzed between 200 and 500 characters in total (see section 2.4). Consequently, the percentages of the accent distribution were thought to provide sufficient data to detect systematic correlations between accents and character traits and to compare this master's thesis with previous societal treatment studies.

5.4   Future contributions

The present study contributes to the broader field of language attitudes. This thesis can be considered as a follow-up study to Urke (2019), which, like Sønnesyn's (2011) study, is a continuation of Lippi-Green's (1997) study. However, the age variable in this study was not investigated by Urke (2019), whereas her study looked at accent authenticity in more detail (see section 2.4.5). This thesis has hopefully provided additional insight into how live-action films may differ from the films that they are based on.

In the coming years, Disney has planned to release more live-action remakes of animated Disney classics as well as new animated films (see section 2.3.2). Since this study has shown that, unlike earlier films, AAVE and English with a foreign accent are not used in the remakes in ways that could perpetuate stereotypes, studies in the future might analyze possible changes in the portrayals of different regional American and British English accents compared to GA and RP, either within Disney or other film studios. Greater expectations toward accent diversity would suggest that regional accents should not only represent the voices of animals and characters who are unsophisticated, evil, or have less important roles in films. Rather, these accents are to be equally showcased across human and humanlike characters as well as characters who are portrayed as sophisticated, good, or have important roles in the films. This way, future research might encounter a completely new approach to portraying accents in film and television, and in that sense be exposed to a whole new world of accents after all.

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Mulan. 2020. Niki Caro, director. Walt Disney Pictures/ Jason T. Reed Productions/ Good Fear Content/ China Film Group Corporation.

Peter Pan. 1953. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske, directors. Walt Disney Animation Studios/ Walt Disney Productions

Peter Pan and Wendy. 2023. David Lowery, director. Walt Disney Pictures/ Whitaker Entertainment.

Pinocchio. 1940. Norman Ferguson, T. Hee, Wilfred Jackson, Jack Kinney, Hamilton Luske, Bill Roberts, Ben Sharpsteen, directors. Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Pinocchio. 2022. Robert Zemeckis, director. Walt Disney Pictures/ Depth of Field/ ImageMovers.

The Lion King. 1994. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, directors. Walt Disney Pictures/ Walt Disney Feature Animation.

The Lion King. 2019. Jon Favreau, director. Walt Disney Pictures/ Fairview Entertainment/ Walt Disney Studios.

The Little Mermaid. 1989. Ron Clements and John Musker, directors. Walt Disney Pictures/ Walt Disney Feature Animation/ Silver Screen Partners IV/ Walt Disney Animation Studios.

The Little Mermaid. 2023. Rob Marshall, director. Walt Disney Pictures/ Lucamar Productions/ Marc Platt Productions.