

# “Blackfella talk”

*An attitudinal study on the linguistic portrayal of Australian Aboriginal characters in Australian films*

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Photo: The Australian

*Dedicated to the great Yolngu traditional dancer, actor and artist  
David Gulpilil.*

*We will never forget you.*

## Summary in Norwegian

Formålet med denne oppgaven har vært å se på fremstillingen av australske aboriginer i australsk film. 12 filmer ble analysert for å se hvorvidt det fantes en korrelasjon mellom karaktertrekk og uttalevarianter blant australsk aboriginiske karakterer. Videre har et av målene ved oppgaven vært å avdekke mulige endringer i fremstillingene, og undersøke om det er mulig å knytte disse opp mot endringer som har skjedd i samfunnet og australsk filmindustri. I tillegg sammenligner oppgaven resultatene for eldre og nyere filmer.

Oppgaven er i stor grad inspirert av kjente språkholdningsstudier som Lippi-Green (1997) og lignende masteroppgaver som Fjeldsbø (2013) og Urke (2019). Filmene i oppgaven er «live action» filmer, altså er det ekte mennesker som spiller karakterene, og disse vil ikke være like ensidige som karakterer i animerte filmer. Sjangeren som ble valgt for oppgaven er drama, noe som gjør det enda mer utfordrende å analysere karakterene da de er mer komplekse og sjeldent har like ensidige egenskaper som enten gode eller onde. Likevel gjør dette på mange måter studien mer interessant fordi det kan gi publikum i større grad en følelse av realisme, noe som potensielt kan bidra til at stereotypiske fremstillinger kan bli en del av deres virkelighetsbilde. Dette igjen kan føre til negative holdninger til ulike grupper i samfunnet.

Med utgangspunkt i de underliggende hypotesene var det forventet å finne en systematisk korrelasjon mellom språkbruk og karaktertrekkene etnisitet, kjønn, sosial klasse og karakterenes rolle. Det var forventet at australske aboriginiske karakterer ble fremstilt som lav-status karakterer, men at det var mer toleranse for aboriginiske varieteter av engelsk i de nyere filmene enn de eldre, da samfunnet i dag har en mer inkluderende holdning til australske aboriginer utad. I tillegg var det forventet å finne systematiske forskjeller mellom kjønn når det kommer til språkbruk. Til slutt ser oppgaven også på karakterer som skifter mellom ulike lingvistiske varieteter gjennom filmen.

I oppgaven konkluderes det med at australske aboriginere er i større grad representert i de nyere filmene, og det er mer bruk av aboriginiske varianter av engelsk i de nyere filmene, noe som reflekterer endringer i samfunnet mot mer tolerante holdninger til australske aboriginere. Likevel er de fortsatt fremstilt som lav-status karakterer, og de få karakterene som er en del av middelklassen eller arbeiderklassen snakker stort sett standard australsk engelsk, noe som kan bidra til vedvarende fordommer mot australske aboriginere som bruker aboriginisk engelsk.

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## Table of contents

<i>Summary in Norwegian</i> .....	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>List of figures</i> .....	<i>v</i>
<i>List of tables</i> .....	<i>vi</i>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Aim and scope</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Delimiting the project: some clarifications about terminology</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 The variables studied</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1.4 Research questions and hypotheses</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1.5 Structure of the thesis</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1 Sociolinguistics</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2.2 Language Attitudes</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.2.1 The field of language attitudes.....	7
2.2.2 Researching language attitudes.....	9
<b>2.3 Ethnicity, gender and social class</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.3.1 Ethnicity.....	10
2.3.2 Gender.....	12
2.3.3 Social class.....	14
<b>2.4 Social change</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.5 Attitudes towards varieties of English</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>2.6 Previous Research</b> .....	<b>19</b>
2.6.1 Lippi-Green (1997).....	19
2.6.2 Dobrow and Gidney (1998).....	20
2.6.3 Gallois, Callan & Johnstone (1984).....	22
2.6.4 Master theses by Urke (2019) and Fjeldsbø (2013).....	24
2.6.5 Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink (2016).....	25
<b>2.7 The language situation in Aboriginal Australia</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>2.8 Aboriginal Australians in popular culture</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>3.1 Methodology</b> .....	<b>32</b>
3.1.1 The direct method.....	32
3.1.2 The indirect method.....	33
3.1.3 Societal treatment method.....	35
<b>3.2 The present study</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.3 The films</b> .....	<b>37</b>

<b>3.4</b>	<b>Linguistic varieties .....</b>	<b>40</b>
3.4.1	RP .....	41
3.4.2	Australian English .....	42
3.4.3	Aboriginal Australian English.....	43
3.4.3.1	Light Aboriginal Australian English.....	44
3.4.3.2	Heavy Aboriginal Australian English .....	46
3.4.4	Aboriginal traditional languages .....	49
3.4.5	Bidialectal.....	49
3.4.6	Challenges with the linguistic varieties.....	50
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Character variables.....</b>	<b>50</b>
3.5.1	Ethnicity .....	51
3.5.2	Gender .....	51
3.5.3	Social class .....	52
3.5.4	Character role .....	53
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>54</b>
4.1	Ethnicity .....	54
4.2	General distribution of linguistic varieties.....	55
4.3	Aboriginal characters only .....	59
4.4	Gender .....	62
4.5	Class.....	71
4.6	Character role.....	80
4.7	Bidialectal characters.....	87
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>92</b>
5.1	Summary of the findings.....	92
5.2	Critique of the present thesis.....	95
5.3	Contributions made by the thesis .....	95
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>97</b>
	<b>FILMOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>103</b>

## List of figures

**Dedication:** David Gulpilil as “King George” in the film *Australia* (2008)

<b>Figure 4.1:</b> Distribution of ethnicity older vs. newer films.....	54
<b>Figure 4.2:</b> Distribution of varieties in the older films.....	56
<b>Figure 4.3:</b> Distribution of varieties in the newer films .....	57
<b>Figure 4.4:</b> Variety distribution in older vs. newer films .....	58
<b>Figure 4.5:</b> Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters in the older films .....	60
<b>Figure 4.6:</b> Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters in the newer films.....	61
<b>Figure 4.7:</b> Variety distribution among Aboriginal characters older vs. newer films.....	61
<b>Figure 4.8:</b> Overall variety distribution for male characters .....	63
<b>Figure 4.9:</b> Overall variety distribution for female characters .....	64
<b>Figure 4.10:</b> Variety use of white characters divided by gender.....	65
<b>Figure 4.11:</b> Variety use of Aboriginal characters divided by gender .....	66
<b>Figure 4.12:</b> Aboriginal characters in the older films male vs. Female .....	67
<b>Figure 4.13:</b> Aboriginal characters in the newer films male vs. Female.....	68
<b>Figure 4.14:</b> White characters in the older films male vs. Female.....	69
<b>Figure 4.15:</b> White characters in the newer films male vs. Female .....	69
<b>Figure 4.16:</b> Variety distribution all characters based on class.....	72
<b>Figure 4.17:</b> Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters based on class .....	73
<b>Figure 4.18:</b> Variety distribution of white characters based on class .....	75
<b>Figure 4.19:</b> Variety distribution based on class of Aboriginal characters in the older films.	77
<b>Figure 4.20:</b> Variety distribution based on class of Aboriginal characters in the newer films	78
<b>Figure 4.21:</b> Variety distribution based on class of white characters in the older films .....	79
<b>Figure 4.22:</b> Variety distribution based on class of white characters in the newer films .....	80
<b>Figure 4.23:</b> Variety distribution of all characters based on role .....	81
<b>Figure 4.24:</b> Variety distribution based on character role of Aboriginal characters .....	82
<b>Figure 4.25:</b> Variety distribution based on character role of white characters .....	83
<b>Figure 4.26:</b> Variety distribution for Aboriginal characters in the older films .....	84
<b>Figure 4.27:</b> Variety distribution for Aboriginal characters in the newer films.....	85
<b>Figure 4.28:</b> Variety distribution for white characters in the older films.....	86
<b>Figure 4.29:</b> Variety distribution for white characters in the newer films .....	86

## List of tables

<b>Table 3.1:</b> The films used in the present study .....	38
<b>Table 4.1:</b> Overall variety distribution .....	56
<b>Table 4.2:</b> Variety distribution among the Aboriginal characters .....	59
<b>Table 4.3:</b> Overall variety distributions divided by gender .....	63
<b>Table 4.4:</b> Overall variety distribution based on class .....	71
<b>Table 4.5:</b> Overall variety distribution divided by character role .....	81
<b>Table 4.6:</b> Overview of bidialectal characters .....	88



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Aim and scope

This thesis is a societal treatment study which investigates language attitudes in Australian films. The overall aim of this thesis is to analyse the linguistic varieties used by Aboriginal characters in Australian films and look for systematic correlations between the use of linguistic varieties and character traits. By doing this, we can learn something about what sort of attitudes towards Aboriginal people are conveyed in Australian media.

The thesis is a study of language attitudes and investigates how different linguistic varieties are used in Australian films featuring Aboriginal Australian characters. The films are divided into *older films*, which were released 1950s-1980s, and *newer films*, which were released from 2000 onwards. One of the aims of the thesis is to look for potential changes in the use of linguistic varieties over time and see whether these changes correlate with changes happening in Australian society and film industry. The data consists of a total of 12 films, six older ones and six newer ones. In the older films, there are 125 characters and in the newer ones there are 96 characters, resulting in a total of 221 characters.

The thesis is mainly concerned with the Aboriginal Australian characters, and I want to see if there has been a change in how they are portrayed linguistically in the media and in terms of the character variables *ethnicity*, *gender*, *class* and *character role*. This being a societal treatment study means that the thesis will look at language use in the public domain, in this case Australian films, which can have implications for society's attitudes towards speakers of a particular linguistic variety, in this case Aboriginal Australian English (AAE). AAE is a variety of English which historically has not been considered a correct way of speaking English, and one of the aims of this thesis is to investigate to what extent Australian films reflect common stereotypes in society. I have also analysed the white characters in the films to compare the results for the Aboriginal characters and put them into context.

The thesis uses live action films and thus the characters analysed are played by human actors, as opposed to the subjects in animated films like the ones Lippi-Green (1997) used in her study. It is harder to analyse live action films because the characters are played by real humans, and the characters are usually much more complex than in animated films. This is especially true for the genre used in this thesis, which is drama. Unlike animated films, where there usually is a clear villain and rarely any doubt about who is the hero, characters in live action drama films typically have elements of both heroic and villainous nature. Arguably, the

realistic portrayal of humans in live action drama films makes it even more interesting to analyse these characters. It might be easier for viewers to identify themselves with the characters, and the realistic portrayal might lead the audience to believe that the films reflect society completely, despite the fact that this is not necessarily the case.

## 1.2 Delimiting the project: some clarifications about terminology

The first, and most important, clarification I want to make is the use of the term *blackfella talk* in the title of the present thesis. According to Arthur, the term *blackfella* alone is a term used to refer to “An Aboriginal person” (Arthur 1996:135) but should not be used by non-Aboriginal people to refer to Aboriginal Australians, as Aboriginal people generally find that offensive. However, *blackfella talk* is a term that Aboriginal Australians use to refer to “Aboriginal English” (Arthur 1996:137), and since the present thesis analyses the use of Aboriginal English in Australian film, I thought it to be a nice addition to the title. Nevertheless, I limit the use of the term to the title and throughout the entire thesis I only use the term Aboriginal Australian English to refer to this linguistic variety.

Wells (1982:3) describes the term *dialect* as a vague term that linguists use to describe “any speech variety which is more than an idiolect but less than a language”. A language can therefore contain several dialects. Dialects can differ in vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation, and it is possible for people to master several dialects and be *bidialectal* (Wells 1982:2–3). However, the line between dialect and language is not crystal clear. A criterion that has been used is the one of “mutual intelligibility” (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics 2007:103; in Sønnesyn 2011:4), however, this can be a problematic distinction in some cases. For example, Swedish and Norwegian are two different languages, but a Swedish and a Norwegian person can usually understand each other perfectly well. At the same time, people who speak different varieties of Chinese cannot understand each other, but these are still considered dialects of the same language. Thus, according to Wolfram, the distinction between dialect and language is usually made more on social and political grounds rather than purely linguistic ones (Wolfram 1998:112).

*Accent* is another linguistic term that is frequently used. Wells (1982:3) explains that while “General English” is a dialect of English, within General English there are varieties that only differ in pronunciation. Thus, they are *accents* of General English, and differences in accents therefore only involve pronunciation or phonology (Wells 1982:3).

In this thesis, instead of using *dialect* or *accent*, I have chosen to use the more neutral term *variety*. The reason for this is that the characters' ways of speaking do not all differ in phonology, grammar and lexicon. Some varieties only differ in phonology, while others are so different, they are not considered the same language. Thus, the term *variety* may involve any or all of syntax, morphology, lexicon and pronunciation (Wells 1982:2).

### 1.3 The variables studied

As stated in 1.1, the aim of this study is to see if there is a correlation between linguistic varieties and a number of character traits, and to examine if there has been a change over time. The thesis will not look at change over time within each linguistic variety but rather look at how the varieties are distributed among the characters and how they correlate with their character traits. The following variables have been considered in this thesis:

- Linguistic variety

The linguistic varieties used in the thesis are as follows: *Received Pronunciation (RP)*, *Australian English (AuE)*, *Heavy Aboriginal Australian English (HAAE)*, *Light Aboriginal Australian English (LAAE)*, *Aboriginal traditional languages (ATL)*. They are presented in a descending order of standardness, with RP ranking as the most standard variety and ATL as the least standard variety.

- Gender

The thesis operates with two genders, *male* and *female*.

- Ethnicity

In the present thesis, the two ethnicities discussed are *white* and *Aboriginal Australian*.

- Character role

The characters are divided into three types of character roles: *main character*, *supporting character* and *peripheral character*.

- Class

Characters in this study are divided into three social classes: *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class*.

These variables will all be presented in further detail in chapter 3.

#### **1.4 Research questions and hypotheses**

The research questions and hypotheses were mainly inspired by previous attitudinal research and sociolinguistic studies. Social changes that have taken place in Australian society were also factored in when composing the hypotheses. Aboriginal Australians are more integrated in society today, and there has been a large focus on correcting mistakes made by the European invaders. The uniqueness of Aboriginal culture and language seems to be more accepted in modern society. The following research questions and hypotheses were worked out for the present thesis:

##### RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ):

RQ1: How are Aboriginal Australians portrayed in Australian films?

RQ2: Is there a correlation between gender and linguistic variety?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between class and linguistic variety?

RQ4: Is there a correlation between character role and linguistic variety?

RQ5: Have the cinematic portrayals changed over the past decades? If so, do these differences reflect social change?

##### HYPOTHESES (H):

H1a: The majority of the Aboriginal characters speak non-standard varieties.

H1b: Aboriginal Australians are portrayed as low-status characters, savages or drunks, not fitting in to western society.

H2: Males speak more non-standard than females.

H3: The lower the class the more non-standard the characters speak.

H4: The smaller the role, the more non-standard the characters speak. Thus, there are more non-standard varieties among the peripheral characters.

H5a: There is a greater tolerance for HAAE and ATL and generally more use of Aboriginal varieties in the newer films.

H5b: Aboriginal Australians are portrayed more positively in the newer films.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction which covers the aim and scope of the study and clarifies some of the terms. Additionally, the research questions and hypotheses are presented in this first chapter. The theoretical background for the thesis is presented in Chapter 2. The chapter goes into more detail about sociolinguistic theory and provides some relevant background. Previous research that is relevant for the study is also presented in detail in this chapter. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the data and methodology used in the present thesis. It goes into further detail about the different research methods used in attitudinal studies and explains why the societal treatment method is made use of in this particular thesis. Furthermore, the chapter presents the data used in the study. The films are presented, as well as the process of obtaining and analysing them. Additionally, the linguistic varieties are presented in detail in this chapter, as well as a clarification of how the different character variables are understood and used to classify the characters. Chapter 4 presents the results of my analysis and discusses the findings in light of the literature and my hypotheses. Finally, Chapter 5 gives a summary of the study and a conclusion is provided. Lastly, some ideas for future research are presented, and I hope this thesis will be an inspiration to future researchers.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter contains an overview of the theoretical background that this thesis is based on. The chapter will concern itself with the field of sociolinguistics and, more specifically, language attitudes. It will provide an overview of some previous research within the field, present some typical findings and what we have learned from studying language attitudes, focusing on varieties of English. Furthermore, the chapter deals with the language situation in Aboriginal Australia and finally, the representation of Aboriginal Australians historically and in popular culture.

### 2.1 Sociolinguistics

Linguistics is a discipline which is defined, in short, as “the study of language” (Mesthrie 2000:1). There are several fields within linguistics, and this thesis will focus on sociolinguistics. The term *sociolinguistics* was first used by the poet and philosopher Haver Currie in 1952, and after Currie pointed out the absence of the social within linguistics, a number of important sociolinguistic studies followed (Mesthrie 2000:3–4). The field can also be further divided into categories of macro-sociolinguistics and micro-sociolinguistics (Mesthrie 2000:5). As in economics, macro is concerned with the big picture, in this case examination of large-scale patterns for example in a whole country, while micro is more narrowed down to a certain structure or accent in a specific community.

Sociolinguistics explores the relationship between language and society. It studies how humans use language in certain situations (Holmes 2008:1–2). How a person speaks and uses his or her language can reveal a number of things about them. Language can tell us where we are from, who we are, and linguistic variation can provide social information about the speaker (Holmes 2008:2–3). A number of social factors are taken into account when we speak. Who we are addressing is one of several important factors that determine how we choose to use our language (Holmes 2008:9), which means that how we speak is to an extent determined by the receiver. You will not speak in the same manner to your doctor as you do to your best friend. The essence of sociolinguistics is the correlation between language and a number of social factors, and one of these factors is attitudes and the values attached to different linguistic forms and varieties.

## **2.2 Language Attitudes**

The following section provides background about the field of language attitudes and some important terminology and issues are presented. Furthermore, the section provides insight into the most common research methods in the field, methodology which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

### **2.2.1 The field of language attitudes**

Attitudes have been a big part of sociolinguistics, starting with Labov (1966) who researched how prestige and stigma correlates with specific linguistic features. An important goal for him and other sociolinguists has been to create a “record of overt attitudes towards language, linguistic features and linguistic stereotypes.” (Labov 1984:33; in Garrett 2010:15). Not only can we discover attitudes, but we are also able to explain language variation and change. Research on language attitudes reveals how people place themselves in society linguistically, but also how language and accent might affect different aspects of people’s lives, like the labour market, education and social status (Garrett 2010:15–16). Several terms like habits, values, beliefs, opinions, ideologies and social stereotypes are closely related to attitudes. In the following, we will take a closer look at social stereotypes.

According to Smith and Mackie (2000:163; in Garrett 2010:32), stereotypes are seen as “incorporating the affective response evoked by the other group”. Not only is stereotyping a cognitive process where you associate certain qualities with certain groups, but you also incorporate the feelings you associate with the group, which can be for example disdain or admiration (Garrett 2010:32). If a group evokes feelings of admiration in you, this can become a stereotype you then link to all other members of this group. Stereotypes are products of social categorisation, where society is divided into groups based on certain features. These features will often be exaggerated and can create similarities and differences within and between groups that in reality might not be present, which then become a basis for social stereotypes (Garrett 2010:30–35). Even more problematic is the fact that stereotypes have proven to be difficult to change. Studies have shown that even if you gain a new friend from an outgroup, they are usually considered an exception from that group. It takes numerous encounters on repeated occasions with a large number of members that are inconsistent with the stereotype to alter the group stereotypes (Smith and Mackie 2000; in Garrett 2010:33). Language, social identity and social stereotypes seem to be closely linked,

which is one of the reasons accents can be socially diagnostic (Kristiansen 2001:129–30). Thus, certain linguistic features are closely connected to social stereotypes and identities.

To access a person's attitudes can be quite difficult, considering that they are inner components of a person's mental life (Garrett 2010:19–20). Allport (1954) defines an attitude as “a learned disposition to think, feel and behave towards a person (or object) in a particular way” (in Garrett 2010:19). This indicates that an attitude is not merely connected to a person's feelings but is more than affect alone. It is easy to think that feelings are based on automatic instinct, but as Allport suggests, everything is in fact learned, even our attitudes. In addition, attitudes are expressed through thoughts and behaviour. Oppenheim claims that attitudes can for example be expressed through stereotypes (Oppenheim 1982:39; in Garrett 2010:19). As Allport (1954) suggests, attitudes consist of three components: *affect*, *cognition* and *behaviour*.

However, there are definitions of attitudes which give us a more stable ground and possibly more measurable variables to work with, which might be leaning more towards the *behavioural* part of the attitude term. For instance, Sarnoff (1970:279; in Garrett 2010:20) defines an attitude as “a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects”. This definition relies on what reaction a person is likely to have towards something or someone, and therefore we have something more concrete to work with. With this definition, it seems attitudes become to an extent more measurable and stable enough for us to research and identify them. Dixon et al. (2002) researched the connection between accent and crime type and found that accent had a significant effect on how likely it was that the listener thought the suspect was guilty. The study found that the suspect was rated significantly more guilty when employing a Birmingham accent rather than RP, and attributions of guilt were associated with the suspect's perceived social attractiveness and superiority (Dixon et al. 2002:162). Studies like these create numbers and facts which again can increase awareness about linguistic stereotypes.

Attitudinal research investigates attitudes in terms of the three different components mentioned above. The first one, *affect*, accounts for favourability. The second, *cognition*, involves a person's thoughts and beliefs. Lastly, we have the *behavioural* aspect, which reveals a person's disposition to act in a certain way (Garrett 2010:23). These are all aspects which are considered when we conduct an attitudinal study, and although there is some debate around how they are all connected, there seems to be a general agreement that they are at least connected to an extent. Furthermore, there seems to be a closer link between cognition and affect, whereas their connection to behaviour is more controversial



(Garrett 2010:24–6). To illustrate, Garrett (2010:23) uses the example of a person's attitude towards learning Spanish as a foreign language. The cognitive aspect will be that the person believes learning Spanish will give her a deeper understanding of Spanish culture. Next, the affective part will be that she is enthusiastic about being able to read Spanish literature. Lastly, the behavioural aspect will be that she is saving money to take a Spanish course (Garrett 2010:23). These are all components of the person's attitudes towards learning Spanish and will in the end determine whether she really follows through and learns it or not.

As mentioned, attitudes are usually thought of as *learned*, and generally we learn attitudes in two different ways. The first one is that we learn through observation, where we notice the behaviour of others and adopt it. The second is an instrumental way of learning, where we pay attention to the *consequences* of expressed attitudes and linguistic behaviour (Garrett 2010:24–5), whether it is our own or other peoples'. We make note of whether an action is punished or rewarded, and thereby learn how we should act towards something which, as we have seen, can be a measurement of our attitudes towards that particular object. Attitudes that are acquired early in life are according to Sears (1983; in Garrett 2010:29-30) likely to be more enduring. For that reason, language attitudes become of special interest, considering the fact that acquisition of language, as well as acquisition of our attitudes towards language, usually takes place early in life. Hence, our attitudes towards language tend to be more enduring than others and are therefore likely to be more constant and easier to access than other types of attitudes.

### **2.2.2 Researching language attitudes**

How do we access attitudes? As they cannot be observed directly, we need a sophisticated way to do research. There are three main approaches to the study of language attitudes: the *direct approach*, the *indirect approach*, and the *societal treatment approach* (Garrett 2010:37). In the *direct approach*, respondents are asked questions directly about their attitudes towards a certain accent or variety (Garrett 2010:39). This method is reliant on the respondents' ability to be aware of their own attitudes. However, it is not always easy, mainly because people are not always aware of their own attitudes, and also because people might not answer truthfully in fear of repercussions.

The *indirect approach* is a more subtle method for studying language attitudes. Here the researcher uses other techniques to elicit the subconscious attitudes that lie within the

respondents, techniques which might even seem a bit deceptive sometimes (Garrett 2010:41). The respondents listen to recordings of speakers with different accents reading a text, and then evaluate the speakers on various traits. Generally, researchers use two main methods within the indirect approach: the *matched guise technique* where a single speaker is recorded speaking different varieties without the respondents knowing it is the same speaker, and the *verbal guise technique* where the linguistic varieties are actually recorded by different speakers (Garrett 2010:41–2). The participants know that their attitudes are being measured, but they do not know that it is their attitudes towards different accents that are being evaluated. This is why it is called an indirect approach.

The last research method is called the *societal treatment approach*, which is the one used in the present thesis. It is considered the least obtrusive of the three, since it is based on the researcher's own inferences of attitudes from analysing documents or observing objects (McKenzie 2010:41). The data used in this type of research is typically publicly available material like newspapers, advertisements, law documents and so on. In this thesis for example, the objects in question are films. With the societal treatment approach, one can infer society's attitudes through observing language use in public material. The three approaches will be presented in more detail in chapter 3.

## **2.3 Ethnicity, gender and social class**

The present thesis addresses the issue of variety distribution and particularly how Aboriginal Australian characters are portrayed linguistically in the films. However, their linguistic portrayal is very much connected to their personalities, and what qualities the characters are given. Therefore, in this thesis I will analyse linguistic varieties in connection with different character variables and compare how characters with a certain variety are portrayed in terms of these variables. This section will elaborate on the relevant character variables for the present thesis which are *ethnicity*, *gender* and *social class* and discuss how these terms can be, and have been, understood. The last of the variables considered in the study, *character role*, will be presented in chapter 3.

### **2.3.1 Ethnicity**

Ethnicity typically refers to race, religion or culture, or a combination of these. According to Milroy and Gordon (2003:108), “ethnic groups are formed by persons who share, or believe they share, common cultural characteristics”. Just like language attitudes, we seem to learn

early in life which ethnic group we belong to and which ones we do not belong to. Ethnic groups share many characteristics, and one of them is language or set of communicative conventions. Thus, it is relevant to look at ethnicity when studying sociolinguistics. Which ethnic group you belong to can be determined by several factors because it is, as Milroy and Gordon stress (2003), a culturally constructed category. In Northern Ireland, for example, the two religious groups, catholic and protestant, are often referred to as different ethnicities.

When it comes to the distinction between ethnicity and race, the line can sometimes seem a bit blurry. Some researchers claim that race is closely associated with ethnicity (Milroy & Gordon 2003:108–110). In reality people who for example share the same skin colour have just as many genetic differences among themselves as they have compared to people of another skin colour, but historically the visual differences have been used to divide people into races based on biological criteria (Milroy & Gordon 2003:108–109). Thus, ethnic and racial differences become “physical variations singled out by members of a community and treated as ethnically significant” (Giddens 1998:246 in Milroy & Gordon 2003:109). These variations are chosen by society, and that is the reason why for example skin colour is used as an ethnical or racial marker while hair colour is not.

Ethnicity is a term that is used frequently but can sometimes be hard to define. It is also important to note that the term can have a different meaning in different societies, and therefore one ideally should try to understand it with reference to its local conditions (Milroy & Gordon 2003:110). According to Faught (2002:445), your ethnicity is defined by social practice, not personal attributes. In other words, it is not about what you *are* but rather what you *do*. One might immediately associate an accent with a certain ethnicity, but that is not always the case. Some speakers have different accents or even languages, and they might use code switching to signal their ethnic identity in different situations. By doing so, they make a symbolic choice using their language (Wolfram 2007:78–79). There can be several reasons for people to use code switching, and racial politics and ideology may enter into the determination of ethnolinguistic distinctiveness. Thus, the language people use serves a purpose beyond just the obvious message or content.

This particular thesis investigates the portrayal of Aboriginal people in Australia, and therefore it is worth mentioning the different ethnicities in Australia. Although Australia is a multicultural country with people with a number of different ethnicities, there are two main ethnicities relevant for this thesis, namely *white* and *Aboriginal Australian*. The thesis will not go into the distinctions within either of these ethnicities, and that is mainly because the films do not either, so it would be impossible for an outsider or the audience to say anything about

for example which Aboriginal people a character belongs to, or which heritage the white characters have for that matter. As suggested above, the line between race and ethnicity is not always clear, and since film is a visual media, this thesis uses mostly visual characteristics to distinguish between ethnicities. This will be explained in more detail in chapter 3.

### 2.3.2 Gender

Much research has been done on female and male speech within the field of sociolinguistics, and there tend to be some systematic differences between genders when it comes to how language is used. Stereotypes of female and male voices are present in much of this research (Gallois et al. 1984:41). Typically, male speech is considered loud, aggressive and frank. Female speech, on the other hand, tends to be more friendly and correct, but also trivial. Typically, when studying language and gender, the findings indicate that females use language that is considered prestigious more than men do, and that men tend to use non-standard linguistic features to a greater extent than women (James 1996:98). In this particular thesis, therefore, it will be interesting to see if females speak more AuE or LAAE than males.

As mentioned, women typically use less stigmatized and non-standard features in their language. For example, pronouncing *-ing* as [ɪŋ], in words like *jogging* and *walking*, is a more common feature among male speakers. Female speakers, on the other hand, tend to use the standard suffix [ɪŋ] (Chambers 2003:122–123). Male speakers also tend to have more features like double negation, copula deletion and replacing the standard [θ] with non-standard variants [f], [t] or nothing  $\emptyset$ , in words like *nothing* or *tooth* (Chambers 2003:127–132).

Numerous studies have established that women use more overtly prestigious language than men, but we still need an explanation. Trudgill (1972) provides two possible explanations for the fact that women use less non-standard speech. One reason can be that women are more status conscious than men. This could be because their status in society is less secure than men's, especially for women who do not work and, therefore, signalling their status through language is of greater importance to women. Another reason why women might be more status conscious than men, is that men are rated by what they *do* (occupation, earnings, power, etc.), whereas women are rated by how they appear. Again, language is a way to ensure an acceptable appearance. The second explanation that Trudgill mentions is that informal working-class speech is associated with masculinity. The roughness of working-class life highlights masculine features, while femininity is more associated with refinement

and sophistication (Trudgill 1972:182–184). Trudgill also suggests that while women tend to favour the overt prestige of standardized language, the covert values associated with non-standard speech is more appealing to men.

Men and women also differ in the way they use language. In 1973, Lakoff properly introduced the term “women’s speech” into the linguistic vocabulary (Lakoff 1973). She presents several areas in which male and female speech differs; choice and frequency of lexical items, intonation and use of certain structures (e.g. tag questions) (Lakoff 1973:49–54). She states that our language reflects attitudes as well as referential meanings, and that the marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in the way women speak as well as the ways women are spoken of. The way we feel about something or someone is often reflected in the words we choose and the way we express ourselves when we talk about that something or someone (Lakoff 1973:45). When we talk about the differences between male and female speech, it is typically the female way of speaking that is focused on, thus making it the deviant variant compared to the “neutral” male way of speaking. This phenomenon is what Juschka (2001) calls *the female deficit*. Women’s way of communicating is often seen as weak, inferior and “handicapped” (Juschka 2001:36–7), even by linguists. Hierarchies determine whose language is considered the norm, and since men have been above women in the traditional western culture, the way men communicate has become the norm as opposed to the inferior “women’s speech” (Juschka 2001:35).

The discussion about language and gender is closely related to social power. Lakoff (1973) states that women who use “women’s language” do not have access to power, so from that we can assume that “women’s language” is closely related to lack of power. Some researchers explain this with biology, and others (like Lakoff) with environment. One of Lakoff’s arguments is that women tend to switch to “neutral” (or male) language for example when they go to university or in formal situations like a job interview (Lakoff 1973:48). What earlier was considered “women’s” problem is in more modern times seen as a problem of miscommunication between women and men because they have different cultures, needs and experiences and thus understand things differently. This is what Juschka (2001:41–42) calls the “two cultures theory”. Again, Juschka points out that put in simple terms, language ultimately comes down to power.

Social power is another theory about why miscommunication takes place in male-female interaction (Juschka 2001:45). There are two explanations for differences in power in cross-sex communication. The first one states that men’s conversational dominance reflects their social and political dominance in society, and that their language is a way to display

their power in society. The second reason is that the use of power in conversation is simply an unconscious consequence of the gender roles that girls and boys are taught by society in gender role training (Juschka 2001:45). Interestingly, Lakoff states that women adopt men's language, but men do not adopt women's speech (except for homosexuals) (Lakoff 1973:50). This is because women frequently seek jobs that men have, but few men seek to be housewives, as was traditionally the woman's job. The inferior group will always adopt the ways of the superior, not vice versa, according to Lakoff (1973:50). Nonetheless, the power balance in conversational interactions between men and women seems to be uneven.

Cargile (2002) points out that, in the case of African Americans, stereotypes linked to males and females differ somewhat from the white gender stereotypes. While African American males are often considered angry, criminal and threatening, the image of the African American female is more varied. She is usually seen as a matriarch, both in a positive and negative way (Cargile 2002:188). When it comes to the Aboriginal communities in Australia, a clear gender segregation has been maintained, but women's role as provider of food and carer of children has given them a high status in their community. However, they seem to lose this position as they adopt the culture of the colonists and appear less powerful (Gallois et al. 1984:41). In a previous study conducted in Australia, Gallois and Callan (1981) found that Australian and British male speakers were rated more positively than females. The opposite was true for Italian, Greek and Vietnamese speakers of English, where females were rated higher on favourability than men. These results might indicate that there are certain cultural differences when it comes to language and gender. In the present study, it is therefore interesting to investigate gender differences in the language use of both Aboriginal and white characters and compare the two ethnicities.

### **2.3.3 Social class**

*Social class* is the stratification of society based on occupational, educational as well as economic similarities. It is also the most linguistically marked aspect of our social being in the industrialised nations (Chambers 2003:41). However, according to Macaulay (1976), when dealing with linguistic variables, the only criterion truly necessary is occupation. Generally, it is common to divide occupations into blue collar and white collar, especially in American contexts. Roughly speaking, in blue-collar occupations employees work with their hands, while white-collar employees work with pens or services. White-collar workers usually have a higher education, earn more money and typically supervise blue-collar workers

(Chambers 2003:42–43). With that definition, a white-collar worker would typically be the director of a mining company, while the blue-collar workers are the miners.

Class is closely related to status, which is transferred to the linguistic varieties people use. Historically, reforms in society happens when privilege is no longer arbitrary, but in fact systematic. For instance, if one group, gender or race is underprivileged, it is no longer a matter of chance or hard work, but a systematic discrimination which makes people wish for, and eventually fight for, change. As a result, social mobility becomes possible (Chambers 2003:39–41). Labov (1966 in Chambers 2003:48) divided social classes into four categories: lower class (LC), working class (WC), lower middle class (LMC) and upper middle class (UMC). Similar categorisation has been done by Blishen (1971), who created a list of occupations with their “socioeconomic index” scores in Canada. Blishen incorporated education and income to the index as well, although Chambers emphasises that “occupation is the touchstone of social class membership” (Chambers 2003:47–9).

As mentioned, social class is linguistically marked, and this is mainly due to the segregation of classes. This segregation is due partly to chance and partly to choice, and it allows differences to blossom. A group might not always be aware of the linguistic change happening, and once the changes become established, they can become important markers of a particular class. Many linguistic differences are quantitative instead of qualitative, thus marked by frequency. A feature can therefore be distinctive for a whole community at large, but the frequency of that particular feature can determine social class (Chambers 2003:56). Since linguistic variables are closely related to status, people in minority groups might climb the social ladder by adapting their language to fit the more powerful groups in society.

## **2.4 Social change**

The present thesis studies Australian film to look for signs of social change in Australian society regarding attitudes towards Aboriginal Australian people, more specifically Aboriginal English speakers. The way language is used in the films is assumed to be representative for how language is used in Australian society, and therefore the films are used as relevant data to study attitudes in Australian society. Traditionally, Australia has been a divided and segregated society, and the conflict between the Aboriginal people who originally lived in Australia and the European invaders who came to the country in the late 1700s has been ongoing for a long time. In the following, some history will be provided, and the social situation of the Aboriginal people today will be discussed.

Historically, the Indigenous population of Australia has experienced discrimination in many areas, and especially when it comes to welfare. The Commonwealth of Australia began to build its welfare state in the early 1900s, but one of the features of the early schemes of the Commonwealth was the exclusion of “Aboriginal natives” (Summers, 2000). Even though the specific reference to the Indigenous people was removed in the 60s, the discrimination continued well into the 1970s, with the exclusion of Indigenous people living in remote areas in the social security system. In the 1950’s, there was a growing international criticism towards how countries like the US and South Africa treated their black populations (*Australians together*, 2020, accessed February 2020). Australia also received their share of criticism, and the fight for Indigenous rights lasted for over a decade, leading to changes in the 60’s like all Aboriginal people’s right to vote in 1962 and the 1967 referendum, which removed two negative references to Indigenous people in the constitution (*Australians together*, 2020, accessed February 2020).

Since then, there has been a larger focus on the Indigenous population and their rights in Australia. One of the measures taken was the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), which started in 1977. The goal was to allow the Indigenous people to work on projects in their own communities, rather than passively receive social security benefits. Recently, the focus in the remote Indigenous communities has changed from direct employment to building skills in order to be able to get employment outside the CDEP (Gray et al. 2012). This is just one of several Indigenous employment programs, and a number of policies have focused on closing the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

Despite efforts to close the gap, the employment situation for Aboriginal people has actually slightly worsened from 2006 to 2016 according to the Australian Government website (*Australian government* 2020. Accessed February 2020). Numbers show that employment rates for people aged 15-64 has decreased from 48% to 46,6%. This might seem like an insignificant change but considering the fact that the number for non-Indigenous people has remained stable at 72%, there is a large gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians when it comes to employment. There are several reasons for this gap, but one of the most important ones is education. Research shows that the employment gap narrows as education levels increase. In fact, in 2016 there was no gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who had a bachelor’s degree or higher, the employment rate was 83% for both. Thus, the higher education, the smaller the employment gap.



Additionally, employment varies with remoteness. In major cities, the proportion of employed Indigenous Australians was 54%, compared to 31% in very remote areas, and the gap increased with increasing remoteness (*Australian government 2019*. Accessed February 2020) It is also important to consider the participation rate, which compares the labour force to the total working age population. Often people may give up looking for work, perhaps because there are no jobs in their local area, and therefore drop out of the labour force. Others may drop out of the labour force due to caring responsibilities. In 2016, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people of working age was 18.4 per cent, 2.7 times the non-Indigenous unemployment rate (6.8 per cent). This is an increase from 15.6 per cent in 2006 and 17.2 per cent in 2011. It seems, despite efforts to close the gap, the number of unemployed Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians is still too big.

As we have seen, the employment situation for Aboriginal Australians has seemingly not changed for the better in the last ten years. However, if we look at how society treats the Indigenous population, at least on paper, there seems to be a change in attitudes towards them in society. This change was publicly emphasised with the apology made by prime minister Kevin Rudd to the Indigenous people of Australia in 2008 (*Australian government 2008*, accessed February 2020). Comparing the old documents where the Indigenous population was actively excluded from government welfare with today's many efforts to change their situation for the better, as well as the formal apology by the prime minister, attitudes towards the Indigenous population in Australian society seems to be improving, however small the actual social effect might be.

## **2.5 Attitudes towards varieties of English**

In the field of sociolinguistics, Giles, Garrett, Preston and Coupland, to name a few, have been leading researchers on attitudes towards varieties of English. When examining attitudes towards language varieties, researchers typically use three evaluative dimensions (Garrett 2010:55–56): Status/superiority, social attractiveness/solidarity and linguistic quality. The respondents are usually asked to rate an accent or a speaker on a scale of 1-5 or 1-7 within these three dimensions. Garrett (2010) mentions a number of studies conducted on language attitudes towards varieties of English and looking at these studies, we get an overview of attitudes towards different varieties of English through several of the methods mentioned above. When it comes to favourable rating in the UK and US, varieties of English are

typically rated as follows: 1. Standard varieties, 2. Rural/regional varieties and 3. Urban varieties.

Studying six varieties of English, three American and three British, Hiraga (2005) found these traditional results to be true using the indirect method on British respondents. She found that RP was rated highest on status, while the Yorkshire and Alabama accents were on top of the scale of social attractiveness. The two urban varieties, which were the New York and Birmingham accents, scored lowest overall. General American scored relatively high in all three dimensions, but it was never rated the highest.

Coupland and Bishop (2007) also studied accents of English and used the direct method. They investigated 34 English accents with British respondents spread around the country. Unique for this study, the respondents were also compared with regards to gender, region, age and diversity. The study has been compared to Giles (1970), and a few general points are worth noting. Firstly, a great gap in the prestige rating between RP and the other varieties was discovered. Next, younger respondents seem to be slightly less negative to stigmatised varieties than the older ones. Lastly, respondents seemed to rank their own accent as well as Irish and Scottish over RP on the social attractiveness scale, and generally the Celtic varieties seemed to show a certain ingroup loyalty. These results also concur with the general tendencies we see in language attitudes studies, some of which will be discussed in more detail in section 2.6.

One might argue that the societal treatment method has had less focus in the field of language attitudes, but there have been a couple of studies which have had some interesting findings. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) studied accent use in children's animated television in the US and found that the use of dialects tends to reflect commonly held American attitudes towards regional dialects and foreign accents. They claim that what is *not* represented might be just as important as what *is* because, especially in television aimed at children, it affects how children see the world, who is good and bad, and they see who they can identify with (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:117). The study suggests that Latino and African American children generally watch more TV and are therefore particularly impressionable, although that might be up for discussion. If that is the case, however, it might be unfortunate that only 16 % of the characters in this study were non-white (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:113). This study, along with several other important studies on language attitudes, will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## 2.6 Previous Research

The following section presents some previous societal treatment studies within the field of language attitudes, as well as other attitudinal studies relevant for the present thesis.

### 2.6.1 Lippi-Green (1997)

One of the most famous societal treatment studies was conducted by Lippi-Green in 1997 using Disney animated films as data material. She studied all of the 24 full-length films available at the time, with a total of 371 characters. Her hypothesis was that while Disney films are undoubtedly entertaining, they also teach children to “associate specific characteristics and lifestyles with specific social groups, by means of language variation” (Lippi-Green 1997:85). Lippi-Green looked at the correlations between accent use and character. The study could be divided into two parts: a general quantitative analysis of accent use, and a closer examination of the representation of three aspects of language use. These aspects were the portrayal of certain groups (mothers and lovers especially), the usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and finally a case study of the usage of French as a tool (Lippi-Green 1997:87).

In analysing the characters, Lippi-Green found that close to 70% of the characters were male. In addition, traditional gender roles were highly emphasised in several ways. Women typically did not work, and when they did, they were restricted to professions which traditionally have been seen as “women’s work” like nurses, housekeepers, waitresses etc. (Lippi-Green 1997:87). These films therefore present children with a universe with a clear gender division. Finally, out of all the villains in the films, the few who actually had character growth (went from bad to good) were all male. The female villains remained bad throughout the films (Lippi-Green 1997:90).

About 43% of the characters in the study spoke what Lippi-Green refers to as Mainstream US English (MUSE), 14% spoke other US varieties and close to 22% had a mainstream variety of British English (Lippi-Green 1997:87). About 90% spoke some sort of native variety of English, and the labels used in the study were MUSE, Social US, Regional US, Mainstream British, Other British and Other Englishes (Lippi-Green 1997:88). Even though 90% spoke a native variety of English, only 60% of the characters overall appeared in English-speaking countries. This brings us to the final category of accents used in the films, and another point of interest in the study, the “non-native English” which only made up 9% of the character total.

Foreign accents were typically used to convey the setting of the film. However, there were many cases where native varieties of English were used in places that were not logical. For example, in *The Lion King*, which is set in Africa, the only connection to Swahili is some of the characters' names, with the exception of Rafiki who speaks a little Swahili (Lippi-Green 1997:87-88). A number of characters with foreign accents also occur in stories set in the US or Great Britain, and many characters set in foreign countries (or mythical universes) speak a native English variety. The study becomes particularly interesting when we look at character traits, especially the one we could call "good vs. bad". When looking at the "bad" characters alone, 85% of them are standard native speakers of English. However, after further examination, Lippi-Green found that when looking at the characters with positive, negative and mixed intentions, divided by major language group, only 20% of the US English speakers were considered bad characters compared to about 40% of the non-native speakers of English (Lippi-Green 1997:90-92). Thus, the overall representation of characters with foreign accents was far more negative than that of the US English speakers.

Lippi-Green also looked in detail into one particular non-standard variety, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). She found that all AAVE-speaking characters were animals, not humans. However, there were so few AAVE speakers overall that no firm conclusions can be drawn (Lippi-Green 1997:93). From Lippi-Green we learn that there is a distinction between good and bad that is marked linguistically. The villains typically have a non-standard accent, while the heroes usually have a standard American or British accent. In the Disney universe, traditional gender roles also remain intact throughout, although that might have changed a bit since 1997.

## **2.6.2 Dobrow and Gidney (1998)**

The year after Lippi-Green's study was published, another societal treatment study was conducted by Dobrow and Gidney, using children's animated programs on American television as data. They analysed 12 shows and 323 characters in total. The aim of the study was to discover any correlation between dialect use and stereotypes in children's animated television shows (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:107).

Earlier research had shown that in general, female and non-white characters were underrepresented in the television world in general. Not only were they underrepresented, but their portrayals were also highly stereotypical (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:108). A study on African American English (AAmE) from 1980 found that there were few instances of

phonetic and syntactic features, so what separated AAmE from Standard American English (SAE) were mainly grammatical features (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:108). Males also generally used more of the AAVE features than females, and younger speakers more than elders. Therefore, the typical image of an African American speaker seemed to be associated with the teenage male (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:109).

In Dobrow and Gidney's study, the main focus was on the representation of gender, ethnicity and status. Of the 323 characters, almost 70% were male, compared to only 27% female, while about 5% were undetermined (monsters, objects etc.). The middle class was represented by about 37%, and although there was a slight increase in ethnic diversity compared to earlier studies, a larger proportion of the characters were white. It is also worth noting that only two of the twelve shows were responsible for most of the non-white characters (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:112-113). In addition, they found that heroes and heroines were often prettier and thinner than villains.

Dobrow and Gidney also compared older and newer shows, and there were a few differences between them. In the older shows, it seemed dark was equivalent to bad, but this was not as obvious in the newer shows. (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:114). The use of female speech, and the female represented as weaker, more passive and dependent than the strong, smart male, was also more apparent in older shows like *Flintstones* and *Scooby Doo*. Male speech seemed in fact to be just as gender-coded as female speech, with low, gruff voices (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:116–117). In contemporary shows, however, it seemed male and female speech were generally quite indistinguishable.

What was probably most interesting in this study was the correlation between dialect and “good versus bad”. Dialect stereotypes seemed to indicate personality or status as hero, villain or comic character. Non-standard dialects were generally reserved for the villains or comic characters, with only a couple of exceptions. There were no instances of villains using SAE whatsoever, which is an interesting finding. Villains were often given non-standard dialects, which was also the case for the comic characters. RP, however, was the variety most used by villains but not used at all for comic characters (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:115–116).

From what this study has shown, there seems to be an uneven representation of gender and ethnicity in the content that children are typically exposed to through television. Why does this matter? Studies show that children are quite impressionable to the things they learn from television. In addition, what message they take from it can depend on gender and ethnicity (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:106). Children usually choose a favourite character of the same sex, and if the characters they identify with are always portrayed as the villain, that can

become a problem. This particularly seems to concern African American, Latino and Asian American children (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:107). The visual, behavioural and also linguistic representation of these groups therefore become quite important, especially when the writers seem to rely heavily on these stereotypes to convey different character traits (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:106).

Speech reveals a lot of information about us, and even though dialects are objectively equal varieties of a language, they are not treated as such (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:110). Dialects spoken by people of status and power tend to be favoured. Standard speakers are considered more educated, wealthy and even better looking (Baker 1992 in Dobrow & Gidney 1998:110). Children are exposed to a world of mostly Caucasian males, where people with different ethnicities or who speak other dialects than Standard American are villains. They are served a world view where white males who speak Standard American English are the good guys, and foreign equals bad. This not only teaches children how to think about others, but also how to think about themselves (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:117–18). They can end up internalizing these stereotypical images of others and themselves, and that is why studies like these are of great importance.

### **2.6.3 Gallois, Callan & Johnstone (1984)**

In 1984 an attitudinal study on Aboriginal Australian speakers was conducted at the University of Queensland. In this study, white males were compared to Aboriginal males, and white females to Aboriginal females. The respondents were 168 high-school students, 84 males and 84 females, who were a mix of white rural, white urban and rural Aboriginal Australians (Gallois, Callan & Johnstone 1984:39). This was a verbal guise study, so the respondents listened to audio tapes of Aboriginal and white males and females. The aim of the study was to compare how the students rated these different speakers, or, more specifically, what personality judgements white and Aboriginal Australian students made about male and female speakers of standard Australian English and Aboriginal English (Gallois et al. 1984:42).

After some preliminary testing to get the most authentic material for the study, four male (2 Aboriginal and 2 white) and four female (2 Aboriginal and 2 white) voices were selected to be used in the study (Gallois et al. 1984:42–44). In the actual test with the 168 respondents, speakers were rated on two dimensions; status and solidarity, rating factors like wealthy–poor, friendly–not friendly, good–bad, intelligent–stupid etc. (Gallois et al. 1984:44).

The study found that Aboriginal males were considered more likable and trustworthy than white males, but the opposite was true for females. Aboriginal women were considered less favourable than white females in terms of trustworthiness and likability (Gallois et al. 1984). According to Gallois et al. (1984:50), this could be due to the fact that Aboriginal males seem more visibly involved in storytelling, dancing and rituals, which could make them seem more warm and friendly than white males both by white Australians and their own ingroup. Why Aboriginal females were rated lower than white females is not clear. However, it is indicated they might have lost some of their power in their community due to their adaptation to colonist culture (Gallois et al. 1984:41), and this might be a reason for their low rating, but these are only speculations and would need further research (Gallois et al. 1984:50).

Previous research has shown that Aboriginal English differs from standard Australian English in terms of stress, speech tempo and various phonemes. Speakers of Aboriginal English have been correctly identified with an accuracy of 55-70%, and when they were not, they were identified as belonging to some other group rather than Anglo-Australian (Gallois et al. 1984:40). From this we can conclude that there seems to be a distinctiveness in their language or voice quality which distinguishes them from Standard Australian speakers, which is also mentioned by Butcher (2008:631) who claims that the stress patterns can explain the distinctive rhythm of AAE. The Aboriginal voice quality is described as being “softer or gentler, slightly husky at lower volume, while harsh and penetrating when speaking loudly and shouting” (Sharpe 1976:4; in Malcolm 2018:48). Since Aboriginal English is a non-standard accent, Gallois et al. (1984) predicted that it would therefore be rated less favourable by both white and Aboriginal listeners on the status dimension, and indeed the white speakers were rated more positively than the Aboriginal speakers on the status dimension (Gallois et al. 1984:45).

For this particular study, there was generally a much larger variation in the results for the status dimension than the solidarity dimension (Gallois et al. 1984:50–51). Attributes like intelligence, ambition, success and wealth fell under the status dimension, and these are common attributes that a subordinate group will seek to acquire to ascend on the social scale in a society (Gallois et al. 1984:50–51). One of the hypotheses that were confirmed was that rural white subjects would rate Aboriginal Australian speakers more favourably than urban white subjects. Gallois et al. (1984:51) explains this by lack of contact. The urban white subjects did not have Aboriginal Australians in their schools or in their neighbourhoods and therefore had less of what Cook calls “acquaintance potential” (Cook 1962:75). It is pointed

out that the white rural subjects' favourable attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians might not go beyond the school setting. Nevertheless, this was the variable with the largest gap in the study and Gallois et al. call for more research and even more importantly; social change (Gallois et al. 1984:51).

Most verbal guise studies on ethnic varieties only use speakers of one gender, often male, in order to not intervene with the main focus of the rating (Gallois et al. 1984:52). This study, however, included both male and female voices, making it possible to set up a sort of hierarchy of voice perception. One of the main findings in the study was therefore that ethnic and racial judgements are made first, and if there is a significant social distance, this is the only judgement that is made, especially if the judge is male (Gallois et al. 1984:52–53). In conclusion, the research indicates that ethnicity, sex of speaker and listener and context are variables that affects evaluations of both ingroup and outgroup speakers (Gallois et al. 1984:53).

#### **2.6.4 Master theses by Urke (2019) and Fjeldsbø (2013)**

When it comes to language attitudes in general, a number of studies have been conducted both with the societal treatment approach and with other methods. Using films as data material within the societal approach has also been done before, and in the following, two master theses from the University of Bergen will be presented, both of which analyse language use in films. Furthermore, they compared old and new films to look for possible change, just like the present study does, and therefore it is worth looking into what they found.

Urke (2019) recently conducted a study on accent use comparing Disney remakes to their originals. She analysed 16 movies, 8 originals and their 8 corresponding remakes, with 234 characters (Urke 2019:75). As is usually the case, Urke found that there was a tendency for females to speak more standardised than males both in the originals and in the remakes (Urke 2019:76). Another relevant finding was that there was a greater use of standard accents among the main characters, and more linguistic diversity among the supporting and peripheral characters (Urke 2019:77). Finally, she argues that in the spirit of political correctness Disney prefer to stick to standardised accents for the majority of characters, seemingly to not offend anyone.

Fjeldsbø (2013) is probably the study that is most comparable to this particular thesis. This was a societal treatment study that used Australian film to compare how speakers of broad and general Australian English were portrayed. She compared two film genres, comedy



and drama, and two different time periods. Fjeldsbø analysed 14 films with a sample of 146 characters and compared older and newer films to see if there was any change in accent use over a 35-year period. One of the main findings of the thesis was that there was in fact no correlation between genre and accent use in these films. The accents were evenly distributed in both genres, and the general Australian accent did not seem to be favoured (Fjeldsbø 2013:62). However, she found a difference in gender and accent use. Women seemed to speak more general Australian, while men had a tendency to favour the broad Australian accent. This is in line with typical results from studies on gender and language and mirrors the findings in Lippi-Green (1997). Fjeldsbø also found that characters speaking broad Australian were portrayed as uncultivated, uneducated and unsophisticated, but not necessarily unintelligent. Thus, there was a link between accent and character traits.

### **2.6.5 Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink (2016)**

The difference between standard and non-standard accents, and how they are treated in society, is still an important issue. Dragojevic et al. (2016) researched American prime-time television shows to compare how different groups in society were represented on screen. They analysed the shows that were broadcasted between 8 and 11 pm across nine broadcast and cable networks over the course of one week. Furthermore, they coded the characters by role, attributes and accent. Accents were divided into Standard American (SA), Nonstandard American (NSA), Foreign-Anglo (FA) meaning Irish English, Scottish English etc., and Foreign-Other (FO).

The results showed that non-dominant groups in society were underrepresented relative to the real-world population statistics, and they appeared less frequently than the dominant groups (Dragojevic 2016:66). Furthermore, the powerful groups tended to have more central roles. Standard accents were systematically over-represented and consequently more favoured than non-standard accents, and therefore the TV shows seemed to convey the message that having a standard accent equals more power (Dragojevic 2016:67). The study had three main points of investigation: that the media mirrors existing intergroup relations, that frequency and role centrality indicates a group's power and influence in the media, and lastly that SA speakers have more influence in America. They therefore hypothesised that SA speakers would appear more frequently than others, and that SA speakers would have the role of main character more frequently than others.

Dragojevic et al. (2016) found that accent portrayals are biased and reflect pervasive societal stereotypes. SA and FA speakers were over-represented compared to real life and NGA and FO speakers, with SA as the dominant linguistic group. Generally, groups that are well represented in the media are usually the most powerful in society (Dragojevic et al. 2016). Dragojevic et al. therefore conclude that the non-standard accents, here NGA and FO, are effectively silenced by relatively little representation in American TV landscape (Dragojevic et al. 2016:79). They are rarely heard, and when they are, it is a less favourable representation with regards to status-related traits and physical appearance. Media consumption can have a potential influence on consumers' social perception of different linguistic groups, and this study shows that this is not only an issue in children's television shows, but also in programs for adults. Long-term exposure to stereotypes can make them stick in your long-term memory when they are reinforced again and again by what you see on television.

## **2.7 The language situation in Aboriginal Australia**

The following section will give an outline of the situation of the Indigenous population of Australia today. As will be made clear later on, the Aboriginal people are losing an important part of their culture, namely their languages, and many Aboriginal Australians no longer speak an Aboriginal language. Instead, they have developed their own variety of English, and today as much as 83% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak only English at home. In comparison, only 11% report that they speak an Australian Indigenous language (*Australian Bureau of Statistics* 2018a, accessed February 2020), which is only about one in 10 of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The historical and current language situation in Australia is quite complicated. Aboriginal people were not very willing to learn English at first, but after a while they actually found it useful. New South Wales pidgin became a cross-cultural communication tool between Aboriginal groups who spoke different languages (Malcolm 2013:44) This way they took ownership of English and used it to their benefit. Nevertheless, when white invaders first came to Australia in 1788, their encounters with the Indigenous population were usually violent and more often than not resulted in blood shed. The most extreme case of abuse took place in Van Diemen's land, today commonly known as Tasmania, where the Aboriginal population was exterminated in its entirety (Madley 2008). One of the ways we can still see traces of this abuse today is through language. Of an estimated 250 Aboriginal languages,

only 20 remain today (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:395). As with many languages, English has managed to influence the Aboriginal languages, even to such a degree that more than two thirds of the original languages spoken on the continent are either heading for extinction or already extinct (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:395).

There are five stages of language loss by attrition (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:394). In stage 1 the language has strong vitality and is transmitted to children in the community, which is also the case for stage 2, only the intergenerational transaction might not be as successful as in stage 1 languages. In stage 3 however, the language is no longer passed down to the next generation, so it is typically exclusively spoken by the older generation. In Stage 4, the language has no fluent speakers left, and by the time it reaches stage 5 the language does not even have semi-fluent speakers and has been replaced by another language in the community (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:394–395). As mentioned, only 20 Aboriginal languages are considered “viable”, which means they are in stage 1 or 2. 50-60 of them are in stage 3, while 170-180 Aboriginal languages are categorised as stage 4 and 5. The situation seem to be worsening, and Bianco and Rhydwen (2001:395) estimate that the number of languages in stage 1 and 2 will halve in just a generation’s time. As we have seen, about 90% of Aboriginal Australians no longer speak their Aboriginal language, which further illustrates the seriousness of the linguistic situation.

How has the situation become so extreme? We see that Aboriginal languages have different degrees of English influence. In the case of the Yolngu people in North East Arnhem Land, the contact with white invaders did not happen until the start of the 20th century. In this speech community, Aboriginal Australians report to not feel obligated to speak English when there are white people present, which is quite a contrast to what seems to be common among Aboriginal Australians in general. (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:398–399). Yolngu Matha is an example of a strong language with about 6000 speakers who take pride in their independent culture and language. Research shows that English influence happens all over the country, maybe even more so in places where the Aboriginal languages are considered “weak” (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:401). In these places, there seems to be a quite large influence among the younger generations, and younger speakers of Indigenous languages tend to be few, but the numbers vary considerably (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:397–400). We see that there is a language shift happening throughout Australia, not only in the places where Aboriginal languages are on the verge of extinction.

One might imagine the English language as the big bad wolf, huffing and puffing smaller languages away until there are none left. However, that is not necessarily the case.

English is probably the most commonly known lingua franca, at least in the western world, but in fact there are several other languages that are used for cross-cultural communication. In Australia, English is just one of a number of lingua francae. It is quite common in some communities to shift between their own native Aboriginal language, other Aboriginal languages, English and other lingua francae. These are dynamic speech communities with a wide range of alternatives. Nevertheless, English seems to be the most powerful one in all domains, with the exception of spiritual and ceremonial life (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:393).

Can the Aboriginal languages be saved? There is an increasing focus on trying to revive Australian languages today, with scientists discovering speakers of a language they thought was extinct and similar discoveries. However, according to Schmidt (1990/1993:106; in Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:396) the chances of success is fairly remote. That is, if “revive” is set to mean “the full restoration of the language to a state of strong vitality” (Bianco & Rhydwen 2001:396). There are to this day no reported cases of this actually happening in Aboriginal Australia. Most of the Aboriginal languages are beyond saving, but their speakers still struggle to keep them alive. Despite the increasing focus on these issues, Bianco and Rhydwen (2001:419) conclude that the extinction of most of the Aboriginal languages is unfortunately inevitable.

## **2.8 Aboriginal Australians in popular culture**

Aboriginal Australians only represent about 1% of the Australian population, despite the fact that they were the original Australians. There has been an ongoing conflict between black and white since the European invasion, and this is reflected in how white Australians see the Aboriginal people. According to Gallois et al. (1984:39), research has shown that Aboriginal Australians are rated quite badly by white Australians, who see them as dirty, lazy, unambitious and wasteful with money. This perception is particularly strong in Queensland, where Aboriginal Australians make out about 2% of the population and tend to have a low economic status (Gallois et al. 1984:39).

The struggle for young Aboriginal Australians to balance the desire for wealth, education and things historically associated with the white population on the one hand, and their wish to hold on to their unique cultural identity on the other, is a big issue for Aboriginal Australians growing up today (Gallois et al. 1984:39–40). There are even expressions like *burnt potato*, which is defined as “an Aboriginal person who has adopted white Australian attitudes” (Arthur 1996:141) or a *coconut* which is “an Aboriginal person who lives in a

manner seen by the community as rejecting Aboriginal identity” (Arthur 1996:144). The difficult balance between white and Aboriginal culture is also present when it comes to language and the use of Aboriginal Australian English or Aboriginal traditional languages. Sometimes what others might see as “flaws” in their English, might actually be the one thing they have left that connects them to their roots if they do not speak their traditional language or have any physical Aboriginal traits (Rickford & Romaine 1999:267).

In addition to the struggle of keeping their identity in society, Aboriginal Australians have historically been underrepresented in Australian films as well. In the early days of Australian film industry, there was not much separating it from European film industry. This eventually became a problem, because competing foreign companies were threatening the Australian film industry. This led to a whole generation being able to grow up without watching a single Australian-made film. However, in the late 1960’s – early 1970’s, a renaissance began in the world of Australian film, and several successful films were made. The most important factor was that the government decided to help fund the industry, wanting to preserve the unique cultural heritage of Australia. The industry started to reflect Australian culture, social moods and trends particular for Australia (*Australian Bureau of Statistics* 2012, accessed February 2020).

Before this wave of cultural perseverance, there were few Indigenous films made in Australia, with the notable exception of *Jedda* (1955), which was the first Australian-made colour feature film. *Jedda* (1955) reflected the uniqueness of Australia, mainly due to the Indigenous aspect, as it had an Aboriginal Australian woman as the main character. It also reflected the problematic relationship between Aboriginal Australians and white Australians. In the late 80’s, however, the Indigenous film culture was able to grow and develop in Australia. The government played a big role in this growth, funding much of the industry. It is vital to this day that Aboriginal art is financially nurtured, which shows that the government now acknowledges the aesthetic and cultural values of Aboriginal art (Langton 1994:105).

How Aboriginal people are represented in the media is potentially affected by how the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been historically. According to Langton, film and other media have a history of racist, distorted and offensive representation of Aboriginal people (Langton 1994:94). As Langton points out, the amount of research and critique of these representations compared to the number of films that have been made is the equivalent of “a family of ants compared to the elephant of colonial representation” (Langton 1994:94). Thus, in order for the representation of Aboriginal people

in the media to develop in accordance with changes in society, more critical research needs to be done.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people has always been quite strained. Today the High Court defines an Aboriginal Australian as “a person who is descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal and is recognised by members of the community in which he or she lives as Aboriginal” (Langton 1994:97). Although white people have been quite preoccupied with labelling and handling the Aboriginal people in different ways, this was not the case for the Aboriginal people. Historians claim that when the white invaders came, the Aboriginal population did not really see them as a group until at least a hundred years later. They also never saw them as a race, which supposedly was a concept of the white Europeans, unknown to the Aboriginal people (Langton 1994:99).

Today there is a larger focus on how Aboriginal people are represented in the media, but Langton (1994) indicates that it is not necessarily always good. The representation of “Aboriginality” is something “that arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue” (Langton 1994:98). It can happen both through actual real-life experiences, but also mediated ones like for example a white person watching a show about Aboriginal people or reading a book. According to Langton, “Aboriginality” only has meaning in encounters where Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are subjects rather than objects (Langton 1994:99). However, it can sometimes be problematic to for example have Aboriginal involvement in a production. The idea that Aboriginal people will make “better” representations of themselves and that simply being Aboriginal makes you automatically understand, supports the notion of “other” and can be misinterpreted as all Aboriginal people being alike and understanding each other, which in turn can come off as somewhat racist (Langton 1994:95).

Langton points out that most Australians today do not know Aboriginal people and have trouble relating to them. The knowledge they have usually comes from the media (Langton 1994:99), which is why it is interesting to have a look at how they are represented in Australian films and other media. If the image of Aboriginal people is highly stereotypical and this is the main source of information and knowledge about them for most non-Aboriginal people, that becomes a problem. Just like the visual, behavioural and linguistic portrayal of foreigners in children’s animated television and films is vital to the world view they end up having, one can argue that the same is true for the representation of Aboriginal people in Australian film.

There are three main types of representation of Aboriginal people in popular culture, or rather three types of “Aboriginalities” that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create (Langton 1994:100). The first one is through interaction between two Aboriginal people in social situations, mostly within Aboriginal culture with some aspects of white culture here and there. The second is a stereotypical portrayal made by white people who in reality have had no significant contact with Aboriginal people. The message that comes across is something like “All Aboriginal people are drunk, dirty and will die out anyway” (Langton 1994:100). The final type of representation happens when, maybe not surprisingly, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people have a dialogue and create something together. This is how working models of “Aboriginality” are created.

Langton poses the question “Can film re-educate people to be non-racist, and eliminate racism?” (Langton 1994:100). To eliminate racism altogether through film might be a bit of a stretch, but discourse between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is still an important step. It gives Aboriginal people the chance to educate and inform the dominant culture of their practices, especially practices of resistance, which can be quite important (Langton 1994:101). This can be done through film, and according to Langton, an expansion of experimental film and video-making is vital for Aboriginal people to keep educating the white population and create their own self-representation (Langton 1994:105).

### 3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in the present thesis, *the societal treatment method*, as well as give a brief overview of the two other methods, *the direct method* and *the indirect method*, mentioned in chapter 2. Furthermore, the linguistic varieties encountered in the films will be described, along with an overview of the films and the analytical process of the present thesis.

#### 3.1 Methodology

As mentioned in chapter 2, there are several ways to access people's attitudes. This thesis uses *the societal treatment method* to infer the attitudes of Australian society towards Aboriginal Australian English using films. The following sections will elaborate more on *the direct method*, *the indirect method* and *the societal treatment method*. Some typical studies will be mentioned, and strength and weaknesses of the respective methods will be discussed.

##### 3.1.1 The direct method

As mentioned in chapter 2, the direct method is one of the three methods used for eliciting language attitudes. Since attitudes cannot be observed directly, researchers use the three evaluative dimensions to access respondents' attitudes: status/superiority, social attractiveness/solidarity and linguistic quality. They are typically evaluated on a scale from 1-5 or 1-7, depending on the study. It usually involves a survey, where the respondents are asked to answer questions directly about their own attitudes. Some studies where the direct method is used are Hyrkstedt and Kalaja (1998), Garrett, Bishop and Coupland (2009) and Coupland and Bishop (2007). Hyrkstedt and Kalaja (1998) studied attitudes to English in Finland. Statements about the role of English in Finland were made and the study found that there is a general tendency for Finnish students to have a positive attitude towards English. Garrett, Bishop and Coupland (2009) compared attitudes to Welsh in Wales and overseas, in North America and Patagonia. They found that there is a stronger commitment to language overseas, but not necessarily engagement to Welsh activities, like rooting for the Welsh rugby team. Finally, Coupland and Bishop (2007) did an online survey of language attitudes in the UK, and this study is mentioned in section 2.5.

The efficiency of the direct method and the fact that it is quite straightforward are some of the advantages with this method. However, one of the major issues that occur is the



*social desirability bias*. Respondents want to come across as good and socially “desirable”, and therefore one might not get answers that are a hundred per cent honest. Not only can the respondents worry about giving the wrong answer, but they also might think about what the right answer is. In other words, they might say what they assume the interviewer wants to hear, which is called *acquiescence bias*. The next weakness, which not only occurs in sociolinguistics but in several areas of research that are based on observation, is what Labov called *the observer’s paradox* (Labov 1972:209). It means that the aim of the research is to find out how respondents interact when no one is observing them, but the research is not possible to execute without actually observing them. Another issue the researcher encounters is formulating questions for the respondents. If the questions are slanted, loaded or leading, it can affect the results. Lastly, the issue of *labels* is worth mentioning as a weakness of the direct method. In their study of attitudes towards Arabic and Hebrew, Lambert et al. (1965) found that Arabic speakers were rated less favourably by Jewish students in the direct survey (where they knew the speakers were Arabic) than in the matched guise part of the study (where they did not know the speaker’s origin). Lambert et al. (1965) concluded that the matched guise part of the study revealed more emotional and private attitudes than the direct survey, which conveyed the attitudes they were prepared to tell people. Thus, answers in the direct method might be coloured by the attitudes the *label* conveys in the respondents, not necessarily the accent itself.

### **3.1.2 The indirect method**

The indirect method enables the researcher to access attitudes that lie within the respondents’ subconscious. Like the direct method, researchers typically use the three evaluative dimensions mentioned in 3.1.1. Respondents listen to a recording of a person reading a text, and then they answer questions concerning the reader, but contrary to the direct method, these questions do not directly ask about the attitudes of the respondents. Instead, they try to access attitudes indirectly. It can be conducted in two ways: the *matched guise* and the *verbal guise technique*. A matched guise study only has a single speaker reading the same text in different accents, while the more common verbal guise technique operates with several speakers.

Many matched guise studies have been conducted over the years, and Garrett (2010) mentions a few of them, one of which was conducted in the UK and the other one in Australia. The first one is Giles (1970), whose work has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, and who is an important researcher in the field of sociolinguistics. In his study, the position of

RP as a dominant variety in the UK was supported. Also, regional British accents were rated lower than French and North American, with the industrial accents on the very bottom of the prestige scale (Giles 1970). Later on, Ball (1983) did a study in Australia where he conducted a number of small matched guise studies including RP, East Coast American, Australian, French, Italian, German, Glasgow and Liverpool accent. The results showed that RP, just like in the UK, ranked high on competence but low in sociability (Garrett 2010:60–61). He found a link between Italian and German accents and the position these immigrants typically had in Australian society at the time. German people usually had more white-collar jobs, and this accent was rated high on competence, while the Italian accent was rated high on sociability but incompetent, which correlates with their tendency to occupy lower positions in the socio-economic structure at the time (Garrett 2010:60).

The second and more common of the two indirect methods is the *verbal guise technique*. As opposed to matched guise, this technique uses several speakers with different accents. This is the most commonly used method, because it is easier to find several speakers of different accents than one person who speaks several accents perfectly. Hiraga (2005), which is already mentioned in chapter 2, is an example of a verbal guise study. Three British and three American accents were evaluated with the typical results: urban accents on the bottom, then rural accents, and the standard varieties on top. Bayard et al. (2001) is another example of a verbal guise study, but in this study, respondents and speakers from New Zealand and Australia were added as well. The study found, among other things, that General American had positive connotations for respondents from all of the three other countries, which might indicate that General American is taking over for RP. Also, they concluded that New Zealand and Australia might be suffering from linguistic inferiority because of their status as colonies.

An important thing for the researcher to do is to make sure that the voice quality of the readers is quite similar. Failing to do so can lead to one of the weaknesses of this method, namely that the respondents rate the speaker on how fast or slow they talk, how high or low pitched their voices are and so on, instead of evaluating the accent. Bayard et al. (2001) concluded that their male New Zealand English speaker had a slightly monotonous voice, which could explain why this speaker was rated lowest by all respondents. Thus, a weakness of the verbal guise technique is that the respondents might evaluate the person instead of the accent, because they do not know what exactly they are supposed to evaluate. This is not an issue with matched guise technique, as the speaker is the same person and naturally has the same voice quality.

Generally, both verbal guise and matched guise studies are less vulnerable to social desirability bias. However, one must keep in mind that it is still possible for the respondents to imagine what they should answer or think the researcher wants them to answer. Other weaknesses with these methods are the issues of style authenticity and neutral texts (Garrett 2010:57–59). Not all accents seem suitable for the formal style of reading a text out loud, and even if the researchers try to use a text that does not express strong opinions or use loaded words, can it truly be neutral? In addition, listening to someone read a text is not the way we usually encounter accents in real life, which might make it seem strange to the respondents. Also, for non-standard accents, there is always a risk that the respondents mistake their particular variety to be “bad” English, or wrong grammar. In the end, it all comes down to the perception of the respondents.

Despite some of the weaknesses of the methods, there are many advantages with the indirect method. They are less vulnerable to social desirability bias (cf. 3.1.1), which can make the results seem more authentic and accurate than with the direct method. Furthermore, the respondents can evaluate the accents without accent labels, focusing only on what they hear and not on the things they might associate with a certain accent without actually hearing it. The advantages of the matched guise technique is that you do not need to find several speakers, but then again it can be difficult to find a person who speaks all the accents you need fluently, which raises the question of accent authenticity (Garrett 2010:57–59). Therefore, the verbal guise technique is generally preferred.

### **3.1.3 Societal treatment method**

As mentioned in chapter 2, the method this thesis employs to study language attitudes is the *societal treatment method*. It mainly differs from the two other methods in its lack of informants, and that it researches language use in publicly available material like road signs, films, newspapers and even language policy documents. The *societal treatment method* is an unobtrusive method where the researcher uses texts and observations to infer attitudes of a whole society (Garrett 2010:52). Using this method, one eliminates the issue of social desirability bias. One of the weaknesses of the direct and indirect method is social desirability bias, where informants refrain from answering 100 per cent what they are truly thinking in fear of repercussions. This is not an issue with typical societal treatment studies.

Using the societal treatment method, one can uncover attitudes in society through media like film, and in that way get a sense of the society as a whole. For example, Haarmann

(1984, 1989) studied advertisements in Japan to investigate ethnolinguistic stereotypes in Japanese television commercials. It is common to use foreign languages in Japanese advertisements, and according to Haarmann (1984, 1989) the stereotypical associations are conveyed even though the audience does not understand the language. Haarmann (1984, 1989) investigated English, French, Italian, Spanish and German, and found that each language was associated with certain products. For example, French was considered elegant and refined, and therefore often used in perfume and other fashion commercials. Meanwhile, Italian was associated with products like sports cars and other motor vehicles. This study tells us how the Japanese audience typically perceives the different languages and maybe even reveals their attitudes towards the culture connected to the specific language.

Another way to study attitudes of a whole society, is to look at the *linguistic landscape*, defined as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis 1997:25). For example, there have been several studies conducted in Brussels where they speak both French, Dutch and Flemish (Tulp 1978, Wenzel 1996; in Garrett 2010:153). By looking at how the three languages were used in billboards and the public domain, Tulp (1978; in Garrett:153) found that French was the dominate language, even in areas where Flemish was the official language. Wenzel (1996; in Garrett:153) later found that French also dominated over Dutch, even after laws had been changed to create a more equal presence of French and Dutch. There are many ways for one language to dominate another, and this is just one example of how this can happen in the linguistic landscape.

Attitudes cannot be observed directly, and of course it is hard to say for certain that the attitudes a researcher infers from for example newspapers or films are correct. If a character has a certain accent, one cannot know for certain if this was an intentional choice made by the film makers. However, in this method of research, one must always assume that every choice is in fact intentional. One common opinion about the societal treatment method is that it is too subjective, and that it is better used as a preliminary research method. It might seem a bit informal, and therefore some think it should be used alongside more extensive social psychological studies (Garrett 2010:158). However, as we have seen, the method has been used for several purposes, and seems to give a good indicator of how language is used in society and society’s view of language. The fact that there are no informants, no social desirability bias and that the material is fairly easily available, are some of the advantages of this method. In the end, sociolinguistics is about how people actually use language, and

therefore that is necessarily also true for how it is used in society. After all, the language we see in films, newspapers and in the media in general is created by choices that individuals have made in the process.

### **3.2 The present study**

The present study uses films as data material and analyses the characters in 12 Australian films based on several character variables that will be explained in detail in section 3.5. The main focus of the thesis is to find out how the media, here Australian films, portray Aboriginal Australian people linguistically. For this thesis, a list of linguistic features was made, and the films were watched in their entirety several times. I created a list of linguistic traits so I could cross out when a character used the different traits, and that allowed me to place the characters linguistically. Furthermore, the character variables were considered and the characters were categorised by ethnicity, gender, social class and character role, looking for correlations between linguistic variety and character variables. Finally, the white characters were also analysed for each category to make a comparison.

### **3.3 The films**

In this thesis, 12 Australian films have been analysed, six older films from the 1950s-1980s, and six newer films from the 2000s onwards. I began by searching for films with Aboriginal characters, and found a few films, but not enough. Then, I searched for the names of the actors in the films I already had and found a few more. I found a list of “10 essential Indigenous films”, and since most of the films I had already found were on this list, I think it is safe to say that the selection films I chose, however small a selection, is representative for films with Aboriginal characters who have roles that are important enough to use in this analysis. A few films were excluded, some because of the lack of easy access to them online, and others because of the lack of dialogue in the film. *Samson and Delilah (2009)* for instance, is very popular and considered an important Indigenous film, but there is almost no dialogue at all, and when there is communication, it is usually either in ATL or non-verbal. The films used in the present thesis are listed in the following table:

**Table 3.1:** *The films used in the present study*

<b>OLDER FILMS</b>	<b>NEWER FILMS</b>
<i>Jedda (1955)</i>	<i>Rabbit Proof Fence (2002)</i>
<i>Walkabout (1971)</i>	<i>Beneath Clouds (2002)</i>
<i>Storm Boy (1976)</i>	<i>Australia (2008)</i>
<i>The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1978)</i>	<i>Toomelah (2011)</i>
<i>Where the green ants dream (1984)</i>	<i>Charlie’s country (2013)</i>
<i>The Fringe Dwellers (1986)</i>	<i>Storm Boy (2019)</i>

The selection of films was made based on several factors, the most important one being that they featured Aboriginal Australian actors. Furthermore, the films needed to be set in Australia and go under the genre “drama” on IMDb, which is a highly regarded film website, but I made no other criteria with regard to the content or theme of the films. Because I wanted to compare older and newer films in search for differences, older films were categorised as films from the 1950s to the 1980s, and newer films from the 2000s onwards. I tried to use films that were set in their present but could not avoid the films *Australia (2008)* and *Rabbit Proof Fence (2002)*, both historical films, which I decided to include because of their importance and popularity. Interestingly, after choosing the films and doing some further research on them on IMDb, I found out that only two of the films were directed by an Indigenous director, *Toomelah (2011)* and *Beneath Clouds (2002)*. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this was in fact the same director, Ivan Sen, which means that in a selection of 12 Australian films, only one Aboriginal director was involved.

Drama was the genre of choice, mainly because most of the films I found with Aboriginal actors were drama films. When searching for films with Aboriginal characters, I discovered that many of these films were *about* Indigenous peoples, and almost all of them went under the genre of drama. Aboriginal characters generally seem to be under-represented in Australian film, but according to Meade (2016), this is slowly changing. Indigenous characters seem to be better represented now compared with the actual Indigenous population, albeit concentrated in fewer TV-shows than white characters. This was also the case in Dobrow and Gidney’s study mentioned in 2.6.2, where non-white characters were severely under-represented and only two of the 12 shows in question were responsible for the majority of non-white characters (Dobrow & Gidney 1998:112–113).

The drama genre generally addresses serious issues, and issues that are a big part of people's everyday lives. In drama films, all sides of human life can be portrayed. It is a broad genre, where the good parts, the normal days, and the challenges that human beings encounter in their lives are all shown on screen (*Filmsite* 2020 accessed February 2020). Usually there is some kind of obstacle or challenge that the main characters need to overcome, and that is a big part of the plot in the film. Compared to previously mentioned studies like Lippi-Green (1997) and Dobrow and Gidney (1998), who used animated films and series as material, this thesis uses live action films. The characters are much more complex, and roles like "hero" and "villain" are not always as clear. For example, the main character Jimmie in *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) is a murderer, which objectively might make him a villain, but following his struggles in life makes us pity him and to an extent understand the frustration that leads up to the murders. The line between hero and villain becomes blurry when the characters are complex, as most of the characters in the selected films are.

The themes of the films differ and there seems to be a difference between the older and the newer films. Generally, in the older films, Aboriginal people are portrayed as either savages that cannot be "tamed" even when the white people try hard to do so, or they are just supporting characters who the white people happen to meet or have encounters with, without necessarily affecting their lives significantly. In the newer films, however, the Aboriginal characters are usually portrayed as victims of abuse and racism by white people, and we get to see their side of the story. These films typically have a bigger Aboriginal cast, like *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) and *Charlie's country* (2013), while films with few Aboriginal characters like *Storm Boy* (1976) and *Walkabout* (1971) are more concerned with the white main character's personal story. As mentioned, there is usually some sort of challenge or obstacle for the main character in the drama genre, and in most of these films racism and discrimination are the main challenges. None of the films with Aboriginal main characters focused only on the characters' personal lives or other issues. The fact that the characters were Aboriginal, and the struggles that came with it, was always their main challenge in the plot and in the characters' lives.

To find and select the films was a bigger challenge than expected, because the films were not always easy to access. After creating a list of films that I thought would suit my project well, I discovered that several of them were quite hard to get a hold of. Many of them were old, so to even find a copy of the film was sometimes a challenge, and several of them were in addition not available in Norway. This was the main reason for the small selection of films. In the end, I finally got the material I needed, however limited it might be.

### 3.4 Linguistic varieties

This section will present the linguistic varieties encountered in the films and explain how I went about classifying the characters. In total, the thesis operates with five varieties: *Received Pronunciation (RP)*, *Australian English (AuE)*, *Light Aboriginal Australian English (LAAE)*, *Heavy Aboriginal Australian English (HAAE)* and *Aboriginal traditional languages (ATL)*. This order also reflects a hierarchy of social status, with RP ranking highest and ATL on the bottom. The characters who spoke other varieties, e.g. Irish English, were not included in the analysis, mainly because there were so few of them. In the second part of the analysis, another category is added, which I refer to as *bidialectal*. In the following sections, the linguistic varieties will be described.

An important thing to clarify about this hierarchy of varieties is that it is not identical for the white and the Aboriginal characters. Obviously, there are no white characters who speak any of the Aboriginal varieties, so the only two comparable varieties for the white characters are RP and AuE. Thus, when talking about standard versus non-standard white varieties, RP is considered the standard and AuE the non-standard, because it also includes broad Australian English. However, for the Aboriginal characters, the scale expands downwards, so when talking about standard varieties for the Aboriginal characters, both RP and AuE are included. Dialects of people of status and power tend to be favoured (cf. 2.6.2.), and in Australia today Aboriginal English is the linguistic minority compared to the majority who speak AuE. However, who possesses status and power in a country can vary and change over time, and AuE speakers were actually a minority themselves once.

Historically, disapproving attitudes towards Australian English were actually quite common in Australia, and it was seen as an inferior version of English in a pro-British education system (Ozolins 1993:14). Interestingly, the media also reflected these attitudes, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission mostly recruited British announcers. These attitudes were increasingly debated, and people that were against them argued that “a true Australian culture and literature would only come from a rejection of deference to the British, and assertion of Australia’s own identity and use of its own vernacular” (Ozolins 1993:14). Later on, though, Aboriginal English speech varieties were the ones considered “broken English”, and at best seen as unsuccessful attempts by Aboriginal people to speak English (Kaldor & Malcolm 1991:67). Nevertheless, when Aboriginal people speak Australian English it is not considered “broken”, and according to Kaldor and Malcolm (1991:67) many Aboriginal people today speak Standard Australian English. Thus, in this thesis, AuE is



considered a standard variety compared to the Aboriginal varieties. Finally, I want to emphasise that the notion that Australian English is standard or “correct” while Aboriginal English is “broken” is obviously not the assumption in this thesis, and the goal here is to investigate how these attitudes that historically have been present in Australian society are possibly conveyed through media.

### 3.4.1 RP

British English has a number of varieties, but the traditional standard accent, sometimes referred to as “The Queen’s English”, is called Received Pronunciation (RP). RP has historically been associated with high status also in Australia due to its history as a British colony. However, according to Trudgill (2001), RP has basically disappeared from Australian society as the national consciousness has increased alongside their cultural independence. What is left is a variety called *cultivated Australian*, which is close to RP and will be discussed briefly in section 3.4.2. Thus, one might say a little piece of the “mother country” still remains. The following list, provided by Cruttenden (2014) and Wells (1982), is an overview of the most common features of the RP accent:

- The RP accent is non-rhotic, which means that the /r/ is only pronounced in prevocalic position.
- RP has two allophones of /l/: velarized dark /l/ in final position and before consonants, and clear /l/ before vowels.
- In RP, the /t/ is normally realised as a fortis plosive.
- The vowel in BATH is open back, /ɑ:/
- The diphthong in GOAT has an unrounded mid-central starting point, /əʊ/
- DRESS and TRAP is realised as open-mid [ɛ] and [æ], respectively.
- The following lexical set will illustrate the close monophthongs and diphthongs in RP:

FLEECE	/ iː /	
GOOSE	/ uː /	
FACE	/ eɪ /	( open-mid starting point)
PRICE	/ aɪ /	(central starting point)
CHOICE	/ ɔɪ /	(open-mid starting point)

GOAT	/əʊ/	(mid starting point)
MOUTH	/aʊ/	(open central starting point)

### 3.4.2 Australian English

A distinctive Australian accent, different from the British English the first invaders and settlers spoke, was first described by A.G. Mitchell (Fjeldsbø 2013:30). One of the typical features that often make the Australian accent recognizable is the way vowels are pronounced. In the following, a list of the most typical traits of Australian English (AuE) is provided, as described by Horvath (1985):

- Like RP, AuE is also a non-rhotic accent
- The /l/ is dark in all contexts
- Intervocalic /t/ is realised as voiced tap [ɾ]
- The vowel of BATH, PALM and START is open front /aː/
- AuE has a raising of DRESS and TRAP, which is realised as close-mid [e] and open mid [ɛ], respectively.
- AuE has a diphthong shift, which involves a “shift” in the quality of the starting point of the closing diphthongs, compared to RP, and diphthongisation of close monophthongs.

The following lexical set will illustrate the diphthongs of AuE:

FLEECE	/eɪ/	(diphthongised)
GOOSE	/əʊ/	(diphthongised)
FACE	/æɪ/	(more open starting point)
PRICE.	/aɪ/	(more back starting point)
CHOICE	/oɪ/	(more close starting point)
GOAT	/ʌʊ/	(more open starting point)
MOUTH	/æʊ/	(more close starting point)

It is possible to distinguish between cultivated, general and broad Australian English. They are not three distinct dialects, but rather they form a cultivated-broad continuum and most speakers find themselves somewhere in between the two extremes (Harrington et al. 1997:156). Since cultivated Australian English is similar to RP, I chose not to make a

distinction between the two in the present thesis, especially since the difference was particularly blurry in the older films. Some of the characters, especially in the older films, sometimes sounded like they had hints of Australian vowels, but since they mainly spoke RP, or at least a variety close to RP, they were characterised as speakers of RP. The reason why this thesis only operates with the general term Australian English (AuE), and does not distinguish between general and broad Australian English, is simply because I mainly wanted to devote the focus on the Aboriginal characters, and decided that to divide the non-Aboriginal varieties into RP and AuE sufficed to make a comparison between Aboriginal and white characters. However, it is worth noting that both broad and general Australian English were indeed represented in the films.

Not only can AuE be recognised by vowel realisation, but other features also make this variety different from RP. When it comes to intonation, a typical feature of AuE is the High Rising Terminal (HRT). AuE speakers tend to have a raised ending in declarative clauses, even when it does not include a question (Horvath 2008:103). AuE speakers also have an intervocalic post-stress tapped /t/, which is realised as [ɾ] in words like *beauty* and *butter*.

### **3.4.3 Aboriginal Australian English**

According to Sharifian (2006:13), Aboriginal Australian English (AAE) is a continuum, with basilectal (heavy) on one side and acrolectal (light) on the other. Although there is a recent focus on discourse and pragmatics in the description of AAE, this thesis will mainly concern itself with the phonetic, grammatical and lexical features of AAE. The basilectal varieties are closer to Aboriginal traditional languages, while the acrolectal ones are closer to AuE. Basilectal and Acrolectal AAE are commonly referred to as Heavy Aboriginal Australian English (HAAE) and Light Aboriginal Australian English (LAAE) and these terms will be used in the present thesis. AAE was not considered a distinctive dialect until the 20th century, and there are not as many descriptions of AAE as there are for example of RP or Australian English. Some of the most central researchers within the field, whose work has been vital to the present thesis, are Eades, Malcolm and Butcher. AAE has been to a smaller or larger degree influenced by Indigenous languages. Some specific traits for HAAE are described in Malcolm (2008:133–134), where all the consonants of Aboriginal English are described compared to AuE. Many of these show clear influence by creole

language history, and the substitution of some consonants by others in AAE can be due to the phonetics of the original Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal Australian English was first described in detail for the purpose of forensic linguistics in Australia. Australian court has a long history of discriminating against Aboriginal people in court cases simply because they are misunderstood. Examples of this could be that an Aboriginal witness stating “he properly his father” might sound like “he probably his father”, which changes the meaning of the witness’ statement. There have been issues understanding not only the phonetics and grammar of Aboriginal English, but the pragmatics as well, which according to Eades (2013) is a crucial part of Aboriginal English that has not received enough attention by researchers. For instance, when a witness is silent or waits a long time to answer a question, an Australian court could potentially interpret this as hesitation because of guilt or because the person is not sure what to answer. However, Aboriginal speakers often use lengthy silences as part of the conversation, especially when important matters are discussed (Eades 2000:167–168), and therefore this would be a natural part of a witness’ statement. For non-aboriginal speakers, silence can indicate that communication has broken down, and these different interpretations of silence can lead to miscommunication in places like a court of law. However, as pragmatics is not easy to investigate in film, it will not be a part of this thesis.

There are several ways to distinguish between Heavy and Light Aboriginal Australian English. Eades (2013) mentions only two features that are uniquely used by HAAE speakers, while researchers such as Malcolm (2008) and Butcher (2008) go into even further detail about the way the two varieties differ. As one can imagine, in reality there are not just two varieties of AAE, but a spectrum ranging from varieties that are incredibly close to ATL, to varieties that are almost indistinguishable from Australian English (Sharifian 2006:13). For the purpose of this thesis, however, we operate with the two categories HAAE and LAEE.

### **3.4.3.1 Light Aboriginal Australian English**

Since it was quite difficult to find a clear line between Heavy and Light AAE, the present thesis has made use of different aspects from all three researchers mentioned above to create one that is supported by their respective phonetic, grammatical and lexical descriptions. There is a high degree of overlap between the features of Light and Heavy AAE, so only a few features were restricted to LAEE, and most of these are also usually present in HAAE. Thus, this thesis has come up with a list of some of the most common AAE features based on

previous descriptions (Butcher 2008, Eades 2013, Malcolm 2008, Butcher & Anderson 2008). Most of these features are used by both Light and Heavy AAE speakers while the rest, which will be outlined in section 3.4.3.2, are only used by HAAE speakers. Features of LAEE are as follows, with examples of use in italics with the AuE translation. The examples are mostly taken from Butcher (2008) or from the films used in the present thesis:

#### Phonetic features:

- Omitting the glottal fricative /h/

It is common to omit the glottal fricative /h/, so that “hurting” is pronounced *’urtin* and “hungry” becomes *’ungry*. Hypercorrection is also common, so the /h/ can be added where it is not supposed to be, so “angry” can be pronounced *hangry*.

- Clear L

The phoneme /l/ is realised as a clear alveolar lateral in all positions. “Well” thus becomes [wel] rather than [weɫ] or [weʊ].

- TH-stopping

The dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are realised as alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ in words like *nothing* and *there*.

#### Grammatical features:

- “Never” as a negative marker

*I never went to school yesterday = I didn’t go to school yesterday*

*I never bin eat that cake = I didn’t eat that cake*

#### Lexical features:

- Restricted use of Aboriginal words

It is quite common for AAE speakers to include Indigenous words in their English, and for LAEE speakers these words seem to be restricted to mainly words that refer to either themselves, another Aboriginal person or a non-Aboriginal person. Abstract words or words referring to things, places or actions is not commonly used in LAEE.

- Moderate use of English words used in an Aboriginal way

Another typical feature of AAE in general, is the use of English words in an Aboriginal way, especially words that relate to kinship and family. For example, the word “mother” not only refers to the person who gave birth to you or raised you, but also her sisters. “Mother” in Aboriginal English means “A female relative of the same generation as the speaker’s biological mother, usually a mother’s sister” (Arthur 1996:82). In Aboriginal societies, everyone has the same obligation to take care of the child, and therefore the term “mother” has a significantly wider meaning than in AuE (Arthur 1996, Eades 2013). There are several examples of English words that have a different meaning in AAE, like *country* (land), *lingo* (Aboriginal language), *camp* (home) and so on. When it comes to the term *moderate*, I made a decision to set the line at five words used in an Aboriginal way in the same scene/dialogue. This will be explained a bit further in the next section.

### 3.4.3.2 Heavy Aboriginal Australian English

Heavy AAE is the variety of AAE that is even further from AuE than LAEE, and closer to creole languages or ATL. In addition to the traits used by LAEE speakers, there are several other linguistic traits which distinguishes AuE from what is here called HAAE, the most important of which will be mentioned below. There are several other traits for HAAE, but these were the ones that we encountered in the films in this thesis, and therefore the most relevant in this context.

#### Phonetic features:

- No distinction between voiced and voiceless stops.

This means that /p/ and /b/ can be used interchangeably, as well as /t/ and /d/ or /k/ and /g/ (Butcher 2008:628). Thus, a speaker of HAAE might pronounce “party” as “barty”.

- Dental fricatives become alveolar fricatives

/θ/ might become /s/ in some cases, so “nothing” could be realised as /nasɪŋ/.

- Fricatives become stops

Labio-dental fricatives can become bi-labial stops in AAE. Just like in LAEE, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are realised as alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/. However, this is a

feature shared with other non-standard varieties as well, but unique for HAAE is that /v/ can be realised as /b/. Therefore “very” can be pronounced “bery” in HAAE (Malcolm 2008, Eades 2013).

- Stress

In words that have more than one syllable, the stress typically falls on the initial syllable in HAAE. Words like “operation”, “referee” and “kangaroo” are commonly pronounced [ˈɔpəɹeɪʃən, ˈɹefɹɪ, ˈkæŋɡɹuː]. Even longer expressions like “cup of tea” can be realised as [ˈkɛpətɪ]. Furthermore, acronyms or road names which have final stress in AuE are pronounced with initial stress in HAAE, making “DVD” and “Bagot Road” become [ˈdɪ bɪ dɪ] and [ˈbɛɡət ɹɔd]. Some words like “along”, “suppose”, “police”, “explain” and “collect” can also be pronounced without the first unstressed syllable altogether, and therefore be realised as [lɔŋ, spɔz, plɪs, splɛn, klɛk(t)]. These stress patterns are transferred from ATL or creole languages into AAE (Butcher 2008:631).

#### Grammatical features:

- “nomo” as a negative marker

*’E nomo my fadda = He’s not my father*

*Jimmy nomo drink coffee = Jimmy doesn’t drink coffee*

- Wh-questions structured as statements.

*Where you go yesterday? = Where did you go yesterday?*

*When he can go home? = When can he go home?*

- *E* as a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronoun for both *he/she/it* (Eades 2013:84)

*E come from Perth = He/She comes from Perth*

*Q: Your mother lives where? A: Before up in Cairns, now e down in Brisbane.*

- Topicalization of the direct object

*That grog they bringin’ = They’re bringing alcohol*

*’Nother woman ’e got = He’s got another woman*

- No possessive marker in the 3rd person

*That my cousin house = That's my cousin's house*

*One little boy trouser bin come down = One little boy's trousers came down*

- Omitting *be/have*

It is a common feature of non-standard varieties to omit copula *be*, but I noticed that some of the characters in these films also omitted auxiliary *have*.

*That my brother house = that is my brother's house*

*Where you been = Where have you been*

- Irregular concord

The literature focuses on the fact that AAE has no marking of the present tense 3rd person singular. However, I noticed that this was not the only type of irregular concord that occurred. In the last example below, there is irregular concord, but not related to marking of 3rd person singular. Several of the characters in the films had this trait, both in the older and newer films. Thus, this category is based on literature, but expanded with observations from the films.

*When my sister come, we can eat = When my sister comes, we can eat*

*Teacher say we can go home = Teacher says we can go home*

*You wasn't at school = You weren't at school*

#### Lexical features:

- Unrestricted use of Indigenous words

The lexical part of AAE, particularly the use of loanwords, is to a large degree influenced by Indigenous languages. However, it seems that in the lighter varieties of AAE, Aboriginal lexicon is only widely used in one area: names that aboriginal people use to refer to themselves or non-aboriginal people (Butcher 2008:636). We can therefore assume, at least for the purpose of this thesis, that a person who uses Aboriginal words in other areas than these is a HAAE speaker.

- Extensive use of English words in an Aboriginal way

As explained in section 3.4.3.1, Aboriginal people might give different meanings to English words. In the present thesis, this feature of AAE has been analysed in terms of quantity. I distinguish between Light and Heavy AAE based on how frequently characters



use English words in an Aboriginal way. Characters who use English words in an Aboriginal way numerous times throughout their talking time, are characterised as a HAAE speakers. As mentioned in section 3.4.3.1, I set the line at five words used in an Aboriginal way in the same scene.

#### **3.4.4 Aboriginal traditional languages**

As mentioned earlier, there are several Indigenous languages in Australia, with only about 20 still viable today. Obviously, it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to analyse every one of the Indigenous languages used in the films, so all of them were classified together in one category named Aboriginal traditional languages (ATL). Many of the Aboriginal traditional languages have influenced Australian English as well, and today Australian English has a range of loan words from several of the Indigenous languages. The word *kangaroo*, for example, originated from the Guugu Yimidhirr language, and the white man adopted it when they first encountered speakers of this language (Koch 2007:26).

The Aboriginal languages are also very different, contrary to early beliefs. As late as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Schmidt came to the realisation that the languages in the north actually have no lexical and only a few grammatical similarities with languages from the south. Thus, he killed the myth that Aboriginal languages were a homogenous group of languages. (Koch 2007:26). Later research, however, has shown that most of the Aboriginal languages seem to actually be in the same language family, with a few exceptions. Nevertheless, they are all placed in one category in this analysis, and they were easy to identify because of the major differences between ATL and English.

In some cases, characters speak both ATL and AAE, depending on who they are talking to. A character can speak ATL with his Aboriginal Australian friends, but Aboriginal English when speaking to a white policeman, doctor, lawyer and so on. Thus, it seems to depend on the situation as well as the person. Because the main focus of this thesis is on Aboriginal English, characters are categorised by the way they speak English, and therefore the ATL category includes only the characters who speaks exclusively ATL throughout the film.

#### **3.4.5 Bidialectal**

Watching the films, I noticed that not only did several of the characters switched between HAAE and ATL, but some also switched between RP and HAAE. Due to this observation, I

decided to do a separate analysis of these characters. Consequently, a character who spoke a traditional language to one person, and later switched to Heavy Aboriginal English, has primarily been characterised as a Heavy Aboriginal English speaker in the first part of the analysis, and analysed again separately as a part of the *bidialectal* characters. This will be explained further in chapter 4.

### 3.4.6 Challenges with the linguistic varieties

Categorising the linguistic varieties was probably the biggest challenge of the thesis. To correctly identify Aboriginal Australian English proved not to be as easy as I had thought, but to distinguish between Heavy and Light AAE was even more difficult. For example, several of the characters has TH-stopping, that I originally had placed as a Heavy trait. However, after reading a bit more I decided to place it as a light trait, because it is shared with several other non-standard varieties of English, unlike /v/ becoming /b/, which is specific for AAE and derives from Aboriginal languages. After a while it became easier, because I had a better overview of the traits, and could place the characters more efficiently. Even if the character for example only had one occurrence of copula omission throughout the film, they were still categorised as a HAAE speaker. The main reason for this is that many of the characters only spoke short phrases, and in accordance with the societal treatment approach I have to assume that the film makers had the characters say that phrase because they wanted the trait to be present. They could have easily asked the actor to say it differently, but since that particular linguistic trait was included, the character was classified as a HAAE speaker. Additionally, if an Aboriginal character for example spoke a few sentences only, and there were no apparent AAE traits, it was assumed that they were AuE speakers. My supervisor also listened to a selected sample of characters to quality check, and there was a high degree of agreement between us about where to place them linguistically.

### 3.5 Character variables

When analysing the films, four main character variables were considered: *ethnicity*, *gender*, *social class*, and *character role*. These are all variables that can affect how we speak and what language we use. With regard to *ethnicity*, the characters were classified as either *Aboriginal Australian* or *white*, the *gender* category consists of *male* and *female*, while *class* was divided into *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class* for the purpose of the present thesis. Finally,

the characters were also divided into three different *character roles*: *main character*, *supporting character* and *peripheral character*.

### 3.5.1 Ethnicity

In this thesis, the characters are divided into two ethnic groups: Aboriginal Australian and white. Although this might not be politically correct, it was done for simplicity's sake. The classification was mainly done by looking at the characters' skin colour, hair, clothes, facial features and so on. Some of the characters were what is known as "half-cast", with one white and one Aboriginal parent (usually Aboriginal mother and white father) and therefore it was not always obvious that the character was Aboriginal. In these cases, the character's background story or revelations in the plot that informed the viewer of the character's ethnicity was used to classify them. For example, Lena in *Beneath Clouds (2002)* has light skin and no obvious Aboriginal traits, but in one of the scenes in her home we see that her mother is Aboriginal. Furthermore, in the film Lena is looking for her father, who we are told is Irish later in the plot. Thus, "half-cast" characters, such as Lena, were categorised as Aboriginal Australians. To have a third ethnic category for these characters could have been a possibility, but since it was not always stated which origin the characters had and most of the characters looked Aboriginal, the choice was made to classify them as Aboriginal Australians. Additionally, one might argue that since most of them looked Aboriginal, realistically they would still probably experience stigma and racism in society.

To identify the Aboriginal characters was quite easy because most of the films were about Aboriginal issues and challenges, and therefore their ethnicity was usually made quite clear. In the films where this was not the topic, they were simply categorised by their looks or sometimes their names. This might seem problematic, considering one of the issues in this thesis is stereotypes, but for the purpose of the thesis the categorisation was made as simple as possible. As mentioned in section 2.3.1, film is a visual media, so to classify characters based on their visual traits makes sense, and arguably that is what the audience will mainly base their impression of the characters on as well.

### 3.5.2 Gender

This thesis operates with two genders: *male* and *female*. Of course, in society today there are several ways to define biological and social gender, but for this thesis I decided to keep it simple and therefore had no trouble dividing the characters into *male* and *female* based on

their looks, their clothes and their names. As mentioned in section 2.3.2, females tend to speak closer to the standard accent than males. In this particular thesis, therefore, it can be interesting to see for example if the female Aboriginal characters speak more AuE or LAAE than males, or if there is a difference between white and Aboriginal characters in this aspect.

### 3.5.3 Social class

As mentioned in chapter 2, *social class* is concerned with both occupation, education and economy. The present thesis uses a scale inspired by Labov (1966). I decided to simplify Labov's scale a bit, and the categories in this thesis are *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class*. The criteria for each category will be explained in the following.

For the purpose of this thesis, lower class consists of characters who are unemployed, although for the characters who have limited screen time, we can only assume they are unemployed based on the impression given by the film makers. *Working class* is, as defined by Chambers (2003:42), people who work with their hands. Next, we will only use the term *middle class* in this thesis and, according to Chambers, this group consist of people who work with pens and services. In other words, not manual labour. People in the middle class also tend to have a longer education and usually a higher income than people in the working class. Upper class will not be considered in this thesis, as it barely exists outside Europe and Asia (Chambers 2003:42). Also, the scale in the films in this thesis only went up to *middle class*, with the exception of Lady Sarah Ashley in *Australia* (2008), and therefore she was instead included in the *middle class* category.

This simplification of social class into manual or non-manual labour sometimes created problems, or at least minor issues. This way, a secretary and a director could end up in the same social class because their labour is non-manual. However, a secretary and a director obviously do not usually make the same amount of money and usually do not have the same level of education, so to say they are in the same social class might seem a bit peculiar. However, for the purpose of this thesis, some simplification was required and, as a result, the *middle class* category therefore can be quite diverse indeed. Also, some professions were quite hard to place. For instance, a nun was placed in the *working class* category because of her lack of formal education, but her work is not mainly manual. Also, policemen were quite hard to place, because they might seem like working class since they have a certain degree of manual labour, but they have an education that would place them in the middle class. Thus, I decided to place all policemen in the middle class, including sheriffs in older films like *Jedda*

(1955). An example of a middle-class character is the lawyer in *Charlie's country* (2013), a working-class character is for example the butcher in *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), and a lower class character is for example Fingerbone Bill in *Storm Boy* (1976). Children are, when possible, classified by their parents' class or the way they live, and some of these cases will be discussed more in detail in chapter 4.

### 3.5.4 Character role

This thesis operates with three different character roles: *main, supporting and peripheral*. The classification is based on Dragojevic et al., who use the categories *main, minor and background* (Dragojevic et al. 2016:70). The criteria are inspired by the ones Dragojevic et al. used, mentioned in section 2.6.5, but with minor adjustments. In the present thesis, characters that are included need to speak enough for it to be possible to hear which linguistic variety they have. Thus, screen time is the most important factor for the role division in this thesis, but how important the character is to the plot was also factored in.

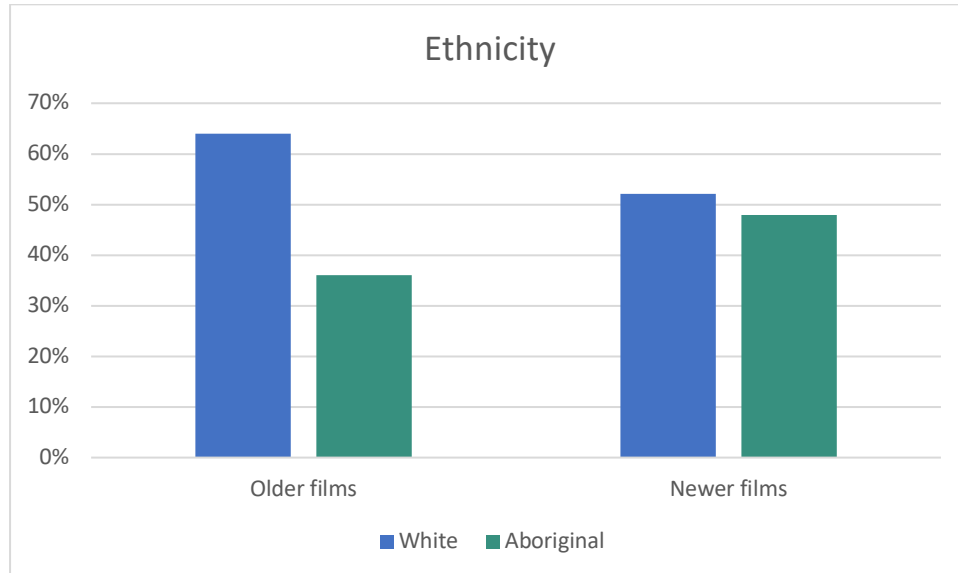
To identify the main characters was quite easy, usually they had their picture on the cover or it was made clear early in the film that these were the characters we were following. The main character is typically the character we are supposed to identify with the most, and thus it is interesting to see if for example both white and Aboriginal characters are represented in this role. The supporting characters also play a big part in the films, and to decide which characters were supporting and which were peripheral was sometimes challenging. When these issues occurred, screen time usually decided whether the character was supporting or peripheral, but it is worth noting that peripheral characters could also have an important role in the main character's life, like Reverend Neville in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978). He is an important part of Jimmie's life in *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) because he represents Jimmie's background and status in society as a middle-class character, but his screen time is quite limited, and thus he is classified as a peripheral character. Sometimes it seemed strange that a character with only a couple of lines was even considered in the analysis, but because I wanted to get a complete overview of the portrayal of the Aboriginal characters, most of them were still included as peripheral characters.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following chapter contains the results from the data analysis. The results are presented in tables and diagrams, which will be explained and discussed. The data material will be analysed based on the following character variables: *ethnicity*, *gender*, *class* and *character role*, and the variety distribution within each category will be presented and discussed. In addition, I will look at the characters who are *bidialectal* in a separate analysis.

### 4.1 Ethnicity

In this thesis, 91 Aboriginal Australian characters and 130 white characters have been analysed, 221 characters in total. One of the variables that were considered was *ethnicity*, and this will be the first aspect to be discussed because throughout the chapter I divide most of the other categories by ethnicity as well, so it can be helpful to first have an overview of the ratio between white and Aboriginal characters. I compared older and newer films and looked at how many Aboriginal characters were present in the older films compared to the newer ones, and the results are presented in figure 4.1:



**Figure 4.1:** Distribution of ethnicity older vs. newer films

In the older films, there were 80 white characters and only 45 Aboriginal characters, resulting in a percentage of 64% white and 36% Aboriginal. In the newer films, however, the results were much more even with 50 white characters and 46 Aboriginal characters. Thus, the relation between white and Aboriginal characters is 52% white to 48% Aboriginal characters

in the newer films. In reality, the Indigenous population make up just over 3% of the total Australian population. Comparing the films and reality, we see that there is a more equal distribution of ethnicity in the films than there is in Australian society in real life. One reason for this could be that the majority of films I chose has Aboriginal Australians as the main focus, and therefore they might include more Aboriginal characters than there normally would be in reality.

Looking at the statistics, the percentage of Indigenous population varies, and for example in the Northern Territory they comprised 30% of the population in 2016, the highest proportion of any state or territory (*Australian Bureau of Statistics*, 2018b, accessed February 2020). The ratio between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population also varies with remoteness, and while most of the non-Indigenous population live in the major cities, almost 70% of them, only a little over one third of the Indigenous population do the same. However, about 12% of the Indigenous population live in the very remote areas of the country, compared to 0,5% of the non-Indigenous population. Most of the films in this thesis are set in more rural areas, and since there is a larger percentage of Aboriginal Australians there, that might be the reason why there is a more even distribution between white and Aboriginal characters in the films.

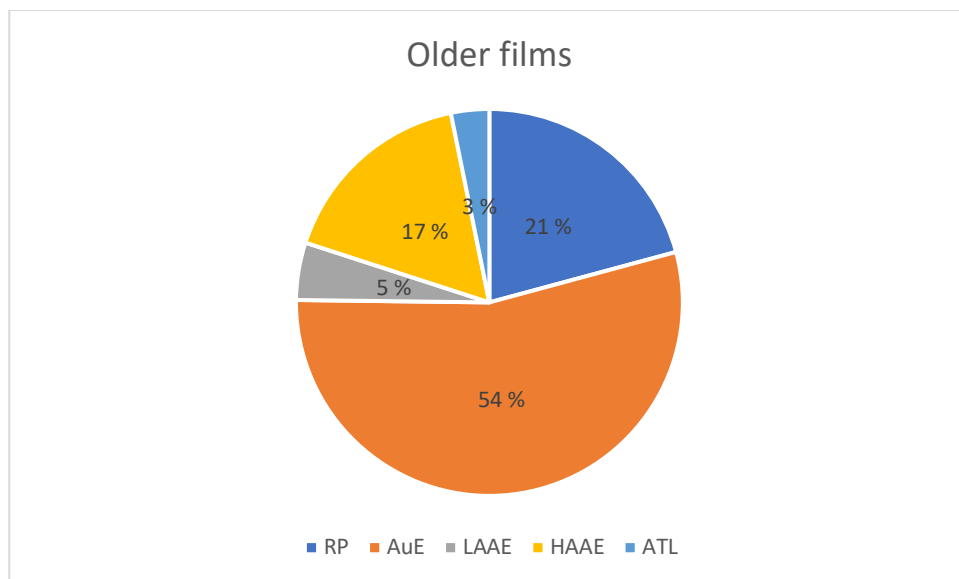
#### **4.2 General distribution of linguistic varieties**

The following section will give an overview of the general variety distribution in the films. The table and figures below present all the characters included in this analysis divided into linguistic varieties. The varieties used in this thesis are Received Pronunciation (RP), Australian English (AuE), Light Aboriginal Australian English (LAAE), Heavy Aboriginal Australian English (HAAE) and Aboriginal traditional languages (ATL). The following table is an overview of the varieties found in the films, with a total of 221 characters:

**Table 4.1:** Overall variety distribution

	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
RP	38	17 %
AuE	112	51 %
LAAE	15	7 %
HAAE	47	21 %
ATL	9	4 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4.1 shows that the variety that is most used overall by all characters in all the films, old and new, is AuE with 51%. HAAE is the second most used variety, but is only spoken by 21%, which is markedly less than AuE, followed by 17% RP speakers. LAAE is the second least used variety, spoken by 7% of the characters, and the variety that is least used overall is ATL with only 4%.

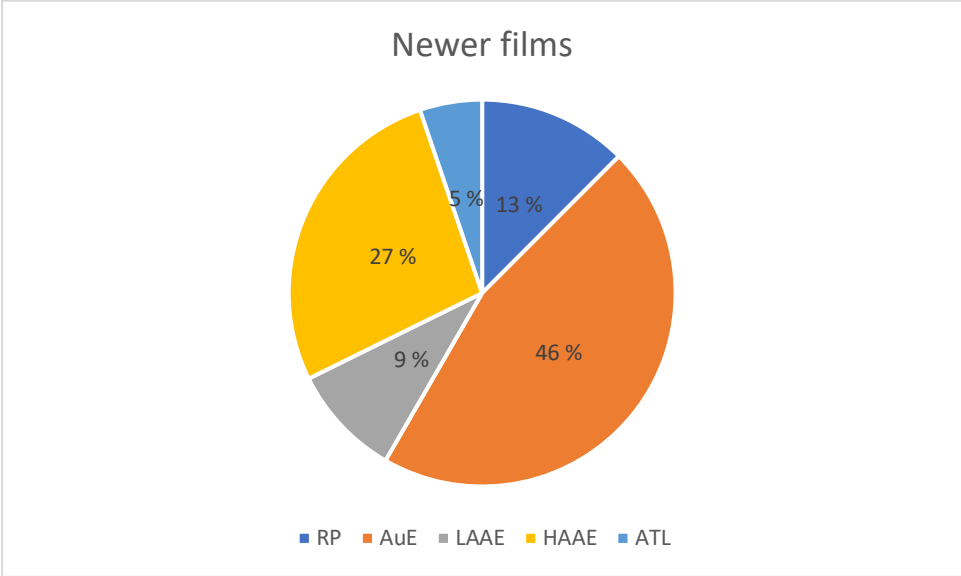


**Figure 4.2:** Distribution of varieties in the older films

Figure 4.2 is an overview of the variety distribution in the older films, with a total of 125 characters: 80 white characters and 45 Aboriginal characters. In this figure, we see that the variety that is most used overall in the older films is AuE. Second, RP is used by 21% of the characters, which is still quite low compared to the 54% who speak AuE. 17% of the speakers use HAAE, while only 5% speak LAAE. Lastly, 3% of the characters speak ATL. Originally, I would expect that RP was the most used variety in the older films, but the results show that

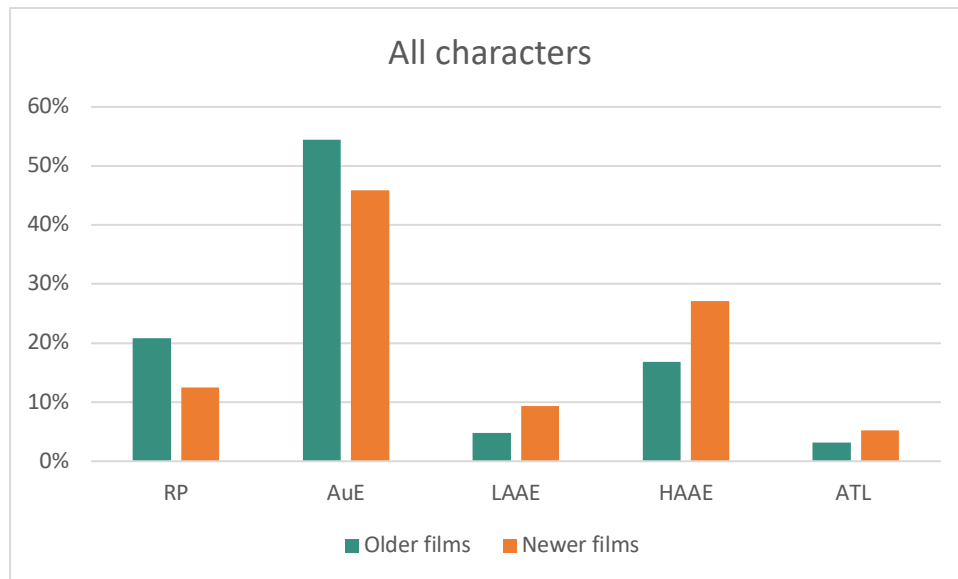


AuE is in fact the dominant variety. This could possibly be due to the fact that the films are all Australian, and that AuE is used to emphasise the Australian culture and language. Since most of the older films are from the 1970s onwards, the use of AuE might reflect the focus on Australian uniqueness that appeared around this time in Australian film industry, as mentioned in section 2.8. The late 1960s and early 1970s are described as a time of renaissance in Australian film industry, and the use of AuE might be a part of the unique Australian image that was born during this time.



**Figure 4.3:** Distribution of varieties in the newer films

Variety distribution in the newer films are illustrated in figure 4.3, with 50 white characters and 46 Aboriginal characters, resulting in a total of 96 characters. Just like in the older films, ATL is the least used variety with only 5% of the characters. LAEE is next with 9%, while RP has a few more speakers with 13%. The second most used variety is HAAE in the newer films as well with 27% of the characters, only beaten by AuE with 46%, which makes AuE the most used variety in the newer films as well.



**Figure 4.4:** Variety distribution in older vs. newer films

Figure 4.4 illustrates the distribution of all the varieties used in the films and compares the distribution in the older films to the distribution in the newer films. In this figure, the first thing to note is that the use of RP has decreased quite drastically. This is in line with what is happening in Australian society, namely that RP seems to be disappearing (cf. 3.4.1). There is still a certain amount of RP speakers in the newer films, but it is worth noting that ten of the twelve RP speakers appear in the two films that are set in the early 1900s, *Australia* (2008) and *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). Only two RP speakers appear in films set in modern time, and it is worth noting that they are both older men of high status, a doctor and a judge in *Charlie's Country* (2013). RP and AuE have both decreased from the older to the newer films, whereas the three other varieties only spoken by Aboriginal characters, LAEE, HAAE and ATL, have all increased. However, HAAE has increased the most, with ten percentage points, and therefore is the main variety that the audience is exposed to more in the newer films than the older ones. This development could be a step towards a more realistic representation of the Indigenous people of Australia, and a reflection of increased tolerance of Aboriginal Australians and their linguistic varieties.

However, it is worth noting that the use of ATL has remained more or less the same. There can be many reasons for not including more ATL in newer Australian films. As mentioned earlier, the traditional Australian Aboriginal languages are few, and of the over 200 languages spoken originally, only about 20 viable languages remain (cf. 2.7). Therefore, no increase in ATL seems like a realistic representation compared to how the Australian population actually speak. One could also argue that when Aboriginal characters speak ATL,

viewers might perceive them as foreign and scary, especially in the older films where the Aboriginal characters often come off as savage and wild. It is possible that film makers try to make it easier to identify with the Aboriginal characters by having them speak English rather than ATL in the newer films, but still emphasising their Aboriginal culture by using Aboriginal varieties of English instead of AuE.

Not surprisingly, there are not many Aboriginal Australian characters who speak RP. Only two Aboriginal characters speak RP, Jedda and Joe, and they are both in the film *Jedda* (1955). This is the oldest film in the selection, from 1955, and the characters are both raised by RP-speaking white people who try to remove as much of the Aboriginal part of them as they can. Additionally, there are obviously no white speakers of LAAE, HAAE or ATL, given that these by definition are Aboriginal varieties. There are cases, however, where white characters know some words or even speak whole sentences in ATL, such as Mr. Fletcher in the film *Australia* (2008).

### 4.3 Aboriginal characters only

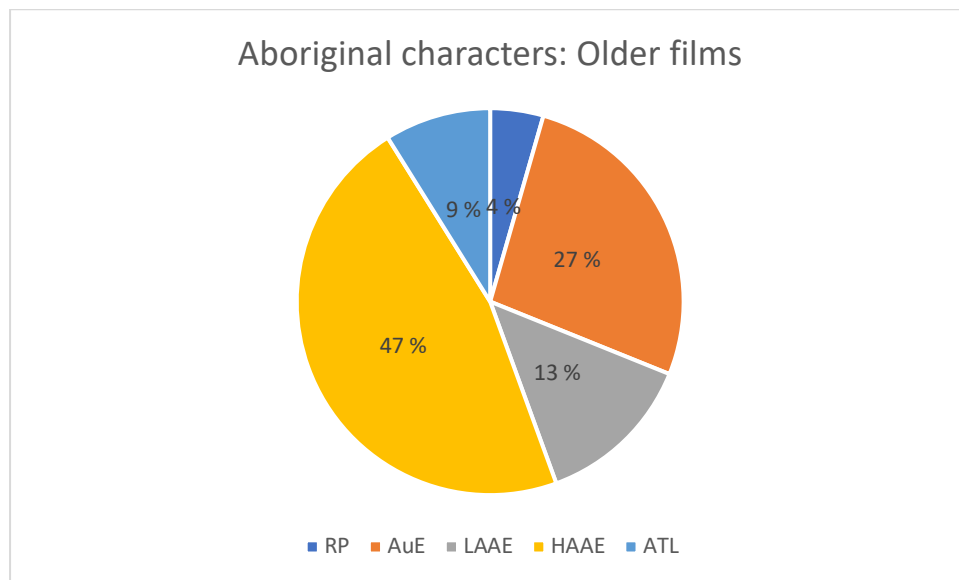
Next, I will present the results for the Aboriginal characters separately and compare which varieties they speak in the older and the newer films. However, it is difficult to say anything about the Aboriginal characters if we do not have anyone to compare them to. Therefore, in sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6, I will look at all characters, but also compare the Aboriginal characters to the white characters within the different categories. This section, however, will lay out the variety distribution among the Aboriginal characters alone.

**Table 4.2:** Variety distribution among the Aboriginal characters

	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
RP	2	2 %
AuE	18	20 %
LAAE	15	16 %
HAAE	46	51 %
ATL	10	11 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100 %</b>

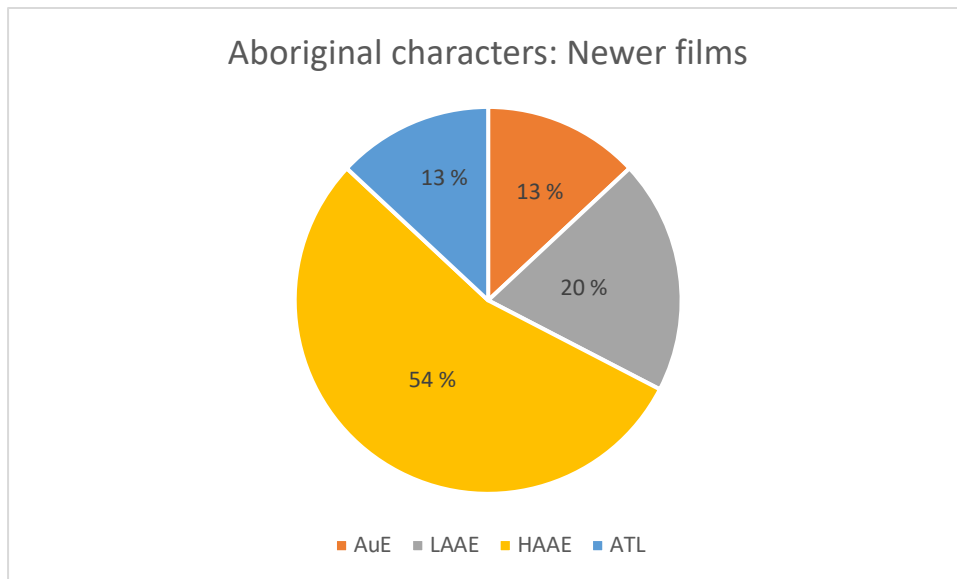
From table 4.2 we see that the variety that is most used by the Aboriginal characters is HAAE, with the high proportion of 51% of the speakers. The second most used variety is

AuE with 20% of the Aboriginal characters, followed by the 16% who speak LAAE. ATL is spoken by 11% of the Aboriginal characters, and only 2% speak RP. While table 4.2 is an overview of the Aboriginal characters in both the older and newer films, figure 4.5 and 4.6 below will give an overview of the variety distribution in the older and newer films separately.



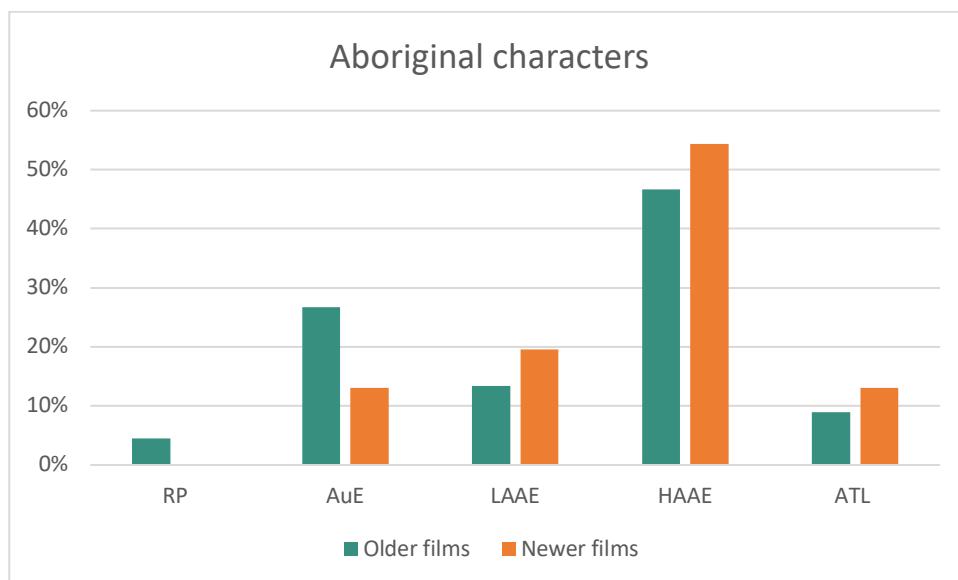
**Figure 4.5:** Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters in the older films

Figure 4.5 illustrates the variety distribution of Aboriginal characters in the six older films alone. As we saw in table 4.2 as well, the most used variety is in fact HAAE, spoken by almost half of the Aboriginal characters. The second most used variety is actually AuE with 27%, while LAAE is the third most spoken variety with 13%. Lastly, 9% of the characters in the older films speak ATL, while as little as 4% speak RP. It is surprising that there are any speakers of RP at all, and one explanation can be that the two Aboriginal RP speakers appear in the oldest film in the data material, *Jedda* (1955), and this film was made in what one might call a different climate in the Australian cinematic landscape, before Australian uniqueness fully became the focus of Australian film industry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as mentioned in section 2.8. The remaining five older films, however, were all made during or after this period.



**Figure 4.6:** Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters in the newer films

The variety distribution in the newer films is presented in figure 4.6. HAAE still has the largest percentage of speakers with a small increase, while AuE has decreased notably from 27% to 13%. RP is non-existent among the Aboriginal characters in the newer films, but ATL which was the second smallest variety in the older films is now equal to AuE, with 13%. Just like the other Aboriginal varieties, LAAE has also increased notably.



**Figure 4.7:** Variety distribution among Aboriginal characters older vs. newer films

Figure 4.7 shows the variety distribution of the Aboriginal characters and compares the older and newer films. As can be observed by the figure, there is an increase in all the Aboriginal varieties, both in LAAE and HAAE as well as in ATL. At the same time, there is a

remarkable decrease in AuE, and no Aboriginal characters who speak RP in the newer films. Thus, we see there is generally more use of Aboriginal varieties in the newer films and less use of non-Aboriginal varieties among the Aboriginal characters.

Looking at the percentage of Aboriginal characters who speak ATL, we notice that there is a slight increase from the older to the newer films. The same is true for HAAE and LA AE, which both have a slightly larger increase. Thus, H5a that states that HAAE and ATL is more represented in the newer films is indeed confirmed, although the increase might not have been as big as expected. It is worth noting that because of the small number of characters, the two RP speaking characters in the older films make out as much as 4% of the total number of Aboriginal characters. Therefore, a single character can make a great difference in a small-scale study like this one. Thus, not surprisingly, the distribution of RP decreases from a few characters to non-existent among the Aboriginal characters in the newer films. AuE also decreases with a whole 14 percentage points.

To summarise, the results above show that the use of Aboriginal varieties has increased in the newer films. There has been an increase in the use of LA AE, HAAE and even a slight increase in ATL, however small it might be. At the same time, there is a markedly decrease in the distribution of AuE among Aboriginal characters. As discussed in section 2.4, there has been an increased focus on Aboriginal rights, employment and education the last four decades or so. Film and media are, as mentioned, the most important means of exposure to Aboriginal people and culture for many white Australians, and therefore the increase in the overall distribution of Aboriginal English and ATL can be said to reflect the way the Australian society have recently worked to lift up their Indigenous population.

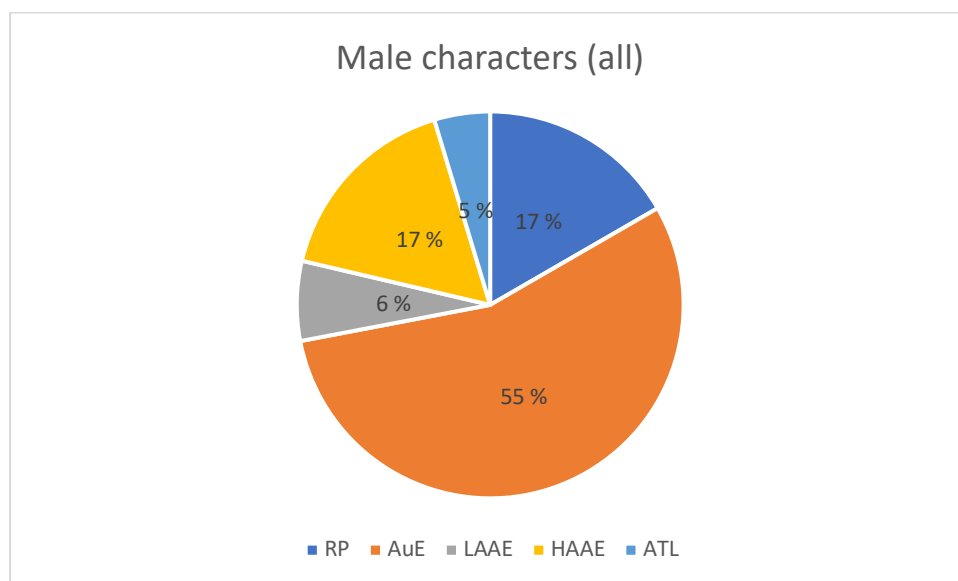
#### **4.4 Gender**

Next, the results will be presented according to gender. I will first look at the variety distribution between male and female characters overall in the films, and then divide into Aboriginal and white characters to compare. The characters will be presented in total in table 4.3, figure 4.8 and figure 4.9, followed by a comparison of the Aboriginal and white characters in figure 4.10 and 4.11. Furthermore, figure 4.12–4.15 will present Aboriginal and white characters over time, comparing the variety distribution in the older films to the newer films for each ethnicity.

**Table 4.3:** Overall variety distributions divided by gender

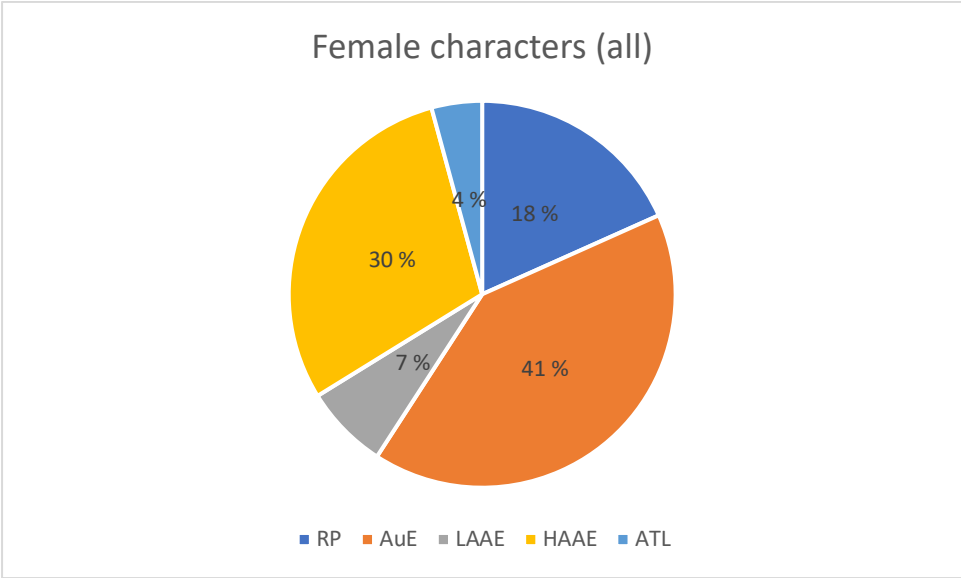
	<b>Male (n)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Female (n)</b>	<b>%</b>
RP	25	17 %	13	18 %
AuE	83	55 %	29	41 %
LAAE	10	7 %	5	7 %
HAAE	25	17 %	21	30 %
ATL	7	5 %	3	4 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4.3 shows an overview of all the characters divided by gender. The first point to make is that there are more than twice as many male characters as there are female characters in the films when we look at the total number of characters at the bottom of the table. We see that the majority of both genders speak AuE, 55% of the male characters and 41% of the female characters. Perhaps the most interesting results are the ones for HAAE, which is spoken by only 17% of the males and 30% of the females. Since traditional results indicate that males typically speak more non-standard than females, these numbers were quite surprising and will be discussed further later in this section. Interestingly, the distribution of RP was practically the same for male and female characters, with 17% and 18% respectively. The same is true for ATL with 5% of the male and 4% of the female characters. LAAE was distributed equally, with 7% for both genders. The results from table 4.3 are illustrated visually in figure 4.8 and 4.9 and discussed in more detail below.



**Figure 4.8:** Overall variety distribution for male characters

We see from figure 4.8 that over half of the male characters speak AuE. There are as many HAAE speakers as there are RP speakers with 17% in both varieties, but only 6% LAAE speakers and 5% ATL speakers. Since this figure includes both Aboriginal and white characters, it is not necessarily surprising that AuE is the most common variety used, so later in this section I will go into more detail and present the results for Aboriginal and white characters separately. This is also necessary to compare standard and non-standard varieties, since this will not be possible from these figures given that AuE is considered a standard variety for Aboriginal characters but a non-standard variety for white characters in this thesis.



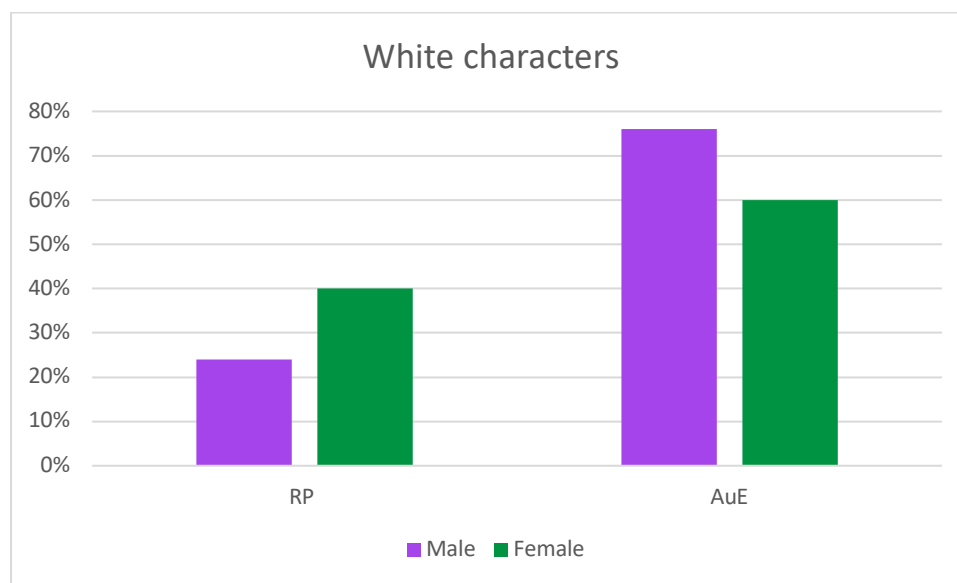
**Figure 4.9:** Overall variety distribution for female characters

Looking at figure 4.8 and 4.9, we see that of the female characters, there is a much larger percentage that speaks HAAE. Looking at LAAE, RP and ATL, the percentage is almost the same for the female characters in these variety categories as for the male characters. Thus, we see that most of the difference between male and female characters' variety distribution lies within the two varieties HAAE and AuE. Figure 4.9 shows that 30% of the female characters speak HAAE, compared to 41% who speak AuE. The male characters, however, have a much larger gap with only 17% HAAE speakers and as much as 55% AuE speakers. Taking into account that the AuE variety in this figure consists of both white and Aboriginal characters, this gap might not be as big when we look at the ethnicities separately.

However, we do see that there is a much larger percentage of HAAE speakers among the female characters than among the male ones, which is fairly surprising. Compared to traditional results on language and gender, one might expect there to be a larger percentage of



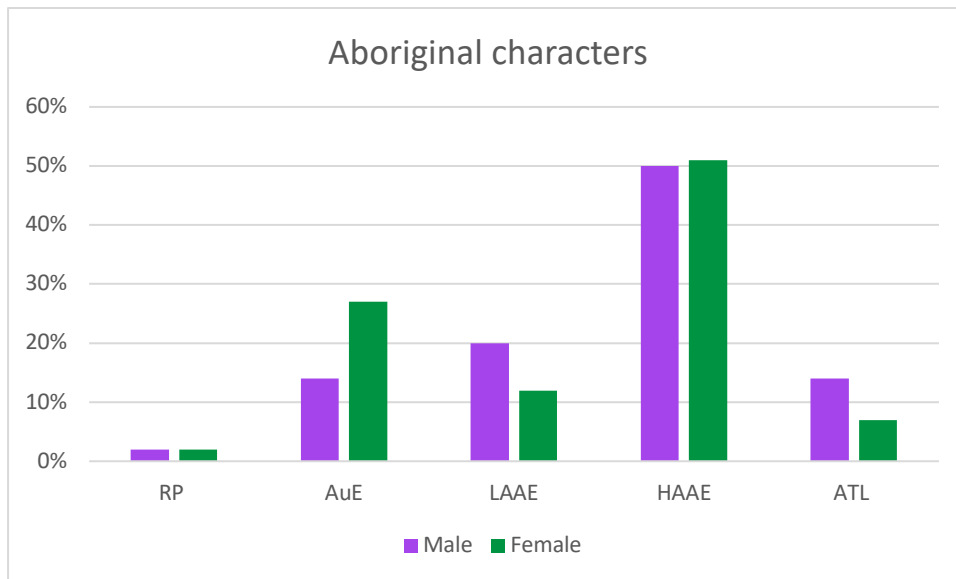
male characters who speak HAAE and ATL. Nevertheless, since the white characters who speak AuE might be considered non-standard because of the contrast to RP and the fact that broad AuE is included in the AuE category, it is hard to draw a conclusion based on these general figures. Therefore, figure 4.10 and 4.11 show the correlation between gender and linguistic variety separately for the white characters and the Aboriginal characters respectively.



**Figure 4.10:** Variety use of white characters divided by gender

The white characters were divided into RP speakers and AuE speakers based on gender. Figure 4.10 shows, as expected, that more women speak RP compared to men, while men speak more AuE than women. When analysing Australian films, Fjeldsbø (2013) found that female characters tended to speak general AuE while males typically spoke broad AuE (cf. 2.6.4), and it is possible that the present thesis would have had similar results had I distinguished between broad and general AuE. Nevertheless, the results in figure 4.10 are in line with traditional results on gender and language, as discussed in section 2.3.2.

Figure 4.11 presents a comparison of the variety distribution for Aboriginal male and female characters.



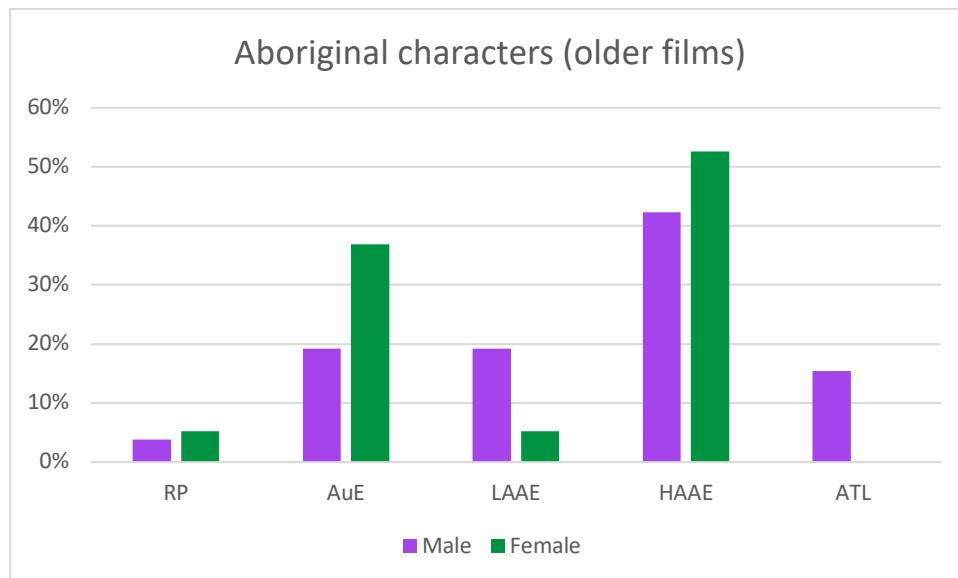
**Figure 4.11:** Variety use of Aboriginal characters divided by gender

Typically, females tend to speak closer to the standard than men, as mentioned in section 2.3.2. H2 states that males speak more non-standard than females. Therefore, I expected more females to speak AuE and LAAE, and more males to speak HAAE and ATL. This hypothesis was partially confirmed, since male characters do seem to dominate the ATL category. Surprisingly, the male characters also dominate LAAE, while there is actually a larger percentage of female speakers of HAAE than men, even if there is only a marginal difference.

The results above indicate that the Aboriginal female characters tend to speak more non-standard compared the white female characters, especially when we compare Light and Heavy AAE. If, as we assume, this is a reflection of society, a possible explanation can be found in section 2.3.2. Aboriginal females have generally had a stronger position in their communities than the white females, and one might argue that this is reflected in their linguistic expression. Aboriginal females speak more non-standard than white females, and having linguistic variables connected to standard speech is connected to lack of power, a position traditionally assigned to women in white societies. The fact that Aboriginal women do not speak as close to the standard as white women can be an indicator of their strong position in Aboriginal communities.

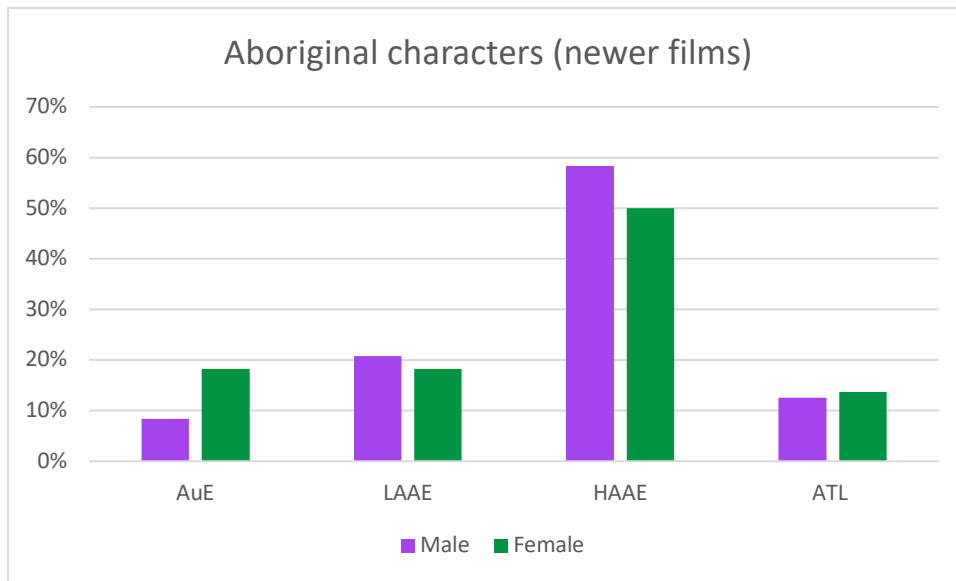
As observed in figure 4.11, this is true for HAAE and LAAE, but not for ATL and AuE. Thus, my hypothesis was indeed partly confirmed since Aboriginal females speak more AuE than males, and males speak more ATL than females. However, I want to point out that AuE is by definition not an Aboriginal variety, and therefore it is interesting that it is when the Aboriginal characters move over into the “white” varieties that gender division correlates

with traditional results on gender and language. Thus, one might argue that when Aboriginal Australians adopt white Australian's way of speaking, which here would be AuE, they also adopt the gender patterns that come with it, at least linguistically.



**Figure 4.12:** *Aboriginal characters in the older films male vs. Female*

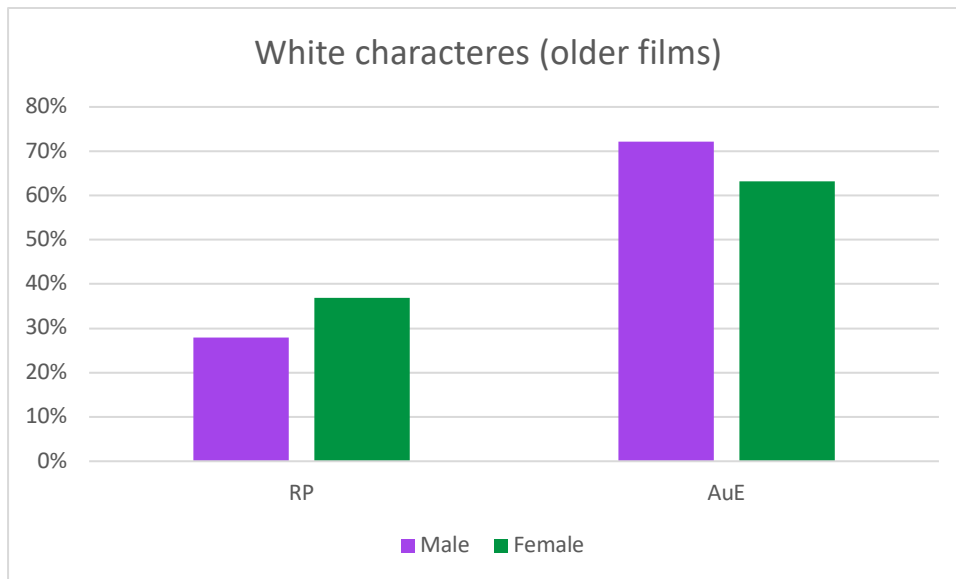
Figure 4.12 shows the distribution of varieties among the Aboriginal characters in the older films. Although there are only two Aboriginal RP-speaking characters, namely Jemma and Joe in *Jedda* (1955), Jemma represents a larger percentage of the female characters than Joe does of the male ones, resulting in a slightly larger percentage of female than male Aboriginal characters speaking RP. However, with only two characters it is not really possible to draw a conclusion regarding the use of RP among the Aboriginal characters, besides the fact that it is barely present in both genders. There is, however, a notable difference in AuE, where there is an almost twice as large percentage of female than male speakers. This is in line with traditional results for language and gender (cf. 2.3.2). Furthermore, results show that there is a larger percentage of female than male speakers of HAAE, with more than half of the female characters speaking HAAE, which is surprising and, unlike the AuE scores, not in line with traditional results. LAEE, on the other hand, is dominated by male speakers. ATL is exclusively spoken by male characters in the older films, which is indeed in line with traditional results. Next, we will compare these results to the Aboriginal characters in the newer films.



**Figure 4.13:** *Aboriginal characters in the newer films male vs. Female*

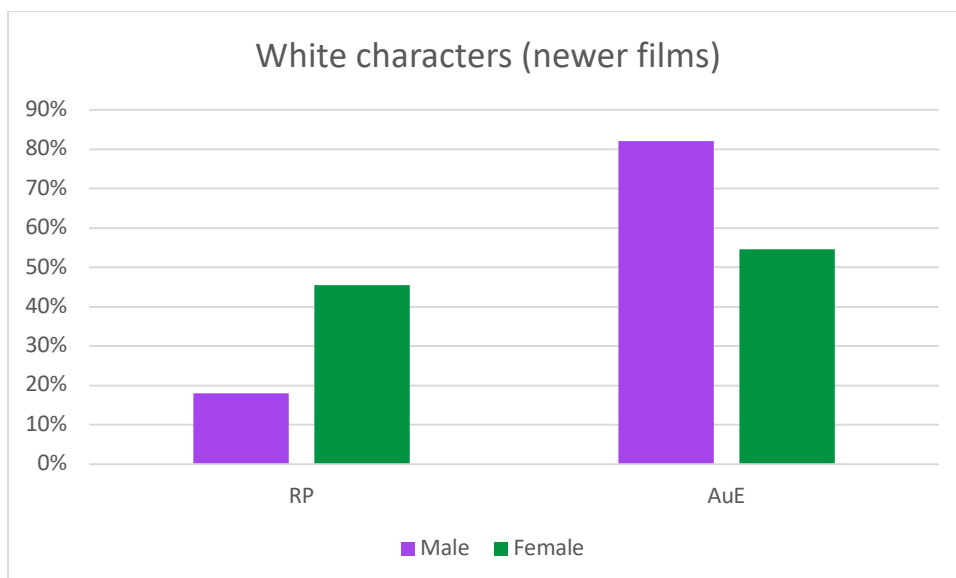
Figure 4.13 shows results that differ a bit from the gender patterns in the older films in figure 4.12. In general, the use of AuE has decreased notably among both genders, but the ratio between male and female speakers is more or less the same. LAEE, however, has around 20% male speakers, which is about the same as in the older films, but the use of LAEE among female characters has increased from around 5% to almost 20%. When it comes to HAAE, the percentage of female speakers has not changed that much, and almost half of the female characters speak HAAE as well. However, there has been a notable increase in male HAAE speakers, from around 40% in the older films to almost 60% in the newer films. ATL, which was not spoken at all by females in the older films, has actually a slightly larger percentage of female speakers in the newer films, but the difference is marginal. However, for the female characters to go from no speakers to over 10% in the newer films is a notable increase.

The language of Aboriginal males seems to shift from AuE to more HAAE, while LAEE and ATL remains more or less the same. Looking at the results for female Aboriginal characters overall, there seems to be a shift from AuE to Light AAE and ATL, while HAAE remains stable. Gallois et al. (1984) suggested that Aboriginal females tend to lose their position of power as they adapt to the white Australian culture. However, seeing as language is a way for women to signal their status (cf. 2.3.2), Aboriginal females actually express their powerful position even more in the newer films, at least linguistically, which is a very interesting finding. Nevertheless, overall for both genders the Aboriginal varieties are more represented in the newer films. Additionally, there seems to be a more equal distribution among genders for all the varieties in the newer films.



**Figure 4.14:** *White characters in the older films male vs. Female*

As previously stated, it is relevant to compare Aboriginal characters to the white characters. Figure 4.14 therefore illustrates the variety distribution among white male and female characters in the older films. As expected, the results show that women speak more RP than men, while the opposite is true for AuE where there is a larger percentage of male speakers. This is in line with traditional results for research on language and gender, as explained in detail in section 2.3.2.



**Figure 4.15:** *White characters in the newer films male vs. Female*

Figure 4.15 shows the results for white characters in the newer films. We see that the same tendency appears here as in figure 4.14, but surprisingly, the difference between genders is

even larger. The results for female speakers show that there is an almost equal distribution between RP and AuE. However, for the male speakers, the percentage of AuE speakers has increased compared to the older films, and an even smaller portion of the male characters speak RP in the newer films. One might assume that the newer films would have a more equal variety distribution between men and women, but as the results have shown, this is only true for the Aboriginal characters. The gender difference when it comes to linguistic variety has actually increased among the white characters over time. The female characters in the newer films speak more RP, while the male characters speak more AuE compared to the older films. One reason for the preservation of traditional gender patterns among the white characters, can be that the focus in the films seems to be on the Aboriginal characters when it comes to development. The white characters are perhaps portrayed more traditionally or stereotypically, as they are more the background against which the Aboriginal people are presented. It is possible that in the newer films, the white characters represent the “establishment” and preservation of a social system that makes Aboriginal people victims. Finally, it is worth remembering that two of the newer films are historical films, which could also impact the results.

In addition to variety distribution, it is interesting to observe the gender distribution in general. As mentioned in the beginning of the section, there are more than twice as many male characters as females in the films, but the picture becomes even more nuanced when we look at the two ethnicities separately. When it comes to gender, I have discovered that there is quite a large difference between Aboriginal and white characters. The results show that of the 125 characters in the older films, there are 80 white characters and 45 Aboriginal characters in total. There is a total of 87 male characters, which is 70% of the total, and 26 of them are Aboriginal (30%) while 61 of them are white (70%). Of the female characters, 38 in total, the ethnic division is strikingly more equal with a 50/50 division between white and Aboriginal characters. Thus, in the older films the Aboriginal characters have a gender distribution of 58% male and 42% female, while the white characters’ distribution is 76% male and only 24% female.

In the newer films, however, one would maybe expect to see a shift towards more equal gender division. However, this is only true for the Aboriginal characters. Of a total of 63 male characters, 38% were Aboriginal and 62% were white. Of the 33 female characters, 67% were actually Aboriginal and only 33% were white. In total, the gender division within the Aboriginal characters were 52% male and 48% female, so the numbers are slowly approaching the 50/50 mark. However, the white characters are actually going in the other

direction, with a slight increase in male characters to 78% and a decrease to 22% female. Looking at only male and female characters, disregarding ethnicity, the gender gap has closed from 70/30 males/females to 66/34. Nevertheless, the results show that the Aboriginal characters carry the weight for this change.

#### 4.5 Class

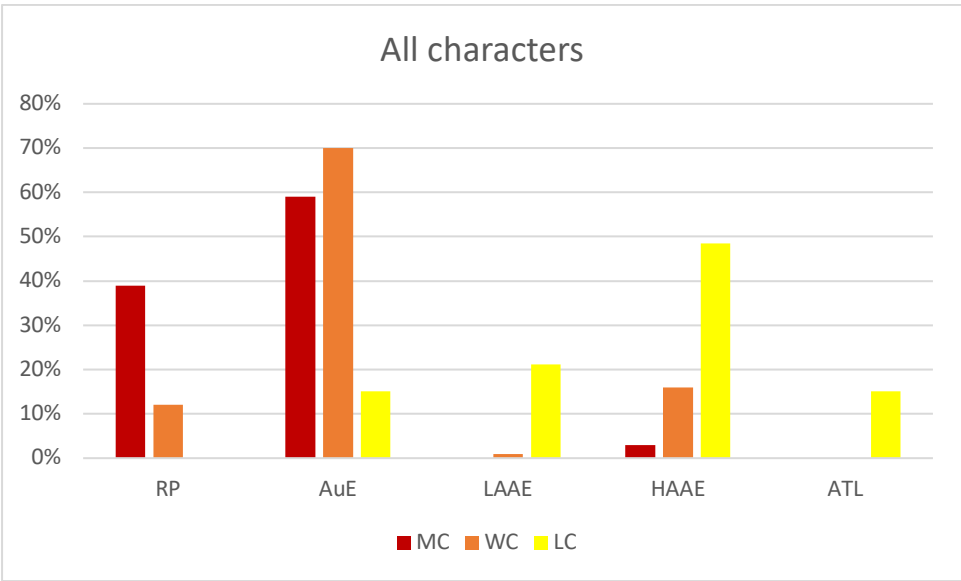
This section will address the variable of class. As mentioned in chapter 3, this thesis divides the characters into three categories: *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class*. Middle-class characters are typically white-collar characters who work with non-manual labour, while working-class characters tend to work with their hands. Lastly, lower-class characters are those who seem to be unemployed.

Most of the characters were divided into class, but seven characters were excluded from this category. For example, children who we see in a school setting but nothing more are difficult to categorise because children are, in this study, classified based on their parents' class. Sometimes we do not see their parents, but we see them in their home environment or their community, and in those cases I base the class division on the conditions they seem to live in, like for example the character Ty from *Beneath Clouds (2002)*. Unlike the main character *Lena*, her parents are not present, but she is a friend of Lena's from school, and the environment they both hang around in after school indicate that they are lower-class characters. A few characters are either hospitalised or we only see them in one scene where their clothes or dialogue do not reveal anything about their class, and consequently these characters were also excluded from this category. The characters are divided into three categories: *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class*, and the results are presented below.

**Table 4.4:** Overall variety distribution based on class

	<b>MC (n)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>WC (n)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>LC (n)</b>	<b>%</b>
RP	29	39 %	9	12 %	0	0 %
AuE	44	59 %	51	70 %	10	15 %
LAAE	0	0 %	1	1 %	14	21 %
HAAE	2	3 %	12	16 %	32	48 %
ATL	0	0 %	0	0 %	10	15 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100 %</b>

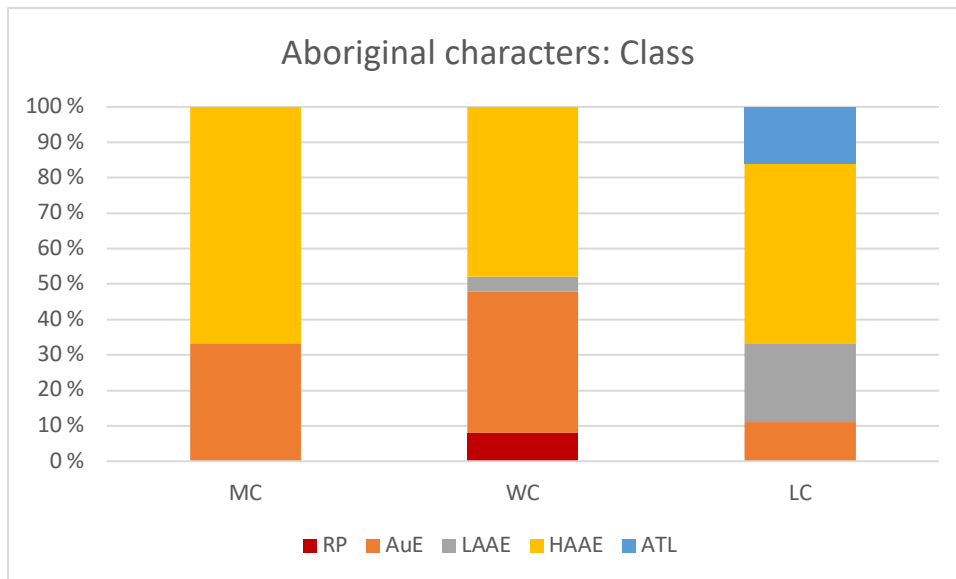
Table 4.4 is an overview of all characters divided by class. The first thing to note is that there is a relatively equal distribution of characters in each class: 75 middle-class characters, 73 in the working class and 66 in the lower class. Generally, from table 4.4, we see that AuE is the main variety in both the middle class and working class, while HAAE is the dominant variety within the lower class. A surprising finding is that HAAE is used by middle-class speakers, while LAAE is not. One would think that, to the extent that there are any Aboriginal characters in the middle class at all, they would at least speak LAAE or AuE. Later in this section, the results for Aboriginal characters only will be illustrated in figure 4.17.



**Figure 4.16:** Variety distribution all characters based on class

Figure 4.16 gives an illustration of how the varieties are distributed within the different classes. We see that the middle class speaks mostly RP and AuE, with a few exceptions of HAAE. These will be discussed a bit further later on in this section. Next, we see that the working class is dominated by AuE speakers, with 70%. Furthermore, 16% of the working class speak HAAE, 12% speak RP, and a marginal amount speak LAAE. Finally, the lower class is dominated by HAAE speakers, but also has some LAAE speakers and an equal amount of AuE and ATL speakers. Not surprisingly, there are no RP speakers in the lower class. Furthermore, the lower class is clearly dominated by Aboriginal varieties, with the exception of only about 15% AuE speakers. About half of the lower-class characters speak HAAE, and the second most used variety is LAAE with just over 20%. Finally, there are about 15% ATL speakers in the lower class as well.





**Figure 4.17:** Variety distribution of Aboriginal characters based on class

In figure 4.17, the variety distribution among the Aboriginal character is illustrated based on class. Interestingly, of the few middle-class Aboriginal characters, two thirds speak HAAE while one third speak AuE. Furthermore, there is more linguistic distribution among the working-class characters, but almost half of them speak AuE and RP. In the lower class, however, characters mostly speak Aboriginal varieties. Originally, I thought that if there were any Aboriginal characters in the middle class, they would at least speak AuE. Nevertheless, there are very few Aboriginal characters in the middle class, only three in fact. Looking closer at these, two of them are actually the same character: Jimmie from *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) as a child and as an adult. Jimmie is brought up by a reverend, and therefore he belongs to the middle class. However, he does speak HAAE throughout the film. Interestingly, his brother Mort is not raised by the reverend, but lives with other Aboriginal people in a community. Mort, unlike Jimmie, actually speaks LAE, while Jimmie, who is raised by a reverend, speaks HAAE. There can be several reasons for this, and one possible reason will be discussed in the following.

Jimmie ends up killing several of the white people who have done him wrong in his life, and it seems like he does this because he is possessed or suddenly struck with some intense feeling of revenge and darkness. This is typical of the representation of Aboriginal Australians in the older films and is similar to how Jedda is drawn to Marbuck in *Jedda* (1955). However, Mort does not seem to possess this darkness, and when he accidentally kills a person as well, he is filled with regret, unlike Jimmie. Thus, Jimmie who speaks HAAE ends up as the bad guy who cannot help himself and does bad things. Mort, however, who

speaks LA AE is portrayed as more or less innocent. He is trapped because he wants to help his friend, but he does not want to kill people and do bad things. In this case, we see a clear correlation between variety and attitudes, because the film makers choose to give Jimmie a HAAE variety, even if that is not logical given his upbringing, so it seems to be done to create an effect. This effect might be, as I have already insinuated, that Jimmie is bad and Mort is good, and to take it even further: people who speak HAAE are bad, while people who speak LA AE are not necessarily so.

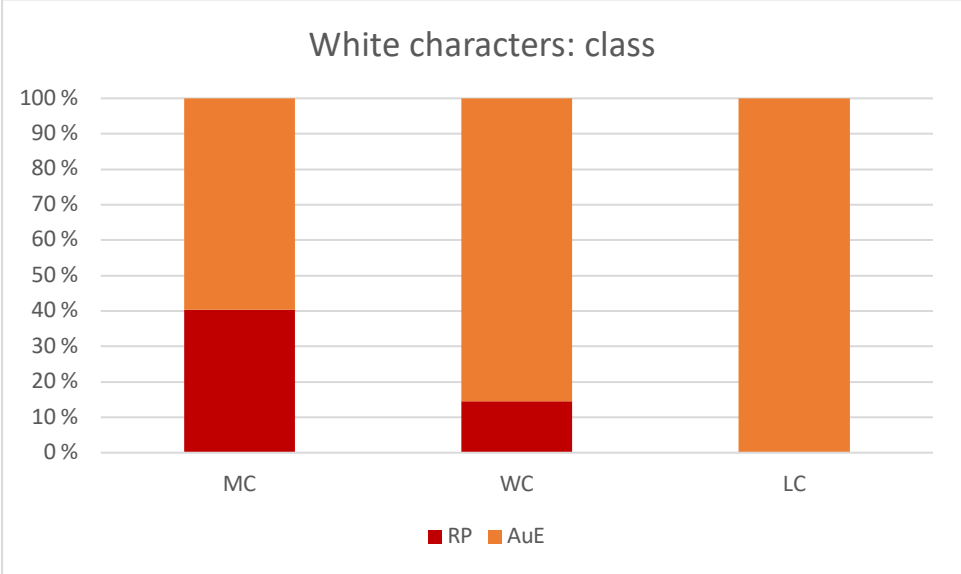
There is one more Aboriginal character who I placed in the middle class, and that was Noonah in the film *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986). She is working as a nurse and studying to get her certificate, so I classified her as a middle-class character based on the criteria I set. She speaks AuE, and so do her two siblings Trilby and Bartie, but they are too young to be placed in a different category than their parents, who are working class. Noonah therefore becomes an example of a character who has risen up from the class she was born into. Interestingly, her parents both speak HAAE while Noonah and her siblings all speak AuE. As her mother mentions in one of the scenes, she has had no education, but her children all attend school, and that might be one reason for them all speaking AuE while both their parents speak HAAE.

Another interesting character in *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986) is Trilby, Noonah's sister, who also speaks AuE. She gets pregnant very young but does not want the baby because she wants to move to the city to work and get a career. After giving birth, she ends up drowning the baby and, unlike Jimmie in *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), she is not punished, but rather pitied by the staff in the hospital and her family. She ends up leaving for the city to pursue a career, and the film ends on a relatively hopeful note. Jimmie, however, also wants to succeed and has a good upbringing that makes him work hard. However, after facing much prejudice, he ends up murdering people and eventually he is executed as punishment. Both Trilby and Jimmie have committed a serious crime, but the reactions they receive from society around them are undoubtedly different, even with the movies made just ten years apart. Again, one might argue that since Trilby speaks AuE and Jimmie speaks HAAE, the audience can relate more to Trilby and therefore feel more for her than they do for Jimmie. Also, the films arguably give the impression that Aboriginal people who speak AuE are more likely to actually succeed with their dreams.

Looking back at how Indigenous people were treated in Australian society around the times these films were made, we find a possible explanation for why Jimmie is punished with death and Trilby goes on into her hopeful future. As mentioned in section 2.4, Indigenous

people were by law excluded from the Australian welfare state until the 1960s, but the discrimination continued well into the 1970s. *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1978)* was released in 1978, and therefore it is not unlikely that the portrayal of Aboriginal characters would be affected by discrimination in society at the time. However, this was also a time for change, and several employment programs and policies were implemented in the late 1970s. Thus, when *The Fringe Dwellers (1986)* was released 8 years later, the tone of the film is more hopeful, released in a time period when Indigenous film culture was growing in Australia (cf. 2.8). It still addresses issues in the Aboriginal communities, but the film also indicates changes that happened around this time, and characters like Noonah and Trilby become symbols of hope and possibilities.

When we compare the figures above, we discover a correlation between class and variety distribution. As mentioned, the majority of characters who speak LA AE, HAAE and ATL are in the lower class and unemployed, and there are only three instances of Aboriginal characters who belong to the middle class. This can indicate a picture of Aboriginal people which implies that if you speak any form of Aboriginal variety, you are typically unemployed and not contributing to society. This can convey attitudes that correlate with the image many white Australians have of Aboriginal people being lazy, dirty and not a valuable part of Australian society, as mentioned in section 2.8. Furthermore, the results indicate that if you speak ATL, you most likely do not even have a chance at a job, since none of the ATL speakers in the films are employed.



**Figure 4.18:** Variety distribution of white characters based on class

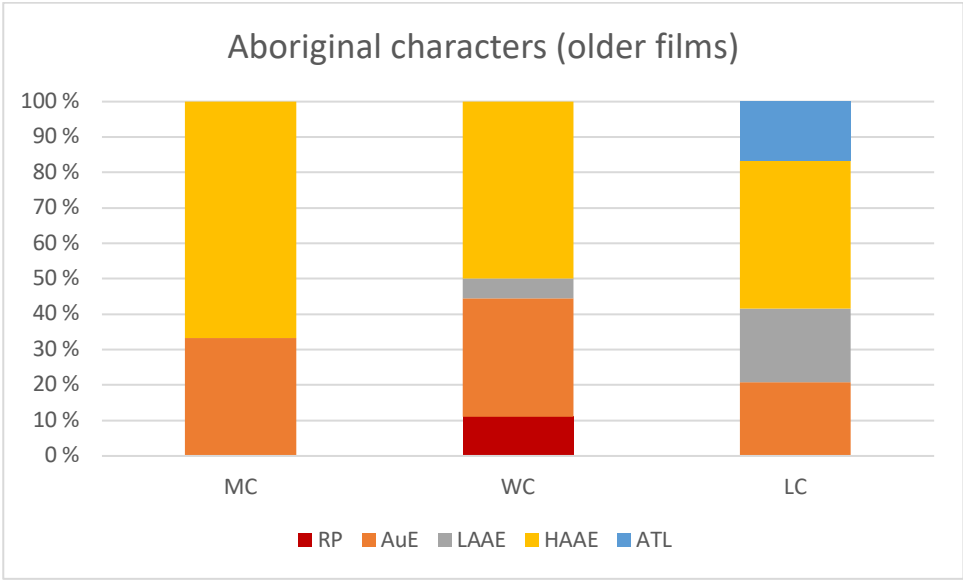
Figure 4.18 illustrates how the linguistic varieties are distributed among the white characters in all the films for each class. All of the white characters in the lower class speak AuE, and most of the characters in the working class also speak AuE. Surprisingly, most of the characters in the middle class also speak AuE, and this could be due to the previously mentioned focus on Australian uniqueness in the Australian film industry, resulting in characters speaking AuE rather than RP. I suspect that if I had divided into general and broad AuE, the results might have shown that more characters in the middle class spoke general AuE and broad AuE speakers were in the working class and lower class.

As we see from the results above, the lower class is grossly over-represented by Aboriginal characters, and the middle class is almost exclusively filled by white characters. Additionally, in the rare cases that the lower-class characters are white, most of them are actually criminals, which shows just how low the lower class is considered for white characters. Looking at statistics from Australian society in real life, the rate of unemployment for Indigenous people in Australia is 2.7 times that of non-Indigenous people (cf. 2.4). However, the government website also includes the *participation rate*, which compares labour force to the total working age population. These numbers are a bit different, and the participation rate for Indigenous people was 57.1 per cent in 2016, compared to 77 per cent for non-Indigenous people (*Australian government 2019*, accessed February 2020). If we compare these numbers to the results in this thesis, it becomes clear that in fact the contrast seems unrealistically large compared to real life.

One possible reason for this exaggeration could be that the film makers are doing it intentionally to make a point and show the audience how things *can* be for the Aboriginal population and make the white population more aware of these issues, seeing as they might not actually experience them in their daily lives. Another reason, to take a more critical approach, could be that the film makers themselves have a perspective on the Indigenous population that is shaped by media and its portrayal of Aboriginal Australians, and therefore they keep reinforcing this idea. Lastly, it is possible that they just find it more interesting to make a film about the problems and issues Aboriginal Australians suffer from and want to shed light on this instead of filling the cinematic landscape with successful stories. If they did this, however, it might not only contribute to breaking down stereotypes and negative ideas about Aboriginal Australians, but actually encourage the Indigenous population and show them that climbing the social ladder is possible. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) pointed out that minority groups in the United States are not sufficiently represented in the media and

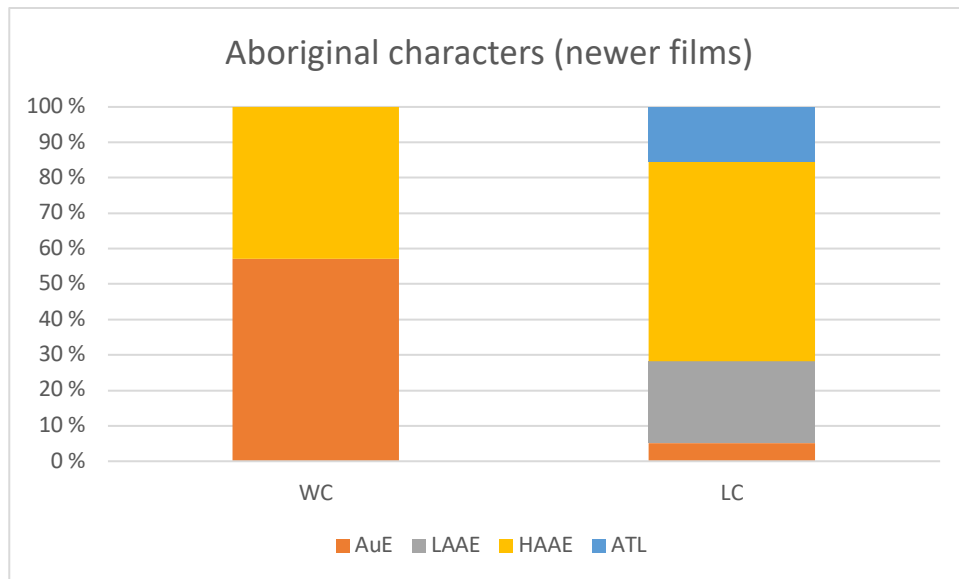
therefore children in these groups lack role models to identify with on the screen, and the same can be said for Aboriginal Australians in the Australian film arena.

Next, figures 4.19 through 4.22 presents the results for variety distribution among the characters divided by ethnicity and time period. Figure 4.19 presents the Aboriginal characters in the older films, figure 4.20 presents the Aboriginal characters in the newer films, figure 4.21 shows the white characters' variety distribution in the older films while 4.22 shows the same in the newer films.



**Figure 4.19:** Variety distribution based on class of Aboriginal characters in the older films

Figure 4.19 illustrates the linguistic varieties used by the Aboriginal characters in the older films. We see that the greatest variation can be found in the lower class, where all varieties except RP are represented, and the varieties are more evenly distributed in the lower class than the middle and working class. HAAE is the Aboriginal variety most used in all three classes, especially in the middle class where it is used by two thirds of the characters. However, as discussed above, it is hard to draw any conclusions about that given that there are only three Aboriginal characters in the middle class, and two of them are the same character as a child and as an adult. Half of the working-class characters speak HAAE, while almost half speak AuE, except for about 10% who speak RP and around 5% LAE speakers.

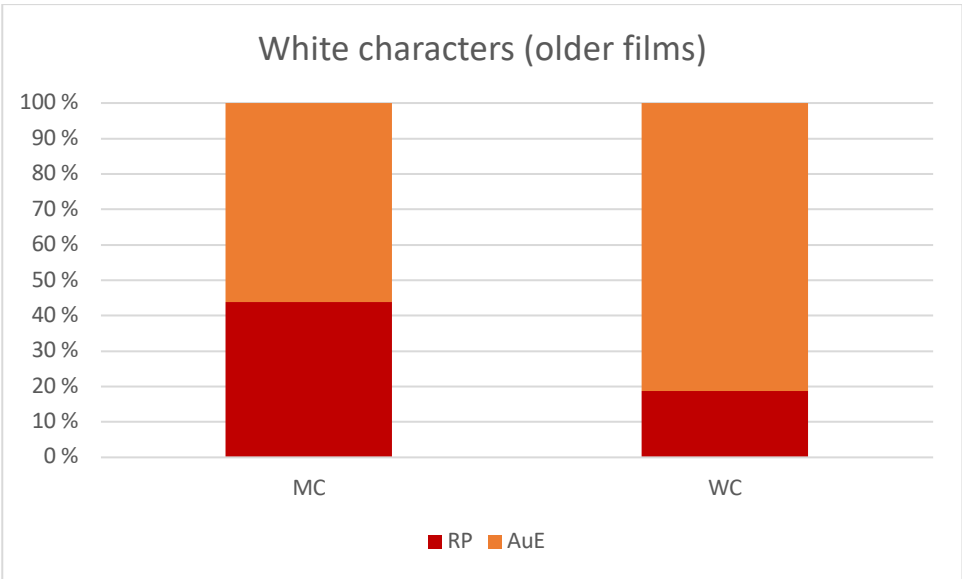


**Figure 4.20:** Variety distribution based on class of Aboriginal characters in the newer films

In the newer films, we see from figure 4.20 that there are no Aboriginal characters in the middle class. The working-class characters speak mostly AuE, and almost all the lower-class characters speak an Aboriginal variety, with only a few AuE speakers. Comparing figure 4.19 and 4.20, I had expected that the results would reflect the opposite. Given the overt change in attitudes towards Aboriginal people from the time the older films were made until modern time, I expected the Aboriginal characters to speak more AuE in the older films than the newer ones. However, working-class characters in the older films speak more varied and in the newer films, they mostly speak AuE. If the films reflect Australian society, it seems strange that there is less linguistic diversity among the Aboriginal working-class characters in the newer films. The results from figure 4.20 suggest that the newer films give the impression that in order to be successful and have a job as an Aboriginal person, one should speak AuE, while the people who speak Aboriginal varieties tend to be unemployed.

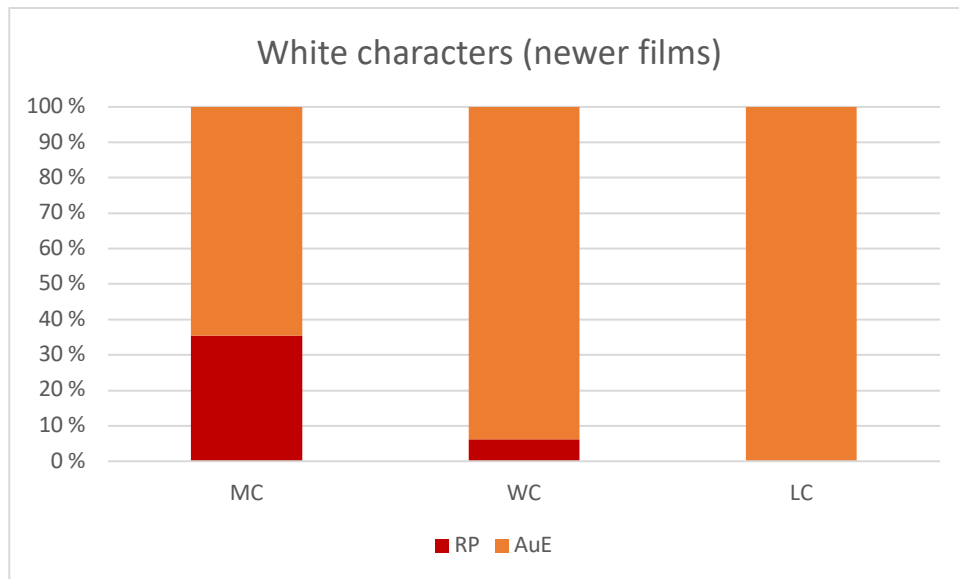
For an Aboriginal person in Australia today, prejudice is everywhere. Tui Raven, an Aboriginal woman with higher education, describes how she feels this prejudice all the time in her Ted Talk from 2018 (Raven, 2018). She explains that she experiences people looking at her like she is not a part of their society, and people’s ignorance makes them throw comments at her like “you smell good for an Aboriginal person”. Looking at the films in this thesis, one can understand how people would think Aboriginal people for example smell bad. Most of the Aboriginal characters live under very bad conditions, not always with good access to water and other facilities. This may be the case for many Aboriginal people, but the fact that these are the images that dominates the media’s portrayals makes it hard for people like Raven.

Where is the story about the Aboriginal woman with a good education who has a nice house and pays her taxes? The closest thing we get to this story might be Noonah in *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986). As I mentioned before, she gets an education and works as a nurse, working her way up to the middle class while her parents and siblings are still working class. Her sister Trilby also wants to escape, and in the end of the film, she takes the bus to the city to get a job in an office. Nevertheless, we never see how she turns out, and as a friend of Trilby points out earlier in the film, it is not very likely that a white person will hire her. *The Fringe Dwellers* is from 1986, but according to Raven’s Ted Talk from 2018, the same kind of prejudice is unfortunately still very much alive in Australian society today.



**Figure 4.21:** Variety distribution based on class of white characters in the older films

In order to compare white and Aboriginal characters, an illustration of variety distribution among the white characters in the older films is provided in figure 4.21. We see that in the middle class, there is an almost equal distribution of RP and AuE. In the working class, however, there are only about 20% who speak RP, while the rest speak AuE. If the films were set in the UK, the distribution of RP would probably be even higher in the middle class but, as mentioned, most of the films reflect a time in Australian film industry where Australian uniqueness was in focus. That might explain why AuE is so widely distributed in both categories. As the figure shows, there are no white lower-class characters in the older films.



**Figure 4.22:** Variety distribution based on class of white characters in the newer films

Figure 4.22 illustrates the distribution of linguistic varieties among the white characters in the newer films. The first thing to note is that in these films, there actually are some white lower-class characters but, as previously stated, two thirds of these are criminals. However, they all speak AuE. The use of RP in the middle class has decreased a little, but there is still about 35% of the white middle-class characters who speak RP while the rest speak AuE. Finally, the use of RP in the working class has decreased to only about 5%. Thus, in this category we see indications of the disappearance of RP that is mentioned in section 3.4.1.

#### 4.6 Character role

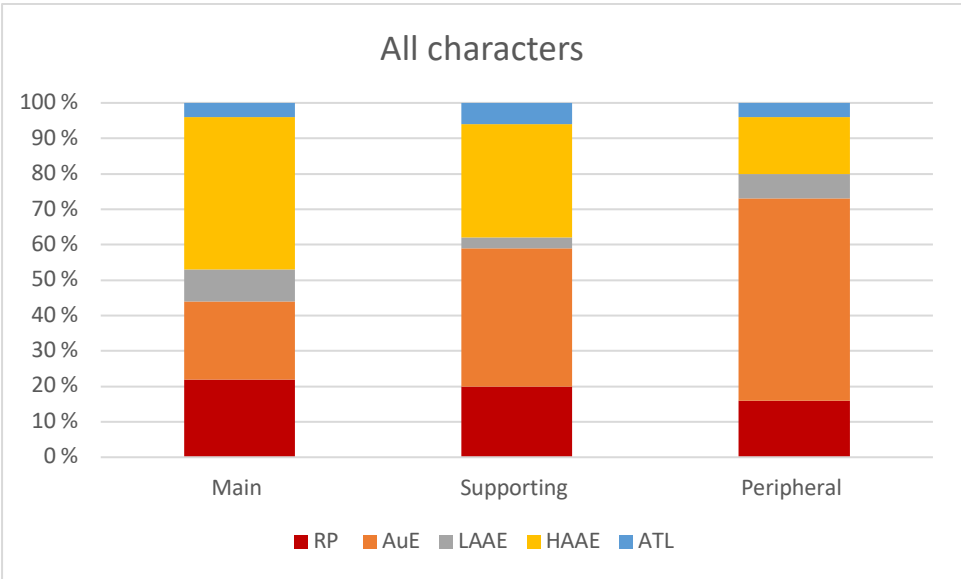
This thesis operates with three categories of character roles, *main*, *supporting* and *peripheral*. As mentioned in chapter 3, there are several ways to divide characters in films, and for this thesis these three were chosen based on previous researchers' categories. Characters are placed in one of these roles based on two main factors: screen time and how important they are to the plot. Table 4.5 gives an overview of the number of characters in each role and the variety distribution in each role, and these results are illustrated visually in figure 4.23. Figure 4.24 illustrates the variety distribution among the Aboriginal characters based on their role, and figure 4.25 does the same for the white characters. Furthermore, I also compare older and newer films, and figure 4.26 and 4.27 presents the Aboriginal characters while figure 4.28 and 4.29 presents the white characters.



**Table 4.5:** Overall variety distribution divided by character role

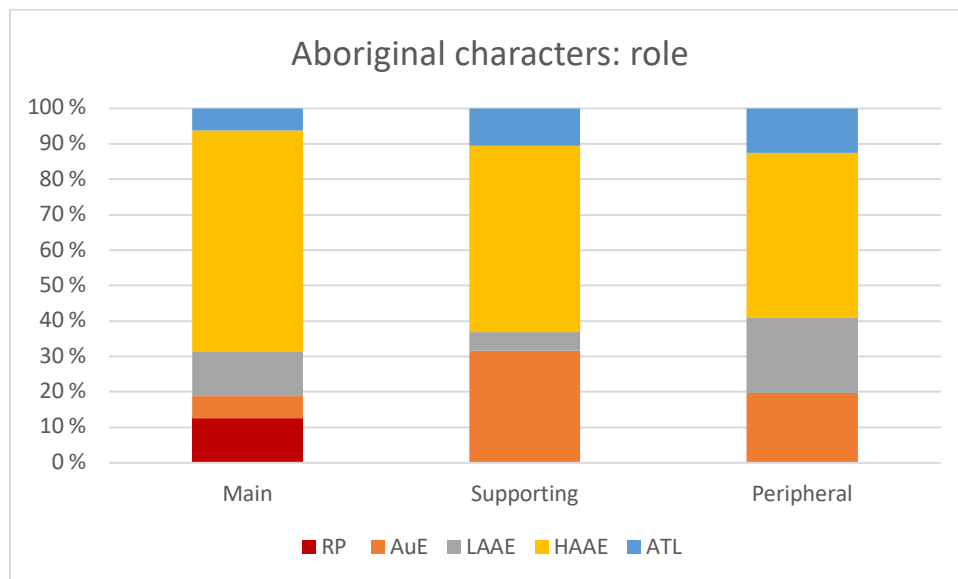
	Main (n)	%	Supporting (n)	%	Peripheral (n)	%
RP	5	22 %	6	19 %	27	16 %
AuE	5	22 %	12	39 %	95	57 %
LAAE	2	9 %	1	3 %	12	7 %
HAAE	10	43 %	10	32 %	26	16 %
ATL	1	4 %	2	6 %	7	4 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4.5 shows the variety distribution of all characters in the films categorised by character role. As expected, the *main character* category has the least amount of characters, *supporting character* has the second least, and most of the characters are in the *peripheral character* category. Looking at these results, what is maybe most surprising is that the variety that is most used by main characters in the films is HAAE. That the variety most used by main characters is an Aboriginal variety reflects the fact that the films are very much occupied with Aboriginal characters, since there are obviously no white HAAE speakers, and thus the main characters are mostly Aboriginal Australians. This information in itself might not be too surprising, since I chose films that specifically had Aboriginal characters in them, but I did not expect them to be speaking mostly HAAE.



**Figure 4.23:** Variety distribution of all characters based on role

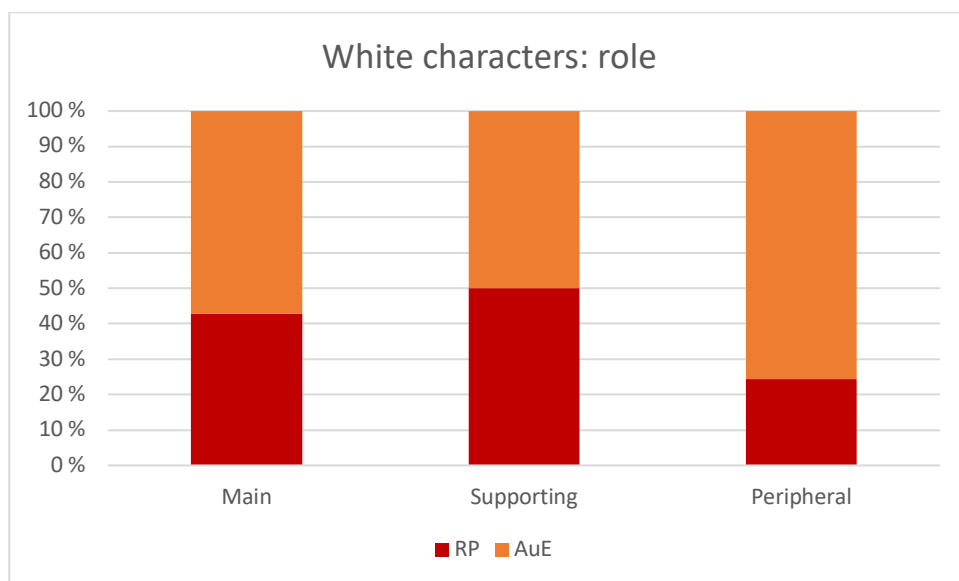
In figure 4.23 we see the variety distribution of the characters based on their role in the films. The first thing to point out is that the percentage of AuE speakers actually decreases with role, so AuE is mostly spoken by peripheral characters. The exact opposite is true for HAAE, which increases with role and is the variety most spoken by main characters. This is quite surprising, and the opposite of what I hypothesised in H4, which suggested that the lesser the role the more non-standard the characters would speak. Additionally, we see that RP is distributed more or less equally among the three roles, and the same is true for ATL. Of the few LAE speakers in the films, most are main characters or peripheral characters and only a marginal percentage are supporting characters. To further investigate in more detail, it makes sense to look at the Aboriginal characters separately. Thus, figure 4.24 illustrates the variety distribution among the Aboriginal characters alone, according to character role.



**Figure 4.24:** Variety distribution based on character role of Aboriginal characters

Looking at the Aboriginal characters only, we see from figure 4.24 that most of the main characters speak HAAE, and in fact only a very small percentage speaks AuE. As mentioned in hypothesis 4, I suspected that the smaller the role the more non-standard the characters would speak. However, as figure 4.24 shows, the opposite is true: the characters speak less close to the standard the bigger their role is. A reason for this variety distribution could be that most of the films in the present thesis are made after the “renaissance” in Australian film industry (cf. 2.8), and therefore when they have Aboriginal main characters, they want to really emphasise their “aboriginality” by having them speak HAAE.

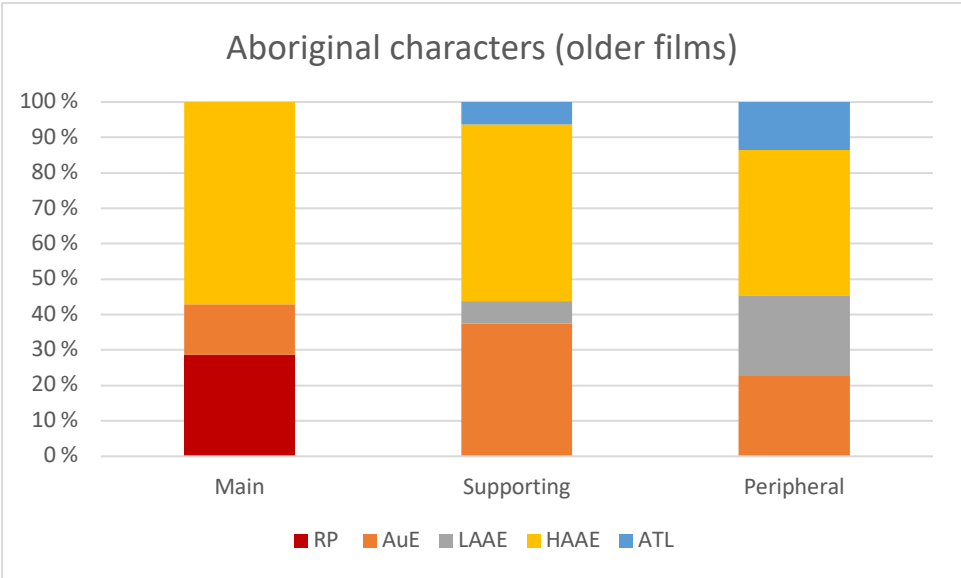
As we have seen, figure 4.24 supports the idea that there are in fact very few Aboriginal main characters who speak AuE. The majority by far of the main characters speak HAAE and, as mentioned, one of the reasons for this might be that the film makers want to emphasise the “aboriginality” of their Aboriginal main characters. Again, I will point out that in societal treatment studies researchers have to assume that everything is done intentionally, so even if this might not be the case, this is what I am basing my discussion and analysis on. As seen from figure 4.24, HAAE is actually the variety most used by Aboriginal characters in all roles, but there is more linguistic diversity among the supporting characters, and even more so among the peripheral characters. This is in line with what Urke (2019) found in her analysis of Disney characters. It is worth mentioning that the only ATL main character is actually Gracie from *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002). In the beginning and end of the film, she narrates in ATL as an old woman, but throughout the film Gracie as a child speaks HAAE. Nevertheless, the Gracie who narrates is also considered a main character, because the story is told by and is about her.



**Figure 4.25:** Variety distribution based on character role of white characters

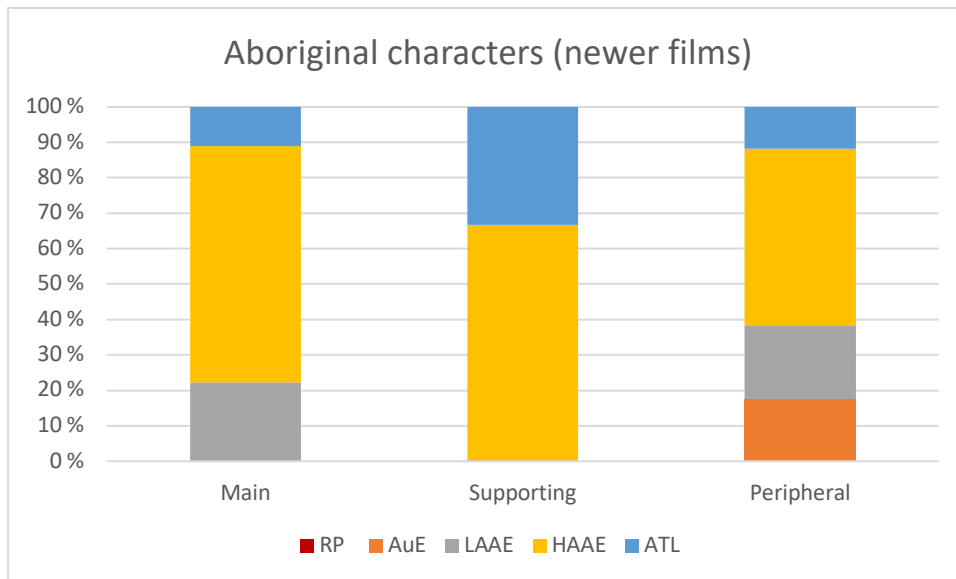
There are not that many white main characters, and as seen from figure 4.25, there is not much difference between the use of RP and AuE among them. The same is true for the supporting characters, but surprisingly there is a slightly larger percentage of supporting characters who speak RP than main characters. However, the biggest difference lies in the *peripheral* category. 75% of the peripheral characters speak AuE, while the last 25% speak RP. If we compare figure 4.25 to figure 4.24, we see that the Aboriginal characters have a

more equal distribution between the varieties among the peripheral characters than the white characters. At the same time, the white characters have a more equal distribution between linguistic varieties in the main and supporting roles. Next, the characters are divided further by ethnicity in older and newer films.



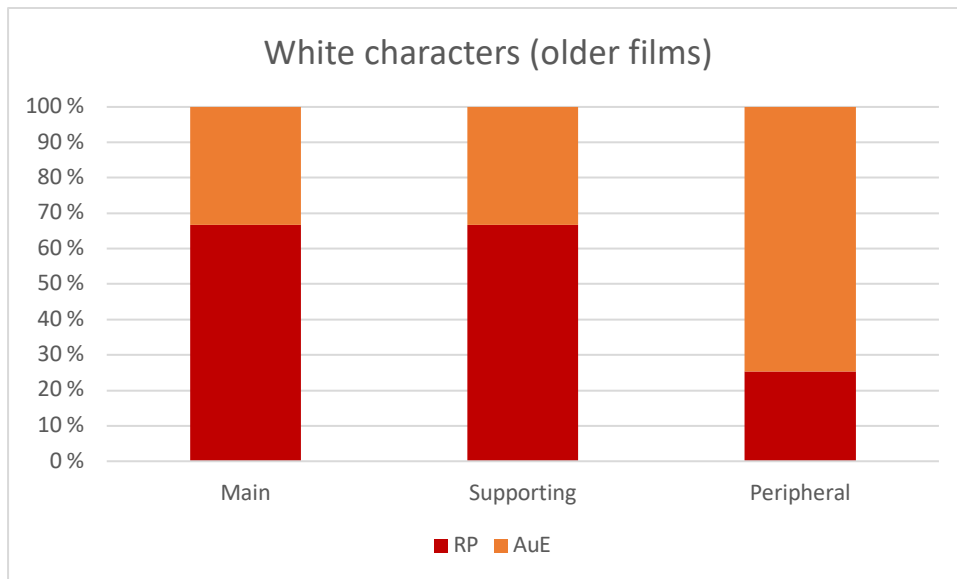
**Figure 4.26:** Variety distribution for Aboriginal characters in the older films

Figure 4.26 shows the linguistic varieties used by Aboriginal characters divided by roles in the older films. The results show that the main characters in the older films mostly speak HAAE with almost 60%, a little over 10% speak AuE and almost 30% speak RP. No main characters speak LAEE or ATL in the older films. The supporting characters have 50% HAAE speakers, almost 40% AuE speakers, and only about 5% LAEE and ATL speakers. Finally, we see that the linguistic diversity is greatest among the peripheral characters where the varieties are more equally distributed, with the exception of RP which is only spoken by main characters.



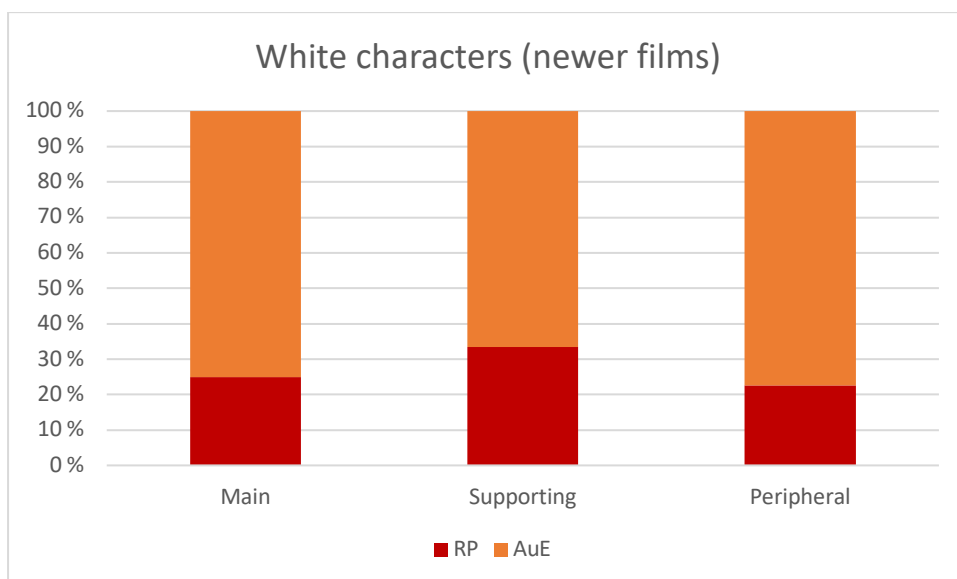
**Figure 4.27:** Variety distribution for Aboriginal characters in the newer films

Figure 4.27 is an illustration of the variety distribution in the newer films among the Aboriginal characters. This figure paints a different picture than figure 4.26, and even though the main characters still speak mostly HAAE, there are over 20% LAEE speakers and about 10% ATL speakers. Supporting characters speak mostly HAAE and over 30% speak ATL, while again the most linguistically varied category is the peripheral characters. The fact that all of the main characters speak Aboriginal varieties of English is an interesting finding. This is a big shift from almost half of the main characters speaking “white” varieties in the older films, as seen in figure 4.26. Unlike Urke (2019), who found that there was a greater use of standard varieties among main characters (cf. 2.6.4), the results for the Aboriginal characters in the newer films show that there is actually no use of standard varieties among neither the main characters nor the supporting ones. AuE is only present in the peripheral category, but with under 20%, so Aboriginal varieties actually dominate all three categories. This might indicate that Aboriginal varieties of English are more appreciated in modern time, and that is especially reflected in the language of the main characters, who the audience is meant to identify with.



**Figure 4.28:** Variety distribution for white characters in the older films

As seen from figure 4.28, in the older films, the main and supporting white characters speak mostly RP, with almost 70% in both categories. However, these results are reversed in the last category, where over 70% of the peripheral characters speak AuE. Figure 4.28 therefore shows that, contrary to the Aboriginal characters, most important white characters in the films speak closer to the standard while AuE speakers dominate the peripheral category. This might indicate that standard speech seems to be higher valued among the white characters in the older films.



**Figure 4.29:** Variety distribution for white characters in the newer films

Figure 4.29 illustrates a meaningful shift in the linguistic usage among the white characters. There are still RP speaking characters present in all the categories, but the majority in all categories speak AuE. Thus, we see that over time AuE has become more common, and although RP is still present in Australian films, it is much less used than in the older films. As previously mentioned, of the 12 RP-speaking characters in the newer films, 10 of these are characters in the two historical films *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) and *Australia* (2008), and the last two are a doctor and a judge in *Charlie's country* (2013). These findings can be said to reflect the declining role of RP in Australian society (cf. 3.5.1).

#### 4.7 Bidialectal characters

As mentioned previously, some of the characters speak several varieties throughout the film. In total, I found that there are 10 characters in total, five in the older films and five in the newer films. Most of these are Aboriginal characters who switch between English and ATL, so they are in fact bilingual, while some actually switch between RP and HAAE, which I found the most interesting. One of the white characters, Mr. Fletcher, has learned a bit of ATL and uses it sometimes when communicating with the Aboriginal characters. A list of the bilingual characters will follow, with the *main variety* being the one they speak the most, and the *second variety* being the one they switch to sometimes. However, it is worth noting that if their second variety is HAAE while their main variety is ATL, like for example the character Marbuck, they are classified as HAAE speakers in the original analysis. The first five characters belong in the older films, and the next five are in the newer films.

**Table 4.6:** Overview of bidialectal characters

<b>Character:</b>	<b>Film:</b>	<b>Main variety:</b>	<b>Second variety:</b>
Joe	<i>Jedda (1955)</i>	RP	HAAE
Jedda	<i>Jedda (1955)</i>	RP	HAAE
Marbuck	<i>Jedda (1955)</i>	ATL	HAAE
Dayipu	<i>Where the green ants dream (1984)</i>	ATL	HAAE
Milintibi	<i>Where the green ants dream (1984)</i>	HAAE	ATL
Molly's mum	<i>Rabbit Proof Fence (2002)</i>	ATL	HAAE
Gracie	<i>Rabbit Proof Fence (2002)</i>	HAAE	ATL
Mr. Fletcher	<i>Australia (2008)</i>	AuE	ATL
Mgarri	<i>Australia (2008)</i>	HAAE	ATL
Charlie	<i>Charlie's country (2013)</i>	ATL	HAAE

All of the characters speak the two varieties interchangeably, except for the character Gracie. She is actually listed as two characters in the original analysis because, as mentioned earlier, Gracie as a young girl speaking HAAE is one character, and Gracie as an old woman narrating ATL is another. Therefore, in table 4.6 she is listed as one person who speaks two linguistic varieties: one for narration, and one for interaction and dialogue in the film as a child.

It seems that, with a few exceptions, the characters are mostly switching between HAAE and ATL. This indicates what is called *code-switching*, which is defined as “the use of two or more linguistic variations in the same conversation or interaction” (Scotton & Ury 1977:5). It is not only useful to know *where* code-switching occurs, but *why*. According to McConvell (1988:102), it has been suggested that code-switching happens for the following two reasons: to redefine the interaction as appropriate to a different social arena, or to avoid defining the interaction in terms of any social arena through continual code-switching.

To explain why code-switching happens, one needs to look at the relationship between the participants in an interaction, the subject of discourse and the societal norms which give meaning to the speakers' language choice (Scotton & Ury 1977). Thus, it is not sufficient only to list the characters who use code-switching in this film, but I will also use some examples and explain the situations where the characters use code-switching and discuss why



this might be. Scotton and Ury (1977) suggest that the social function of code-switching unfolds in three ways: *identity, power and transaction*. Furthermore, Scotton and Ury (1977) point out that there is a correlation between the linguistic code used and the social meaning of the interaction. The following examples will illustrate these different arenas with examples from code-switching characters in the films.

First, I will discuss the cases I found most interesting, namely Jedda and Joe in *Jedda* (1955), who speak a variety close to RP throughout the film but switch to HAAE when speaking to the Aboriginal people who work at the farm. It seems logical for them to speak RP since they have been raised by RP-speaking parents, unlike the case of Jimmie in *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) who is mentioned in section 4.5. However, as there are many Aboriginal Australians working and living at the farm, it seems Joe and Jedda have also adopted their way of speaking, which is HAAE. Thus, when Jedda and Joe speak to each other, or when they speak with their parents, they speak RP, but when they speak to the Aboriginal tribesmen or the Aboriginal women working in the house, they switch to HAAE, leaving out copula verbs for instance. Since they are both Aboriginal of decent, they might want to convey a certain degree of shared identity with the other Aboriginal people on the farm, since their status and their position on the farm is different from the others. For instance, they do not go walkabout with them, and to Jedda this has been a dream since she was a girl, but she is never allowed. Thus, it seems the motivation for them to switch to HAAE is mainly shared identity.

The second motive for code-switching, according to Scotton and Ury (1977), can be power. In the films used in this thesis, none of the Aboriginal characters have a significant amount of power outside their own community, at least not explicitly or compared to the white characters. Thus, language can be a way for them to assert power despite their obvious inferior position in the films. A good example of this is one of the main characters in the film *Where the green ants dream* (1984). The film revolves around a group of Aboriginal Australians who are protesting some construction work in an area they consider sacred. The two main characters, Dayipu and Milintibi, are the ones who mainly communicate with the people from the mining company who want to do the digging. Milintibi functions as a translator between the white scientist and Dayipu, and in the beginning it seems as if Dayipu does not speak English at all, but all of a sudden, he answers the scientist himself, and we realise that he speaks more or less just as well as Milintibi. However, we learn that he is one of the elders in the tribe, and Milintibi is their spokesman, so it seems as though he

intentionally uses a translator and speaks mostly ATL to signal his position as a tribal elder. Thus, one might argue that Dayipuu uses code-switching as an assertion of power.

The final reason for code-switching is neither related to identity nor power, but merely transactional. This is the case for a couple of the bidialectal characters in the films. First, we have Molly's mother in *Rabbit proof fence* (2002). She speaks ATL with her family and the other Aboriginal people in the reserve where they live, but on this reserve are also some white men. When Molly's mother speaks to them, she speaks HAAE. In her case, it does not seem as if she uses English in any other way but simply to be understood and to have a conversation, or transaction, with the white men. The same can be said for Charlie in *Charlie's country* (2013). He speaks ATL mostly, sometimes to his Aboriginal friends and sometimes just to himself. Thus, we understand that this is the language that is most natural for him to speak. However, he speaks HAAE with the white people in the village, and in these cases, it also seems as if he simply does it to be able to interact and have a conversation with them, not to assert any position of power or as an identity marker. Nevertheless, there is one scene where he is shouting swear words and yelling bad things in ATL at the white policeman because he is angry with him, and in this case it might be a way to express himself fully without the white policeman understanding, which can arguably indicate a type of power. Even more so because it allows him to say things that he might have been punished for if the white policeman did understand him.

Lastly, I want to point out a slightly special case: the character of Marbuck in *Jedda* (1955). He is introduced as a man from a different tribe than the workers on Jedda's farm, and the workers answer for him when Joe, who does not speak ATL, asks about him. We therefore get the impression that he does not speak English. This is further confirmed when he kidnaps Jedda, and she tries to talk to him in English, but he only responds in ATL and does not seem to understand her. However, later in the film he suddenly speaks HAAE and Jedda speaks HAAE back to him. Thus, it seems that either he magically learns English in the short period of time they spend together, or he only then chooses to communicate with her in English. There is another scene earlier in the film where we see Marbuck and Jedda talking and the narrator says that Marbuck is telling Jedda about something regarding his tribe. However, since Jedda does not speak ATL and Marbuck up to this point has not proven to speak English either, it would be quite impossible for him to explain a fairly complicated issue in his tribe to Jedda. Thus, the case of Marbuck and how and why he uses language illustrates that language use in films is not always realistic, and not necessarily meant to be. Language can be a powerful tool to convey feelings and attitudes, and this becomes clear in

these films, especially so in *Jedda* (1955) with the unexplained communication between Jedda and Marbuck.

## 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter contains a summary of the thesis as well as an attempt to draw a conclusion. The first part of the chapter is a summary of the findings followed by a critique of the thesis. Finally, a section concerned with the contribution this thesis has made to the field and suggestions for further research is provided.

### 5.1 Summary of the findings

The main aim of the thesis has been to analyse the linguistic portrayal of Aboriginal characters in Australian films. It used 12 films, six released in the decades 1950s-1980s and six released from 2000 onwards, analysing a total of 221 characters. Another aim of the thesis was to discover any possible changes in the portrayal of Aboriginal Australians over time.

Overall results show that the linguistic variety most used, combining white and Aboriginal characters, was AuE. This was true for both older and newer films. Looking at Aboriginal characters only, however, HAAE was the most used variety overall in both older and newer films. With regard to *ethnicity*, the majority of the characters were white. Nevertheless, there was a much more equal distribution between white and Aboriginal characters in the newer films than the older ones. Also, looking at the distribution of linguistic varieties among Aboriginal characters, the results show that there is a decrease in RP and AuE, but an increase in all the Aboriginal varieties. Thus, hypothesis 1a and 5a was supported.

Next, the results for the variable *gender* will be summarised. For the Aboriginal characters, the results for LAEE compared to HAAE showed that male characters actually spoke closer to the standard than females. However, for AuE and ATL, the results were more in line with traditional findings on language and gender. Looking at the distribution over time, both genders spoke markedly less AuE, and while male speakers shifted towards HAAE, female characters spoke more LAEE and ATL in the newer films. Thus, the results for gender among the Aboriginal characters were quite ambiguous. Nevertheless, there was definitely a shift towards a more equal distribution among genders for all the linguistic varieties. For the white characters, however, the variety distribution actually went even further in the direction of traditional results with males speaking more non-standard and females speaking even closer to the standard in the newer films. Looking at the distribution of male and female characters, the Aboriginal characters had a more equal distribution in the newer films, while the white characters actually had an even larger gap, with a majority of male characters. Thus,

gender equality tended to be more present among Aboriginal characters overall. Hypothesis 2 was therefore confirmed for the white characters but only partially for the Aboriginal characters.

The third variable that was analysed in the present thesis was *class*, and this study operated with *middle class*, *working class* and *lower class*. Some interesting observations were made in this category. All middle-class characters, white and Aboriginal, spoke RP or AuE, with the exception of two characters, who in fact were the same person as a child and later as an adult. The Aboriginal characters showed much more linguistic diversity in the lower class, while the few white characters in the lower class spoke exclusively AuE. One might expect a higher tolerance for linguistic diversity among the Aboriginal characters in the working and middle class in the newer films compared to the older ones, but the results show that in the newer films, almost 60% of the Aboriginal characters in the working class spoke AuE, while rest spoke HAAE. Also, there were no middle-class Aboriginal characters in the newer films. Thus, compared to the older films, the use of AuE has actually increased among the working class, indicating that in order to get a job and success as an Aboriginal person in Australia, speaking AuE seems to be preferred. Many of the Aboriginal characters were categorised as lower class, and hypothesis 1b was confirmed for the class category. The hypothesis was even further supported by the fact that most of the lower-class white characters were criminals, indicating that to be in the lower class for the white characters is more or less equivalent with being a criminal. Thus, Aboriginal people, especially the ones who speak Aboriginal varieties, are still portrayed as low-status characters.

The last variable in the primary analysis was *character role*, a category that was divided into *main character*, *supporting character* and *peripheral character*. The results are similar to those of Urke (2019), in that the peripheral characters showed much more linguistic diversity than the main characters. However, this was only true for the Aboriginal characters. The white characters actually had a different result, with a vast majority of AuE speakers in the peripheral roles but almost 50/50 RP and AuE speakers in the main roles. However, looking at the characters over time, AuE dominated all the white roles in the newer films. One important finding was that the Aboriginal main characters in the older films speak mostly HAAE and almost half speak AuE and RP, while in the newer films they spoke only Aboriginal varieties. The results show that there is more use of Aboriginal varieties in the newer films, especially among the main characters, and this development indicates a greater tolerance for Aboriginal varieties, thus supporting hypothesis H5a. However, it is not in line

with what I hypothesised in H4, which was that the lesser the role the more non-standard the characters speak, and H4 was therefore not corroborated.

I hypothesised in H5b that Aboriginal people would be portrayed more positively in the newer films than the older ones because of social changes and more tolerance of minorities in modern times. However, the overall impression of the films is that Aboriginal people are not necessarily portrayed more positively, only differently. In the older films, Aboriginal characters are portrayed as savages who cannot be civilised, even if white people try hard to do so. However, in the newer films, the focus seems to be on the misery of the Aboriginal people and makes us pity them or see them as victims of the white man's abuse. Although this is an important side of their history, it is not a positive image, and the successful stories about the Aboriginal main character who found happiness in life, or even just had other problems besides being Aboriginal, seems to be absent in the films analysed in this thesis. Thus, hypothesis 5b was not confirmed per se, though there did seem to be a shift in how Aboriginal people were portrayed in the films.

Finally, the present thesis looked at *bidialectal* characters, characters who switched between the linguistic varieties. Most of the characters switched between languages, ATL and HAAE, while two of them switched between varieties of English, RP and HAAE. This analysis showed that characters in the films used code-switching for various purposes. Some characters used it as a marker of identity, others used it as an indication of power, and lastly, code-switching was used merely for transactional purposes. Thus, all three purposes were represented in the films.

The results of the analyses are not always clear-cut and might seem a bit ambiguous, and it is hard to draw a firm conclusion based on this study alone. However, some points can still be made. First, the fact that there is a more equal distribution of white and Aboriginal characters in the newer films reflects change in attitudes towards Aboriginal people, with more acceptance as they are given more roles and more screen time in the films. Aboriginal females tend to be linguistically portrayed as more powerful than white females, especially in the older films, and gender patterns tend to be more traditional among white characters than among the Aboriginal characters. Aboriginal varieties are represented more in the newer films, especially among the main and supporting characters, indicating that there is a greater tolerance for the use of Aboriginal varieties. When it comes to class, however, Aboriginal Australians are still portrayed as low-status characters, and the newer films indicate that in order to have a job or be successful as an Aboriginal person, AuE is the preferred linguistic variety. The Aboriginal characters are not necessarily portrayed more positively in the newer

films, but rather differently, as victims instead of savages. Lastly, the results show that several of the characters use code-switching to mark identity, power and for transactional purposes.

## **5.2 Critique of the present thesis**

Looking back at the process of writing this thesis, there are several things that I could have done differently. The first one, which I have also mentioned a few times earlier in the thesis, is that I could have divided the white characters that spoke AuE into broad AuE and general AuE. This might have given a more thorough comparison to the Aboriginal characters. Nevertheless, I believe that the points that were made in the thesis are still valid, especially since the main topic of interest in the thesis is the linguistic portrayal of Aboriginal characters, and the white characters were merely used as a comparison group.

Another thing that I believe could have affected the results, is if I had found enough material to use Aboriginal characters in films or TV-series that were not specifically concerned with the troubles and issues of Aboriginal people the way that most of the films in this thesis were. As mentioned, because of the limitations I made for the thesis, for example in terms of the chosen genre *drama*, I was unable to use films from other genres like the comedy *Crocodile Dundee* (1986, 1988, 2001) and the musical *The Sapphires* (2012). If I had found enough of these types of films to include them in the thesis, that would have been an interesting addition to the project.

Finally, I would like to point out that the distinction between LA AE and HA AE was based on previous literature on the subject, but the classification of the characters into LA AE and HA AE speakers was done by me. I chose which linguistic traits to use and decided that just one heavy trait was enough to place the character in the HA AE category. Another person might have chosen a more holistic approach when classifying the characters, and the same is true for the bidialectal characters. I decided that if a character only spoke one sentence HA AE and the rest ATL, they were included in the original analysis as HA AE speakers. These were choices I made and limitations I imposed to make the analysis more manageable, and if I had made different distinctions the results would probably be different.

## **5.3 Contributions made by the thesis**

The present thesis has shed light on the linguistic portrayal of Aboriginal people in Australian film. Media is an important source of knowledge about things that people do not encounter in their everyday lives, and it contributes to the shaping of our attitudes in various degrees. Thus,

it can be helpful to analyse the media's portrayal with a critical eye, and that is what this thesis has done.

There have not been any previous societal treatment studies on attitudes towards Aboriginal English to my knowledge, and thus this thesis makes an important contribution to the field of language attitudes. Hopefully, this thesis will have opened up for future research that will lead to more knowledge about the status of Aboriginal Australian English and more positive attitudes towards the variety and its uniqueness. Although linguists may be positive to diversity, we have seen in this thesis that the media plays a huge role in disseminating attitudes that consumers of the media internalise as stereotypes.

One of the most interesting aspects of the thesis was the correlation between language and gender, and it could be interesting for future researchers to look more into the specifics of language use among Aboriginal females in particular. I have argued on the basis of which varieties they used that Aboriginal females use less standard speech than males, but it would be interesting to investigate this further, looking in more detail at which features they use or do not use compared to white females and in which context they use them.

Originally, I wanted to conduct a verbal guise study to investigate white Australian's attitudes towards Aboriginal English, and that would have been a very interesting project. However, I was unable to find recordings of Aboriginal Australian English that contained enough of the distinctive traits mentioned in the literature, and it would have been too time consuming and too big a project to collect this data material myself for a master's degree. Nevertheless, I believe that it is an interesting idea, and hope that this thesis will inspire further research so that such a project might be realised.



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