

**The use of accents in Disney's animated
feature films 1995-2009:
a sociolinguistic study of the good, the bad and the foreign**



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Summary in Norwegian

Føremålet med denne oppgåva har vore å sjå på bruken av ulike dialektar ("accents") i Disney sine animasjonsfilmar utgitt i åra 1995-2009. Undertittelen på oppgåva kan omsetjast til norsk som "ein sosiolingvistisk studie av den snille, den slemme og den utanlandske", og gjenspeglar at oppgåva ikkje berre har sett på førekomstane av ulike engelske uttalevarietetar, men også har undersøkt kor vidt ulike karaktertypar systematisk vert gjevne visse typar dialektar. Eit delmål med oppgåva har også vore å avdekka eventuelle diakroniske endringar, sidan resultatata frå denne studien til dels har vorte samanlikna med resultatata frå den eine store studien som er gjort på området tidlegare, nemleg Rosina Lippi-Green si studie frå 1997. Hennar studie, som tok føre seg Disney sine animasjonsfilmar frå perioden 1938-1994, avdekka nettopp slike systematiske mønster i samband med bruk av ulike dialektar, og ved å samanlikna mine resultat med hennar funn, vil det verta tydeleg om det har skjedd ei endring dei siste åra.

Oppgåva har arbeidd ut frå eit syn på filmmediet som noko som reflekterer eksisterande haldningar og normer i samfunnet, også når det gjeld språk. Med bakgrunn i talrike studiar av språkhaldningar, veit ein at ulike dialektar er med på å danna grunnlag for oppfatningar me har av ein talar sin sosiale bakgrunn, personlege eigenskapar m.m. Å nytta ulike uttalevarietetar i filmar vert såleis eit hjelpemiddel for å bygga karakterar.

Utifrå dei underliggjande hypotesane, blei det forventa å finna spor av systematiske mønster i forhold til språkbruken. Det vart forventa å finna skilnader i språkbruken i samband med kjønn, etnisitet og kor sofistikerte karakterane var, samt kva karakterrolle dei hadde i filmen. Samstundes vart det også forventa å finna skilnader mellom mine resultat og funna til Lippi-Green (1997). Grunna eit aukande press i samfunnet for å framstå og å opptre politisk korrekt, vart det forventa at språkbruken hadde vorte meir autentisk, t.d. i forhold til etnisitet, og at dei systematiske korrelasjonane ikkje var like framtrødande lenger.

Oppgåva tek føre seg atten av Disney sine animasjonsfilmar frå dei siste femten åra, og funna syner tydeleg at ei endring har skjedd, sidan ein mykje større del av karakterane snakkar med standard amerikansk uttale no enn før, uavhengig av karakterrolle eller andre karaktertrekk. Nærare analysar av datamaterialet avslører likevel at biletet er svært nyansert: Trass i mykje standard amerikansk uttale, er det skilnader mellom kvinner og menn, mellom etniske og ikkje-etniske karakterar, mellom karakterar ut frå kor sofistikerte dei er og mellom karakterar med ulike rollar. Stereotypisering og karakterbygging ved hjelp av språket er såleis eit verkemiddel som tydelegvis enno er i bruk i Disney sine animasjonsfilmar.

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Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we're curious... And curiosity keeps leading us down new paths

- Walt Disney -

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and scope

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, it aims to look at the use of accents in Disney animated films released in the years 1995 till 2009. That different accents are used for different characters in films is a well-known phenomenon, but the question remains as to whether it is possible to find any correlations between certain character traits and the use of various accents in these particular films. Are there systematic patterns in the way accents are used, in order to build characters? The thesis hypothesises that this certainly is the case. With Disney being an American-based company, it is very likely that General American¹ (GA) will be the most common accent, as well as the accent most often connected to the ‘good guys’, whereas Received Pronunciation (RP) and/or English with a foreign accent are accents that might be given to characters holding less favourable roles, e.g. as villains, aides to villains etc.

The second aim of this thesis is to see how the newer films compare to the ones that were released prior to 1995. In order to answer this, the results from this study will be compared to the one major study that has been carried out on this topic previously, and the study from which this thesis takes its point of departure, namely Rosina Lippi-Green’s study from 1997, published in her book *English with an Accent*. Seeing as she dealt with all full-length animated Disney films released in the years 1938-1994, and came up with some rather interesting results, a comparison with her study will yield information regarding any diachronic change that has taken place in the past fifteen years. The working hypothesis of this thesis is that a change will be detectable in comparison with previous results. There is no two ways about the fact that during the past fifteen years we have experienced an increased pressure to appear politically correct in all spheres of society, and it is likely that this pressure has had an effect on Disney and their use of accents in the animated films as well. Special attention will be given to how ethnicity is reflected. An increased pressure to appear politically correct arguably also entails an effort to give characters accents that are more true to nature, in the cases where it would be natural to do so. This could for instance be topical in cases where a character is of an ethnic origin², or if the story of the film is set in a place where one would not necessarily expect the natural accent to be GA. Bearing in mind that we in the

¹ General American is used as the term of the mainstream, non-regional American accent. What exact linguistic features that characterises this particular accent will be explained in further detail in chapter 3.

² What is meant by this classification is clarified in chapter 3.

autumn of 2009 saw the release of the first animated film with an African-American heroine, an investigation of the correlation between accent and ethnicity is extra relevant.

Ever since its early days, film has been a medium that has reflected its time very well. Films show signs of the time in which they are made, and thus provide us with valuable information regarding history and culture, as well as language, from certain periods in time (Lund 2009: 2). The issue of language first became important after the silent-to-sound-transition that took place in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, when talkies gradually replaced silent movies (Taylor 2009). One can claim that the language used in films reflects how people were speaking at a given time in history, and to a certain extent this is probably a feasible assertion. However, this study is based on a slightly different assumption. Instead of viewing linguistic data from films as synchronic evidence as to how language actually were used, this thesis rather views the linguistic data as a reflection of the societal norms connected to language at a specific period of time. There have always existed opinions that some accents are more acceptable than others, and as Taylor (2009: 17) states, this has been reflected via the film medium from early on:

The questions about what kinds of voices would end up on the screen were not only about how stars should sound, but also about what kinds of voices should end up coming out of the mouths of Americans.

Accent is thus more of an artistic device, a device that arguably is used with care to promote some kind of attitude, rather than as an effort to mirror actual language use.

Using accent as an artistic device would not have had the same effect unless accent itself had an effect on people. Part of the theoretical framework this thesis builds on, are the numerous attitudinal studies showing the importance of accent when listeners draw inferences about speakers. Accent is often – arguably more often than most people are aware of – the main basis for passing judgments on a person's background, race/ethnicity and social status, as well as numerous other social and personality traits (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 1), and it is an important part of the stereotypical images we form of people and groups of people. That accents evoke different attitudes among listeners is also intrinsically related to the belief that some accents are regarded as more standard, i.e. better, than others. The assignment of various accents to different characters in films could potentially be one way to promote such a standard language ideology, especially if it is possible to detect correlations between accent and character type. Looking at the use of accents in films/ television could therefore provide us with information not only about which stereotypes that belong to which

accent, but it could also be an indicator of the language ideologies that permeate the society as a whole.

A study like the one this thesis aims to undertake could potentially have been performed on any kind of films or television broadcasts. Lund (2009), for instance, did a similar study, where he looked at the portrayal of working-class speech in British films. Other studies have also been undertaken on both films and television broadcasts, and have focused both on how different accents are used and/or portrayed in the media, as well as how the media may affect people's speech (cf. e.g. Timmins and Stuart-Smith (2004), Cooke (2005), Stuart-Smith (2006) and Harvey et al. 2007). However, there are no doubt certain aspects that make the material chosen for this thesis stand out as perhaps more suitable than others. Seeing as the main audience for which Disney animated films are made, are children³, they need to be very explicit in their creation of characters, and the need to emphasize stereotypical features is thus greater. Granted that one treats accent as a device used to build characters, one could argue that animated films therefore need to rely more on language and accent than real-life films or television broadcasts do, seeing as the effort needed to create an animated character that conveys just the image you would want him to do arguably is bigger. This thesis thus works under the assumption that due to this, it will be easier to detect any possible correlation between character and accent in animated films than in others. Additionally, the types of stories we find in the animated films also make them extra suitable as objects for this kind of study. A great deal of the stories in these films resemble the traditional fairy tale, and a distinguishing feature of fairy tales, or stories resembling them, is that they have rather clearly defined character types, i.e. there are usually easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys, etc. Being able to distinguish clearly between the different character types is a necessity for doing such a study as the present thesis aims at.

An analysis of the variety of films included in the material will hopefully provide fruitful results that shed light on these different aspects, and either substantiate or refute the different hypotheses.

1.2 Delimiting the project: a note on the difference between dialect and accent

The terms *dialect* and *accent* are somewhat fuzzy terms, and are often used interchangeably, especially among non-linguists. They are closely connected, but seeing as *accent* is the core

³ Of course, even if children arguably are the primary audience for these films, the Disney films are probably enjoyed just as much by adults, and have a sizable adult audience.

term for this thesis, a note on the difference between the two terms could be useful, as this also helps delimiting the project and clarifying what linguistic data the thesis aims to look at and what it is not concerned with.

Wells (1982: 3) defines the term *dialect* as ‘any speech variety which is more than an idiolect but less than a language’. In other words, we are dealing with different varieties of the same language. These varieties are distinguished from one another due to differences involving any or all of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (Trudgill 2000: 5). These distinguishing features automatically emphasize the fuzziness of the term, as one easily could argue that differences involving the areas vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation just as well could be defining characteristics of different languages as well as of different dialects. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics* (2007: 103) points to ‘the criterion of mutual intelligibility’ as a way to distinguish the terms *language* and *dialect*, but this is not in any way a watertight criterion either, seeing as we can find dialects that are not mutually intelligible and languages that are.

Accent is more or less a term that is a further specification of the term *dialect*. Where *dialect* is more of an envelope term and covers differences of grammar, lexicon and pronunciation, *accent* deals with differences of pronunciation only. Thus, when this study aims at looking at the use of various accents, its primary basis for differentiating between these various accents are phonological features. Potential differences of grammar and/or lexicon will not be taken into account.

1.3 The variables studied

In many ways, this thesis is a somewhat atypical sociolinguistic study. The majority of sociolinguistic studies that deal with accents usually aim to investigate certain phonological, morphological or syntactical variables within a certain accent or dialect and further correlate these linguistic variables to social variables, like gender, social class or level of education. This study, however, is not particularly concerned with internal features of various English accents, as the important variable is whether a particular accent is used or not, and not to what extent a certain feature is detected in that particular accent. Detailed phonological analysis is thus not a major part of this study. The kind of accent used will be correlated to character traits and roles, so the complete list variables will be the following:

- *Accent*
 - General American, Received Pronunciation, Regional American English, Regional British English, African American Vernacular English, English with other accent.
- *Character role*
 - Hero/heroine, villain, aide to hero, aide to villain, unsympathetic character, authority figure, character with peripheral role.
- *Gender*
- *Ethnicity*
- *Level of sophistication*

A further explanation of the variables is provided in chapter 3, *Data and methods*.

1.4 Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions for the present thesis are the following:

- a) Are there correlations between accent and character traits in Disney's animated feature films released in the years 1995-2009?
- b) Has there been any diachronic change in the use of accents, compared to the findings from Lippi-Green's (1997) study?

The hypotheses for the present thesis are as follows:

- a) Correlations between accent and character traits will be found, but it will be possible to detect changes compared to Lippi-Green's study, due to a change in society which in turn influences the film medium.
- b) Hero/heroine and authority figures will speak primarily with a GA accent.
- c) Villains are likely to speak either RP or foreign-accented Englishes.
- d) Aides are likely to show the greatest variability and make most use of regional accents.
- e) Female characters will speak more standardised than male characters.
- f) There will be more authentic use of language, i.e. stronger links between the use of accents and the characters' ethnicity, as well as story setting.

- g) Characters with a low level of sophistication will speak less standardised than characters with a high level of sophistication.

1.5 The history of the Walt Disney Company

The Walt Disney Company is probably one of the most well-known companies in the world, and their productions, characters and products have entertained and delighted generations of people for decades. But however famous the company is, a thesis on animated Disney films would not be complete without an overview of the company history.

In 2009, the net income of the Walt Disney Company was \$3.31 billion (The Walt Disney Company 2010b). However, the road to such a huge economical success has been long. The company's founder, Walter Elias Disney, was a man with visions, but his first attempts on producing short-films of various kinds were rather unsuccessful. In 1923, however, the partly animated short-film *Alice's Wonderland* was contracted for release by a New York film distributor and this officially 'marked the formal beginning of the Walt Disney Company' (The WD Company 2010a). Several *Alice*-films were made in the following years, and Disney constantly worked hard to improve the technicalities and the use of effects for each production. However, by 1927, Disney felt that the *Alice*-series had run its course, and he decided to replace it with a new, completely animated series which he named *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*. This became an instant success, but also Disney's first lesson on how brutal the film business could be. When *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* became the success it did, the series' distributor went behind Disney's back, signed up most of his animators and aimed at producing the series himself, at a smaller cost than what Disney demanded (Schickel 1968: 112). Seeing as the distributor owned the rights to the series, there was nothing Disney could do to prevent this, but it taught him to ensure that he controlled the rights to all his future creations (Schickel 1968: 112).

Although the *Alice*-series is the production that officially marks the start of the Walt Disney Company, one can arguably claim that the character that was born in the aftermath of the *Oswald*-incident is the character that marks the start of the Walt Disney Company we know today. With the loss of *Oswald*, Disney found himself in need of a new character and it did not take long until *Mickey Mouse* was born. While the animation of *Mickey Mouse* was underway, the first film with synchronized sound, *The Jazz Singer*, premiered (WD Company 2010a), and seeing as Disney always aspired to be technologically innovative, he decided that his studio should be the first to make a sound cartoon (Schickel 1968: 120). *Steamboat Willie*,

released in 1928, was thus not only the first *Mickey Mouse*-film released to an audience, but also the first cartoon ever produced with sound. Its success was one of enormous proportions, and resulted in a whole series of *Mickey Mouse*-cartoons (Schickel 1968: 166-168).

The success of the Walt Disney Company continued to grow along with Disney's urge to constantly improve the quality and the methods of film production. Achievements worth mentioning are the production of the first full-colour cartoon, as well as the 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which was the first animated feature film ever produced (WD Company 2010a). World War II caused a financial down-turn for Disney, as well as for other film studios, especially since the war resulted in them losing access to their foreign markets (WD Company 2010a), and it took a while before they managed to get back to their pre-war successful heights. However, the 1950s and the 1960s saw the production of a number of highly popular films like *Cinderella*, *Treasure Island*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *101 Dalmatians* and *Mary Poppins*, so when Walt Disney passed away in 1966, the company had restored its footing as one of the most successful film studios.

With the release of *The Jungle Book* in 1967, Disney adopted a new strategy in relation to their animated films, when, for the first time, actors and musicians were consciously chosen to cast the voices of different characters on the grounds of how well established they already were among the audience (Lippi-Green 1997: 92). In the years following *The Jungle Book*, the company expanded its business to a number of new areas, e.g. by opening Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, establishing TV broadcasting companies, etc. In this period, the production of animated films was slightly put on hold. They still produced animated films at regular intervals, but none of these films reached the same popularity as the earlier films had experienced. However, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Disney's animated features got their renaissance, with massive successes like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994). The three last-mentioned films all shattered records in one way or another: *Beauty and the Beast* is the only animated film ever to have been nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture, *Aladdin* was the first animated film to gross more than \$200 million in the U.S. and *The Lion King* grossed a staggering \$312 million in the U.S. and \$783 million worldwide (WD Company 2010a). From these films onwards, the success of Disney's animated films has just continued. In the mid-nineties, they went into partnership with Pixar Animation Studios, with whom they released the first computer-animated feature film, *Toy Story*, in 1995. Eleven years, and a number of successful co-productions later, Disney bought Pixar and made it a subsidiary company (WD Company 2010a).

1.6 The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters which cover various aspects of the study. The introductory chapter presents the aim and scope of the present thesis, both its objectives and its limitations. It also presents a brief history of the Walt Disney Company. Chapter 2 is concerned with the theoretical background of the present study. It devotes its attention to language attitudes, language ideologies, societal changes and the role of the media, as well as a presentation of some of the previous studies on the use of accent in the media. Chapter 3 gives a detailed presentation of the accent categories as well as the social variables that are used in the present study. Further, it outlines the methodological procedures employed in the collection and analysis of the data material, and it discusses some challenges that had to be dealt with in the course of the study. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results, and chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, as well as the present thesis' conclusion, and it also suggests some ideas for further research.

2 BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter presents the theoretical framework this thesis builds on. It will start with an outline of general sociolinguistic theory, devoting a large part to the issue of language attitudes, and the social significance of language variation. Further, the term *standard language*, and how such a standard language is established, is given quite a lot of attention, together with the role of the media in relation to language. Last, but not least, the chapter presents a variety of previous studies on the use of accent in film/broadcasting.

2.1 A brief introduction to the field of sociolinguistics

Hudson (1980: 1) defines sociolinguistics as ‘*the study of language in relation to society*’. In other words, sociolinguistics aims to describe how language is used in society, if and how it varies and changes through time and why these particular variations and changes take place. As an academic discipline, this field of study is relatively young, growing forth as recently as the 1960s. Prior to this, there had been little interest in studying language variation or a possible relationship between this language variation and societal factors of various kinds. However, after William Labov, who by many is considered to be the founder of modern sociolinguistics, published his pioneering work on variation of English in New York (1966), the interest in all things dealing with the relationship between language and society exploded, and the interest has been growing ever since.

Sociolinguistics as an academic discipline is thus based on the belief that there exists a relation between the language we use and the society that surrounds us. Various theoretical positions have been proposed during the years, regarding how the relationship between language and society actually functions. One of the most well-known hypotheses on this inter-relationship is the *Sapir-Whorf-hypothesis*, framed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf in the first half of the 20th century. This hypothesis views the relationship between language and society as being one-directional, with language being the influential part. According to the hypothesis, the way we perceive the world is all because of how our language is constructed, as the language ‘act[s] as a kind of grid through which [we] perceive the world’ (Trudgill 2000: 13). This means that a difference in language inevitably will lead to a different perception of the world (Trudgill 2000: 15). This view has been held to be rather controversial, and most linguists today have discarded the Sapir-Whorf-hypothesis, at least in its strongest form. The opposite view, that society affects our language, has on the other hand

been much less controversial. Numerous examples are found of instances where both our physical and our social environment are reflected in the language we speak and this often manifests itself in either the vocabulary or the lexical structure. Additionally, the way we speak may just as well be influenced by the different values we find in our society. Various speech traits, both of the lexical, syntactical and phonological kind, may be valued differently, and the values people attach to these traits influence to which degree the traits in question are used or avoided. That society plays a pivotal part with regard to language variation, and that language is very much “a social and cultural phenomenon” (Trudgill 2000: 21) which is nearly impossible to investigate without taking any kind of societal factors into account, is thus universally acknowledged by most linguists today, and is the core principle of most sociolinguistic studies.

2.2 Language attitudes

Investigating language variability and seeking to find explanations as to why this variability exists are the fundamental aims of most sociolinguistic studies. An important part of this has been to try to map how this variability leads to, or might exist as a result of, different attitudes among speakers towards a language, an accent or a particular speech trait. Whether we are aware of it or not, language attitudes are ever-present in our daily lives, providing a backdrop in our day to day interaction with others and affecting how we behave towards or experience other individuals. Garrett (2010: 2) points out that ‘language variation carries social meanings and so can bring very different attitudinal reactions, or even social disadvantage or advantage’. However, before we take a closer look at the social significance of language variation, and try to come up with an explanation for why attitudes towards this variation, particularly with regard to accents, exist, a closer look at the concept of attitude could be useful.

2.2.1 Defining attitude

The term *attitude* originally comes from the field of social psychology, but has also played a vital part in the field of sociolinguistics from the very beginning. A layman’s definition of attitude would arguably be something close to having a certain feeling and/or opinion regarding someone or something, either of a positive or a negative kind. However, as a socio-psychological concept, it has proved to be harder to define. Various scholars have emphasized

different aspects and have incorporated different features, showing that attitude is a rather manifold concept. Allport's (1954) definition of attitude as 'a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way' (Allport 1954, cited in Garrett 2010: 19), is one of the most well-known and recognized definitions, and arguably a definition that bears somewhat of a resemblance to the layman's definition of the concept. Others, e.g. Oppenheim (1982: 39), have pointed to the fact that our attitudes are not directly observable, as they are 'an inner component of mental life', which might make it challenging to actually study them.

Allport (1954) also points to another important aspect with regard to attitude. His definition highlights the fact that our attitudes are something we are taught, rather than something innate. Borrowing an old philosophical expression, we could say that a person is born with a *tabula rasa* with regard to evaluative opinions, but the learning of attitudes starts off immediately.⁴ The learning of attitudes happens in a variety of ways, but Garrett (2010: 22) points to 'our personal experiences and our social environment, including the media' as two of the most influential factors. With respect to the present thesis, the last aspect, i.e. the influence from 'our social environment, including the media' (Garrett 2010: 22), is the most interesting. A more thorough discussion of the media's role specifically in relation to language and language attitudes will be given in 2.5, but for now it will suffice to say that the role of the media as an influence is still somewhat of a controversial issue in many fields of study.

2.2.2 Stereotypes

In relation to the concept of attitude, another and related term also needs to be given some attention. *Social stereotypes* is a notion that has asserted itself very strongly in the field of attitudinal studies in general, and language attitudes in particular, in the last decades, and it is a concept that in many ways walks hand in hand with the concept of attitude. Kristiansen (2001: 137) defines stereotyping as 'a functional cognitive device by means of which we systematize our social environment, creating distinct and apparently homogenous categories', i.e. it is our way of dividing individuals into different groups based on the fact that they share

⁴ Garrett (2010: 22) refers to recent research showing that heritability actually may be an influential factor with regard to attitudes as well (cf. Tesser (1993) and Alford, Funk and Hibbing (2005)), which contradicts the common belief of attitudes as something that is the sole result of learning. However, none of these studies directly relates to language attitudes, so I have chosen to follow Garrett's example and not pursue this aspect any further.

certain common features. Stereotypes could be both of the positive and negative kind, depending on which features of the different group members are emphasized. Garrett (2010: 33) points to the fact that stereotypes ‘are generally difficult to change’ and especially the negative stereotypes could prove to be of the persevering kind. Increased contact with members of social groups that are viewed negatively has been held to be a good cure when it comes to changing the negative stereotypes, but as Garrett (2010: 33) also points out, this is not necessarily a recipe for success. Even if negative stereotypical images could be said to stem from ignorance in many cases, it is not always the case that these stereotypical images are significantly altered just because we have more contact with the social group(s) in question, and thus might experience instances that do not fit into our stereotypical images.

The way we speak may easily trigger stereotypical images among listeners. Kristiansen (2001: 140) draws our attention to the fact that there lacks a consensus regarding the degree of importance attached to language as a social marker, as not all scholars attribute it an equally central role. However, most scholars belong to the group who do attach a great deal of weight to language varieties when it comes to marking a speaker as a member of a certain social group. Having a particular accent may result in listeners making inferences about such things as the speaker’s social class background and ethnicity, which in turn might result in them making inferences about the speaker as a person, based on the stereotypical characteristics attached to that particular social group. This undeniably results in a certain degree of discrimination, which might advantage some but disadvantage others (Garrett 2010: 33).

2.2.3 Attitudinal studies

Attitudinal studies can provide us with information on how language functions as a social marker. Baker (1992: 9), for instance, states that ‘a survey of attitudes provides an indicator of current community thoughts and beliefs, preferences and desires’, thus emphasising the link between language and society. Eliciting information on people’s attitudes is not a straightforward task, bearing in mind Oppenheim’s (1982: 39) point that attitudes cannot be observed directly, but this challenge has not cast any damper on linguists’ eagerness to study this phenomenon. With regard to the present thesis, the important studies are those dealing with people’s attitudes towards various accents and accent variation, and these studies generally present rather unanimous results: accent matters. We automatically use speech as a basis for

evaluating others, and as some of the studies referred to in this section show, our linguistic attitudes as well as our linguistic and social preferences, are shaped at a very young age.

Garrett et al. (2003: 86) argue that ‘young adulthood can be an interesting developmental period from a language-attitudes perspective’. However, studies have shown that speakers have generally developed their attitudes and preferences, as well as a ‘social awareness of the language(s) or dialects used in their speech communities’ (Day 1980: 27), long before they reach adolescence. In Marilyn Rosenthal’s study of American pre-school children’s reactions to Standard English vs. non-standard Black speech (Rosenthal 1974, cited in Hudson 1980: 210-211), children as young as ages 3 till 6 made judgments based on accent/dialect. In her study, the children were presented with two identical cardboard boxes, each painted with a face and containing a tape-recorder and a present. The taped voices from the cardboard ‘heads’ each gave a description of the present it contained, and this description was identical apart from the fact that one of the ‘heads’ spoke Standard English whereas the other spoke with a variety that was easily recognised as non-standard Black speech. Following this, the children were asked to choose the ‘head’ whose present they wanted, and they were also asked a set of questions revolving around their reactions to the heads. An overwhelming majority of the children judged the ‘head’ speaking Standard English to speak better, and they also ‘expected a nicer present from this box’ (Hudson 1980: 211).

A similar, and more recent, study by Kinzler et al. (2009), also investigated the role and interaction of the factors language, accent and race on children’s social preferences, and came up with results similar to those of Rosenthal (1974). Kinzler et al. did four different experiments, where they presented the informants, who in this case were 5 year old children, with photographs of children’s faces paired with speech, and asked them to choose who they wanted to be friends with. Some of the photographs were presented with a native English accent whereas others were given a foreign accent, and they also used children of various races to test the correlation between accent and race. Their experiments showed that the children preferred to be friends with the faces that were paired with a native accent, regardless of what the faces looked like. For instance, when race and accent were the two variables in question, the research showed that the children selected the White faces if the target child (i.e. the photograph) were silent, but if the faces were paired with a speech sample, where the White faces were given a foreign accent and the Black faces were given a native accent, the informants would prefer to befriend the Black faces (Kinzler et al. 2009: 629). This indicates that accent is a powerful tool in guiding social preferences, overriding many of the other

social categories like gender, age and race, which for years have been considered ‘the primary categories by which individuals divide the social world’ (Kinzler et al. 2009: 623).

Numerous other studies provide support to the statement that accent matters. Giles and Powesland (1975) did a study where they investigated attitudes towards RP and the Birmingham accent. Two groups of 17 year olds were each given a short talk on psychology from one who supposedly was a university lecturer of psychology, aiming to map the students’ knowledge of the field. Following the talk, the students were asked to write down all they knew about psychology, as well as give an evaluation of the lecturer. For both groups the study was carried out in exactly the same way, and the only difference was that one of the groups heard the lecturer give the talk in RP whereas to the other group, he spoke with a Brummie accent. The results were highly significant, as the students reacted far more positively towards the lecturer when he spoke with an RP accent than when he had a Birmingham guise (Giles and Powesland 1975: 102). It is also worth mentioning that the students’ attitudes towards the two accents in question had been rated beforehand, showing a high rating of the RP accent and a comparatively low rating of the Brummie accent, which supports the findings that the difference in the students’ reactions was due to the difference in accent.

A similar matched-guise technique⁵ was used by Alford and Strother (1990) when they tested both native (L1) and non-native (L2) university students’ attitudes towards certain regional American English accents. The students were presented with passages read by a male and female native speaker speaking with a southern, northern and midwestern accent, respectively. The overall results showed that both L1 and L2 students judged the three accents differently, with the midwestern speakers generally rated the highest and the speakers with a northern accent the lowest. Some years earlier, Gallois and Callan (1981) investigated Australian-born subjects’ attitudes towards accented English speech, and how accent affected their judgements of the speakers’ personalities (Gallois and Callan 1981: 347). The stimulus contained recordings of speakers speaking English with accents from Australia, Britain, France, Greece, Italy and Vietnam (Gallois and Callan 1981: 347), and their study showed that speaker accent, in interaction with speaker sex, did influence the subjects’ judgement of the speaker in various degrees.

⁵The matched-guise technique is a method for doing (linguistic) experiments, where subjects are presented with stimulus material, e.g. various speech recordings, where the only difference between the different stimuli is the conditions that are tested for. The advantage of such a method is the possibility to eliminate the chance of outside factors influencing the experiment.

Coupland and Bishop (2007) conducted one of the most recent, and comprehensive, studies of attitudes towards British accents, mapping informants' reactions to 34 different accents of English. An incredible 5010 informants partook in the online survey asking them to evaluate the different accents in terms of variables like prestige and social attractiveness. These findings were further correlated with factors like informant age, gender and region (Coupland and Bishop 2007: 74). Several accents attracted similar findings for both social attractiveness and prestige, with Standard English getting high overall ratings, and regional varieties, like the Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester accents, getting low ratings. The ratings also differed especially with regard to informants' age, with younger informants giving less prestige to standard accents and more favourable ratings to accents that traditionally had been much stigmatised, a finding that Coupland and Bishop interpreted as an indication that a possible attitudinal and ideological change was in the making (Coupland and Bishop 2007: 85).

2.3 Language ideologies

The various studies referred to in section 2.2.3 all support the sociolinguistic doctrine that we hold different attitudes and beliefs towards different accents, as well as the speakers of different accents, and that this matters in guiding our social preferences. Trudgill (2000: 2) argues that we as speakers cannot avoid revealing clues about our background and what kind of person we are, and this information helps people we are speaking with to form an opinion about us. But why do we judge accents, and therefore also the speakers of these accents, so very differently? Why is it still widely accepted to discriminate against people on the grounds of linguistic differences? Even if sociolinguists agree that accents are valued differently by speakers, they also agree on one more fundamental issue, viz. that these values are assigned in a completely arbitrary way. Lippi-Green (1997: 11) emphasises that 'all spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms', meaning that there is no intrinsic quality in one accent that makes it superior or inferior compared to other accents. But even if all languages and varieties of languages possess equal capabilities as communicative tools, non-linguists still judge some accents, and hence their speakers, to be better than others. These judgments of accents, and the speakers, must therefore necessarily stem from other factors than those that are of a purely linguistic kind. Researchers may point to various reasons behind such value judgments, but one of the most common explanations is the existence of so-called language ideologies.

2.3.1 Standard varieties

Passing judgments on things, it being accents or something else, entails the existence of some kind of norm we can use to judge the thing(s) in question up against. When dealing with language variants, these are obviously first and foremost put up against each other, e.g. ‘Accent A is better than accent B’, but when all is said and done, both accents A and B are usually judged against an accent C, which functions as the standard variety, i.e. the norm. William Enfield (1809, cited in Mugglestone 1995: 58) defined the term standard as something ‘by which we ascertain the value of things of the same kind; so a standard weight is that by which we try the justness of all other weights’, but defining a standard in relation to (spoken) language, in this case English, is not necessarily a straight-forward matter. Milroy and Milroy (1999: 19) argue that the notion of standardisation is more of an abstract ideology than a reality, claiming that a standard language is best considered as ‘an idea in the mind’, containing ‘a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent’. Their arguments in favour of this viewpoint is that it has proved very difficult to pinpoint one variety of spoken English as *the* standard variety, especially since there is such a large gap between the theoretical definition and the language practice that exists in reality. According to them, the notion of standardisation in itself implies that variability is not tolerated, but in reality quite a great amount of variability is accepted in what is referred to as ‘standard’ spoken English (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 18-19).

Crucial in this connection is a clarification of the notions of standard English and Standard English, as there seems to prevail considerable confusion about what these terms entail (Trudgill 1999: 117). The latter notion, i.e. Standard English spelt with a capital <S>, refers to a specific dialect, and is defined by Trudgill as

[...] that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. (Trudgill 2000: 5-6).

Another, and arguably very important, feature of this variety is that it is distinguished from other varieties on the grounds of grammar rather than phonology, seeing as ‘Standard English has nothing to do with pronunciation’ (Trudgill 1999: 118). In other words, it is therefore possible to speak Standard English with any kind of accent.

The concept of Standard English is thus not relevant to the present thesis, seeing as it is concerned with grammar and vocabulary, while the present thesis deals with accent. The notion of standard English, spelt with a lower-case <s>, is however a term commonly referred

to in the course of the present study. Although all accents are judged to be linguistically equal, there are arguably some accents that are held to be more ‘correct’, and thus closer to functioning as a standard, than others, viz. GA and RP. Thus, even if there is no sign of equation between GA/RP and Standard English in theory, it is likely that these accents are held forth as the best examples of Standard English accents anyway, especially among non-linguists.

The reasons for GA’s and RP’s status as standard accents are several. First and foremost, these accents are codified, thus functioning as framework for describing the sounds of English, for instance by serving as norms for various pronunciation dictionaries. If you are taught English as a foreign language, it is also highly likely that either GA or RP provides the phonological framework. Another central aspect with regard to these accents is also that they hold rather prestigious positions in the English-speaking world, much due to the fact that they are non-regional, i.e. they disguise the speaker’s regional background. Thus, these accents end up serving as yardsticks for other accents in terms of standardness, so that the closer a speaker is to having a GA or an RP accent, the more ‘standard’ he or she is perceived to be speaking, and vice versa.

This is also how the terms *standard English* and *standard accents* are used in the present thesis. These notions refer to RP and, in particular, GA (seeing as Disney is an American company), i.e. reference accents that are non-regional and therefore hold a certain prestige value. Certain scholars (cf. e.g. Lippi-Green 1997: 59-60) would probably argue against the use of such terminology as *standard*, and consequently *non-standard*, seeing as this could imply proscription and disparagement of the varieties not defined as standard varieties. It is therefore important to emphasise that the usage of these terms in the present thesis is in no way intended to imply disapproval of or proscription against particular varieties.

2.3.2 Establishing a standard language ideology

According to sociolinguists (cf. e.g. Lippi Green 1997, Trudgill 2000) all accents are equal in linguistic terms, thus the various values assigned to various accents are not due to inherent qualities but is rather a result of the value system prevalent in society. These value judgments often have ideological underpinnings, and both Milroy and Milroy (2003) and Lippi-Green (1997) are among those who argue for the existence of a standard language ideology. Lippi-Green (1997: 64) defines such an ideology in the following way:

[...] a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.

In other words, a standard language ideology helps to discipline discourse, in the sense that it validates certain forms of language and thus regulates who is allowed to speak and who is heard (Lippi-Green 1997: 64). A society that is permeated by a standard language ideology expects their speakers to know that there are some features, both of the grammatical and phonological kind, that are right and some that are wrong. Milroy (2007: 135) sums it up very neatly:

Everybody is supposed to know this – it is part of general knowledge to know it, and in a standard language culture it is your own fault if you cannot spell or if you speak incorrectly. It is believed to be open to everyone to learn what the correct forms are; therefore, it is thought to be quite proper to discriminate – in employment, for example – against people who use **non-standard** forms. (Author's emphasis)

Thus, if you use non-standard forms, you automatically put yourself in the line of fire, and risk the danger of being judged as lacking intelligence, being lazy or ignorant (Trudgill 2000: 8).

But how is such a standard language established? Lippi-Green (1997: 64) refers to 'bloc institutions' as being the ones who impose such an ideological belief upon us, referring to institutions as the educational system, the media and entertainment industry and the judiciary. Such authoritative institutions are often forerunners in the promotion and development of a standard language, and in addition to being an important participant in the developmental process, they also play a pivotal role in maintaining the position of the standard variety. When apparently successful and authoritative people and portions of society make use of the standard language, they function as positive examples of what you can accomplish and how far you can get if you just choose to conform to the 'correct' lifestyle, of which language use is one of the important factors. In many ways this creates a distinction between the successful conformers, for whom doors are opened, and the non-conformers, who clearly do not stand a chance at succeeding in society. A good example of authoritative institutions' efforts to promote standardised language varieties is the former reluctance of the BBC to allow speakers with a non-RP accent to act as news-readers, particularly in the televised news broadcasts. A similar example can be found in Norway as well, where NRK, in its early years as broadcaster, denied people with any kind of regionally flavoured dialect to speak on air. By carrying out such policies, both the BBC and NRK clearly promoted the

standardised way of speaking as the variety everyone should aim for, while at the same time sending a signal to the speakers of non-standard varieties that their way of speaking is not as valuable as the standard language.

2.4 Societal changes

One of the hypotheses of the present thesis is that societal changes in recent decades will serve as potential influences of the film medium, causing changes for instance in the way accents are used as devices for building characters. The central societal change in this regard is related to what is known as *political correctness*, an issue that has increased its importance severely in the past years. Although originally a communist heritage from the writings of Mao Tse-Tung, this concept made its way into the modern lexicon and the modern mind-set due to ‘the wide-ranging public debate which started on campuses in the United States from the late 1980s’ (Hughes 2010: 3). The core of this concept is arguably an effort to neutralise vocabulary, speech codes and behavioural norms so that no one is offended, or in Hughes’ words, it all

[...] started as a basically idealistic, decent-minded, but slightly Puritanical intervention to sanitize the language by suppressing some of its uglier prejudicial features [... and] it has had a major influence on what is regarded as “acceptable” or “appropriate” in language, ideas, behavioural norms, and values. (Hughes 2010: 3-4)

The debate has become more and more focussed on words, causing a change in vocabulary relating to areas such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and culture. According to Hughes (2010: 16), the major focus on language as the central object has come about due to the fact that ‘language is not neutral, but a reflection of dominant ideologies, unhealthy prejudices, and limited notions of normality’. The belief thus seems to be that by changing the tool we use to express our attitudes, we might be able to change the attitudes as well.

Obviously, seeing as the concept of political correctness seems to manifest itself primarily through changes in vocabulary, one might question whether this can serve as any kind of explanation in a study on the use of various accents, i.e. a study primarily concerned with pronunciation rather than lexicon. However, bearing in mind that the concept indeed has had an impact on public life, the present thesis works under the assumption that this impact might apply to other areas than just vocabulary as well – even though this clearly is the field

where it has been most visible. When people's everyday vocabulary is changed in the direction of becoming more politically correct, this inevitably results in raising people's general awareness of the issue of political correctness as well. Thus, when this becomes a public issue, it is highly likely that it might assert itself in other ways than just a change in vocabulary. Also, Hughes (2010: 65-70) argues that the issue of political correctness has made itself more felt in the American society than e.g. in Britain. Thus, even if Hughes (2010) does not explicitly mention the use of accents, e.g. in films and broadcasts, as something affected by the concept of political correctness, the present thesis works under the assumption that this is one of the areas to which it is likely that this issue has spread out.

A second societal change worth mentioning as a possible influence could also be the increasing tolerance towards various accents that we have experienced in recent years. As mentioned in 2.3.2, the RP accent has long been known as 'BBC English', seeing as this is the accent most commonly associated with newsreaders on this channel. A similar situation is to be found in the US, where General American, commonly referred to as the 'Network Standard', is 'the model aimed for by TV and radio announcers whose audiences are national in scope' (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 314). The BBC, for instance, has traditionally been rather reluctant to allow speakers with a non-RP accent to act as newsreaders, particularly in the televised news broadcasts, but in recent years, a change has clearly been in the making. In 2008, Mark Thompson, the General-Director of the BBC, expressed to *The Telegraph* that he

[...] wanted to see an increase in the range of regional accents – from the Newcastle brogue to the West Country burr – on BBC shows as part of a drive to end the domination of the standard English accent [...] [and that] viewers should be able to listen to a broader range of accents on television and radio (Martin 2008).

This thus serves as a clear example that the tolerance of regional accents is increasing – even in traditionally conservative institutions like the BBC. The softening-up of the attitudes towards regional accents could arguably be viewed as a consequence of the concept discussed in the previous paragraph, i.e. political correctness. Although political correctness is primarily concerned with neutralising language and behavioural norms to avoid stigma and offense, an inevitable consequence of this is an acknowledgement of diversity, which arguably also could manifest itself in an increased tolerance, and therefore use, of regional accents, as well as a caution to correlate the various accents with negative character traits.

2.5 The role of the media – does it play a role at all?

Seeing as this thesis deals with the use of language in a selection of films, the theoretical framework of the thesis would not be complete without taking a closer look at the media's role in relation to language. Media has been brought up as a potential explanation for both language change and the creation of attitudes, but there is still a lacking consensus regarding what kind of role the media actually plays, and even if it plays any kind of role at all.

According to Milroy and Milroy, many tend to blame the mass media for the growth of a standard, leading to uniformity and a reduction of diversity (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 24). Lippi-Green too points to the media as one of the powerful 'bloc institutions' (Lippi-Green 1997: 64) which imposes beliefs on what is 'correct' and 'good' use of language. On the other end of the scale, many choose to blame the media for what they see as a language in decline. But what is really the case? Does the media reduce diversity, making us all sound the same? Are they to blame for what 'language defenders' view as sloppy diction? Or do they not have any authority in this area at all? Aitchinson (1998) and Chambers (1998) argue that the immense authoritative position awarded to the mass media on these matters is simply a result of myths, and not something that is grounded in reality. According to Aitchinson (1998: 18-19), the media is more of a 'linguistic mirror', reflecting already existing language use rather than being the inventors. Milroy and Milroy (1999: 25) also award the media the role as someone who raises language users' awareness, rather than someone who plays a very influential part in deciding how people's everyday use of their language ought to be. One of the examples they particularly choose to point out, and which undeniably serves as a very valid example, is the situation concerning the spread of RP:

[...] it seems to be the case that the media have successfully promoted an awareness of the standard spoken language (which is in fact popularly known as BBC English) without having much influence on the rate of adoption of that standard (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 25)

If the mass media channels did play a very influential part with regard to language use, one should think that the number of people speaking RP should have increased drastically in the years where the BBC had their non-regional accents policy, but as Milroy and Milroy show, this is not the case. However, this issue is still a hot potato among scholars, and as some of the studies referred to in section 2.6.2 show, influence from the media has been held forth as one of the reasons behind recent change in Modern Urban Scots/ Glaswegian Vernacular (cf. Stuart Smith 2006 and Stuart Smith et.al. 2007).

The lack of consensus with regard to the media's role is the same when dealing with language attitudes. Again, there is a very clear difference between what scholars mean and what non-linguists claim to be the case. The latter group tend to assign a very significant role to the mass media and the entertainment industry, not just with regard to language attitudes, but to attitudes in general. The former group tend to be very careful when the issue of media influence is raised. Garrett (2010: 22) points to 'our social environment, *including the media*' (emphasis added) as one of the two important sources to our attitudes, but to what degree they actually help creating our attitudes, or influence them in any way, is still a question that remains open. Part of the reason why this is hard to answer conclusively, is the characteristic of attitudes as a mental concept that was touched upon in 2.2.1. The fact that attitudes are not something we can observe directly, but rather something that must be observed indirectly through our behaviour, makes them difficult to study. Additionally, this also makes it difficult to decide on where the attitudes come from. Giving the media a strong explanatory role in relation to attitudes will inevitably turn into a classic 'Which came first, the hen or the egg'-situation, and the question is whether the attitudes displayed in the media are a creation of the mass media industry or simply a reflection of already existing attitudes. How can someone who has never had any kind of personal contact with, say, a person from the southern parts of the US, automatically attribute certain qualities to him or her? If we assume that attitudes are indeed a product of learning, rather than something biological, these attitudes must be learned from somewhere. If the media is someone's only frame of reference with regard to e.g. persons speaking with a southern accent or people from Scotland, it might be natural to 'blame' the media for the stereotypical images one holds of these groups. But the stereotypical images and the attitudes, e.g. toward certain dialectal groups, that are presented in the media must also come from somewhere. The media is not a living, breathing organism with a mind of its own, but rather a product of its time, so one could easily argue in favour of the media as a reflection of society's attitudes rather than as a creator of them.

With regard to the present thesis, the latter view is the underlying assumption. The thesis acknowledges the fact that the media may be one of the institutions that help maintaining stereotypes and attitudes, because regardless of whether they create these issues or simply reflect them, they still contribute to keeping them in focus and on people's agenda. The working hypothesis is nevertheless that the media, and perhaps the film industry in particular, show signs of the time they are made in and reflect the various societal norms present at various points in time. If a particular stereotypical image or an attitude is presented in the media, this means that it is already present somewhere in society. By making the media,

in this case films, a subject of study, we could potentially reveal information about the prevailing opinions on such things as stereotypes, language ideologies and language attitudes.

2.6 Previous studies

Even though broadcast speech has been somewhat neglected as an object of sociolinguistic studies, recent years have seen an increasing interest in the language used in different media productions. This subsection presents an overview of some of the work that has been carried out in this field previously, starting with the study that is this thesis' point of departure.

2.6.1 Lippi-Green (1997)

Rosina Lippi-Green's study of the use of accents in animated Disney films is the main study this thesis builds on. Her study, published in her book *English with an Accent* (1997), was part of a large body of work taking a closer look at the language situation in the United States, focusing on existing language ideologies and the way language could be a potential source of discrimination. Animated films were one of the things she put under scrutiny, in order to reveal systematic patterns with regard to how language was used. Her working hypothesis was the following:

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

In other words, she considered animated films to be a tool used in a conscious manner in order to teach children how to discriminate. Her hypothesis was tested by analysing all available Disney animated feature films from the release of *Snow White* in 1938 and up until the release of *The Lion King* in 1994. All characters who said more than just single-word utterances were included in the analysis, resulting in a total number of 371 characters.

The quantitative results of Lippi-Green's study indeed showed systematic patterns with regard to the characters. First and foremost, it was clear that the Disney films portrayed a rather traditional view with regard to males and females. In their universe, the male characters held traditional male occupations whereas the female characters were portrayed in accordance with the traditional view of women as primarily mothers and wives (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). When she did a further analysis of the characters' accents, she found that an overwhelming majority spoke English with a native accent, with only around 9% of the characters speaking

English with a foreign accent (for the exact distribution, see figure 2.1). That most of the characters had a native English accent, with Mainstream US English⁶ as the largest accent group, was perhaps not that surprising, but when she took into account the setting of the different stories, she found that only 60% of the characters actually appeared in settings where the expected language would be native English (Lippi-Green 1997: 90). The link between setting and language was thus not always of the authentic kind. Further, she divided her characters into four categories based on an evaluation of their motivation and actions: positive, negative, mixed and unclear. When the characters' portrayals were correlated with the language varieties, she found that 'the overall representation of persons with foreign accents [was] far more negative than that of speakers of US or British English' (Lippi-Green 1997: 92), seeing as twice as many of the characters who spoke English with a foreign accent were portrayed as bad characters compared to the native English-speaking characters.

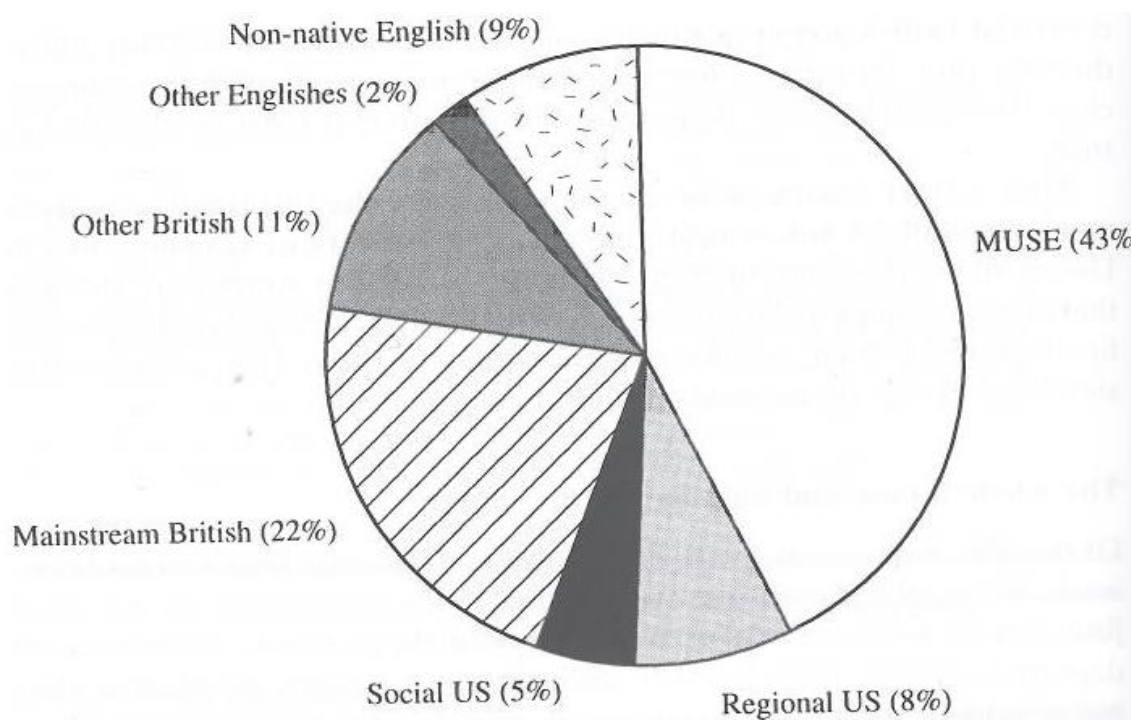


Figure 2.1. Disney animated characters by language variety used, from Lippi-Green 1997: 88

⁶Mainstream U.S. English (MUSE) is the term used by Lippi-Green. This corresponds to the term General American, which is the term used in the present thesis.

In addition to the quantitative study, Lippi-Green also focused especially on three aspects, viz. the representation of African-Americans, the representation of certain character groups and the stereotypical representation of characters with a French accent. With regard to the representation of characters speaking African American Vernacular English (AAVE), she discovered that all of them appeared as animals rather than in humanoid form (Lippi-Green 1997: 93). However, as the overall number of characters speaking AAVE was low, she saw it as impossible to draw any strong inferences from these findings. Her investigation of how particular groups, viz. lovers and mothers, were represented showed that the mainstream varieties of British and US English were the accents prevailing among these characters. The case study she did of the characters speaking English with a French accent revealed that the characters portrayed a fairly stereotypical image of the French. Even if the stereotypical images in no way were of the overtly negative kind, Lippi-Green still argues that this stereotyping is less fortunate, as it still presents a contorted picture of what the French are like. She therefore concludes that the media is an important source of information when teaching children how to discriminate. She also points out that not only are children taught to discriminate, they are also taught to use language as a cue:

What children learn from the entertainment industry is to be comfortable with *same* and to be wary about *other*, and that language is a prime and ready diagnostic for this division between what is approachable and what is best left alone (Lippi Green 1997: 103, author's emphasis).

2.6.2 Studies of language variation in television

Lippi-Green chose to conduct her study on films, but the last decade or so has seen the emergence of quite a few studies focusing on the use of language in television broadcasts as well. Dobrow's and Gidney's (1998) study relates strongly to this thesis, as they did their study on the use of dialect in children's animated television. Similar to Lippi-Green, they too detected a correlation between the use of language and a character's status as either hero or villain. Their study also showed a tendency for regional and foreign accents to be used in order to emphasise comic elements, and they argued that the way language variation was used reflected typical American attitudes toward dialects and foreign accents (Dobrow and Gidney 1998: 11).

Various studies have also dealt with the language of television in relation to selected British accents. Cooke (2005) looked at two of the British television providers in the 1960s

and the 1970s, viz. Granada Television, with its roots in the north of England and with a primary focus on a regional audience, and BBC English Regions Drama, based in the South and with their production aimed at a national audience. Granada Television is the producer of the long-lasting successful regional drama *Coronation Street*, and Cooke (2005: 146) points to the portrayal of ‘regional accents and attitudes’, creating recognition among the audience, as one of the key factors behind its success.

Timmins and Stuart-Smith (2004) did an analysis of the language used in three London-based television shows, aiming to see if and how ‘Media-Cockney’ (i.e. the London accent portrayed in these television shows) related to real-life accent use. They found expected Cockney features portrayed in all three of the shows, but they also detected a clear genre variation, with the comedy show displaying the greatest similarities to real-life Cockney and the contemporary drama portraying a more mainstream South East English accent (Timmins and Stuart-Smith 2004: 44).

Two related studies by Stuart-Smith (2006) and Stuart-Smith, Timmins, Price and Gunter (2007) investigated accent change in Modern Urban Scots/Glaswegian Vernacular and what role television played in these changes. Stuart-Smith (2006) dealt with the increase of TH-fronting, which was ‘statistically linked to a number of extra-linguistic factors to do with the South of England’ (Stuart-Smith 2006: 42), and influence from watching various London-based TV-programmes could be one of these factors. The study by Stuart-Smith et al. (2007) focused on the spread of L-vocalisation and detected similar results to those of the previous study.

2.6.3 Studies of language variation in films

The studies dealing with language variation in films are in many ways the studies that are most relevant to this thesis. There has not been a substantial amount of studies done on this topic either, but as with language variation in television, the interest has increased in the course of the past fifteen years. Marriott (1997) did a case study of the 1942 British war film *In Which We Serve*, and argued that the film managed to build a social hierarchical model mainly by using different sociolinguistic variants (Marriott 1997: 173). She pointed to a conspicuous difference between the language of working-class characters and upper-middle class characters, with the former using more non-standard phonological and grammatical variants than the latter, like T-glottalling, H-dropping and the realisation of [ŋ] as [n] in progressive verb forms (Marriott 1997: 178).

In a similar study, Lund (2009) looked at how working-class accent has been portrayed in British films from the 1960s and the 2000s. He hypothesised that the films from the oldest time period would portray ‘working class heroes’ possessing less regional features in their accents than the ‘working class heroes’ from the 2000s, who would have a more authentic speech (Lund 2009: 1). The overall findings supported the hypothesis, though the data revealed important nuances, indicating that the difference between the old and the new films was not as great as predicted beforehand.

The studies that most closely resemble the present thesis are the studies by O’Cassidy (2005) and Harvey, Pretzsch and Snowman (2007). Based on Lippi-Green’s framework, O’Cassidy (2005) did a study of the relations between accent, linguistic discrimination and stereotyping in portrayals of West Virginia film characters. She found evidence which supported previous findings, e.g. by Lippi-Green, that ‘accented characters in films were more likely to be portrayed with stereotypic traits than unaccented characters’ (Cassidy 2005: 85).

Harvey et.al. (2007) analysed the language of three central characters in the animated film *Shrek* in light of the language attitudes towards the accents the three characters spoke, namely AAVE, RP and Scottish English. Their aim was to establish an understanding of how the use of a specific accent/dialect could function as an important element in the build-up of a character (Harvey et.al. 2007: 39). They argued that the language attitudes attached to specific accents were ‘important factors in determining the identity/personality of the character’ (Harvey et.al. 2007: 47), and that this could explain why the three characters in question had been cast with the accents they had. In addition, they included the element of voice recognition, claiming that there could be a potential connection between the actors’ social and linguistic backgrounds and the overall impression of the animated characters.

3 DATA AND METHOD

This chapter outlines the data and the methodology for the present thesis. The different subsections present the various accents as well as the socially related variables. Further, it will take a closer look at the material which has been analysed in this study, whereas the last part will focus on the methodology used to carry out the analysis.

3.1 Presentation of the various accents

One of the main aims of this thesis was to establish what kind of accents that were used in the various films. The core question revolved around whether a given accent was present or not, and the thesis did not aim at doing thorough phonetic analyses of the various accents, but even so, an awareness of the linguistic features of the various accents was necessary in order to be able to assign the characters the correct accent. The thesis operated with six different sub-categories of accents, viz. General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), Regional American English (RegAmE), Regional British English (RegBrE), African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and English with other accent, and these categories are presented below.

3.1.1 General American

General American (GA) is the term used to refer to the standard variety of American English. As already discussed in section 2.3.1, the term *standard* is a notion that might be difficult to apply to spoken language, and Janicki (2005: 26) argues that giving an accurate and concise definition of what constitutes Standard American English is very difficult. Nevertheless, General American is widely used as a label for the accents that lack particular regional or social features (cf. e.g. Wells 1982, Trudgill and Hannah 2002), and as referred to in 2.3.1, being non-localisable is a key element if a variety is to be labelled as a standard variety. However, it is important to stress the fact that using such a notion as General American might give a wrong impression of the accent, as it implies that GA is a uniform variety. This, however, is a truth with certain modifications. Seeing as this accent type has been applied to around two thirds of the American population (Wells 1982: 118), it means that it covers a rather vast geographical area, which entails that some regional variation within the GA accent

area is inevitable⁷. According to Wells (1982: 118), this is also one of the central reasons why many scholars tend to use the label General American with some caution. However, Wells (1982: 470) also states that despite this lack of uniformity, the concept of General American as a supra-regional variety⁸ ‘referring to non-eastern, non-southern accents’ is still a useful label, seeing as it both corresponds fairly well to a layman’s perception of a standard American accent, as well as being the variety that is best reflected in broadcast speech in the major nationwide broadcasting companies. The concept of General American thus lends very well as a reference to the mainstream, general way of speaking American English and this is how the present thesis has chosen to use this term, but it does acknowledge the fact that it is not a label completely without any controversy.

The diagnostic feature above any that distinguishes GA from the other main regional American accents, as well as from RP, is rhoticity. GA is a rhotic accent and in its simplest sense, this means that the accent pronounces the phoneme /r/ in every phonological context, i.e. not just pre-vocalically, which is the common pattern in non-rhotic accents. Another well-known feature of this accent is T-voicing, which means that intervocalic /t/ in words like *letter* and *city* is normally pronounced as the alveolar tap [ɾ], so that the difference between the distribution of /t/ and /d/ in this position is neutralised (Wells 1982: 248-252, Trudgill and Hannah 2002: 39). In comparison to RP, there is also a distinct difference with regard to the pronunciation of /l/, which in RP has the allophones ‘clear’ /l/, [l], and ‘dark’ /l/, [ɫ]. In American English, the most common pronunciation is the velarized variant [ɫ]. However, this is not a feature that could help to distinguish between the different regional varieties of American English, as it is a feature which is present in most (if not all) American English accents.

With regard to the vowels, the most striking feature is arguably that BATH⁹ words, like *plant*, *grass* and *ask*, are pronounced with /æ/. Further, words like *pot*, *got*, *caught* and *daughter*, which belong in the LOT and THOUGHT categories, tend to be pronounced with an /ɑ:/. The aforementioned rhoticity also results in r-coloured vowels in NURSE words, i.e. the pronunciation of words like *hurt*, *church*, *turn* and *earth* with [ɜ:].

⁷In this review of General American, the details of the internal regional variation will not be given much focus. For more information on this, see e.g. Wells 1982, Trudgill and Hannah 2002.

⁸ If a variety is supra-regional, it means that it is not regionally bound, but rather covers more than one region.

⁹These capitalised reference words refer to the standard lexical sets as designed by Wells (1982).

3.1.2 Received Pronunciation (RP)

Similar to the role General American holds, RP functions as the standard variety of British English. Its role as *the* standard of British accents has historical roots, and Mugglestone (1997) even traces it as far back as the 17th century. RP is a non-regional accent, and this is one of the main reasons why it is usually held forth as a frame of reference. By laymen's standards it is also judged to be 'better' and more prestigious than other accents and it tends to be associated with high social status, wealth and power (Hughes et al. 2005: 3), although some scholars argue in favour of a changing attitude towards RP (cf. e.g. Trudgill 2002, Fabricius 2002)

As with General American, using such a label as Received Pronunciation implies that the accent we are dealing with is a uniform variety. Even though RP also is what is commonly referred to as a supra-regional variety, it still has a certain degree of internal variation. Especially in recent years, RP has picked up traits that diverge from the conservative pronunciations of the accent, and RP speakers make use of these traits to a variable degree. An example could be T-glottalling, which is considered to be a rather new feature in RP and therefore is used to a variable extent, often depending on style (cf. e.g. Fabricius 2002). Like with GA, it would therefore be too extensive to go into detail on all the different accent features, so the ones mentioned in the present thesis are just the most characteristic ones.

The diagnostic feature that is most prominent in RP is, like with GA, rhoticity. RP belongs to the non-rhotic accents, i.e. accents that pronounce the phoneme /r/ only in pre-vocalic contexts. Words like *car*, *clear* and *bartender* would thus be pronounced [kɑ:], [klɪə] and [bɑ:tendə], respectively. If, for instance, *clear* appeared in a phrase like *clear out*, where the /r/ would precede a vowel sound, we would get an instance of linking *r*, meaning that the speaker would pronounce this particular /r/ due to the nature of the succeeding sound. Linking *r* is therefore a characteristic feature that walks hand in hand with non-rhoticity. Another characteristic feature related to /r/ in RP is the use of so-called intrusive *r*. A linking *r* is usually not employed unless there is an *r* present in the spelling of the word. An intrusive *r*, on the other hand, is an /r/ that is added where there is none in the spelling of the word, e.g. in *drawing* [drɔ:rɪŋ] and *America is ...* [əməɪkər ɪz]. Another consonant feature is, as already mentioned in 3.1.1, the allophonic variants of /l/. Where GA primarily has the velarized variant [ɫ], RP has both [l] and [ɫ], with the former allophone being used before vowels and the latter allophone appearing in all other contexts.

With regard to the vowels, RP is most easily recognised on the pronunciations of BATH and LOT words. BATH words like *staff*, *path*, *ask* and *laugh* are pronounced with [ɑ:], as opposed to the GA pronunciation [æ], and LOT words, like *stop*, *odd*, *honest* and *bother*, are pronounced with [ɒ], in contrast to GA [ɑ:]. Another diagnostic vowel feature of RP is also the three centring diphthongs /ɪə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/, which appear in e.g. *dear*, *bear* and *tour*, respectively. This feature is arguably one of the most stereotypical traits of the more conservative type of RP, and is strongly associated with upper-class pronunciations, but Hughes et al. (2005: 51) suggest that this trait is in retreat today. Even if this might be the case in present-day RP, these diphthongs are still stereotypically RP features, thus it is likely that characters that are cast with an RP accent in the data material will use these centring diphthongs.

3.1.3 Regional American English (RegAmE)

Regional American English (RegAmE) is the first of the so-called umbrella categories. By this, I mean that in comparison to GA and RP, which are categories consisting of one accent each, this category comprises more than one accent. One might argue that this is an unfavourable way of categorising, seeing as using such an umbrella term will obscure the nuances, so that the final analysis will not show exactly which accent that has been used, just that it is a regional variety. If one of the main aims of the present study is to look at the distribution of different accents, one could claim that the thesis partly cuts off its nose to spite its face with such a categorising. However, the reasons, as well as advantages in my opinion, for using such a categorising are many. First of all, Lippi-Green (1997) also used umbrella categories in her study, and even if her categories were not exactly the same as those used in the present thesis (cf. 3.1.7), it will still ease the comparison between the two studies. Secondly, the study undertaken in the present thesis is of the quantitative rather than the qualitative kind. In the overall picture of accent distributions, it is expected that regionally marked varieties will be used less than GA or RP. Thus, if the regional accents were to be split into separate groups, and then correlated with the other variables, chances are that the numbers would be too small to detect any potential patterns. Thirdly, a working assumption of the present thesis is that the overall motivation behind casting a character with a regional accent rather than a standard variety is more or less the same, regardless of the specific accent in question. Also, even if the regional accents are merged in the overall analysis to ensure

quantity, it does not prevent me from commenting on the use of specific regional varieties in the discussion of the results, in cases where this should be of interest.

In the analysis of the data material, there were primarily three regional American accents I was on the look-out for, viz. the varieties from New York City, Eastern New England and the South. These were chosen due to their status as major accent regions in the US (Wells 1982: 437), as this is where we find the regional accents that arguably are the most identifiable. Based on this they arguably have the highest recognition rate among an audience, and would therefore be the most likely candidates to be used if a character were to be given a regional accent.

3.1.3.1 New York City

According to Wells (1982: 500-501), the New York (NY) accent is the American regional accent that stands out the most and which Americans themselves are most aware of. Arguably, Americans rarely care about social-class differences and prestige values with regard to accents (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 13), but the NY accent is reportedly an exception, as ‘there is no other American city whose speech evokes such disapproval’ (Wells 1982: 502). The pronunciation patterns diverge sharply among the different social classes, making the social stratifications in the city very clear.

The most salient features of this accent are, according to Wells (1982: 503), non-rhoticity, TH-stopping and the quality of the BATH-TRAP and NURSE vowels. The NY accent has traditionally been a non-rhotic accent, just like RP, but as this has been a feature with relatively much social stigma attached to it, speakers tend to vary their pronunciation depending on how high up in the social hierarchy they belong (Trudgill 2000: 10, cf. also Labov’s (1966) New York department store study). TH-stopping, i.e. that /θ/ and /ð/ are realised as dental stops /t/ and /d/, is also a diagnostic feature of the NY accent, and this is also a feature that has a strong social distribution, in the sense that the higher educated a speaker is, the less likely he or she is to realise the fricatives as stops (Wells 1982: 517). With regard to vowels, speakers with a NY accent usually have a diphthongized pronunciation of BATH and TRAP words, realising the vowel as [eə] before certain consonants. A word like *bad* would thus be pronounced [beəd]. The NURSE vowel also has a diphthongal pronunciation when it appears pre-consonantly, resulting in words like e.g. *turn* and *first* being pronounced

[tʰɪm] and [fʰɪst]. Another vowel feature worth mentioning is the high number of centring diphthongs that appears in this accent, as the vowels we find in NEAR, SQUARE, CURE, PALM, START, THOUGHT, CLOTH, NORTH and FORCE are all realised as centring diphthongs of various kinds.

3.1.3.2 Eastern New England

The Eastern New England dialect area consists of the states Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. According to Wells (1982: 518), this area has traditionally received a substantial amount of European, in particular English, influence, which clearly is visible in the accent. Like the NY accent, the Eastern New England variety is also traditionally non-rhotic, a heritage that arguably stems from the accent used in the East of England. However, the word *traditionally* is also central in this regard, seeing as the accent is currently undergoing a change from being non-rhotic and to adapting itself more to the GA pattern of rhoticity. The same goes for the vowels in START, PALM and BATH, which in traditional Eastern New England were pronounced with an open front [a:]. Particularly the BATH vowel is adapting strongly to the GA pattern, so that more and more speakers change from [a:] to [æ] (Wells 1982: 522-523). This open front vowel quality is nonetheless a salient characteristic of the stereotypical Eastern New England accent. The last characteristic worth mentioning is the RP-like /ɒ(:)/ that many speakers use in LOT words, which again shows the influence of British English.

3.1.3.3 The South

The South is arguably one of the regional areas that are hardest to give a uniform linguistic description of. Various scholars have given different internal classifications of the accents that belong to the linguistic South, as there arguably exists a high number of sub-varieties (Wells 1982: 527). However, in this section, the linguistic South is nonetheless treated as rather uniform, and the diagnostic features focused on are the ones that are the most characteristic of the Southern accents in general.

According to Wells (1982: 529), the best known characteristic of southern accents is what is commonly referred to as the ‘southern drawl’. This is claimed to be very easily

recognised, albeit difficult to describe satisfactorily, but Wells attempts to describe it in the following way:

[the southern drawl] involves greater length in stressed, accented syllables as compared to unstressed; this is accompanied by diphthongization and other modifications of some accented syllables, together with a wider weakening of unstressed syllables than in other accents, but **not** necessarily an overall slow rate of delivery (Wells 1982: 529, author's emphasis)

Thus, the southern drawl often manifests itself in the presence of a glide in contexts where there is not typically a glide in other varieties, e.g. in KIT, DRESS and TRAP, causing words like *bed* and *Bill* to be pronounced as [bɛyəd] and [bɪyʊl], respectively (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 82-83). Wells also emphasises that the 'southern drawl' involves much more than just a slow speech-rate. Still, these speech-rate differences, however subtle they may be, are arguably one of the features that are most easily used in stereotypical portrayals of Southern speakers. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006: 84) argue that this is the case "because speakers of Southern American English are often stigmatized as 'dumb' and 'uneducated' and thus 'slower' than speakers of non-Southern varieties".

As with the previously mentioned regional accents, the South has also traditionally been a non-rhotic accent. However, this is one of the traits where the internal variation fully kicks in, and Wells (1982: 542) also points to the fact that rhoticity is a very distinct social marker in the south, with non-rhoticity being associated with upper-class whites and blacks, whereas rhoticity traditionally is associated with lower-class whites. However, recently rhoticity has been gaining ground in the South as well, in line with the rest of the non-rhotic US areas, so a change is clearly in the making with regard to its function as a social marker. With rhoticity becoming more common, this is thus not a water-tight diagnostic feature in order to distinguish southern from non-southern speech either, but seeing as rhoticity is highlighted as perhaps the most central characteristic of the other accents, it is also included here. Apart from rhoticity, the rest of the most salient features of the linguistic South are related to vowels. Southern accents lack the glide on the diphthong in PRICE (except before fortis consonants), resulting in words like *ride* and *time* being pronounced with [a:], i.e. as [ra:d] and [ta:m], respectively. The DRESS vowel is also commonly raised when preceding nasals, resulting in pronunciations like [pɪn] *pen* and [hɪnrɪ] *Henry*.

3.1.4 Regional British English (RegBrE)

Like RegAmE, this is also an umbrella category, consisting of more than one accent. The reasons for why this is thought to be the best way to classify these accents are the same as those prevailing for RegAmE (cf. 3.1.3). However, this category is not as comprehensive as the previous umbrella category, much due to the nature of the material that forms the basis of the present study. The Walt Disney Company has a worldwide market for their productions, but even if their audience is just as much international as local (local here refers to the U.S.), it is first and foremost an American company, producing for an American audience. The primary audience's relationship to and attitudes towards regional British accents are thus arguably not as strong as their knowledge of the regional accents that exist in their own society. In order to secure a certain degree of familiarity among the primary audience, it is therefore likely that the amount of British accents (except RP) used is kept at a minimum. If any particular regional British accents were to be detected in the material, I found it most likely that this would be one of the major regional accents, like e.g. Scottish English. Irish English is also included in this category, even though it is not a regional British variety in the same way as Scottish English is. However, for the sake of simplicity I have chosen to treat the British Isles as one area in the present thesis, rather than just focussing on Great Britain, which justifies the inclusion of Irish English under the subheading RegBrE. The reason why I have chosen to focus on these two varieties in particular is that they are the regional British accents deemed to be the ones most familiar to an American audience. The review of diagnostic features thus concentrates on these two varieties, but this does not in any way mean that the present thesis neglects the possibility of other regional British accents showing up in the data material.

3.1.4.1 Scottish English (ScotEng)

Scottish English is, like GA, a rhotic accent. The /r/ may be realised in a number of ways; a tap [ɾ], an alveolar approximant [ɹ], a retroflex approximant [ɻ] and also a trill [r]. The tap [ɾ] is arguably the most typical, whereas the trill [r] is the variant commonly used in the 'stereotyped or "stage" form of the accent' (Hughes et al. 2005: 102). Other distinguishing consonant features are the distinction between /m/ and /w/, giving Scottish English speakers the ability to distinguish words like *which* [mɪtʃ] and *witch* [wɪtʃ] (Trudgill and Hannah 2002:

93). Scottish English is also known for its occurrences of the velar fricative /x/ in typical Scottish words like *loch* [lɔx]. Further, T-glottalling is very common, particularly with non-initial /t/ (Wells 1982: 409), and speakers of Scottish English also seldom alternate between dark and clear /l/, usually realising the dark allophone [ɫ] in all positions (Trudgill and Hannah 2002: 93).

Arguably, it is in the vowel inventory we find the most distinctive features of Scottish English. First, the variety lacks the distinction between the vowels of FOOT /ʊ/ and GOOSE /u:/, as both are pronounced as the close central rounded vowel /ɯ/. This causes homophony between words that would have been distinguished in other varieties, e.g. *full* and *fool*, which both are pronounced [fɯl], and *look* and *Luke*, which are pronounced [lɯk]. Further, the NURSE vowel, which in RP is [ɜ:], is commonly found in two contrasting possibilities, viz. the open central /ʌɾ/ and the open-mid front /ɛɾ/. This partial merger of the NURSE vowel results in a falling together of the vowels in words such as *bird* /bʌɾd/, *hurt* /hʌɾt/ and *word* /wʌɾd/, and *earth* /ɛɾθ/, *term* /tɛɾm/ and *person* /pɛɾsn/ (Wells 1982: 407). ScotEng is also easily recognised on its monophthongal vowels in FACE and GOAT, leading to pronunciations like *late* /let/, *nem* /nem/, *road* /rod/ and *bone* /bon/. The vowel of MOUTH is pronounced with a raised starting point, resulting in pronunciations like *out* /ʌut/ and *round* /ɾʌund/ (Wells 1982: 406). A last point worth mentioning is that vowel length is not phonemic, but rather varies according to phonetic environment (Wells 1982: 400). This system, commonly known as *Aitken's Law*, basically entails that a vowel is “phonetically short unless it is followed by #, a voiced fricative, or /r/, in which case it is long [...]” (Wells 1982: 400).

3.1.4.2 Irish English (IrEng)

This description deals with the variety labelled as the Standard Irish English accent, i.e. the accent that has originated from the English spoken in the west and west Midlands of England (Trudgill and Hannah 2002: 98).

Irish English belongs to the rhotic accents, with /r/ having a similar pronunciation as in GA. Like in ScotEng, the distinction between [ɹ] and [w] is preserved and the accent does not have any alternation between the different allophones of /l/ either, but in contrast to

ScotEng, the clear /l/ is the prevailing pronunciation in all positions in IrEng. A common feature of IrEng is also TH-stopping, i.e. loss of the contrasts /t/-/θ/ and /d/-/ð/, with /t/ and /d/ being used in all positions. Another characteristic is T-opening, which basically means that we have an incomplete closure of /t/, resulting in more of a fricative sound. According to Wells (1982: 429), this is “one of the most conspicuous features of Irish English”, and it leads to pronunciations such as *bottom* [bʌtəm] and *hit* [hɪt̪].

Similarly to ScotEng, and other rhotic varieties, the rhoticity leads to an absence of centring diphthongs in IrEng as well. Other distinguishing vowel features are for instance the quality of the LOT, CLOTH, THOUGHT and NORTH vowel, which often is realised as an unrounded /ɑ(:)/, thus *stop* /stɑp/ (Wells 1982: 422). Trudgill and Hannah (2002: 101) also emphasise features like the use of [u:] rather than [ʊ] in words like *book* and *cook*, the use of /æ/ rather than /ɑ:/ in words like *dance* and *path* and the tendency to pronounce words like *many* and *any* as [mæni:] rather than [meni:] as salient characteristics of the Irish English accent. Additionally, IrEng too has monophthongal pronunciations in FACE and GOAT, similar to what we find in ScotEng (Wells 1982: 425).

3.1.5 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

African American Vernacular English is the label given to the variety used by the black population in the USA. AAVE closely resembles the accent type found in the South. This is due to the historical past with slavery on the Southern plantations, causing the majority of African-Americans to be located in this area, thus resulting in them picking up traits from the accent they were surrounded by. Even though the accent has its roots from the American South, it is not a regional variety as such. It is first and foremost connected to the black population, making it primarily a social/ethnic variety rather than a regional variety. However, it is important to emphasise that not every one of the black population speaks this variety, even if the accent has a firm ethnic foundation. Its status as primarily social/ethnic, rather than regional, is part of the reason why I have chosen to single it out as a variety of its own, instead of including it in the umbrella category along with the rest of the Regional American accents. Also, in light of the fact that the most recent film that was included in the material was the first Disney film ever to have an African-American protagonist, it seemed right to let AAVE be an independent category. Although AAVE and the variety described in 3.1.3.3 (The South)

are not identical, some of the same traits that were mentioned in that description will inevitably have to be repeated here.

It is claimed that AAVE is often most easily recognised by way of its syntax and morphology, which is rather different than the more standardised varieties of English. However, seeing as this study is concerned with accents only, the primary focus is the phonological features that make this variety distinct from others. Nevertheless, an awareness of some of the syntactic and morphological characteristics could prove fruitful in cases where it e.g. is difficult to decide on whether a character speaks with a southern or an AAVE accent, seeing as these varieties have a certain degree of similarity. Such syntactic and morphological features could e.g. be the absence of inflectional –s, copula-deletion and double negation (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 214-215).

With regard to the phonological features, the first feature worth mentioning is rhoticity. AAVE belongs to the non-rhotic accents, and the accent may even be more non-rhotic than your average non-rhotic variety, seeing as speakers of AAVE sometimes drop /r/ also in inter-vocalic position (Wells 1982: 557). Other consonant features are the deletion or vocalisation of non-prevocalic /l/ and the fronting, stopping or deletion of /θ, ð/. The latter process is what leads to pronunciations like [tu:f], [smu:v], [nʌfɪn] and [b(r)ʌvə] for *tooth*, *smooth*, *nothing* and *brother*, respectively. Also, speakers of AAVE tend to reduce consonant clusters, particularly when these appear in word-final position and are followed by a word beginning with a vowel, like *lif' up* instead of *lift up* (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 215).

The most salient features in the vowel system are the pronunciations of the vowels in PRICE and MOUTH. Like speakers of the Southern accent, AAVE speakers also pronounce PRICE with [a:], but they have a more extensive use of this pronunciation, seeing as they also use it in front of fortis consonants, whereas a southern speaker most likely would have used a diphthongal pronunciation in this context (Wells 1982: 537, 557). Like PRICE, MOUTH is also given a monophthongal pronunciation in AAVE, using either [a:] or [æ:]. A last characteristic worth mentioning is the raising of DRESS before nasals, like described in relation to the South (cf. 3.1.4.3).

3.1.6 English with other accent

The last linguistic variable is also an umbrella category. It is also the only category it is more or less impossible to describe the linguistic features of, for various reasons. First and foremost, this is due to the possibility of this category being an extremely diverse category. This category namely functions as somewhat of a remnants category, consisting of all the 'leftover' accents. The varieties discussed in sections 3.1.1- 3.1.5 are those accents that were deemed to be most likely to appear in the material. I also expected to find speakers of English with foreign accents, and possibly also speakers with other English accents than those already mentioned, e.g. Australian or Canadian, but I had no expectations to which accent types I should be prepared to meet. Going too much into detail on every possible accent of English therefore seemed too comprehensive, especially considering the fact that the study did not aim at doing very detailed phonological transcriptions or analyses of the accents used. Thus, to state that the category consists of accents of English that are either foreign or from the English-speaking world outside of the U.S or the British Isles seems sufficient enough.

Obviously, one might question whether grouping English with foreign accents together with other Englishes is a particularly good way of categorising. This is for instance in contrast to what Lippi-Green did, as she split the two into separate categories. Still, in my opinion, the categorisation used in the present thesis is not too unfavourable. The expected amount of characters speaking with these Englishes was estimated to be relatively low, so by grouping them together, it would be easier to quantify the data and see potential patterns when the accents were correlated with the various non-linguistic variables. Also, even if the use of an umbrella label like this arguably hides potential nuances in the material in the analysis of the data, it does not hinder the possibility of discussing individual findings, in cases where this would be of interest.

3.1.7 A brief comparison to Lippi-Green (1997)

Seeing as the present thesis partly is a comparative study to the one Lippi-Green (1997) did, a brief comparison of my accent categories and the ones she used could be useful. There are minor differences, but they are not so extensive that they jeopardize the possibility of doing a comparison between the overall results.

In her study, Lippi-Green uses seven sub-categories, i.e. she uses one category more than the present study has done. Her category labels are also somewhat different. In her study she does not clarify exactly how she defines the categories, but some of the labels are rather

self-explanatory. What I refer to as General American corresponds to what she has labelled Mainstream US English (MUSE) in her material. She argues in favour of such a label seeing as she then avoids having to use a term like ‘standard’, and its opposites ‘substandard’ and ‘non-standard’, as ‘these terms automatically bring with them a uni-directionality and subordination which is counterproductive to a discussion of language variation in linguistic terms’ (Lippi-Green 1997: 60). Whether this actually is a better label than the one the present thesis uses is probably a debatable point, but as the labelling issue has been touched upon previously (cf. 3.1.1), it will not be repeated here. With regard to the rest of the accents relating to US English, Lippi-Green uses the labels ‘Regional US’ and ‘Social US’, but what kind of accents she defines as the one or the other is left unsaid. Thus, how these labels correspond to the categories I have chosen to name Regional AmE and AAVE, cannot be established with certainty. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the categories the present thesis uses are just as good as those of Lippi-Green, simply due to the fact that regional and social accent features often tend to go hand in hand, with broad regional features being typically related to low(er) social class, etc. Thus, apart from AAVE, which is primarily a social/ethnic accent, it might not always be straight-forward to draw a line of demarcation between what constitutes a regionally marked and a socially marked accent. Using one category that comprises both socially and regionally marked accents thus seems like the best solution.

With regard to the British accents, Lippi-Green has labelled her categories *Mainstream British* and *Other British*, which are assumed to correspond to my category labels *RP* and *Regional British*. Arguably, Lippi-Green’s labels could be viewed as more neutral than mine, but I am still of the opinion that mine are better, particularly with regard to the use of ‘mainstream’ in referring to RP. According to Hughes et al. (2005: 3), only 3-5 % of the English population speaks RP, so to label this as the mainstream variety of British English is arguably somewhat inaccurate. However, when it comes to the labelling of the last categories, one could possibly argue that Lippi-Green has done a more accurate division than the present thesis, seeing as she uses two separate categories for English with a non-native accent and other Englishes, where the present thesis uses only one. Nevertheless, as discussed in 3.1.6, I believe the present thesis’s category division is more useful to the nature of the study, for the various reasons already mentioned in the previous section.

3.2 Non-linguistic variables

In addition to looking at the distribution of various accents in the data material, the second main aim of the thesis was to reveal potential systematic patterns with regard to how these accents were used in relation to building characters. In order to reveal this, the characters' accent had to be correlated to various features of the characters, viz. their role, their gender, their ethnicity and their level of sophistication. This sub-section presents an overview of these non-linguistic variables.

3.2.1 Character roles

Defining what character roles to look for in material of this kind is not necessarily the easiest task. Compared to the accent categories already described, the issue of character roles is also necessarily a much more subjective matter. The selection and definition of the various character roles are based on my own subjective judgements, and are chosen on the basis of what I have judged to be the most appropriate. This means that if this study had been undertaken by someone else, both the selection and definitions of the character roles could have been different. Altogether, I ended up with seven different character roles, viz. *hero/heroine*, *villain*, *aide to hero/heroine*, *aide to villain*, *authority figure*, *unsympathetic character* and *character with peripheral role*, of which the first six are the most interesting ones.

The films' *hero/heroine* is the central character in the film, the one that the plot revolves around. Most films have one hero or heroine; a few films have more than one character that can be assigned this character role. The traditional hero/heroine is a positive character and holds qualities like kindness, courage, strength and a strong sense of justice. It is the character with which we should either identify or sympathise, as it fronts the positive side (in the dichotomy good vs. evil). However, the Disney films in the material displayed a somewhat greater variety of heroes/heroines than the traditionally defined heroic character (cf. 3.4.2), so the first part of the definition, i.e. the hero/heroine as the central character, was sometimes the decisive factor with regard to whether a character was classified as the hero/heroine or not.

Seeing as the classic plot in Disney animated films tends to revolve around the 'battle' between good and bad (cf. 3.3), the existence of a *villain* is a necessity. Those characters that are classified as villains in this material are characters that function more or less as opposite

poles to the heroes/heroines. Basically, the villain is ‘the opposing force’ to the hero/heroine, and the one who tries to prevent the hero/heroine from fulfilling his or her mission. In contrast to the heroic characters, who are kind and courageous, the villain tends to be morally bad, unsympathetic and wanting to cause trouble and harm. Most stories tend to have one main villain, but depending on the plot, there may be more than one, although the number tends to be rather limited.

The next two character types are the *aides to hero/heroine* and *villain*, respectively. These are characters that ‘help another more important or more intelligent person’ (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 2005: 1416). As the ‘definition’ points to, these aides, or sidekicks, often tend to be less intelligent, and these characters are also often the ones that provide humorous elements in the story.

The characters that have been placed in the category as *unsympathetic* have more of an uncongenial streak. By this I mean that they do not care either or and they do not show any particular involvement on behalf of the main characters. They are negative characters, but not villains, due to the already mentioned lack of affiliation to either side. The line of demarcation between which characters that belong in this category and which characters that belong e.g. in one of the sidekick categories, or even among the peripheral characters, could arguably be somewhat blurry and this is yet again a division that is very much a result of subjective judgments on my behalf.

The last central character role category is named *authority figure*. In many ways this is an umbrella category, as it consists of characters that act like advisors, caretakers (i.e. parents) or are authority figures in other ways, e.g. as bosses etc. Arguably, these different characters could have been split into three separate groups, but seeing as they all have similar authoritative roles (though to a variable extent), it seemed more natural to group them all together, particularly with regard to the quantification.

The remaining characters that did not fit into any of the aforementioned categories were classified as *character with peripheral role*. This category consists primarily of minor characters without any specific roles. Examples of such characters could be narrators or characters that do not play any part in the story as a whole. However, they still have enough speech/screen time to decide on their accent, as well as the other non-linguistic variables.

3.2.2 Gender

By including *gender* as one of the non-linguistic variables, the present thesis aimed at exploring whether there would be any differences with regard to the speech of male and female characters. Considering the fact that gender has been held forth as one of the variables that influences language use (cf. e.g. Trudgill 2000, Chambers 2009), a correlation between the characters' gender and their accent could potentially reveal whether the Disney films reflect this. The typical pattern with regard to language and sex is that women tend to speak more standardised, i.e. either using the standard variety or forms that closely approach the standard (Trudgill 2000: 70). Men, on the other hand, often use more non-standard accents, thus having a more regionally and socially marked language. When Lippi-Green (1997) did her study, she commented on the fact that the Disney films constructed their universe in a very traditional way with regard to gender, and that the 'universe shown to young children in these films [was] one with a clear division between the sexes in terms of life style and life choices' (Lippi-Green 1997: 87). In her study, she gave particular attention to lovers and parents, discovering that mainstream US and British were the most common accents, regardless of story setting, for both lovers, as well as parents. She also found less variation among female romantic leads and mothers compared to their male counterparts. Thus, it seems as if the Disney Company indeed reflects real-life usage patterns with regard to gender and language in their film universe. By including the variable of gender in the present study as well, it will therefore provide us with the opportunity to investigate whether this correlation is still present.

3.2.3 Ethnicity

Using ethnicity as one of the non-linguistic variables is not without challenges. The main challenge is undoubtedly related to how the notion of ethnicity, in relation to the Disney universe, ought to be defined. The term *ethnicity* in itself is defined as 'the fact of belonging to a particular race' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 2005: 520). However, to ease the correlation in the present thesis, the variable of ethnicity was made binary, treating the characters as either non-ethnic or ethnic. Those characters grouped as *non-ethnic* were all the characters of a European or European-American ethnicity, i.e. white characters. Non-white characters, e.g. African Americans, American Indians or Asians, were labelled *ethnic*. In a thesis that among other things is looking at whether the Disney Company is acting more politically correct than previously, it might seem paradoxical to use what someone could

claim is a non-politically correct distinction. Additionally, if we take the dictionary definition of the term into account, this wording entails that a white person is just as ethnic as a non-white person, so to label one as ethnic and the other one not might appear somewhat inaccurate. Even so, a binary distribution of this variable was still judged to be the most suitable to the nature of the present thesis. Another point worth mentioning is that this variable obviously applies to the human characters only. A large portion of the characters appearing in the Disney universe are animals or some other creatures to which it is impossible to assign any kind of ethnicity.

3.2.4 Level of sophistication

The last non-linguistic variable used in the study is the characters' level of sophistication. This variable is also binary, as the characters are classified as either sophisticated or non-sophisticated. A *sophisticated* character is one which is intelligent and socially apt. An *unsophisticated* character, on the other hand, is not very worldly or socially knowledgeable, and usually appears as less intelligent. The sophisticated characters are also usually of the more 'serious' kind, whereas the unsophisticated characters often function as so called 'comic reliefs'. Again, as with some of the other variables, it is important to stress the fact that this variable also involves an element of subjectivity. What I have classified as a sophisticated character could be classified differently by others, and vice versa.

The reason why this is an interesting variable in the present study is simply the fact that, as discussed in chapter 2, accent matters with regard to what qualities listeners assign to speakers. If a speaker has a standard accent, it is far more likely that this speaker is judged to be more intelligent and socially 'better' than a speaker who has a non-standard, i.e. regional, accent (cf. chapter 2). Thus, non-standard accents are often used as a device to stereotypically portray someone as less intelligent or less socially attractive. By correlating the characters' level of sophistication to the distribution of accents it will therefore be possible to detect if the Disney universe shows signs of such stereotypical portrayals.

3.2.5 A brief comparison to Lippi-Green (1997)

Even though the present study is modelled on what Lippi-Green (1997) did, the social variables used in the present study are somewhat different. The reason for this, and what this implies regarding comparison of the results, deserves a brief comment. The non-linguistic variables Lippi-Green uses in her study are first and foremost *story setting* and *evaluation of*

character's actions and motivations. She also uses *gender*, looking first and foremost on the language of lovers and parents. Her study offers interesting results, revealing systematic patterns in the way accents are used. However, the present study aims at going into further details on the connection between accent and character roles/traits, and in order to do this, it was necessary to choose somewhat different variables than what Lippi-Green did in her study. This naturally complicates a direct comparison between her results and my results somewhat with regard to this specific part of the study.

3.3 The selection of films – a brief note on Disney's universe

The present study is based on an analysis of eighteen Disney animated feature films from the past fifteen years. Table 3.1 presents an overview of the films that were included in the study. Other films than these could have been included on the list, seeing as the complete list of released films from the Disney Company from 1995 and up until today comprises a fair few more than the eighteen I have chosen to analyse. Including different films could arguably result in different findings, so the results that are presented in chapter 4 must obviously be treated with some caution, as they only show the patterns detected in the eighteen films included in the study. I am still of the opinion that the selection of films I have made is a selection that is representative of the Disney productions from the past fifteen years.

Table 3.1. The Disney films used in the study. The asterisk marks the films that are not part of Disney's Classics collection

<i>Pocahontas</i> (1995)	<i>The Incredibles</i> (2004) *
<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i> (1996)	<i>Chicken Little</i> (2005)
<i>Hercules</i> (1997)	<i>The Wild</i> (2006) *
<i>Mulan</i> (1998)	<i>Ratatouille</i> (2007) *
<i>Tarzan</i> (1999)	<i>Meet the Robinsons</i> (2007)
<i>The Emperor's New Groove</i> (2000)	<i>Bolt</i> (2008)
<i>Lilo and Stitch</i> (2002)	<i>A Christmas Carol</i> (2009) *
<i>Treasure Planet</i> (2002)	<i>Up</i> (2009) *
<i>Finding Nemo</i> (2003) *	<i>The Princess and the Frog</i> (2009)

With regard to the selection of films it is of course also important to stress the fact that the only films that were eligible for inclusion on the list were films that were fully animated. The Disney Company does not only release animated feature films, but also films that combine animation and live action (e.g. *WALL-E* and *Alice in Wonderland*), live-action films (e.g. *The Pirates of the Caribbean*) and even documentaries (e.g. *Morning Light*). These were obviously excluded from the list even before the selection of the final films was done. Another common feature of the majority of the films that were selected to be part of the study was also their status as Disney Classics. The Classics is a collection consisting of the full-length animated feature films produced by the Walt Disney Animation Studios, and the films on this list are arguably among Disney's most popular productions. By choosing the majority of the films from the Classics collection, I thereby ensured that the films indeed were typical Disney productions and thus good representatives.

However, this does not entail that the films on my list that are not from the Classics collection (these are marked with an asterisk in table 3.1.) are not good representatives of the works of the Walt Disney Studios. There are various other reasons why these are not part of the Classics collection, the most common one being that they are co-productions of Walt Disney Studios and another (subsidiary) company, which disqualifies them from being part of the Classics collection, since this is for films fully produced by the Walt Disney Animation Studios. But taken into account that some of the most popular Disney animated films in recent years have been such co-productions, e.g. *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles* which both were co-produced with Pixar Animation Studios (now a subsidiary company of the Walt Disney Company), I still think it is fair to include these in the material. A film such as *A Christmas Carol* was included due to the fact that the film is one of the few with a fully British setting, thus provoking the curiosity on whether this was something that would be reflected in the accents used or not.

Going into details on all the films in table 3.1 would be too time consuming, nor would it add very much information to the present thesis. However, a general note on what kind of universe we are introduced to in Disney's animated films could be of interest. Most (if not all) Disney films contain varieties of the same main plot, a plot that also is well-known from most fairy tales. Usually, we meet a hero/heroine who is trying to solve a problem or working towards some goal or another. On this mission, the hero/heroine meets obstacles, usually in the shape of a villain who is trying to prevent the hero/heroine from completing the task he or she has set out to do. Along the way, both hero and villain usually receive help from one or more aides, and the story usually ends happily, with the hero/heroine overcoming

the problems, defeating the villain and achieving his or her goal. This classical plot structure is one of the reasons why the Disney animated films lend themselves well to such a study as the one the present thesis aims to undertake, seeing as the classic plot of the good vs. the bad usually involves very clear character roles.

3.4 Method

3.4.1 Collecting and analysing the data

After deciding on which films I wanted to include in the study, the next step was to get hold of all the films, which proved to be less of a challenge than expected. The Disney Company has a policy of drawing their films off the market a few years after releasing them on DVD, and then keeping them off the market for years before re-releasing them in new editions. The latest example of this is *The Beauty and the Beast*, which, prior to its re-release in the autumn of 2010, had been off the market for approximately a decade. I therefore expected some difficulties in getting hold of some of the films, particularly the ones from the late nineties. However, collecting all the relevant films went smoothly.

The analysis of the films itself consisted of watching the films, and noting down all the relevant information on the various characters in a pre-made form (cf. figure 3.1). All the characters with enough speech time to make any kind of judgment regarding their accent were included, although some of these characters were excluded at a later stage in the analysis. The films were all watched in their entirety. Further, in cases where there was any kind of uncertainties regarding accent type, character role etc., certain sequences of a number of the films were watched numerous times. With regard to the assignment of the various characters' accents, this was done by auditory analysis only. If we take into account the nature of the material, this technique stands out as the most suitable, but obviously there are pros and cons to choosing this kind of analysis. The greatest concern with such a method is obviously the element of subjectivity, and thereby also the reliability of the results (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 151). The element of subjectivity is rather substantial in the present study, as the classification of the characters' accent, as well as the other relevant traits, relies solely on my own judgments. However, the repeated viewings of the films contributed in improving my awareness of various phonetic traits in the speech of the different characters, thus also improving my ability to distinguish the different accents. Also, one way to ensure the validity of the analysis in cases like these, which rely heavily on the researcher's subjective

judgements, is to get a second opinion on parts of the material. If the other person's judgements are in accordance with your own in more than 80% of the cases, this is a good indication that your results are valid. For the present study, my supervisor also analysed a selection of the films, thus functioning as my second opinion, and our results were sufficiently in step with each other.

Character	Accent / accent features	Gender	Ethnicity	+/- sophisticated	Character role

Figure 3.1. Blueprint of the analysis form

Another factor that supports the use of an auditory technique as opposed to an instrumental, or a combination of the two, is the level of detail needed in the analysis in the present study. Instrumental analysis, e.g. by means of such software products as *Praat*, offers us the chance to get more accurate measurements of the phonological data we are working on than what is possible with just an auditory coding (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 150). However, taken into account that the present thesis aims at establishing whether a particular accent is present in the data material or not, rather than doing any kind of in-depth phonological analysis, there is no need for very detailed and accurate measurements. Thus, despite the obvious short-comings of the auditory technique, it was still judged to be the best way of performing the analysis.

After collecting all the relevant data, these needed to be quantified in order to reveal any potential patterns. The quantification and correlations were done manually. First, all the occurrences of the different accents were counted, in order to map the general distribution of accents in the data material. Further, each non-linguistic variable was counted separately, mapping the distribution of accents among males/females, ethnic/non-ethnic characters, sophisticated/non-sophisticated characters and the various character roles, respectively. Percentage scores were then calculated for each of the variables, and in order to represent the quantitative results in a more perspicuous way, basic charts were made by use of *Microsoft Office Excel* (2007).

3.4.2 Challenges

The process of data collection and analysis brought with it some challenges that needed to be solved along the way. First, the initial plan was to classify the characters according to whether they appeared in human/humanoid or animal form, and correlate this variable with the distribution of accents to see whether certain accents were more prone to be used with animal characters than others. The idea for using this variable came from Lippi-Green, who noted that all the characters with an AAVE accent appeared in animal rather than humanoid form (Lippi-Green 1997: 93). Although the total number of AAVE speakers in Lippi-Green's data material was too small to draw any inferences from, it still indicated that this could be an interesting non-linguistic variable to include. However, after starting the data collection, I came to realise that this might not be a very good variable after all. This was mainly due to the fact that it proved difficult to draw lines of demarcation between the various classifications. Lippi-Green operated with a distinction between *humanoid* and *animal*¹⁰, but taking into account that most characters are anthropomorphised in the Disney universe, regardless of what form they appear in, it seemed pointless to draw a distinction between humanoids and animals. This variable was therefore discarded and rather replaced with the variable dealing with the characters' level of sophistication, as this was deemed to be more fruitful to the present study.

In relation to the assignment of accents, I sometimes experienced slight difficulties in placing a character's accent in the right category. Some characters, albeit not many, spoke with an accent that somehow placed itself in the middle of nowhere, containing traits that in a sense contradicted each other. For instance, some of the characters spoke with a rather modified American accent, which placed them more or less in-between the categories of GA and RP. The question thus remained as to whether I should establish a distinct category called 'Modified American' to cater for these occurrences. However, as the overall number of characters that were classified with such a modified accent was rather low, they were put in the GA category, for the sake of simplicity in the quantification of the results.

Another example of such contradictive accent features could for instance be the film *A Christmas Carol*. Most characters in this film were cast with an RP accent (cf. chapter 4), but at some points, some GA features still shone through in some of the characters' speech. Usually, this was most evident in the pronunciation of some of the vowels, but despite some anomalies, they were still classified as RP. The anomalies were registered, but were not

¹⁰She also used inanimate creatures as a third sub-category of this variable, but this one is disregarded here.

deemed to be sufficient enough to result in a change of accent classification, as the remaining features clearly indicated an RP accent.

A last point worth mentioning in relation to the classifications of accents is the challenge of distinguishing the fictive character from the person giving voice to the character. To a large extent, the present thesis has chosen to disregard the linguistic background of the actors giving voice to the various characters, thus not attaching any weight to their original accent. One could of course claim that if the actor giving voice to a character is American, but speaks with a British accent when casting the voice of that particular character, this could signal an intentional policy on behalf of the Disney Company. Some could therefore argue in favour of taking the linguistic background of the actor into account when doing such an analysis as the present study. However, seeing as we have no way of knowing whether the actors voicing the various characters are speaking the way they do out of their own free will or whether they have been instructed to speak with a particular accent, attaching too much weight to their linguistic background might be unfortunate. The challenge obviously arises when the actors casting voice to the various parts are well-known, as the recognition of the voice automatically will conjure up expectations with regard to the accent as well, thus potentially clouding the researcher's judgements somewhat. If, for instance, Eddie Murphy casts the voice of a character, one might arguably expect him to speak AAVE, thus 'prejudging' him before listening properly to the data material. Nonetheless, every effort has been made in order to avoid that potential voice recognition affects the accent classification in the present study.

The last main challenge that had to be dealt with in the data collection process related to the assignment of character roles. Prior to the study, I expected that the character roles found in the films would be of the very stereotypical kind: all-good heroes, all-bad villains, etc. This, however, proved to not always be as straight-forward as thought beforehand. For instance, not all the heroes were without bad streaks. Kuzco, the hero in *The Emperor's New Groove*, starts out as being anything but kind, and rather possessing qualities like vainness, cockiness and egotism – qualities that are in no way associated with a heroic character. Scrooge, the main character in *A Christmas Carol*, also starts out as the complete opposite of a traditional hero. The occurrence of such characters thus challenges the typical definition of a 'hero'. Nevertheless, even if the heroes appearing in the various stories are not always positive through and through, they were still classified as heroes, based on their status as the most important character in the story (cf. 3.2.1).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the distribution of accents in Disney animated feature films. First, it will take a closer look at the overall distribution of accents in the data material, before it will present the different variables, and the correlation between these and the distribution of accents in each case. Following each of the presentations of the results, the findings will be discussed in further detail.

4.1 General distribution of accents

Table 4.1 shows the overall results from the quantitative analysis done on the distribution of accents in the Disney animated feature films. Figure 4.1 displays the same results graphically.

Table 4.1. The overall distribution of accents in the data material

GA	227	61,0 %
RP	53	14,2 %
Regional AmE	44	11,8 %
Regional BrE	13	3,5 %
AAVE	2	0,5 %
English w/accent	33	8,8 %
Total no.of characters	372	100,00 %

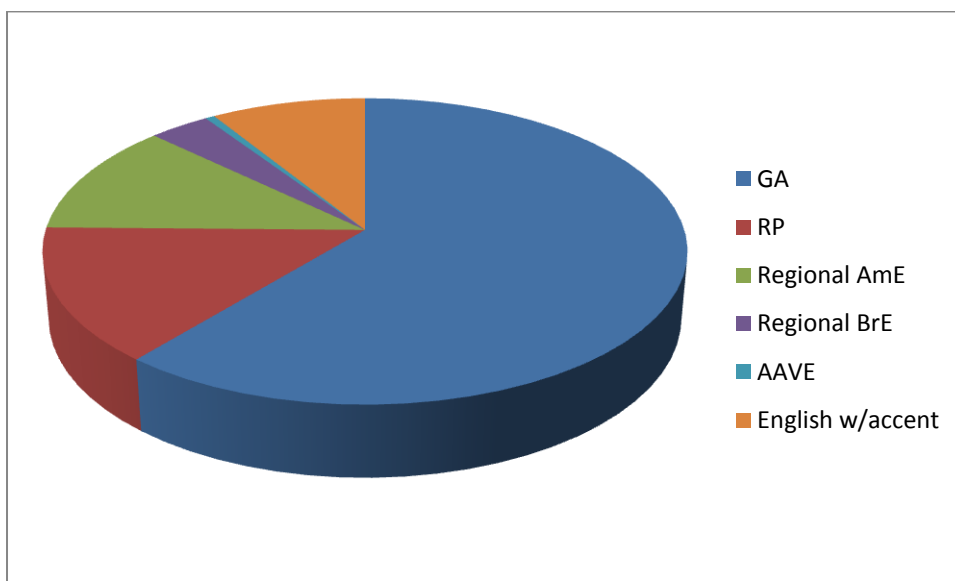


Figure 4.1 The general distribution of accents in the Disney animated feature films

There is no doubt that the dominating accent in the material is General American. Out of the total of 372 characters, well over half of the characters speak with a General American accent. Regional American, RP and English with other accent are the second most used accents, but the numbers of characters cast with these three accents are far behind the total number of GA speakers. The category of Regional British contains a rather modest number of speakers, applying to only 3.5% of the total number of characters. African American Vernacular English is even less represented, seeing as only two characters in the whole of the data material were classified as AAVE speakers.

If we compare the overall distribution discovered in this study to the overall distribution of accents in the previous study by Lippi-Green (1997), there are clear differences. The overall findings of Lippi-Green were presented in 2.6.1, but for sake of simplicity, the figure is repeated here.

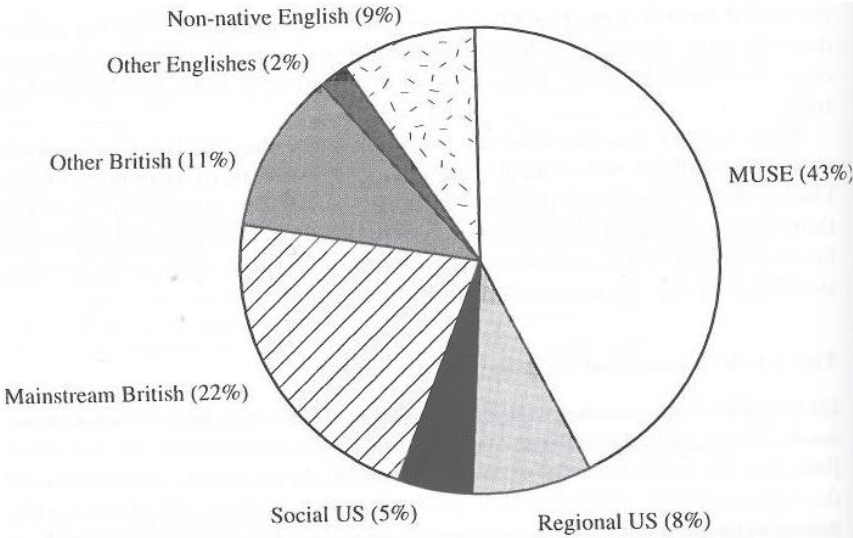


Figure 4.2. The overall distribution of accents in Lippi-Green’s study (from Lippi-Green 1997: 88)

As previously discussed, there are certain differences between the categories Lippi-Green uses and the ones the present thesis has used (cf. 3.1.7), which might complicate a direct comparison of the results somewhat, seeing as we do not know exactly how Lippi-Green defined her categories. However, despite the differences in the categorising, it is still possible to do a comparison of the results and figure 4.3 shows the results from the two studies pitched against each other. The most problematic categories are Lippi-Green’s categories *Regional US* and *Social US*, seeing as we have no way of knowing which accents she has categorised as one or the other. For the sake of the comparison, I have thus chosen to collapse those two, as

well as the present thesis' categories *Regional AmE* and *AAVE*, to ensure a best possible basis for comparison. Also, seeing as the present thesis has treated foreign-accented Englishes and other Englishes as one sub-category, while Lippi-Green has not, the two categories in Lippi-Green's study are collapsed into one to ease the comparison.

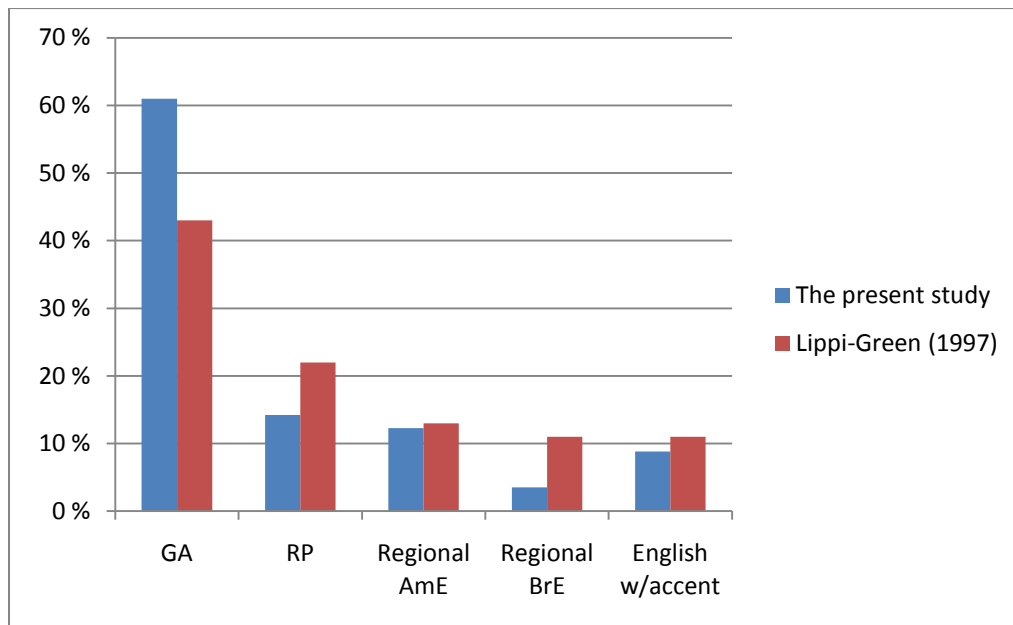


Figure 4.3. A comparison of the results from the two studies

If we look at the different columns, there is no doubt that the distribution of accents has changed from when Lippi-Green did her study and compared to the present study. The most marked differences are the changes that have happened to the GA and the RP sectors, with the first clearly increasing and the latter clearly decreasing. The number of speakers with a regional British accent (or 'Other British', in Lippi-Green's wording) has also decreased significantly, from 11% till 3.5%. The remaining accent types have only experienced minor changes, though the number of speakers seems to have dropped somewhat for each of them in the present study compared to the previous results. The general pattern thus seems to be that General American has gained a significantly amount of ground, whereas the other accent groups have decreased accordingly.

The question that thus remains is why this pattern emerges in the overall distribution of accents in Disney's animated films. Does this signal a changing attitude towards the use of various accents or is it simply a coincidence? Obviously, without actually asking the Disney

Company¹¹ whether they have changed their policies, the answer to this question will have a certain degree of speculation to it, but even if it is difficult to know the exact reason for the change in the distribution, the numbers in themselves are perfectly clear. From having a rather large diversity in the accents used in the animated feature films, this diversity is reduced and rather replaced with an abundance of characters speaking with a standard accent. There might be several reasons for this. As already mentioned, this may of course be entirely coincidental, being for instance a result of the selection of films that has been analysed in the course of this study. It might be possible that other films contain more use of different accents than the ones included in the present thesis, so that an inclusion of them would have changed the results somewhat, thus perhaps making the results of the present study more similar to the results Lippi-Green gained. However, as the differences between the two studies were rather substantial, particularly with regard to the amount of characters with a GA accent, it is not very likely that this is due to coincidence only.

As discussed in chapter 2, the world community has gone through a series of changes in recent years, particularly with regard to the issue of behaving politically correct in all spheres. We are supposed to tread carefully in every context, so that we avoid stepping on anyone's toes and causing any kind of offence with regard to different social groups. Since language is so strongly connected to social factors, often functioning as the most important marker of factors such as ethnicity, gender, social class and regional origin, there has been a growing focus on how to make speech more politically correct. Obviously, these efforts have particularly been concerned with improving the choice of words, but may also involve the use of accents in for instance the media. One way of making the use of accents more politically correct is to make use of more standardised accents rather than accents that are in some way regionally and socially marked. However, that this pressure to appear politically correct would manifest itself in an increased use of standardised accents was not what the present thesis expected to find. Rather, it was expected that the Disney Company would opt for a more authentic voice casting, in relation to for instance ethnicity and story setting. Another, and arguably just as good, way of showing an increased political correctness regarding the use of accents, would be to actually *use* a diversity of accents, while at the same time ensure that the accents are not used systematically in order to define certain kinds of characters. A

¹¹Efforts were indeed made to contact the Disney Company, in order to try to get their view on the use of various accents, but this proved to be extremely difficult. Despite extensive searches online, the only email address that was possible to get hold of, was to the company's press office, and the email that was sent to that address was never replied to. The Norwegian branch of the Walt Disney Studios was also contacted, and they did indeed reply, but seeing as they could only give any kind of information regarding the Norwegian dubbing of the various films, the matter was not pursued any further.

reduction of the diversity of accents and more use of standardised speech signals instead less acceptance of various accents rather than the opposite.

Nevertheless, if we look at the distribution of accents in the data material it seems as if the Disney Company has opted for the former solution, i.e. more use of standard varieties. The amount of characters who speak with a General American, i.e. standardised American, accent is significantly higher in the newer films compared to the older ones, which might indicate just such an effort to make their films adapt to the political correctness of the society. The more characters they cast with a GA accent, more and more characters ‘sound the same’. By doing this, they avoid the problem of stepping on people’s toes by letting certain types of characters speak with particular accents, which could result in stereotypical images. Some could perhaps claim that this finding is anything but surprising. Letting the majority of characters speak with a standard accent, thus avoiding the potential problems of which character that should be cast with which accent is arguably the easiest solution. Still, it contradicts the expectations the present thesis held beforehand, and if the increased use of standardised accents is Disney’s strategy to conform to the societal pattern of political correctness, we could arguably question their choice.

However, that Disney seems to have chosen the strategy of standardisation rather than diversity when it comes to their use of accents in animated films could partly be ‘blamed’ on the audience. Most likely, the audiences bring with them certain expectations with regard to how certain types of characters *ought to* sound. Garrett (2010: 1), for instance, refers to the many comments that followed the release of the film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* due to the fact that some of the accents clearly broke with audiences’ expectations, seeing as Richard the Lionheart spoke Scottish English and Robin Hood spoke American English. Evidently audience expectations *do* exist, so this is likely to be something film and broadcasting companies carry in the back of their minds when producing films etc. If accents are used in ways that break the ‘socially normative language expectations’ (Garrett 2010: 1), audiences may experience this negatively, which in the end could lead to negative judgements of the film itself. Also, seeing as it is more likely that regional accents, more so than standardised varieties, will be more salient to an audience if used in unexpected settings, and thus more likely to cause fuss, an avoidance strategy may be judged to be the safest choice. If the great majority of characters speak the same, the producers are less likely to be in danger of breaking anyone’s language expectations.

In addition to the increase of General American, another finding that perhaps was slightly surprising was the marked decrease in the number of characters that was cast with an

RP accent, as well as with Regional British accents. Compared to Lippi-Green's study, the portion of RP speaking characters has decreased from 22% till 14.2%, whereas the portion of speakers with a Regional British accent has decreased from 11% till 3.5%. The total difference in the number of characters with accents from the British Isles is thus nearly as big as the difference in the number of characters which is cast with a General American accent (15.3% vs. 17.9%, respectively). This could arguably be interpreted as an indication that the increase of characters speaking General American has not come about due to a general decline in the use of accents, but rather at the expense of the amount of speakers with a British accent in particular. Why RP and Regional British are the accent types that 'suffer' the most is not easy to give a conclusive answer to. As already mentioned, even if the Walt Disney Company also aims at an international market, their primary audience is found in their home market, i.e. the US, which might explain why they choose to use American accents as their target accents, as these arguably will have the highest recognition rate. However, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006: 13) state that Americans tend to assign positive values to British English and British dialects. With regard to RP, Garrett (2010: 14) cites the English actor and comedian Stephen Fry saying that he 'sometimes wonder[s] if Americans aren't fooled by our accent into detecting a brilliance that may not really be there'. This suggests that accents from the British Isles are rather popular among Americans, which means that they are likely to have a high recognition rate as well. If this is a correct assumption, it appears somewhat strange that RP and the other British accents should be the varieties that decrease the most.

However, a factor that might be worth taking into account, and which might serve as a partial explanation to the substantial decrease in the use of British English in Disney's animated film universe, is the number of films set in England in the two studies. In Lippi-Green's data material, four of the films are fully set in England¹², whereas the present thesis contains only one film with a fully British setting (*A Christmas Carol*). Lippi-Green does not specify which characters or films that use British English, but if the use of accents reflects the films' settings, this could at least be a partial reason to why the amount of British speech is bigger in the older films, and thus why these are the accent varieties that decrease the most in the present study.

¹² These films are *Robin Hood* (1952), *101 Dalmatians* (1961), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) and *The Great Mouse Detective*. Lippi-Green does not mention specifically the setting of the various films, so to check the setting of the films included in her study, I consulted The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>)

4.2 Gender

The variable of gender was included in order to see whether the Disney films analysed in the present study would show any differences between the speech of male and female characters. Seeing as traditional sociolinguistic studies show that female speakers tend to use more standardised speech than males (Chambers 2009: 115), the present thesis hypothesised that this would be the pattern found in the data material as well. Figure 4.4 gives an overview of how the characters in the material were distributed in terms of gender.

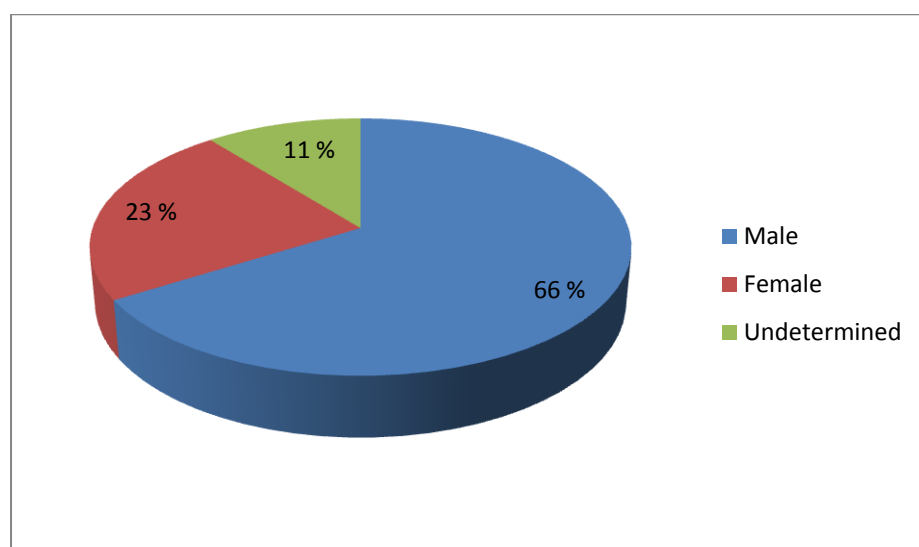


Figure 4.4. The distribution of characters in terms of gender

As the figure clearly shows, male characters are in majority, a finding that is in line with the distribution Lippi-Green found in her material.¹³ The figure also shows that 11% of the characters were unclassified with regard to their gender. This is simply due to the fact that it in some cases proved difficult – or even impossible – to decide on whether a character represented the one or the other. Characters which proved hard to classify in terms of gender were for instance robots, aliens or in some instances animals. As a general note to the distribution of gender, it is clear that Disney’s film universe is a poor reflection of modern society, seeing as the animated films portray rather disproportionate numbers of male and female characters.

If we turn to the correlation between gender and accent, figures 4.5 and 4.6 below show the distribution of accents among the female and the male characters, respectively.

¹³ In her study, 69.8% of the characters were male whereas just over 30% were female (Lippi-Green 1997: 87).

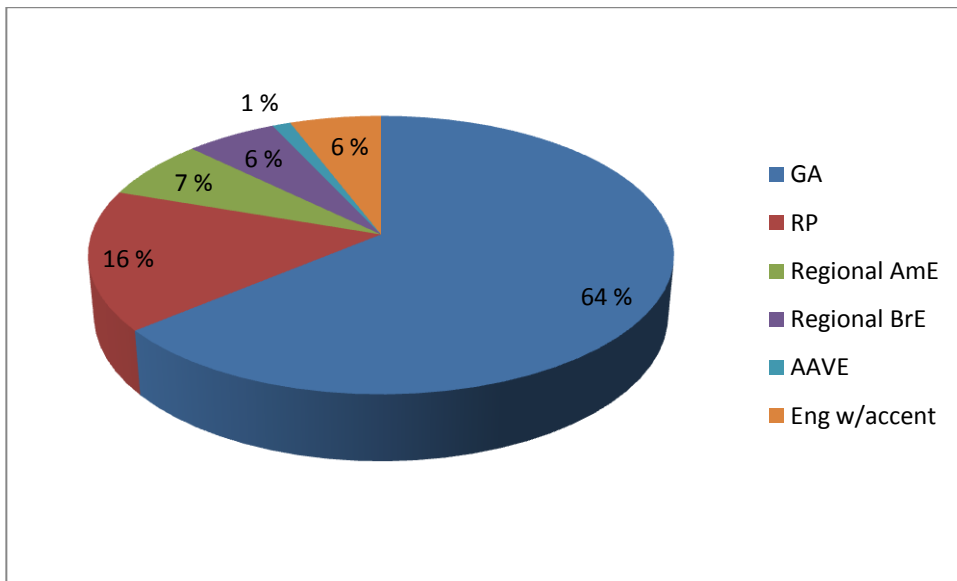


Figure 4.5. The distribution of accents among the female characters

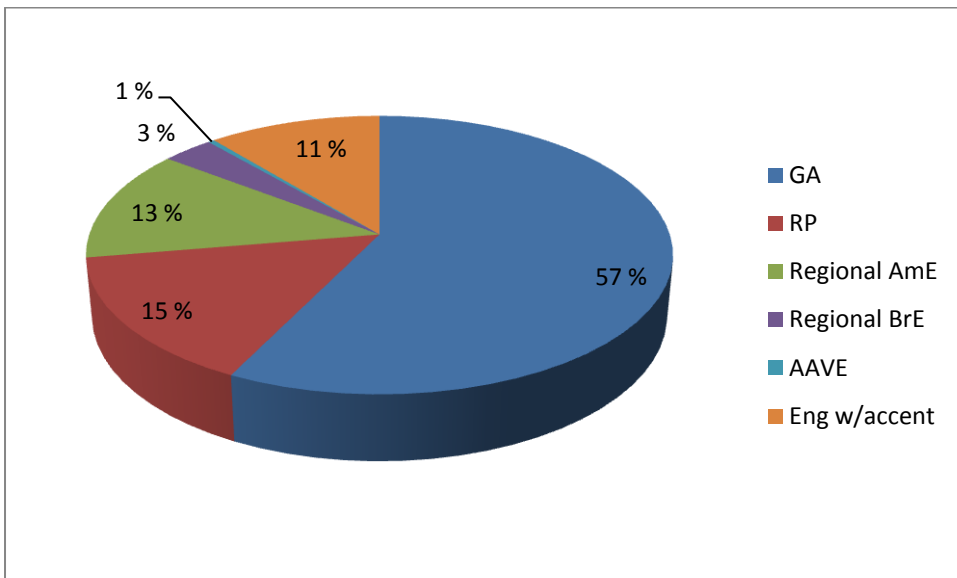


Figure 4.6. The distribution of accents among the male characters

If we compare the two charts, we see that there are differences in the amounts of characters that are cast with the various accents, although these differences are sometimes marginal. The amount of speakers cast with either an RP accent or with AAVE is approximately the same for both female and male characters. General American is the dominating accent for both genders, although it, together with Regional British, has a higher representation in percentage

among the female characters, compared to the male characters. The remaining accent varieties are all more used among the males than the females.

First and foremost it thus seems that the accent distribution follows the general pattern detected in 4.1, also when correlated to character gender. General American is clearly the dominating accent among both male and female characters. However, as the amount of female characters that are cast with a General American accent is slightly bigger in percentage than that of male characters, this seems to indicate that female characters are speaking more standardised than male characters, a finding that is in line with prior expectations (cf. 3.2.2). Also, the general pattern is that there is more variability among the male characters, as both Regional American and English with other accent are more present among the male speakers than among the females. Yet again, this is in line with both prior expectations, as well as real-life language use. As mentioned, the most common pattern with regard to the correlation of language and sex is that women speak more standardised, whereas men have a more regionally marked language (Trudgill 2000: 70), and this is seemingly the pattern that emerges in Disney's universe as well. This finding is also in line with the results from Lippi-Green's study, as she too found less variability and more use of standard varieties among females than among males (Lippi-Green 1997: 95-98).

The only accent type that diverges from the general pattern is Regional British, which has a higher percentage of speakers among the female characters than among the males. This is arguably a somewhat surprising finding, as it contradicts the typical pattern with regard to language and gender. Obviously, this occurrence is rather minor, so in many ways it serves as an exception rather than the rule and does not ruin the general tendency. Even so, a look into the reasons why just Regional British is the accent variety where the pattern is opposite of what is expected could be of interest. First of all, it could obviously be due to a coincidence, perhaps as a result of the selection of films used in the analysis. As discussed in 3.3, other films could have been included on the list, and the choice of different films could potentially have resulted in different findings.

But apart from this, are there any reasons why Regional British is deemed to be an accent type more suitable for women than men? To get closer to an answer to this question, it might prove fruitful to scrutinise the female characters that are classified as speakers of Regional British in the data material, in order to see if they have any common features. The female characters in question are the Fates (from *Hercules*), Bob Cratchit's wife and Mrs Dilbert (both from *A Christmas Carol*). The first common feature of these characters is the regional British variety they speak. As previously explained (cf. 3.1.4), Regional British has

been treated as an umbrella category, consisting of more than one sub-type of accents, where the most likely candidates to appear were deemed to be either Scottish or Irish English. However, all of these female characters actually speak Cockney, which is the regional accent traditionally associated with working-class speakers from the East End of London. Traditionally, this has also been an accent that has been somewhat stigmatized (Melchers and Shaw 2003: 33), so when this particular variety is the regional British accent deemed to be the most suitable to these female characters, it does not exactly send a very positive signal. If we take into account that none of the female characters that are cast with this accent type are particularly positive characters either, it might indicate that the Cockney accent is used to highlight the negative aspects of these characters. The three Fates, bearing some resemblance to the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, are unsympathetic characters with a rather ominous aura. They emerge as rather nagging, old women in every possible way, including their visual appearances and how their voices sound. Both Cratchit's wife and Mrs. Dilbert are also characters with much of the same features as the three Fates: not very sympathetic, rather nagging and impertinent, and Mrs. Dilbert in particular is portrayed as less intelligent and less sophisticated.

Of course, it is impossible to draw a general conclusion with regard to the use of this particular accent type simply based on such a small number of characters. The occurrences of Regional British accents are not overwhelming in the data material as a whole, so to conclude on any patterns might be difficult, but even if the quantity of the data material is rather small, tendencies may still come in view. And one such tendency is clearly that Cockney is an accent that fits rather well to unsympathetic, nagging women of low social class. This tendency becomes increasingly clear if we compare with the varieties of regional British accents the male characters are cast with, as Scottish and Irish English are the accents prevailing here.

A particularly good illustration of the contrast between a female and a male character could be found in *The Christmas Carol*, with Bob Cratchit and his wife. As already established, the female character is cast with a Cockney accent, characterised by among other things H-dropping and T-glottalling. Based on the fact that she is a working-class woman from London, the accent fits the character role well. Bob Cratchit, on the other hand, is not cast with a Cockney accent, but rather with an accent more resembling modified RP, i.e. a more standardised variant. Considering the fact that Bob Cratchit has the same regional and social backdrop as his wife, one would expect that they both were cast with the same accent. However, if we look at how the two characters appear, we clearly see a difference in their personal appearance. Where Bob Cratchit appears mellow and sympathetic, his wife appears

as rather unsympathetic and somewhat nagging. Bob Cratchit also plays more of a hero role in the story as a whole, emerging as one of the most important characters and one the audience should sympathise with. His wife, on the other hand, plays a supporting part, and although she is an important aide to her husband, she is not one we automatically take to, particularly due to her little appealing personality traits. Without direct knowledge of the decision making process with regard to the casting of these accents, it is of course impossible to know if the choices of accents in this case were deliberate, but there is no two ways about the fact that they appear to be chosen based on a judgement of which accent that fits best to the kind of impression they want the character to give.

4.3 Ethnicity

The variable of character ethnicity was included on the basis of the assumption that, due to an increased pressure to appear politically correct, the characters' ethnic origin could be something that potentially would affect the casting of accents. A working hypothesis was that the efforts to appear politically correct would result in more authentic use of accents. As mentioned in 3.2.3, the variable was made binary in order to ease the classification of the characters, even if this arguably resulted in a distinction that was somewhat politically incorrect. Those characters classified as *non-ethnic* are white characters whereas the label *ethnic* refers to non-white characters (cf. 3.2.3). Figure 4.7 shows the general distribution of characters in the data material, in terms of ethnicity.

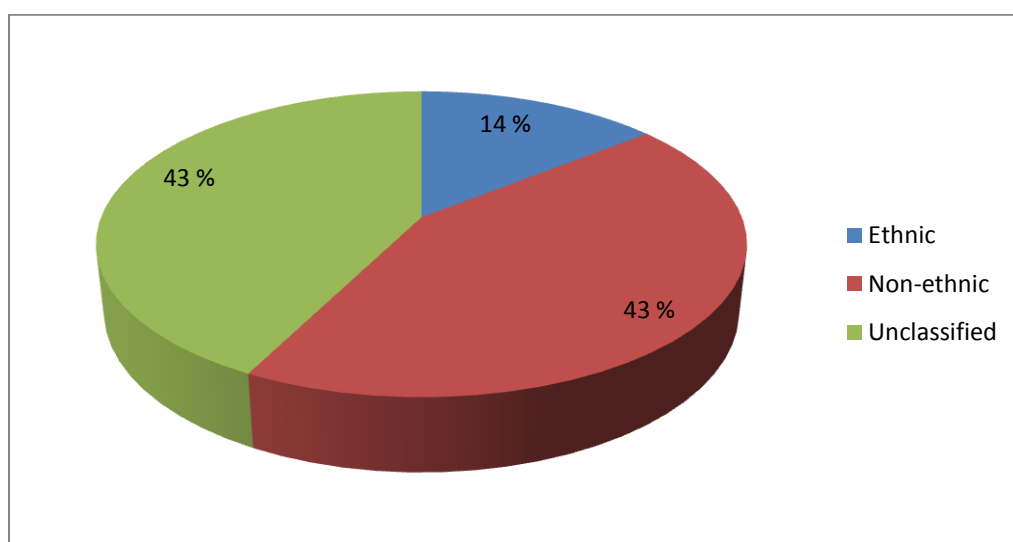


Figure 4.7. The distribution of characters in terms of ethnicity

Firstly, as the chart shows, a rather large percentage of the characters had to be left unclassified. A great portion of the characters that appear in Disney films are animals, monsters, ghosts, etc. – creatures to which it is impossible to assign any kind of ethnicity. Leaving all these characters aside, we can still clearly see that what I have defined as non-ethnic characters are in majority in the data material. Vincent Faherty's (2001) study of race, gender and social vulnerability in Disney animated films points out that "the high percentage of European and European-American characters may be due to the fact that many of the Disney classic films are based on Western European folk tales" (Faherty 2001: 3), and indeed this could serve as a partial explanation to the majority of non-ethnic characters. However, if we take into account the films that constitute the sample in the present thesis, this might not be very valid as an explanation after all, seeing as a fair few of the films are new stories and not based on old folk tales. Still, seeing as the setting of most stories is somewhere in the Western world, this might explain why European/European-Americans (i.e. white characters) are the dominant group. Whether this predomination of non-ethnic characters gives a realistic reflection of society, is a whole different matter. The Disney Company has been accused of presenting a somewhat skewed picture of the world (cf. e.g. Lippi-Green 1997), and there is no doubt that a fictive world where only 14% of the 'inhabitants' are of ethnic origin, is a poor representation of the real world. With the release of *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009, which was the first Disney film with an African-American protagonist, it might seem that Disney was trying to take a small step towards ridding themselves of their somewhat racially biased past. *The Princess and the Frog* will be given some extra attention, due to its special status as the first film with an African-American heroine, but before taking a closer look at this film and the accents used in it, we will look at the general distribution of accents among the ethnic and the non-ethnic characters.

Figures 4.8 and 4.9 show the distribution of accents among ethnic and non-ethnic characters, respectively. Once again, the charts show that General American is the accent that has the highest representation in percentage among the characters, regardless of the characters' ethnic origin. Thus, this variable also falls in line with the overall pattern that emerged in the general distribution of the accents (cf. 4.1). In one way, this might not be too surprising, considering the different settings of the films. As a fair few of the films either have an American setting, or is set in some mythical place, of which there are no particular language expectancies, it might be natural that General American is the dominant accent type. But one might expect that in the films where the Disney Company had the chance to use as

authentic speech as possible, they would do just that. However, this is definitely not always the case.

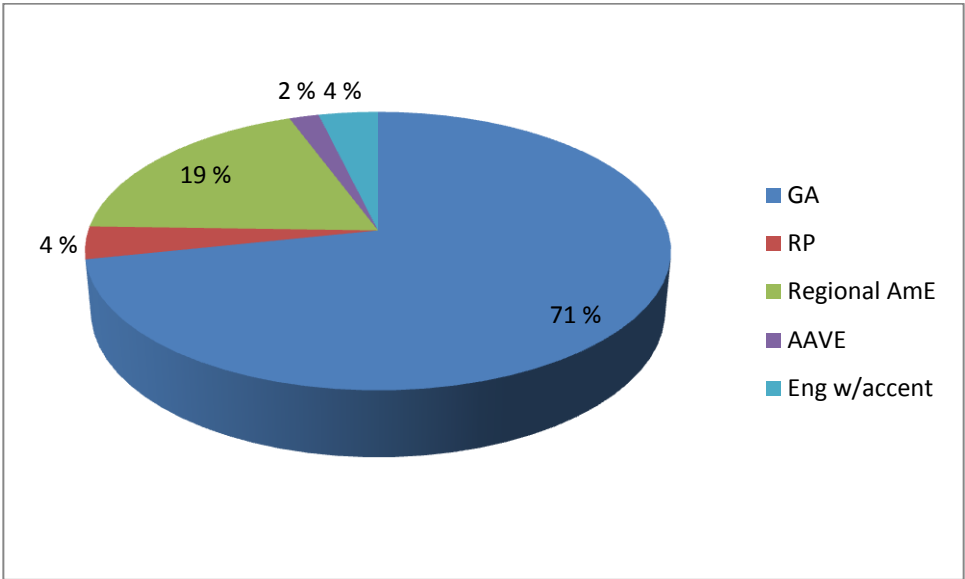


Figure 4.8. The distribution of accents among ethnic characters

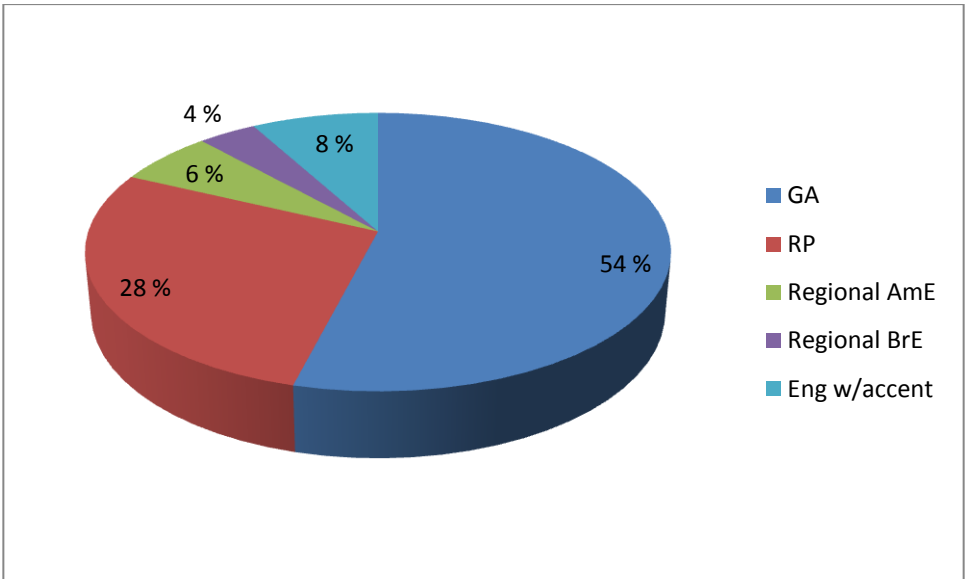


Figure 4.9. The distribution of accents among non-ethnic characters

The arguably best example of a film where the characters' ethnic origin is not reflected in the characters' accent is *Mulan* (1998). This film tells the story of the young Chinese girl Mulan, who impersonates a man in order to take her father's place in the army fighting against a Hun invasion. In other words, we are here dealing with a film where the majority of the characters

– at least the characters to which the variable of ethnicity is applicable – are of ethnic origin and the story itself is set in China, so we would expect that this would be reflected in the characters’ speech. However, this is not the case. Out of the sixteen characters that could be characterised in terms of ethnicity, only *one* of them speaks with a foreign-accented English. Thirteen out of sixteen characters, i.e. by far the majority, are classified as having a General American accent, whereas the two remaining ones are classified as speaking RP and Regional American, respectively. The lack of correlation between ethnicity and accent variety is thus substantial.

In one way, this might not be very surprising if we take into account when the film was released. According to Hughes (2010: 6), political correctness is ‘still a relatively new phenomenon’. Thus, at the time the film was produced, the use of authentic language was perhaps not too high on any film producers’ agenda. Therefore, letting all the characters of a film speak with a foreign-accented English would arguably have been somewhat controversial at the time, and could easily have alienated the audience somewhat. But this leads to the following question: if the Disney Company first decided to use General American for this film, why did they single out three characters and cast them with other accents? That Mulan’s father was cast with a Chinese-English accent, as the only one of the ethnic characters, makes him stand out in comparison to the others. His character is portrayed as authoritative and very honourable, as he sees it as an honour to protect his country and his family, and this is something he is willing to do even if his health is poorly and he is likely to die in the attempt. In other words, he is portrayed as very firm in character and with a strong sense of ethics, i.e. solely positive traits. If these character traits, and the way he appears, are judged to be character traits that give a good stereotypical image of the Chinese, this could perhaps explain why he is the only one that is cast with a Chinese-accented English. However, the choice to use a Chinese-accented English may also have been done in order to make the character stand out in a more negative way. Even if Mulan’s father is portrayed as an honourable man, he is also physically weak. The reason why Mulan decides to impersonate a man so that she can go into the army is just because her father is ill and incapable of managing it himself. Seeing as he is unable to carry out the duty of conscription like all the other men in his society, he is in many ways left as rather weak and even somewhat emasculated. By letting him speak a different accent, it is created a distinction between him, the weak male who is unable to fulfil his responsibilities, and all the others, who are more than capable of doing what is expected of them and even more. Thus, if we assume that the Disney Company indeed uses accents in a conscious manner, so that there is no coincidence that precisely Mulan’s father is the

character that speaks with a Chinese accent, the reason may be a wish to emphasise the negative aspects of the character.

As mentioned, there were also two more characters that were given other accents than GA in this film. Those were a helper woman appearing quite early in the story, who was cast with an RP accent, and Yao, one of Mulan's fellow soldiers, whom I classified as speaking Regional American, more specifically a New York accent. Arguably, we could claim that using these accents in a film where the story is set in China makes even less sense than casting all of the characters with GA or letting only one of them speak with a Chinese accent. The helper woman has a rather peripheral role in the beginning of the story, where she assists in preparing Mulan to meet the Matchmaker, a woman whose task it is to determine girls' marriage age. There is no particular reason why she should be cast with an RP accent, as there seemingly is no particular quality about her that an RP accent would emphasise. Particularly considering that she has a rather fleeting appearance as well, it does seem rather odd that she is assigned an RP accent. Coming across a Chinese soldier who speaks with a New York accent is also rather odd. However, in relation to Yao, there are certain features of his character that might shed light on why a NY accent was chosen as the most suitable. As already mentioned in the description of the different accents in chapter 3, the NY accent is arguably one of the most stigmatised regional American accents, and Wells (1982: 502) claims that 'there is no other American city whose speech evokes such disapproval'. Speakers with a NY accent are thus not always judged very positively. If the use of accents in the Disney universe in any way reflects linguistic stereotypes found in the real world, we would therefore expect to find the NY accent used for characters that arguably would not be placed highest on the social ladder. Yao is one such character. He appears to be rather gruff and somewhat of a quarreller. He is not portrayed as the most intelligent character either, and appears to take on the part of a comic relief in the story. In other words, he is a character it is easy to look down upon, which in many ways fits perfectly with the stereotypical image many (Americans) have of the typical NY speaker.

In other words, *Mulan* is a prime example of the rather inaccurate representation of characters that may be found in Disney's universe. In addition to *Mulan*, the films *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000) and *Lilo and Stitch* (2002) also serve as examples of films which contain a discrepancy between the characters' ethnicity and their language. The former is set in South America and the latter in Hawaii, but there is no link between the accents used and the characters' ethnicity, as GA is the predominant accent in both films. Gregory (2010) points at the fact that accusations of racism and cultural inaccuracies have been raised against

the Disney Company at several occasions, and it might seem as if there has at least been a certain ring of truth to it. However, as mentioned previously, there are certain indications that a change has been in the making in recent years, and that efforts have been made in order to get things more authentic.

Some of the films featuring primarily non-ethnic characters, but that are set elsewhere than the US, also deserve some attention. In the selection of films used in the present thesis, *Ratatouille* (2007) and *A Christmas Carol* (2009) are both set elsewhere than in the US. The first film is fully set in France, more precisely in Paris, whereas the latter takes place in London, Great Britain. In *Ratatouille*, the majority of the characters speak with a clear French accent, which suits well to the setting of the film. There are of course exceptions, for instance the hero who speaks GA¹⁴. The same goes for *A Christmas Carol*. The accents that are used reflect the setting of the film well, as nearly all of the characters are cast with either RP or a Regional British accent. Thus, despite a few exceptions in these films, there is no doubt that the use of language is much more authentic, compared to for instance *Mulan*. The question that thus remains is whether the increased authenticity in the casting of the accents has come about due to an increased pressure from outside influences to appear more authentic, or whether there may be other explanations for the apparent change. In *Ratatouille*, for instance, all the characters that speak with a French-accented English are chefs. In her Disney-study, Lippi-Green did a mini-case study on the representation of the French in the films she analysed, and according to her, “the truly French, the prototypical French, are those persons associated with food preparation or presentation [...]” (Lippi-Green 1997: 100). In other words, the reason why these characters are cast with a French-accented English might not be primarily the setting of the story as such, but rather that the characters fit the stereotypical representation of the French so well. By letting them speak French-accented English, this helps to substantiate the portrayal of the characters as truly French.

With regard to *A Christmas Carol*, it is likely that the nature of the story may have had an influence on which accents that were used. After all, *A Christmas Carol* is originally a British literary work by arguably one of the most well-known British authors of all time, i.e. it is archetypal British and a piece of cultural heritage. It is of course impossible to know whether this mattered in any way when the decisions regarding the use of various accents in the film were taken, but I find it likely that this has made an impact. One could of course argue that efforts to avoid taking liberties when transferring literary works onto the screen is

¹⁴This will be further discussed in relation to the discussion of character roles.

an argument that does not hold, as film producers, incl. Disney, regularly take poetic licences in such circumstances. However, it is clear that the Disney Company has tried to stick as closely to the original story as possible in their production of this film, and a way of staying true to the story is to ensure that the use of language is as authentic as possible. Obviously, whatever the motivation behind the use of British accents is, the outcome is the same, as the accent use is authentic with regard to the setting of the story. Nevertheless, the likelihood that the authentic language use is due to a societal pressure to appear politically correct, rather than an effort to avoid messing too much with a literary work, is not very high. Thus, even if the Disney Company seemingly has become more authentic, this may come about due to other things than as a reflection of societal changes. Another factor that might serve as an explanation why these films have a more authentic use of language is obviously the fact that they primarily feature non-ethnic characters. It might seem that Disney traditionally has been cautious to make use of both ethnicity and language as devices in the same films. Bearing in mind Barker's (2010) point that Disney wishes to appeal to the broad markets, they might fear that it will be too controversial to let ethnic characters use authentic languages as well, whereas if the characters are non-ethnic, authentic use of language may not be in danger of alienating the audience.

4.3.1 *The Princess and the Frog* - a case study

In relation to ethnicity and accents, *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) deserves some extra attention. When released in 2009, it became the first animated feature film with an African-American woman in the lead, which was seen as an effort by Disney to deal with a past that by many was claimed to have racist traces. Prior to the production of the film, Disney even consulted both television host Oprah Winfrey, as well as members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to ensure that they represented the African-American characters, in particular the heroine Tiana, in the best possible way (Breux 2010). This in itself is a clear indication that they were aware that the film would be scrutinised by critics to a much greater extent than usual, thus leaving them with a necessity to ensure that they would get things right, i.e. that the characters and the culture would be presented in an accurate and politically correct manner. However, despite all these efforts, the film received mixed responses, from both critics and the popular audience alike. First and foremost, it did not become the roaring success at the box office as previous Disney films had been (Breux 2010). Secondly, many critical voices were raised at the fact that in the first

animated feature film with an African-American woman in the lead, the heroine spends more time onscreen in an anthropomorphic form, more precisely a frog, than as an actual human being (cf. e.g. Gregory 2010, Gehlawat 2010).

What kind of considerations that were taken in relation to what accents the various characters in *The Princess and the Frog* ought to be given, and whether this was an issue that was part of their effort to get things right, is left unsaid. But there is no doubt that the accents we meet in this film leave us with a somewhat mixed impression with regard to the representation of the various characters. The first thing that makes the film stand out somewhat in terms of accents is that none of the characters speak General American. Seeing as this is a film with a fully American setting, and considering the track record of the other films in the study with similar settings, this is rather surprising. Instead of giving the characters a General American accent, nearly all the characters speak Southern. Taking into account that the film is set in the American south, it does indeed seem as if the Disney Company has tried to give the characters accents that reflect the setting of the film. The story takes place in New Orleans, i.e. in the South, and most of the characters can indeed be classified as *Southern*, though to variable extents.

However, in the analysis of the film I also discovered the presence of the regional variety known as *Cajun English*, a variety stemming from the French language, and primarily used in the Bayou Teche area (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 202), which is the exact area where the story of *The Princess and the Frog* takes place. Prior to the actual analysis, this was not an accent that was expected to crop up in the material, but seeing as it *is* used – though in a very modest proportion – we cannot help but wonder why it is not used more. If the Disney Company aimed at giving the characters as authentic accents as possible, they could thus arguably have given their characters an even more authentic accent variety than “just” *Southern*. A potential, and probably also the most likely, explanation to this, is what Barker (2010: 483) has referred to as ‘the sanitized aesthetic’, i.e. Disney’s wish to appeal to the broad markets. Being authentic in terms of using regional accents is positive, but arguably only to a certain extent, as the use of too regionalised varieties could alienate parts of the audience.

The wish to appeal to the broad markets and offer something for everyone could perhaps explain the choice of accents for both Tiana and her parents, as well as the male lead Prince Naveen. With Tiana and her parents being portrayed as African-American characters, the expectations prior to the analysis were that they would be speaking AAVE. However, in line with the majority of the cast of characters, they too are given a mainstream Southern

accent. There is no way of knowing what kind of discussions that have been on the agenda in relation to what accents these characters ought to be given, or indeed whether there has been any discussions at all. By giving them a Southern accent, the link between story setting and character accents is kept intact, but in one way we could claim that the link between character accent and ethnicity is not. However, taking into account that being African-American does not automatically entail that you are a speaker of AAVE (cf. 3.1.5), it is arguably not too much of an issue that Tiana and her parents, as well as the rest of the African-American characters, are given a Southern accent rather than AAVE. It is also likely that if they had been given an AAVE accent, this could have created some controversy. Barker (2010: 492) points to the fact that ‘Disney’s transformation of princess characters over the years is a telling indication of the changing demographics and audiences in the USA since the 1930s’, and there is no doubt that the society has changed enough in recent decades for the audience to accept African-Americans playing the lead role even in Disney’s animated universe.

The question that thus remains is whether the audience would have accepted an African-American princess with an AAVE accent as well. The Disney Company obviously doubts this. Not only do they choose to cast the characters with a Southern accent, but Tiana and her parents are arguably the ones that speak with the most moderate Southern accent among the cast of characters as well. Their accents lack all the broadest regional features we often find in the Southern accent variety, like TH-stopping and L-vocalisation, and their accents are also variably rhotic, as opposed to the more vernacular varieties of Southern, which traditionally are non-rhotic. If we also take into account that Tiana and her parents are low class, and that other characters with the same social background have much broader accents, this clearly indicates that the marked accent differences are not ‘realistic’. Thus, the choices of accents emerge as rather paradoxical, and in many ways it seems as if the Disney Company has tried to get things right with regard to the portrayal of these characters, but without being entirely successful. To ensure the authenticity with regard to the setting, and arguably also the characters’ ethnicity, they could not have been given a GA accent, but it appears as if Disney has tried to moderate the main characters’ Southern accent to such an extent that it ends up being in close proximity to General American anyway. A finding like this falls neatly in line with some of the critique that was raised against Disney following the release of *The Princess and the Frog*. Gregory (2010: 434-435), for instance, claims that even if the film ‘is premised on the commercial success of its first black princess’, Disney still ‘reasserts its “possessive investment in whiteness”’, to not alienate its mainstream audience.

Thus, Disney seemingly tries to avoid being too controversial, perhaps out of fear for not appealing to the broad markets.

This might arguably also explain the portrayal of the male lead Prince Naveen, another aspect that has been heavily commented upon by scholars following the release of the film in 2009 (cf. e.g. Barker 2010, Gehlawat 2010). First of all, Prince Naveen is attempted cast as a race-neutral character. It is evident that he is not supposed to appear as someone from the US, but Disney has clearly made every effort to obfuscate his origins. His name is Indian, meaning ‘new’ in Hindi (Gehlawat 2010: 423), his skin-tone is neither white nor dark, he has a butler who speaks British and he comes from the fictive kingdom of Maldonia. His accent is also impossible to place as other than foreign-accented English. Barker (2010: 494) claims he has a Brazilian accent, but this is likely to be an assertion based on the fact that the character is voiced by a Brazilian actor, rather than something that springs from the accent the character actually has. Prince Naveen’s accent has, in my opinion, more of a resemblance to French-accented English, an assertion which can be substantiated by the fact that he obviously knows French, as he translates a French utterance from Ray the firefly. However, seeing as his origin is a fictitious kingdom of unknown location, as well as the fact that his accent sends somewhat mixed signals with regard to the diagnostic features, it is impossible to give any conclusive answer to his accent. As with Tiana and her parents, there is every reason to question why Disney has chosen to portray Prince Naveen in the way they have. When the setting of the rest of the film, as well as the portrayals of the remaining characters, is attempted to be kept as authentic as possible, to ensure that they “get it right” (Gregory 2010: 442), it seems paradoxical that they choose to make the character of Prince Naveen so confusing. Gehlawat raises the question of whether this could be related to the fear of outsiders that grew strong in the aftermath of 9/11:

[...] one could posit, particularly in the post-9/11 era, that fear of outsiders and newly arrived immigrants (particularly those from non-European countries) continues to exist in the United States today and that Disney, ever-mindful of this, deliberately nuanced the character of Naveen so as to obfuscate any clear-cut ethnic origin and, in the process, avoid offending any particular demographic base. (Gehlawat 2010: 424)

Gehlawat thus suggests that the choices Disney takes with regard to how they portray various characters in their films, both in terms of accents and other traits, are influenced by the attitudes that prevail in the American society at every given point in time. The interesting aspect in all of this, though, is the fact that Prince Naveen holds the role as one of the heroes in this film, i.e. he is a positive character. Thus, even if he had been given a proper racial

identity and an authentic accent, Disney would have projected a positive, rather than an offending, image of this ‘outsider’, and hence also his ethnic origins. Instead, they have arguably let themselves be influenced by Americans’ scepticism towards outsiders, and they reflect this by portraying Prince Naveen’s ethnicity as fuzzily as possible, perhaps in fear of alienating themselves from their mainstream audience.

4.4 Level of sophistication

As mentioned in chapter 3, level of sophistication was not one of the original variables that were included as part of the study. However, in the course of the study, it became evident that this could be a variable worth investigating. Studies show that accent is a potential influence when listeners pass judgments on speakers with regard to their personal qualities, and that speakers of standard varieties tend to be judged as e.g. more sophisticated and more intelligent compared to speakers of regional accents (cf. e.g. Luhman 1990, Edwards 1999, Garrett 2010). Thus, the working assumption is that, insofar as Disney’s animated universe reflects attitudes that prevail in the real world, it will be possible to see differences in the use of accents among characters of high and low sophistication. Figure 4.10 shows the distribution of sophisticated vs. unsophisticated characters in the data material.

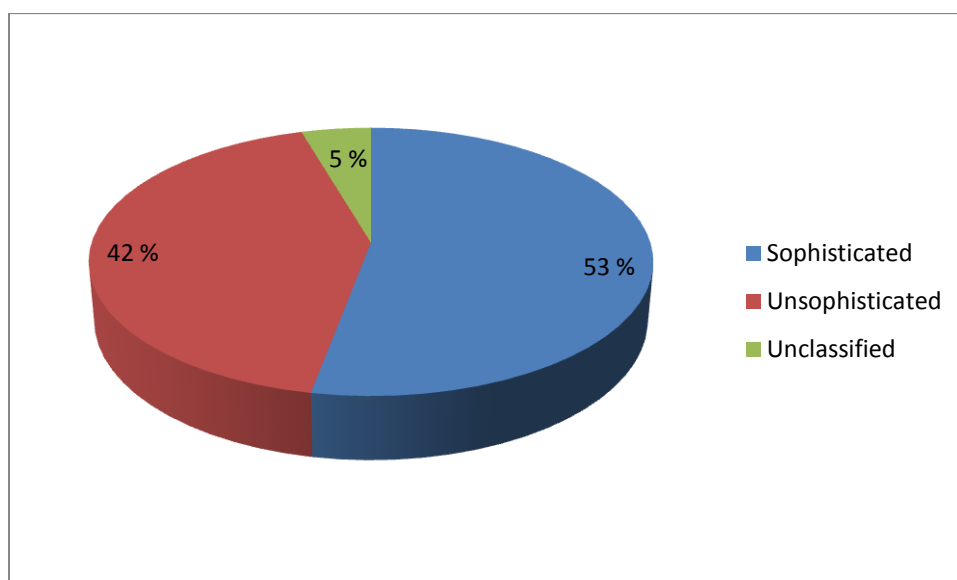


Figure 4.10. The distribution of characters in terms of level of sophistication

There is a slight overweight of characters classified as having a high level of sophistication, though the proportional difference between the percentages of sophisticated and unsophisticated characters was not massive in any way. A mere 5% of the characters were also left unclassified, seeing as the variable of sophistication was not judged to fit in every circumstance. Examples of characters that were left out of this classification could be for instance narrators or groups of characters, e.g. choirs.

Figures 4.11 and 4.12 below show the distribution of accents among sophisticated and unsophisticated characters, respectively. As with the other variables, the general pattern emerging seems to be that General American is by far the dominating accent regardless of the characters' level of sophistication. However, the percentage of characters that are classified as GA speakers is higher among those of high sophistication than among characters of low sophistication. If we consider the amount of RP speakers as well, seeing as RP too is a standard variety, this accent variety is much more represented among the speakers classified as having a high level of sophistication. Thus, even if GA is highly represented among unsophisticated characters as well, the percentage scores clearly show a higher overall presence of standard varieties among the sophisticated characters. When it comes to the regional varieties, the pattern is reversed. Both the accent categories Regional American English and Regional British English are much more represented among characters classified as unsophisticated, compared to the sophisticated ones. As for the two remaining accent categories, i.e. English with other accent and AAVE, these have roughly the same distribution among both sophisticated and unsophisticated characters.

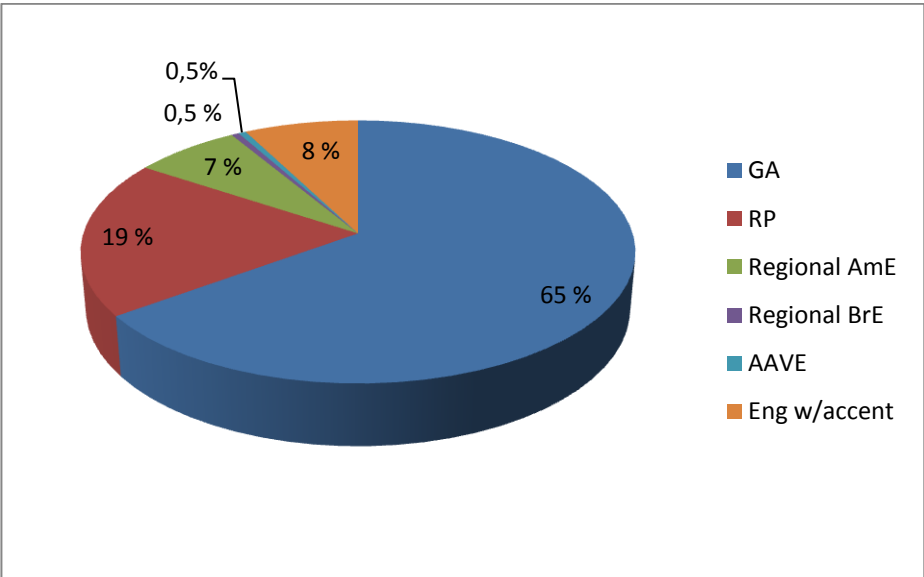


Figure 4.11. The distribution of accents among sophisticated characters

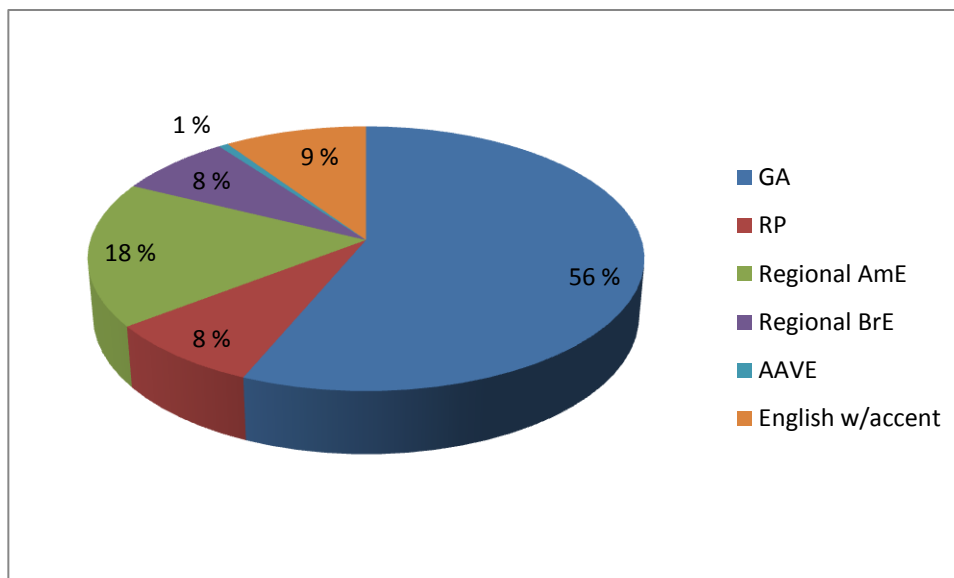


Figure 4.12. The distribution of accents among unsophisticated characters

Thus, the overall pattern seems to at least lend some support to the expectation in the present thesis. If we consider GA and RP to be equal in terms of their status as standard accents, a staggering total of 84% of the sophisticated characters are classified as having a standard accent, compared to ‘only’ 64% of the unsophisticated. This arguably indicates that standard accents are judged to be more fitting to characters of high sophistication. If we draw lines to real-life language use, and listeners’ attitudes towards speakers of various accents, this finding is arguably not all that surprising. As previously mentioned, studies show that listeners tend to assign other qualities to speakers with standard accents, compared to speakers of regional varieties, and one such quality is precisely the speaker’s level of sophistication (cf. e.g. Luhman 1990). In this regard, the findings related to RP are arguably more interesting than the findings related to GA. When evaluated, RP has traditionally tended to be evaluated highly on such things as prestige (cf. e.g. Coupland and Bishop 2007), which indicates that it is considered as a marker of high social status. Taking into account that prestige and high social status are qualities that go hand in hand with being perceived as highly sophisticated, this might thus serve as an explanation why RP is much more used among the characters classified as having a high level of sophistication. Also, if we compare the presence of RP among the sophisticated characters to the overall presence of RP in the data material as a whole (cf. table 4.1), we see that RP is overrepresented in this category, which might indicate traces of a potential correlation with regard to RP and the characters’ level of sophistication. Thus, it seems as if the Disney universe reflects the stereotypical beliefs attached to RP in the

way they use this accent, i.e. by using it predominantly for characters with a high level of sophistication.

Bearing in mind Stephen Fry's comment, that he 'sometimes wonder[s] if Americans aren't fooled by [Britons'] accent into detecting a brilliance that may not really be there' (Stephen Fry 2007, cited in Garrett 2010: 14), the findings of the present study may suggest that Fry was rather spot on in his observations. Obviously, seeing as RP is found among the unsophisticated characters as well, this arguably implies that the correlation between the use of RP and the characters' level of sophistication is not absolute. Whether this could indicate an ongoing change, or whether the distribution among characters of high and low sophistication has been like this also in the films released prior to the ones included in the present study, is impossible to tell, seeing as Lippi-Green did not investigate this variable in her study. Studies do indeed show that attitudes towards RP seem to be changing (cf. e.g. Trudgill 2002, Fabricius 2002), which arguably could result in a change in the usage of this accent e.g. in relation to portrayals of characters, but since these studies are usually carried out in the U.K., it is highly uncertain whether the results are transferable to the American society. Working under the assumption that Disney's universe reflects real-life attitudes, the likelihood of Disney being most influenced by the attitudes prevailing in the American society, rather than e.g. the British, is big. Thus, a change in the attitudes towards RP among people in the U.K. will not necessarily influence a potential correlation between the use of the accent and the characters' level of sophistication in a Disney production.

However, the most interesting findings with regard to the distribution of accents among characters of high and low sophistication are definitely related to the use of both Regional British English and Regional American English. The former accent category is virtually non-existent among the sophisticated characters, whereas it is relatively well-represented among those characters that have a low level of sophistication. Clearly, sophistication and Regional British English accents are not two things that are deemed to fit particularly well together. In many ways, this is in line with general findings from sociolinguistic attitudinal studies of real-life speech, which suggest that speakers of regional varieties tend to be judged as less sophisticated than speakers of more standardised accents. At the same time, this finding arguably also contrasts somewhat with the claim from Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006: 13), that 'Americans [...] assign positive value to British dialects'. If that is the case, it is rather odd that British accents are used to portray characters in a less positive way. Obviously, if a character is classified as having a low level of sophistication, it is in no way tantamount to him or her being a *negative* character as such, if we interpret

negative in the sense of being evil or villainous. But still, if you are perceived as unsophisticated, you are judged to be a rather simple-minded and not very socially apt person, which is not exactly equal to an overly positive evaluation either. Thus, the correlation that exists among Regional British English and characters' low level of sophistication in Disney's universe does not reflect a very positive set of attitudes towards speakers of these accents.

Also Regional American is much more used among the characters classified as having a low level of sophistication. Additionally, if we compare to the overall use of Regional American accents in the data material as a whole, we see that Regional American is overrepresented among the unsophisticated characters, seeing as the total percentage of speakers with a Regional American accent is 11.8%, whereas among the unsophisticated characters, the amount is 18%. Seeing as Regional American is one of the umbrella categories, it could be interesting to see beyond the total percentage score and look at what kind of regional accents that were present in the material. Figure 4.13 shows the internal distribution of regional American accents among the characters of low sophistication.

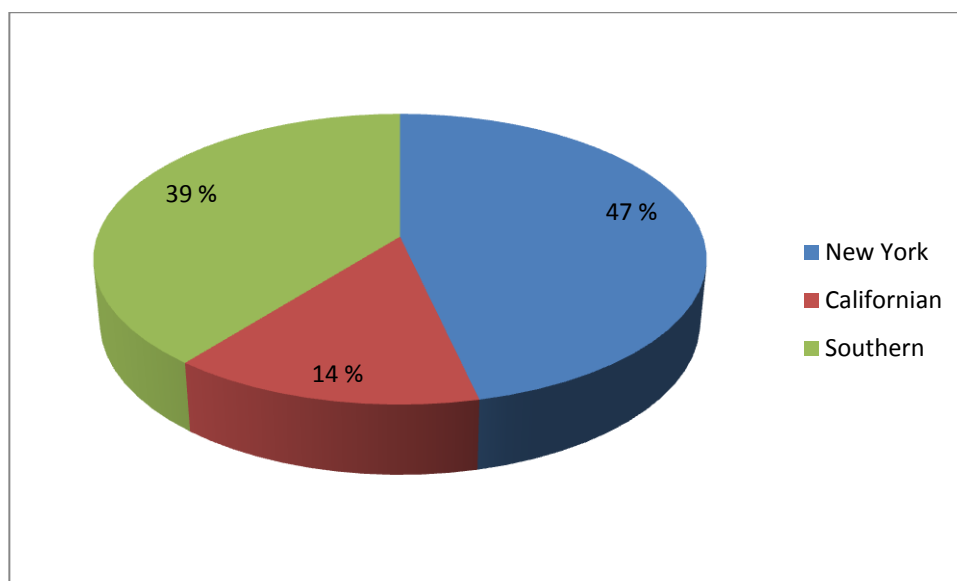


Figure 4.13. The distribution of regional American accents among the unsophisticated characters

As the figure tells us, there were three different regional accents that were used among these characters, two of them being substantially higher represented than the third. Prior to the study, Californian English was not an accent that was expected to be found, but in *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *The Wild* (2006), respectively, some of the characters had a very distinctive Californian twang to their accent. Common denominators for the characters that were

classified as having a Californian accent were that they were depicted as laid-back and cool, thus giving associations to the stereotypical Californian ‘surfer dude’. Even though there are too few characters with this accent to draw any kind of firm conclusions with regard to how the accent is used, there seems to be indications that the accent is chosen particularly to create associations with the audience.

The two other regional American accents that were detected among the unsophisticated characters were the accents from New York and the American South, respectively. Even though both varieties were used almost to the same extent, there are certain differences in their usage that is worth commenting on. First of all, the New York accent is not only the accent that is used the most, it is also the accent that has the highest diachronic usage. By this I mean that the New York accent is used for characters of low sophistication in films from the whole time period under scrutiny in the present study. The Southern accent is used by an almost equally high percentage of characters, but the major difference is that most of these characters belong to the same film, namely *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). This finding could be interpreted in the direction that the New York accent has a tradition of being a common accent to use in order to depict characters of low sophistication. As already mentioned in relation to the discussion of the character named Yao, from the film *Mulan* (1998) (cf. 4.3), this is not really a surprising finding, bearing in mind the status of the NY accent. Wells (1982: 502) states that ‘there is no other American city whose speech evokes such disapproval’ and that ‘the New York accent lacks not only overt but also covert prestige’. In other words, the stereotypical image of speakers with a NY accent is not overly positive, and if we take into account what kind of characters that are given this accent in the Disney universe, it appears that these attitudes are reflected in the way the accent is used.

The use of accents in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) has already been discussed in 4.3.1, but since that discussion was primarily from the perspective of ethnicity, the use of accents in relation with the characters’ level of sophistication deserves a comment as well. As mentioned, there is extensive use of regional accents in this film, a finding that was interpreted as an effort to mirror the setting of the film as authentically as possible. This means that most of the characters speak with a Southern accent. However, if we look at what type of the Southern accent is used among characters with different levels of sophistication, a pattern still seems to be emerging. A particular accent often varies along a continuum ranging from very moderate pronunciations to broad non-standard pronunciations and this is clearly a device Disney has chosen to make use of in *The Princess and the Frog*. Thus, even if the majority of the characters speak with a Southern accent, their degree of non-standard

pronunciations varies depending on their level of sophistication. The less sophisticated the characters are depicted, the more traces of non-standard diagnostic features can be detected. As previously discussed, Tiana (i.e. the heroine) and her parents speak with a rather moderate Southern accent, resulting in a close proximity to GA, an observation that fits rather well with their classification as sophisticated characters. Other characters, e.g. Louis the alligator, Buford, Madam Odie and the three hunters, who are classified as characters of rather low sophistication, use several non-standard traits in their Southern speech. Examples of such features could be TH-stopping, L-vocalisation and copula deletion. By doing this, a clear distinction is drawn between characters of high and low sophistication simply by giving the characters different Southern accents. This distinction is obviously supported by the characters' visual appearance as well, but the accent they speak clearly strengthens how the different characters are portrayed. Again, this arguably exemplifies that Disney seems to equate regional accents and low levels of sophistication, and even in cases where they make every effort to try to 'get it right' (Gregory 2010: 442), like *The Princess and the Frog*, they still seem to be unable to let go of this device in order to project the desired images of their characters. By doing this, the Disney universe reflects and potentially strengthens the attitudes that commonly are found in the real world, with relation to attitudes towards speakers of regional accents.

4.5 Character roles

All the previous variables have looked at whether there are correlations between certain traits of the characters and the accent they speak. In this sub-section the focus will be on potential correlations between the roles the various characters hold in the films and the accent they speak. The working hypothesis of the present thesis was that such systematic patterns would be possible to detect, e.g. it was expected that heroes/heroines were more likely to speak GA than others, whereas the majority of the regional accents were most likely to be found among the aides (cf.1.4). As outlined in chapter 3, the characters were classified as having one of the following seven character roles: hero/heroine, villain, aide to hero/heroine, aide to villain, unsympathetic character, authority figure and peripheral role. Figure 4.14 shows the total distribution of the characters with regard to character roles.

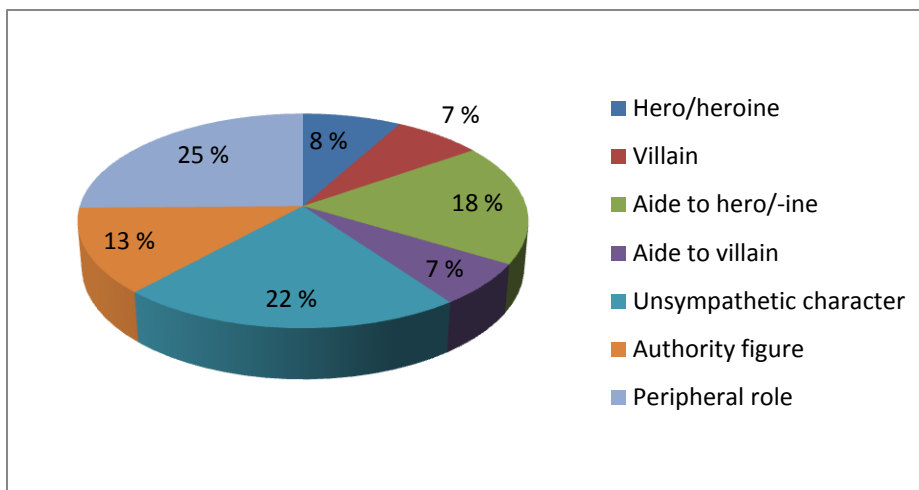


Figure 4.14. The distribution of different character roles in the data material

As the figure tells, the largest character group is the characters with a peripheral role. In many ways, this is not surprising, considering the fact that there are a fair few characters that cannot be assigned particular character roles in these films simply because they have a too fleeting appearance to play any particular part in the story. Thus, even if this amount of characters is included in the statistics, they are not very interesting seeing as they do not have any particular character role to correlate to their accents. Therefore, they will not be given any particular attention in the following discussion.

Figure 4.15 shows the distribution of accents in percent among the different character roles.

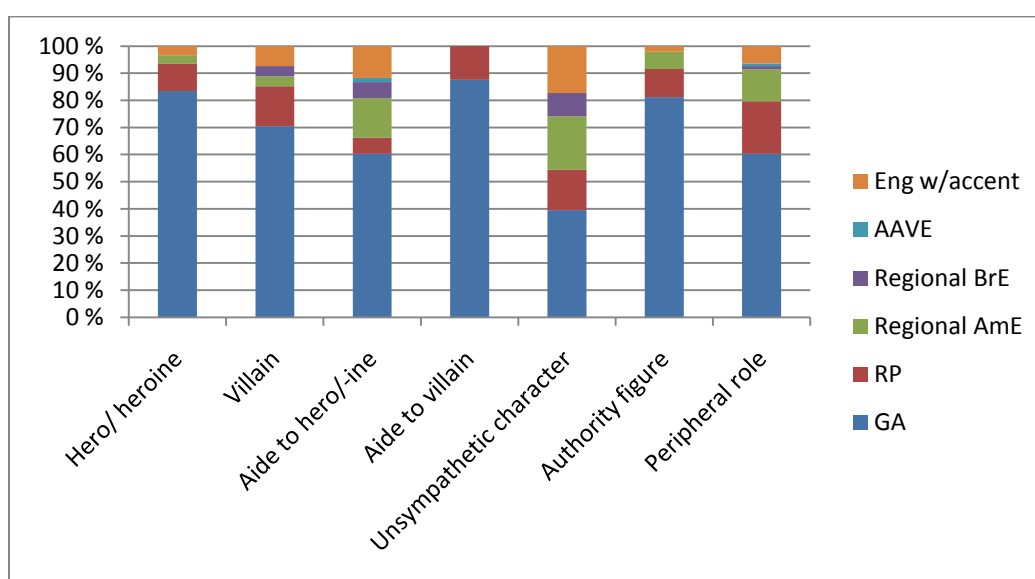


Figure 4.15. The distribution of accents among the different character roles

As with the previously discussed variables, GA is the dominating accent in most character roles, but there are also clear variations, both with regard to which accents that are present and to what extent the different varieties are used. The use of GA, for instance, varies from close to 90% of the characters classified as *aide to villain*, to ‘only’ 40% of the unsympathetic characters. *Hero/heroine*, *aide to villain* and *authority figure* are also categories with relatively little accent variation, whilst the remaining character roles are marked by more variation. That there are such differences may arguably indicate that how the various characters in Disney’s universe speak is not entirely random.

4.5.1 Heroes and heroines

One of the main hypotheses of the present thesis, regarding potential correlations between accent and character role, is that heroes/heroines are expected to speak primarily standardised, i.e. with a GA accent. It seems as if the analysis supports this hypothesis to a large extent, as GA is by far the most dominant accent among these characters (83,3%). Bearing in mind that Disney is an American company, with a primary focus on the American market, it is arguably not surprising that the hypothesis is supported. When the hero/heroine speaks with a General American accent, it presumably creates a better chance for the audience to identify with the character. Another aspect that might serve as an explanation to why GA is the dominant accent, is of course the setting of the films included in the study. A majority of the films are set in the US, or have a mythical setting, and both of these settings are arguably settings where the expected accent would be GA. Based on this it is therefore arguably not too surprising that GA dominates.

But even if it might seem as if the Disney Company is simply trying to be as authentic as possible, there are several examples where GA is used, that contradict this. In *Pocahontas* (1995), for instance, the hero John Smith is originally of British descent, but out of the British settlers that are portrayed in the film, he is the only character with a GA rather than a British accent. Of course, we may only speculate why this is the case, but the likelihood of it having to do with his role as the hero of the story, is rather large. Films like *The Hunchback from Notre Dame* (1996) and *Mulan* (1998) are further examples of films where there is a lack of correspondence between the hero’s/heroine’s origin and the accent he or she has, but in these cases, GA is the dominant accent anyway, which arguably makes them stand less out than the case of John Smith in *Pocahontas*. A similar case to John Smith is found in *Ratatouille* (2007). This film is set in France, and the majority of the characters speak with French-

accented English. The exceptions are Linguini and Remy, which are the main characters, and also Remy's brother and father. Considering the fact that the three latter characters are rats, there are arguably no particular expectations as to which accent they should be speaking, but bearing in mind that they live in Paris, we could perhaps nonetheless expect them to have a French-English accent. Linguini, on the other hand, is human, and just as French as the other human characters depicted in the story. Still, he speaks GA, whereas most of the remaining characters speak with French-accented English. Thus, the accent serves as a device to draw a distinction between him, as the hero of the story, and the others. Again, we may only speculate about the reasons why these choices have been made, but it does indeed seem as if Disney prefers their heroes to be speaking GA. Reasons for this were only just touched upon in the previous paragraph. Another reason why Disney seems to prefer their heroes to speak GA, is that by choosing to cast the main character(s) with a standardised accent, they arguably also comply with the audience's presumed expectations. As previously discussed, people attach different attitudes to various accents, and it is therefore important that a character sound 'right', in order to avoid alienating the audience. A hero/-ine speaking with regional, or even foreign-accented, English could arguably be judged as less fitting, which could cause the audience to react negatively.

But even if GA seems to be the preferred accent for *hero/heroine*, there are a few occurrences of other accents as well, namely RP, Regional American and English with other accent. First of all, that RP shows up among characters classified as heroes/heroines is contrary to the present thesis' expectations. After all, RP has a long history of being used with sinister characters (Trudgill 2002: 176), so to find it present among heroes/heroines is slightly unexpected. However, if we look at which hero-characters that are classified as RP speakers, this might help us explain the unexpected occurrence. Those characters are Scrooge and Bob Cratchit (both from *A Christmas Carol*) and the female protagonist of *Tarzan*, Jane Porter, which all are British. Scrooge, the main hero of *A Christmas Carol*, is one of the characters that challenge the typical 'hero' definition (cf. 3.4.2), as he spends most of the film being rather sinister. Thus, even if he is the hero of the story, his character traits still make him resemble the characters that traditionally have been given RP accents. Also, the fact that *A Christmas Carol* is set in London makes RP seem like the natural choice. Obviously, we could argue that there is a discrepancy in that Bob Cratchit is cast with an RP accent, seeing as he clearly is of a low social class, and since his wife is given a Cockney accent (cf. 4.2). However, where Scrooge is the anti-hero, Bob Cratchit is the one we really sympathise with in this film, and his role as a hero in the story is thus a likely explanation to why he is given a

standard rather than a regionally marked British accent. Additionally, even if the films' settings or the characters' regional background are the most likely explanations to the occurrences of RP among heroes/heroines, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006: 13) argue that RP is a variety to which the Americans usually assign positive values, which also might indicate that Disney judges RP to be a 'safe' choice of accent for heroes/heroines.

The occurrences of Regional American and English with other accent both stem from the same film, namely *The Princess and the Frog*, where Tiana speaks Southern and Prince Naveen speaks with an unclassifiable foreign accent. With regard to Tiana it is yet again the story setting and her ethnicity which probably are the main reasons why she is given a regional American accent. Prince Naveen's accent, on the other hand, still appears as a rather odd choice, perhaps especially if we consider the fact that he is one of the main characters in the story. However, seeing as both Tiana's and Prince Naveen's accents have been thoroughly discussed in 4.3.1, this will not be repeated here.

4.5.2 Villains

With regard to the characters classified as *villain*, the present thesis expected to find substantial use of particularly RP, as well as foreign-accented English. If we look at the accents used for villains in the present study, we see that the findings conform to the expectancies, at least to a certain extent. In line with all the other variables, GA is the dominant accent in this regard as well (70.4%), but it is not as dominant as with *hero/heroine*. RP (14.8%) and English with other accent (7.4%), on the other hand, have increased, compared to the usage for *hero/heroine*, and there has also been made room for both Regional American (3.7%) and Regional British (3.7%), though the occurrences of the latter ones are rather moderate.

Thus, although the use of non-GA accents arguably is too modest to draw any firm conclusions from, they still indicate certain tendencies, namely that RP, in particular, and English with other accent are judged more suitable to villains than heroes. Compared to the heroes, where story setting and regional background could serve as an explanation for the choice of accent, there are not always such links with the villains. The findings are rather more in line with general tendencies in films, as there is no two ways about the fact that RP has a long-standing tradition for being used as the accent of villains and evil characters (Trudgill 2002: 176, O'Hara 2010). The reason for this is arguably yet again related to the associations and attitudes that the RP accent evokes among listeners. It is often perceived as

being rather posh-sounding, as well as a bit cold and distant, which arguably makes it suitable to sophisticated villainous characters. Foreign-accented English is also commonly used in portrayals of evil characters, which arguably could stem from the scepticism that sometimes prevails against ‘outsiders’. In other words, it seems as if Disney’s universe largely reflects these attitudes with regard to which accents villainous characters are given. Seeing as the dominant accent clearly is GA, it would have been interesting to know whether this is a tendency that has come about in the past fifteen years, or whether GA has always been the majority accent among villains. In her study, Lippi-Green did correlate the characters’ evaluation and motivation to the major language groups, and found that British and other English, as well as foreign-accented English, were used far more among characters with either negative or mixed motivations, than among positive characters, which in turn were predominantly GA speakers (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 90-92). However, considering that we still do not know exactly how Lippi-Green has defined her categories, we cannot know whether her negatively motivated characters correspond to the present study’s villain category. Most likely her category enfolds more character roles than my category, which prevents a direct comparison. Nevertheless, where only 20% of the US English speakers were bad characters, according to Lippi-Green (1997: 92), 70% of the villains in the present study were classified as GA speakers. Thus, even if we have to be careful with the comparison, we can still view these findings as an indication that the use of accent among negative characters has changed in the direction of less variation and more standardised speech.

4.5.3 Aides

The results for both *aide to hero/-ine* and *aide to villain* are discussed simultaneously in this paragraph, due to the fact that, even if they aide different characters in the story, their character roles are more or less the same. As outlined in 3.2.1, characters classified as aides are typically characters of less intelligence and sophistication, which often results in them appearing as so called ‘comic reliefs’ in the story. Prior to the study, it was expected that these would be the characters which would show the greatest variety of accents, i.e. that regional accents would dominate, whereas standard varieties like GA and RP would be in a minority. The findings from the study both support and contradict these expectancies.

The distribution of accents among *aide to hero/-ine* conforms to prior expectations. Apart from the characters with a peripheral role (which in reality are disregarded from the discussion), the *aide to hero/-ine* is the only category where all the six different accent groups

are present. Some of them are rather modestly represented, but they are nonetheless there, which makes this a very varied category, with regard to accent use. Considering that a fair few of these accent groups are umbrella categories (cf. 3.1), a look at the internal nuances of these groups shows that the variation indeed is even bigger. We find everything from Victor in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), who speaks something resembling an Eastern New England accent; Philocetes in *Hercules* (1997), who speaks a NY accent and Mushu in *Mulan* (1998), who has an AAVE accent, to Chef Collette in *Ratatouille* (2007), who speaks a French-accented English and Ray the bug in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), who is given a Cajun English accent. Thus, with such an immense variation, it is not possible to conclude that any particular accent, other than GA, which still is the predominant accent overall (60.3%), is preferred and found most suitable to this character role. Still, the general tendency is that *aide to hero/-ine* is among the character roles most prone to make use of various accents. Considering that speakers of regional accents in particular often tend to be evaluated as kind and jovial, but less intelligent and with low levels of sophistication (cf. Luhman 1990, Edwards 1999), this might serve at least as a partial explanation as to why precisely aides are given a variety of accents. If these are the associations evoked by using other accents than GA and RP, and this is the character image Disney wants to project, this is undeniably a helpful device. Also, as discussed previously, Disney might not want to alienate their mainstream audience by letting major characters speak too ‘controversially’. However, seeing as aides arguably are less important characters, it might thus cause less controversy among an audience if these characters are given various other accents than the standardised varieties.

Aide to villain, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite case, which arguably is somewhat of a surprise. This is the character role with the highest usage of GA, and it is also the character role with the smallest degree of variation, since those characters that do not speak GA, speak RP. In other words, all of these characters speak with a standardised variety, which resembles more the finding that was expected to appear in the analysis of villains. The marked difference in the use of accents between characters aiding heroes and those aiding villains is also rather unexpected, but this disparity is interpreted as a manifestation of the characters’ difference in affiliation to either the good or the bad side. Seeing as regional and other (i.e. other than GA and RP) English accents were present among the characters acting as aides to hero/heroine, but not among the characters aiding the villainous characters, this seems to signal that regional accents are somewhat stronger connected to kindness, which indeed is in line with traditional sociolinguistic studies conducted on people’s attitudes towards various accents (cf. e.g. Luhman 1990, Hiraga 2005, Coupland and Bishop 2007). Standard varieties

tend to be evaluated highly on social attractiveness and prestige, but when it comes to traits like trustworthiness and friendliness, regional varieties tend to score higher. Seeing as characters aiding the good guys are more trustworthy and friendly than those aiding the bad guys, this could be the reason why it is more natural to let them have a greater variety of accents.

4.5.4 Unsympathetic characters

As mentioned in 3.2.1, the unsympathetic characters are uncongenial characters without any particular affiliation to either the good or the bad side. This is a diverse category, including characters like The Fates and the townspeople in *Hercules* (1997), the three sharks Bruce, Anchor and Chum in *Finding Nemo* (2003), the food critic in *Ratatouille* (2007) and Mrs. Dilbert and her husband in *A Christmas Carol* (2009). With regard to accents, they make up the smallest group of GA speakers in the material, with only 40% of the characters using this accent. The regional accent categories are well represented (RegAm 19.7%; BrE 8.6%), as is English with other accent (17.3%) and even RP (14.8%). Prior to the study, I expected GA to be the dominant accent, with RP in hot pursuit, but apart from that I had no particular expectancies as to which accents that would be detected. The findings were thus somewhat unexpected, as there is no two ways about the fact that GA is clearly not considered as an accent suitable to unsympathetic characters. A reason for this could perhaps be that Disney, as an American company, does not want to portray GA speakers as unsympathetic, and by this is showing some kind of loyalty towards their primary audience. However, this clearly does not fit in with the findings of the other character roles. Both with regard to villains and aides to villains, which not exactly are the bee's knees either, Disney seemingly have had no scruples about giving the majority of the characters a GA accent. Also, bearing in mind the discussion in 4.5.3, on the qualities usually assigned to speakers of regional accents, those are not qualities that match being unsympathetic.

In order to shed light on the accent distribution found in this character role, a closer look at the level of sophistication of the unsympathetic characters could perhaps be helpful. Figure 4.16 shows the distribution and this finding may arguably explain why the accent distribution has turned out the way it has. As the figure tells us, the unsympathetic characters are predominantly classified as having a low level of sophistication, and bearing in mind the findings discussed in 4.4, it is clear that their level of sophistication may be an influential factor with regard to which accents that are used. Referring back to figure 4.12, which shows

the accent distribution among all the characters classified as unsophisticated in the data material, we see the same pattern emerging: even if standardised accents, i.e. GA and RP, still dominates, characters of low sophistication use a greater variety of accents, compared to e.g. sophisticated characters.

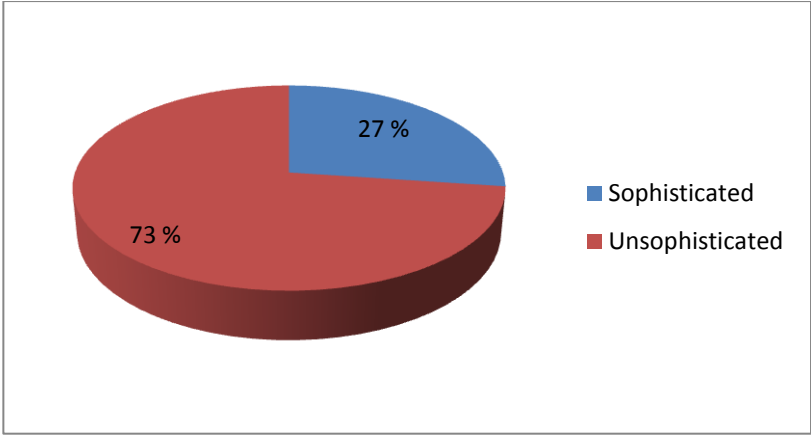


Figure 4.16. The level of sophistication among the unsympathetic characters.

Thus, seeing as there are so many of the unsympathetic characters that also have a low level of sophistication, this might explain the low scores of GA and the relatively higher usage of both Regional American and Regional British, as well as English with other accent.

4.5.5 Authority figures

The findings for the characters classified as *authority figure* are quite similar to the distribution among *hero/heroine*. The standard varieties, i.e. GA and RP, are spoken by roughly 90% of the characters, with the remaining amount using an accent belonging to the category of either Regional American or Regional British. Again, with GA being so dominant, this is a finding that is in line with the results from the majority of the other variables. Thus, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions on whether the use of accents for this character role is the way it is because it follows the general tendency seemingly emerging in the data material, or whether these accents are chosen because they somehow help portraying authoritative figures best.

However, taking into account what kind of characters that are put into this category, it might just be that the standardised accents actually are the ones that are judged to be the most suitable. In addition to caretakers (i.e. mothers and fathers), the characters in this category all

have in common that they hold some kind of position of power, for instance as guards, bosses or the likes. Arguably, such characters are often characters with a certain degree of social status and they also tend to belong among the characters with a high level of sophistication. Thus, we could arguably expect to find much use of standardised accents among characters holding this particular role. Studies (cf. e.g. Coupland and Bishop 2007) show that standardised accents typically are given higher scores with regard to factors like prestige and social attractiveness. Seeing as judgements of the accent itself are hard to keep separated from judgments of the speakers of that particular accent, these characteristics can thus be transferred onto the speakers of that particular accent, i.e. that speakers of standardised accents are perceived as prestigious and socially attractive. Arguably, these are qualities that suit those holding the kinds of authoritative positions that are relevant in this context. Obviously, it is important to bear in mind that Coupland's and Bishop's study was conducted in Britain, whereas the Disney Company is most likely to reflect American attitudes. Bearing in mind Wolfram's and Schilling-Estes' (2006: 13) comment that '[f]or the most part, Americans do not assign strong positive, or prestige, value to any particular dialect of American English', we should perhaps be careful with drawing the conclusion that results from a study done on Brits' attitudes can be transferred automatically to Americans. However, despite Wolfram's and Schilling-Estes' claim, there are studies (cf. e.g. Alford and Strother 1990, Luhman 1990) indicating that Americans attach different values to accents too, e.g. in terms of solidarity and attractiveness. Further, seeing as the general tendency among people arguably is to expect high-status or authoritative characters' speech to be as close to standardised as possible, this makes the findings for this variable feasible.

As a final note on the language use among authoritative characters, the language of those characters acting as caretakers deserves a brief comment. Lippi-Green also took a closer look at the language of mothers and fathers in her data material, based on the following assumption:

To be truly sexually attractive and available in a Disney film, a character must not only look the idealized part, but he or she must also sound white and middle-class American or British. *In a similar way, mothers and fathers are most likely to have mainstream accents of US or British English [...]* (Lippi-Green 1997: 97, my emphasis).

Her findings were completely in line with her expectations, as 17 out of 20 mothers and 16 out of 22 fathers were classified as speakers of either mainstream US or mainstream British (cf. Lippi-Green 1997: 97). Also, when correlated with story setting, she found that 'eleven of

these mothers and fathers would not be native speakers of English' (Lippi-Green 1997: 97), which arguably makes the findings stand out even more. Figure 4.17 below shows the distribution of accents among mothers and fathers in the present study, and the findings here are very much in keeping with Lippi-Green's results.

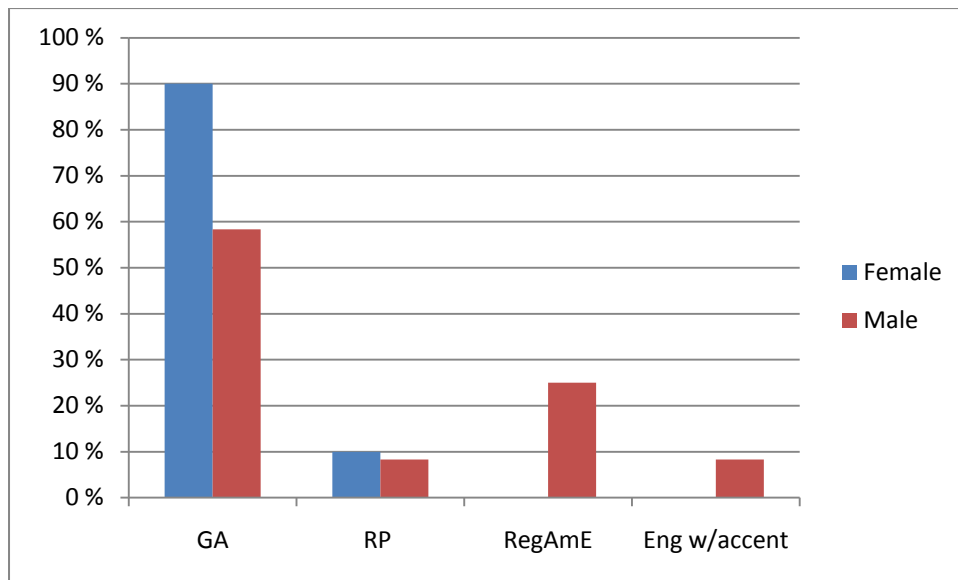


Figure 4.17. The distribution of accents among caretakers in the present study

Both the female and the male caretakers are predominantly GA speakers, but the females are so to a much larger extent than the males. Also, the variation among the male caretakers is larger, seeing as they have speakers of regional and foreign/other English as well as the standard variants GA and RP. As discussed in relation to the variable of gender (cf. 4.2), such results are a clear indication that the characters in Disney's universe seem to be following the findings from real-life sociolinguistic studies on gender and language, concluding that female speakers often tend to speak more standardised than men. Further, this may also serve as another explanation for the high presence of standardised accents in the character role *authority figure* as a whole. Seeing as I have chosen to put the caretakers into this category, and they amount to quite a few standard accent speakers, they will naturally influence the overall numbers for this particular character role.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter gathers the threads from the previous chapters, and provides a summary of the findings, as well as a conclusion to the study – to the extent that it is possible to reach any firm conclusions. Further, it will also comment on some shortcomings of the study, some contributions the thesis has made and how it might serve as a point of departure for future studies.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The main aim of this thesis was to investigate the use of accents in Disney's animated feature films released in the years 1995-2009, to see if it was possible to reveal systematic patterns with regard to how various accents were used. An intermediate aim was to compare the findings of the present study with the findings from Lippi-Green (1997), who did a similar study of the Disney films released prior to 1995, in order to see whether there have been any diachronic changes.

The overall results showed that GA was by far the accent that was used the most in the various films. When the overall findings were compared to the previous study conducted by Lippi-Green, it became evident that changes had taken place in the course of the past fifteen years. The most evident changes were particularly related to the use of RP and Regional British English, which had decreased, and the use of Regional American English and GA, which had increased.

The correlation between *gender* and accent showed that GA was the dominant accent for both female and male characters. However, in line with traditional sociolinguistic studies, the findings showed more variation among the male than the female characters, who in turn used more standardised accents (cf. fig. 4.5 and 4.6). These results were also quite similar to those of Lippi-Green (1997), as her study too revealed a marked gender difference in how accents were used. The only exception in the present study, where the pattern between male and female characters was reversed, was Regional British, which the female characters used more than what the male characters did. The present thesis suggested that a likely explanation for this was the kind of regional British accent that was used among the female characters, as all of the female characters classified as Regional British spoke with a Cockney accent. Seeing as the female characters had certain common denominators, with regard to behaviour

and character traits, the present thesis argued that the choice of the Cockney accent for these particular characters was not coincidental.

With regard to *ethnicity*, the results were similar to those of *gender*. GA was the dominant accent among both ethnic and non-ethnic characters, whereas e.g. RP was hardly present among ethnic characters at all (cf. fig. 4.8 and 4.9). Films like *Mulan*, *Ratatouille*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Princess and the Frog* were given particular attention, seeing as they served as different examples of how Disney has treated the portrayal of ethnicity, both in terms of characters' ethnicity and with regard to story setting. *Mulan* (1998), together with *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000) and *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), were prime examples of films that lacked any kind of correlation between the characters' ethnicity and the story setting, and the accents used. *Ratatouille* (2007) and *A Christmas Carol* (2009) both reflected the story setting authentically in the language used, while *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) was a serious effort to 'get things right', without being entirely successful. Again, lines can be drawn to the results of Lippi-Green's (1997) study, as she too discovered discrepancies between story setting and the language that was spoken in the various films.

The characters' *level of sophistication* also showed similar findings as the other variables, with GA being the most used accent (cf. fig. 4.11 and 4.12). However, a closer investigation of the accents used revealed a more nuanced picture. The accent from New York City emerged as an accent that was commonly used to portray unsophisticated characters, a finding that was in agreement with the low status attached to this regional accent. Further, *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) again provided us with illustrative examples of how accent use was varied primarily according to traits such as level of sophistication, whereas social background and ethnicity were non-relevant factors. The majority of the characters in the film spoke with a Southern accent, which fitted well with the setting of the film, but how many non-standard features the various characters made use of in their speech varied according to the characters' level of sophistication.

The last variable the present thesis investigated was *character role*. Again, GA was the accent that the majority of the character roles made use of the most, but even so, there were some exceptions that stood out from the others. This applied primarily to the aides and the unsympathetic characters (cf. fig. 4.15). The aides were expected to employ much variation and much use of regional accents, and the characters acting as aides to hero/heroine fulfilled the expectations. However, the characters acting as aides to the villains did not, as they were the characters with the smallest degree of variation, which the present thesis interpreted as a possible indication that due to their evil affiliation, standardised accents were

the most suitable choices. With regard to the unsympathetic characters, the fact that they showed as much variation as they did was arguably somewhat unexpected, but the present thesis discussed the possibility that the characters' level of sophistication could be an influential factor.

5.2 Gathering the threads

The present thesis set out to do 'a sociolinguistic study of the good, the bad and the foreign' in Disney's animated feature films. Eighteen films later there is a big question that remains to be answered: whether the results summarised in the previous section make it possible to draw any firm conclusions on the use of accent in this body of films.

At first glance, there is no question about the fact that there have been changes in the way Disney uses various accents in their films, at least in comparison to Lippi-Green's (1997) study. This part of the hypothesis is thus supported, seeing as one of the main expectancies was that changes would be detected. However, the strategy chosen by the Disney Company was contrary to the underlying expectations. The present study expected to find a diversity of accents, as well as a more authentic voice casting with regard to ethnicity and story setting, but discovered instead a reduction of diversity and more use of standard varieties, primarily GA. However, even if the general pattern seems to be that GA is frequently employed by all kinds of characters, regardless of gender, ethnicity, level of sophistication or character role, the study has also revealed a number of nuances, proving that the language use in these films is far from homogenous.

The working assumption in the present thesis has been that whatever goes on in the Disney universe is a reflection of and/or some sort of reaction to happenings in the real world. In other words, the films are, to various degrees, products of their time, and the various elements of the films, e.g. the language used, will show signs of this. Numerous sociolinguistic studies, some of which are outlined in chapter 2, have shown that people react differently to various accents, and attach different qualities to speakers based on the language variety they use. Making use of different accents is thus a helpful device when building characters, as it is a handy way of assigning particular qualities to the various characters portrayed.

But bearing in mind that the world has become increasingly more politically correct in the past decades, in addition to becoming more accent 'tolerant', this should also be noticeable in the use of various accents. As already mentioned, the changes that have taken

place in the Disney films may be interpreted as an indication that the political correctness has had its effect, and this is indeed the conclusion the present thesis has reached. However, the strategy the Disney Company has chosen can also be seen as contrary to the expectations. Instead of reflecting the diversity, Disney seems to prefer standardisation. Of course, this policy is arguably the easiest way to comply with the demands of political correctness. By primarily using standardised accents, the majority of characters will end up sounding the same, which avoids the problem of stepping on people's toes, since no one in particular will be singled out either positively or negatively. But at the same time we could argue that Disney's efforts to appear politically correct indeed make them miss their target. The core of political correctness is arguably the effort to neutralise things so that no one is offended. Another way of looking at political correctness could be that it is an effort not only to avoid stigma and offense, but to acknowledge that diversity is accepted. Thus, another way of showing an increased political correctness with regard to the use of accents would therefore be to actually *use* them as authentically as possible and distributing them equally among 'good' and 'bad' characters. By choosing that option, the signal that had been sent would have been one of acceptance with regard to various accents, rather than the opposite.

The present thesis also expected to find a great deal of authenticity in the treatment of ethnicity, due to this much mentioned societal pressure to appear more politically correct. However, the results seem to indicate that Disney is on somewhat shaky ground. Firstly, there are very few films starring ethnic characters on the whole, and in the few that do, the ethnicity is rarely reflected in the accents used. Arguably, it seems as if Disney is afraid of pushing the limits too far: if the characters are portrayed as ethnic it would perhaps be too much to give them authentic accents as well. One could of course claim that *The Princess and the Frog* exemplifies Disney's efforts to step away from the standardisation strategy and rather use authentic accents, but as the discussion in chapter 4 shows, even this film is riddled with examples of language use that appears to be somewhat strategic.

In addition to *The Princess and the Frog*, there are also numerous other examples to be found in the data material, which exemplify that Disney is far from consistent with their standardisation policy. A fair few of these examples have been discussed in detail in chapter 4, and even more of them could have been included. Using accents for what they are worth in terms of building characters is thus still a device Disney makes use of. Also, where there are instances of stereotypical use of non-GA accents, it is by and large the traditional stereotypes that emerge, e.g. that regional accents, particularly the NY accent, are used with unsophisticated characters, etc. Arguably, we could view it as a positive development that the

systematic use of accents, particularly regional and foreign, seems to be decreasing, compared to Lippi-Green. However, letting the majority of characters speak with a standardised accent is arguably not the best solution either. First, it does in no way contribute to heightening the acceptance of various accents. Secondly, even if the use of standardised accents has increased, there are still characters that use other accents than GA (or RP), which arguably makes these characters stand out more than usual. When the majority speaks GA, non-GA speakers automatically end up as somewhat marked. However, at the same time there is no two ways about the fact that some stereotyping in terms of language use in these films might be inevitable, as also Lippi-Green (1997: 82) points to, and the present thesis acknowledges this.

As a final remark, we can thus conclude that the main hypothesis of this study is supported: it is possible to detect traces of systematic patterns with regard to the use of accent in Disney's animated feature films, but with a growing amount of characters being cast with a GA accent, the extent of this stereotypic language use has decreased, compared to Lippi-Green (1997). The reasons behind the choices of accents are of course known only to the film producers themselves, but the present thesis finds it likely that these choices are heavily influenced by the language attitudes and the language ideologies prevailing in society. The Roman scholar Varro once said that "the vernacular is always in motion" (cited in Chambers 2009: 241), and so are the language attitudes, the ideologies and the society of which the language is a part. How the development will continue, and whether the Disney films will continue in the direction they seem to have been heading in the past decade or so, with increasing use of GA, or whether they will increase their use of non-GA accents again, only time can tell.

5.3 Critique of my own work

In the course of this study, certain choices and limitations had to be made, and although some of them have been mentioned previously, they still deserve a small comment as the thesis draws to a close.

In order to perform the analysis, an auditory technique was employed. As previously discussed, this is a technique with obvious shortcomings. Milroy and Gordon (2003: 151) point to the element of subjectivity as the greatest concern with regard to this method, as this element potentially might influence the reliability of the results. However, as argued in 3.4.1, this method was still deemed to be the most suitable. First of all, there was no need for detailed phonological analysis, of the sort more instrumental techniques could have provided.

Secondly, seeing as the films were watched several times, my own awareness of the various phonetic traits improved in the course of the study, thus also improving my ability to distinguish the various accents. Thirdly, the validity was tested by getting a second opinion from my supervisor, on parts of the data material, and our results were sufficiently in step with each other.

Both the accent categories and the selection and definition of the character roles included in the study were also results of my own judgements. With regard to the accent categories, the majority of these were rather broad and roughly sorted out in many ways, which can be seen as a minor weakness. For instance, the present thesis chose not to distinguish between socially and regionally marked accents¹⁵, but rather to lump these together in umbrella categories like Regional American and Regional British. This is also contrary to what Lippi-Green (1997) did in her study. Still, even if a differentiation between socially and regionally marked variants potentially could have yielded interesting information with regard to the use of accents, the present thesis judged the use of such broad categories as the best solution. After all, it might not always be straight-forward to draw a line of demarcation between a regionally and a socially marked accent, as regional and social accent features often tend to go hand in hand. Further, the selection and definition of the different character roles I wanted to include in the study were also results of my own judgements. Even if I set down certain criteria with regard to e.g. the classifications of different character roles, when all was said and done, the subjective judgements got the final say. Thus, if the study had been undertaken by someone else, both the selection and definition of the character roles could have been different, which potentially could have influenced the findings.

Statistical tests have not been employed, as it was deemed sufficient to calculate the percentage scores in each case. A minor drawback with the data material is that the quantities were sometimes rather uneven, e.g. that the number of female or ethnic characters were substantially smaller than the number of male or non-ethnic characters. However, seeing as I chose to calculate the percentage scores and compare these in each case, rather than the raw numbers, this should ensure that the basis for comparison was rather even.

A last point worth mentioning, which also has been discussed previously, is the choice to disregard the linguistic background of the persons giving voice to the various characters. Obviously, some could argue in favour of including this information, as persons speaking

¹⁵The exception is of course AAVE, which could be said to be primarily a social accent, which was not grouped together with the other regional American varieties. However, AAVE was not singled out primarily due to its status as a social variety, but rather due to the extra attention given to *The Princess and the Frog* (2009).

with different accents than their native one could signal intentional choices on behalf of the production company. However, it is impossible for us to know why a particular actor is performing with a certain accent, and in most cases we know little or nothing about the actor's linguistic background as well. Thus, seeing as there are too many elements of uncertainty related to this, the present thesis found it wise to not attach any weight to this aspect.

5.4 Contributions made by this thesis

Hopefully, the present study has resulted in an increased understanding of accent use in animated feature films, and a raised awareness that the use of accents in these films is a device which often is used in a conscious and systematic manner in order to build specific characters. Further, it has hopefully also shed light on the aspect that the choices of accents are an interaction between language attitudes, language ideologies and societal norms, and that performing such studies can be fruitful with regard to revealing information on attitudes and ideologies related to language use. Media language has traditionally been somewhat neglected as an object of sociolinguistic studies, but a study like this could hopefully show that media language is just as interesting as an object of study as other variants of language use.

The present thesis could hopefully serve as point of departure for future studies of the same kind as well. Although Disney is by far the heaviest actor in the area of animated feature films, they are by no means the only producer of animated films, so a similar study could easily be conducted on films produced e.g. by DreamWorks Studios or others. By doing a comparative study, this could also reveal potential differences among the various film studios. Doing a comparative study of e.g. American and British films could also be a possibility. The present study also deliberately excluded all animated productions that were not feature films, but by changing the scope to e.g. cartoons, this would give a whole different material to work with. Again, a study performed on e.g. cartoons or shorter animation films could be compared with the findings from the animated feature films, thus including the aspect of genre/format as well. Another possible extension of the present study could of course be to include dialect features as well, instead of just focussing on accent features, like the present thesis has chosen to do.

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