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Animated Films and Linguistic Stereotypes: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Accent Use in Disney Animated Films

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Animated Films and Linguistic Stereotypes: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Accent Use in
Disney Animated Films

A Thesis Presented

by

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Animated Films and Linguistic Stereotypes:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Accent Use in Disney Animated Films

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Abstract

Although cartoons are entertaining and worldwide appreciated, studies have demonstrated that they are not neutral, and are likely to convey messages about society linguistic ideologies. This study aims to find out if Disney animated films released in 2016 use accents to express the nature of the characters. A discourse analysis is conducted with two animated films produced by Disney Studios to examine the language choices concerning accent use. Results show that these films convey language ideologies in animated cartoons through the use of accents, and the portrayal of these accents can reproduce and sustain language-based stereotypes of the groups who used these accents. The study also aims to raise awareness of second language teachers on how animated films might influence learners' attitudes towards language learning.

Keywords: Linguistic stereotypes, Language ideologies, animated films

Contents

Abstract	2
Animated Films and Linguistic Stereotypes: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Accent Use in Disney Animated Films	5
Literature Review.....	8
Language Ideologies and Language Attitudes	8
Language Ideologies	8
Language Attitudes	10
Accent and Dialects	12
Media, Language Attitudes, and Stereotypes on Accent and Dialects.....	13
Accent and Dialect Use in Disney Animated Cartoons	15
Methodology.....	19
Research Design.....	19
Film Selection	19
Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis	20
Data Collection Procedure	22
Characters	23
Accents and Dialects Identification	24
Analysis and Discussion	25
Zootopia	25

Plot	25
Zootopia in Numbers	25
Zootopia: Stereotypes, Race and Racism.....	26
Zootopia: Critical Analysis of Accent and Dialect Use	27
Finding Dory.....	35
The Plot.....	35
Finding Dory, Family and Physical/ Mental impairment.....	35
Finding Dory in Numbers.	36
Accent and Dialect in Finding Dory.	36
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	40
Implication for English Teachers	42
Contribution for Future Studies	43
References.....	44
Tables	50

Animated Films and Linguistic Stereotypes:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Accent Use in Disney Animated Films

Animated cartoons can make any story interesting. They are entertaining and use colorful images to tell stories and to play with the viewer's imagination. Many animated cartoons are based on fairy tales with engaging characters and popular songs that stay in our heads forever. They idealize a perfect world where people have happy endings (Azad, 2009; Lippi-Green, 2012). Many animated films have become part of the childhood memories of millions of children around the world, for instance, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Snow White* (1938), and *Cinderella* (1950) (Lippi-Green, 2012). These films are distributed worldwide by big corporations such as Walt Disney Animation Studios and therefore are watched by a vast audience, especially children. For example, in the first quarter of 2016 alone, the Disney Channel from Walt Disney Corporation reached 4.6 million people just in the United Kingdom, broadcasting children's programs including animated films (Statista, 2017).

However, over the years studies have demonstrated that animated films are not innocuous or harmless as they appear. (Lippi-Green, 2012; Azad, 2009, van Lierop, 2014; Rosa, 2006; Sonnesyn, 2011). Klein and Shiffman (2009) studied the underrepresentation of minorities in animated cartoons for children, and concluded that these films are likely to portray more often the culture of dominant society groups than the culture of less valued groups. Gajek (2009) recognizes that the way the media depicts or fails to depict minorities has a strong influence on people's attitudes to diversity, and constant exposure to media's propaganda may shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior towards minority groups of people. Also, animated films are likely to expose their audience to language ideologies such as one nation only one

language, and when building characters, they use preconceived ideas associated with the language spoken by ethnic and regional groups. (Azad, 2009).

In fact, Disney, one of the biggest animated films producers is not immune to this trend (Statista, 2017). Sonnesyn (2011) studied the use of accents in Disney's animated films from 1995 to 2009 and concluded that 61% of the characters spoke a standard variety of American English. The other 40% spoke other English varieties such as regional varieties of American and British English, while foreign accents were often used to define characters such as villains. Additionally, Azad (2009) concluded that in mythical settings, accents were used in a similar ways to create characterizations, even though there are no dialects or languages that can logically be associated with imaginary settings.

The media have become a very powerful socialization agent, and Disney is one of the largest corporations to produce animated films. Tavin & Anderson (2003) recognize that Disney is a source of ideologies of the dominant culture. For these two authors "Disney is an evil capitalist machine that constructs identity through mass deception" (p. 23), and Disney's film is a dominant discourse on gender, race, and ethnicity. Lippi-Green (2012) argues that children are shaped by the ideas that they are constantly presented in these films, especially when it comes to language stereotypes and ideologies. Children are not passive agents. They are very capable of assimilating bias and prejudices at very young age.

Further, constant exposure to language-based stereotypes may influence language attitudes towards people who do not speak standardized English. The number of international migrants across the globe is increasing at a fast rate. In 2015 alone, according to the United Nations report on international migration, there were 244 million people around the globe living in a country that is not their country of origin. North America was the destination of 54 million

of this total and the largest number of these, 47 million live in the United States (UN Population Division, 2015). Therefore, in the US the probability of encountering different languages and accents is high. Moreover, during the 2016 US election, there was a noticeably increased amount of racial hostility towards foreign languages as well as the rise of a nationalist movement encouraging the English-only agenda, as reported by the American press (Milligan, 2016; Porter, 2016).

Furthermore, there are studies demonstrating that the persistent exposure to the depiction of accents and dialects in animated films may encourage linguistic discrimination (Azad, 2009; Lippi-Green, 2012; Rosa, 2006; Sonnesyn, 2011). However, following these observations, there is a need to analyze how recent Disney's animated films portray foreign accents and varieties of American English to their public.

Purpose of the Study

This study proposes to analyze the usage of accents in two movies released in the US in 2016, *Zootopia* and *Finding Dory*, and determine how these films may convey linguistic stereotypes and behaviors such as accent discrimination to their audience. It also intends to raise awareness among second language teachers on how animated films can influence learners' attitudes towards language learning. The research question is the following:

- *How do Disney animated cartoons convey and disseminate linguistic stereotypes?*

In order to set the stage for research, Chapter 1 presents a background of the research problem and the relevance of this study. Chapter 2 explores the notions of language ideologies and their implications regarding language-based stereotypes presented in all other media, as well as in these animated films. It also provides a brief overview of the role of Critical Discourse Studies in “unmasking ideologies” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 6). Chapter 4 discusses how and

why these films were selected and what procedures will be implemented in order to answer the research question. Chapter 5 presents a critical analysis of these films' discourse and presents a summary of the major findings and the implications of this study.

Literature Review

Language Ideologies and Language Attitudes

Language ideologies. In the past, linguistic anthropologists have examined a wide range of issues related to the definition of the term *ideology* due to its lack of straightforwardness (Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998). Ideology, a term which was coined by French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy (Schieffelin et al., 1998), and used first to mean "science of ideas", has been defined in different ways. The most prominent notion among the definitions presented by Schieffelin et al. (1998) is that ideology refers to an abstract representation of ideas, mental phenomena, and beliefs which are considered to be the ideal for a certain individual. It is also a tool in "the service of the struggle to maintain power" (Schieffelin, et al., 1998, p. 7). It is understood as a common perception shared by individuals from the same societal group in regard to "basic notions that the members of a society hold about a fairly definite area such as honor, and division of labor" (as stressed by Friederich in Schiefflin et al., 1998, p. 5).

In terms of ideologies regarding language, Woolard (1998) defines language ideology generally as "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (as cited in Woolard, 1998, p. 4). Focusing more on linguistic structure, language ideologies are a "set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Woodlard, 1998, p.4). Thus, this definition draws

attention to the assumptions which one may hold towards other individuals' spoken language, and which may be used to justify how one perceives the other.

It is crucial to study language ideologies because inquiries into this matter help one understand why and how some languages are deemed more desirable than others (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006), why nations fight to have "one nation one language" policy (Nana, 2016, p. 169), and what shapes individuals' language attitudes in a multilingual society (Schieffelin et al., 1998).

Moreover, these ideologies may shape individuals' perceptions of the roles languages play in a social context, "and if these (biased) models control discourse, they are often expressed in polarized ideological discourse structures" (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 69). For instance, dominant groups in a society establish a "normative variety" of their language usually "based on written language of established writers" and "perpetuated by formal institutions such as schools" (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 10; Davila, 2016). Lippi-Green (2012) observes that standard language ideology is:

A bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous 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 (p. 67)

In doing so, these institutions in power tend to deny recognition of other varieties which are equally important to their society. As a result, standard varieties will be attributed higher social status by dominant groups than non-standard varieties.

Further, language ideologies may serve to diminish or support political, educational, and media alignments, such as dissemination of the idea that Standard English is "normal, linguistic

neutral and widely accessible” (Davila, 2016). This can impose linguistic imperialism in countries such as Cameroon, where English and French gained the status of official languages in detriment to local languages (Nana, 2016). In the context of mainstream media, particularly animated films, Lippi-Green (2012) asserts that “(...)media is a powerful institution that plays a major role in the stability and the perpetuation of the nation-state, and the way language serves as both a tool and a target”(p. 131).

Language attitudes. Individuals can have positive or negative attitudes about language, their own or other people’s language. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *attitude* as a “settled behavior or manner of acting, as representative of feeling or opinion” (*OE Dictionary*, 2017). Edwards (1985) points out that attitude involves a “disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects” (as cited by Garret in Edwards 1985, p. 140). This disposition can include thoughts, feelings, or even actions. For this same author, the notion of belief should not be mistaken with attitude; attitude is the means by which individuals express beliefs.

Likewise, Garret (as cited in Sonnesyn, 2011, p.11) stresses that “our personal experiences and our social environment” have a significant influence on the type of attitudes individuals develop throughout their lives. Human language practices are socially and culturally constructed, and the “conventions of assigned meaning” they assimilate help them interpret and understand their social world. However, these conventions are influenced by institutions of power in their society. Thus, their linguistic and non-linguistic performance may reflect relationships of power existent in their social environment. (Jager & Maier, 2016, p. 114) As an illustration, Giacalone (2016) reports that Sicilian language is less spoken in Italy due to an implementation of language policies encouraging the dominance of Italian in educational, government and business settings. Thus, Sicilian was assigned the status of a less functional,

regional and stigmatized language. Sicilian speakers are avoiding use this variety because they do not want to be related to a language that does not bring them any social recognition. As a result, a decision from an institution in power has influenced the Sicilian speakers' language attitude towards their own language. Lippi-Green (2012) states, "if an individual cannot find any social acceptance for her language outside her own speech community, she may come to denigrate her own language, even while she continues to use it" (p.68).

Further, an individual's assumptions can be expressed in positive or negative actions towards language. To exemplify this idea, Lippi-Green (2012) points out that language-focused discrimination can be one expression of negative attitudes towards language: "language and accent have become an acceptable excuse to turn away publicly, to refuse to recognize the other or acknowledge their rights" (p.67). For example, speakers of non-standard varieties of English have to appropriate SAE, if they aim to succeed in educational institutions. If they fail to do so, they will be constantly reminded that the regional variety they speak is incorrect or "ugly, unacceptable, incoherent, illogical" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 69). The same author goes on to say that "when speakers of devaluated or stigmatized varieties of English consent to the standard language ideology, they become complicit in its propagation against themselves, their own interests and identities" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 68). The constant negative depiction of non-standard varieties in the mainstream media may help reinforce these beliefs people may hold against stigmatized language varieties.

Accent and dialects. Linguistic performances in the media are not authentic.

Interactions are scripted before they are performed, and media draws on language variation to make speech styles closer to those in real life. Language variation exists within and across languages, whether is at the level of pronunciation, vocabulary, morphology, or syntax. The media uses these varieties of language options when depicting language use.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *accent* as a manner of pronouncing words or sentences that are distinct from a country, area, or social class. Hughes, Trudgill, and Watt (2012) explain that accent is a variation of words pronunciation. Lippi-Green (2012) adds that accent can be also used to identify stress in words, and it is a structured variation in language that can be determined by a geographic region, ethnicity, or race. Thus, the definition of accent is related to phonological features and the pronunciation of words and sentences.

On the other hand, even though some authors may use the terms *accent* and *dialect* interchangeably, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) state that linguists use the term *dialect* as a variety within a language; for instance, Southern American English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are varieties of American English. Lippi-Green (2012) explains that dialects “differ in morphological structures, syntax, lexicon, and semantics”(p.46).

Research has demonstrated that language attitudes can play a crucial role in how individuals “perceive, evaluate, and treat” others based on their accents (Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles, & Sink, 2016, p.60). Also, certain linguistic features can elicit stereotyped responses. For example, “standard accents and dialects usually connote high status and competence” (Edwards, 1985 p. 149), while regional and lower status group dialects are perceived as non-standard and less sophisticated speech styles. Such attitudes can result in discrimination based on certain accents (Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011), influence language policies in language

classes (Mori, 2014) or marginalize people with accents as foreigners (Souza, Pereira, Camino, Lima, & Torres, 2016). Additionally, Munro (2003), in a review of human rights in Canada regarding language and accent, names three types of discrimination that had arisen: discrimination in employment because of an accent, accent stereotyping, and harassment. The author also mentions that negative attitudes towards foreign accents influence discrimination against second language speakers in Canada. Souza et al. (2016) report that 37 respondents in a pilot study relied on the accent factor to decide which candidate would be more qualified for a position. The one applicant that spoke the standard language in question was considered more competent for the position than the other one who had a non-standard accent.

Adding to this, Kim et al. (2011) state that in the US, Chinese Americans are eternally perceived as foreigners, no matter how much time they have been living in the United States because of their accent. These authors carried out a research study in which 444 Chinese American adolescents reported their perceptions of discrimination in their daily life. Results demonstrated that these adolescents were more likely to be stereotyped as foreigners due to their accent. This stigmatization led to adjustment problems for these adolescents, and they were afraid to be ridiculed by their native speaker peers for their accent (Kim et al., 2011).

Media, Language Attitudes, and Stereotypes on Accent and Dialects

Studies in the field of sociolinguistics have revealed that media play an important role in promoting standard language ideology, reinforces linguistic stereotypes, and stigmatize accents and dialects. (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Firstly, there are ideological social institutions such as education systems, governments, in which media serve the interests of the dominant class, and exert power over the subordinated

class through discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Foucault defines discourse as a rationalized and legitimized manner of speaking that “regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power” (Jager & Maier, 2016, p.111; Glapka, 2010). Thus, “discourses exercise power because they institutionalize and regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting” (p. 117). The media form an institution in power that serves the interests of the the privileged class, and “ is both a mirror of existing intergroup relation in society, as well as a casual agent of them” (Dragojevic et al., 2016, p.66). After all, the media are ruled by individuals who have power and influence, and the groups mostly represented are part of the elite that manages media’s agenda, while non-dominant groups are underrepresented and have no decision power in what is displayed (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Dragojevic et al. (2016) analyzed 1,252 characters on primetime television from nine cable networks for one week, and concluded that standard American speakers were portrayed more frequently (84.3%) than any other language groups; they played the main roles; and they were depicted more positively and appeared to have more attractiveness and status traits than any other groups. The media, written or broadcast, claim authority in preserving the notion of language correctness associated with the idea that there is a superior language, which when used facilitates communication among the different language groups (Lippi-Green, 2012). However, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) claim that “ standard varieties constitute dialects every bit as much as those varieties spoken by socially disfavored groups whose language differences are socially stigmatized” (p.2).

Additionally, language choices in the media are likely to reinforce linguistic stereotypes by stigmatizing dialects and accents that are not considered standard (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Linguistic stereotype is “an uninformed and frequently culturally-biased overgeneralization

about subgroups (their language or dialect) that may or may not be based on a small degree of truth” (A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics, 2004). Kim and Davis (2010) assert that there is a correlation between voice effects (accent) and speaker identity recognition; thus individuals attribute different traits to different accents. The media’s language choices, linguistically (negative comments on language variants) or non-linguistically (constant association of certain linguistic variants to negative traits) help disseminate stereotypes related to racial groups based on language (Lippi-Green, 2012). For example, Sui and Paul (2017) note that Latinos were more often portrayed in local TV news coverage in crime related reports and usually with a heavy accent. Thus, the continual exposure to this type of content in the media can influence people to generalize linguistic and behavior traits to a racial group (Sui & Paul, 2017). Lippi-Green (2012) reports that the imagery repetitively presented in media along with certain stigmatized varieties of English can legitimize the assumptions individuals make concerning speakers of these variants.

Accent and dialect use in Disney animated cartoons. Walt Disney Company is the most prominent company in the business of animated film production in the world (Chytry, 2012). It was established in 1923 in Los Angeles by Walt Disney and his brother, the creators of famous characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Their first full animated film hit was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. The movie grossed a profit of almost 185 million dollars. Since then, the company has been producing one hit after another. It also has diversified its products in film production, children TV channels, huge amusement parks and all sort of merchandise related to films released (Lippi-Green, 2012).

In 2016, Disney was considered the most powerful brand in the world by Brand Strength Index (BSI), and also the 6th leading brand among children from 6-12 years olds in the United

States (Statista, 2017). However, many types of research have demonstrated that Disney's complicity in magnifying all sorts of language-based stereotypes (Lippi-Green, 2012; Azad, 2009; Sonnesyn, 2011). In the earliest days of the company, Disney produced a large number of films that slandered and taunted people with disabilities and all sorts of minorities, and they are well known for appropriating and reinterpreting famous stories from other cultures (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Furthermore, one aspect that has received some attention lately (Azad 2009; Sonnesyn, 2011; Trowell, 2007; Souza et al., 2016) is the use of accent to not only establish the settings of the film, but also give insight into characters' nature (Azad, 2009) and enact a form of language discrimination (Souza et al., 2016). Sonnesyn (2011) studied Disney's animated films from 1995- 2009 with the purpose of analyzing how accent was used to create characters. Data from this quantitative analysis demonstrated that out of the total of 372 examined characters, 227 spoke General American (GA), and the rest of the characters spoke English with an accent. Findings also demonstrated that accent was used in most films to give insight to the audience about the social status and level of sophistication of the speaker.

Like Disney, other companies such as Pixar, DreamWorks, Century Fox, and Warner Bros have utilized accent use in animated films to build characters (Azad, 2009). Azad (2009) examined dialect performance in animated films produced by Disney, DreamWorks, Pixar, Century Fox, and Warner Bros, and found that 49% of characters in 17 animated films from 1995 to 2008 spoke Standard American English in comparison to other variants of English, and that the use of accents in films was deliberate, not only to establish the setting in which the film occurred, but also to characterize the person speaking. Azad (2009) notes that even when the setting was mythical, the filmmakers still used current dialects in the films.

In recent studies, researchers have provided more evidence that Disney animated movies can perpetuate linguistic stereotypes within a very large and sensitive public (Van Wormer & Juby, 2016; Rosa, 2006). Disney's choice of vocabulary may convey messages about what is considered standard and non-standard English, and the use of phonological and syntactical constructions may transmit ideas to the society about which variant of the target language is ideal to construct characters and to provide background information about their social status (Rosa, 2006). Through linguistic production, characters are portrayed as being good or bad; good characters are those who show more flexibility in adapting to the standard or formal language.

Additionally, Trowell (2007) reports that in a quantitative study conducted with 215 3rd to 5th graders, respondents tended to characterize speakers of Mainstream United States English (MUSE), portrayed in animated films, as more competent and socially attractive than speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), French, Arabic and British language. Also, AAVE speakers were seen as less competent than speakers of the other languages present in the study. In this same quantitative study, AAVE speakers were assigned lower-paid occupations (Janitors), while MUSE-accented characters were assigned higher paid jobs, such as teachers and doctors. This study demonstrated that if children are capable of assimilating stereotypical attitudes in regard to certain dialects, than the more they watched animated films, the more negative would be their language attitudes concerning speakers of a non-standard mainstream English.

Tavin and Anderson (2003) argue that teachers should raise awareness in classrooms of the existence of such ideologies and the effects they can have on learners' identity. They conducted a study with 5th graders in which students analyzed Disney films, where they had to identify any type of prejudice related to the characters. At the end of these sessions, students

would have healthy discussions about these prejudices. They were also asked to produce an art project which would re-vision these Disney films in a less stereotyped way.

Animated films are a vehicle of language stereotype and sociopolitical ideologies, according to Lippi-Green (2012). The broadcast media has become a very powerful socialization agent, and Disney has been one of the largest corporations in producing animated cartoons targeting children.

After all, language is not just a mean of conveying thoughts; it is the “machine that generates the social world” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 12). The meaning that is conveyed in words is not innate; it is a result of our social interactions, our beliefs, and how we interpret the world around us. So changes in the discourse may result in some changes in the social world.

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to find out how animated films convey language stereotypes and language ideologies concerning the use of accent to language learners; considering the nature of this study's research question, a critical discourse analysis design will be applicable to this inquiry. This method will allow a deep exploration of language use in order to find out why and how a certain type of language is used in the selected animated films.

Film Selection

Although researchers have analyzed the use of accent in several popular Disney animated films (e.g. Azad, 2009; Sonnesyn, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2012) so far no studies have covered these full-length Disney movies released in 2016.

This study is based on a critical discourse analysis of two recent animated films from Disney studios *Zootopia* (Disney 2016) and *Finding Dory* (Disney Pixar 2016). *Finding Dory* was produced by Pixar, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios. It is important to note that although *Pixar Animation Studios* and *Disney* companies had only distribution agreement in the past, Disney decided to merge with *Pixar Studios* in 2006. Steve Jobs, former CEO of *Pixar Animation Studios* stated that "he came to the conclusion that it made the most sense for Pixar to align itself with Disney permanently instead of trying to distribute films on its own or sign with another movie studio partner" (as cited in La Monica, 2006). At the beginning of the merger, these two companies acted as two separated entities. However, throughout the years they have collaborated in the production of movies such as *Zootopia*. They also have the same President, Ed Catmull, and the same chief creative officer, John Lasseter. In an interview with *The*

Australian, Catmull stated that “initially it was Pixar teaching Disney how to do it but we only did that for a year and a half and then Disney got going” (Bodey, 2016). Both movies were accessed on *Netflix* at the expense of the researcher.

I decided to analyze *Finding Dory* and *Zootopia*. These two movies’ popularity was determined by their box office numbers. They rank the 4th and the 5th highest-grossing animated films of all times respectively (Box Office Mojo, 2017). *Zootopia* alone broke one of Disney’s records by grossing more than any other Disney animated film ever produced in the first two weeks of release in theaters. And the more popular and recent these movies are the greater the implications for the effects of the stereotypes they convey.

The table below shows which movies were selected:

Movie	Year of Release	Studio
Zootopia	March 4 th , 2016	Walt Disney Studios
Finding Dory	June 17 th , 2016	Disney and Pixar

Table 1: Films Selected

Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis

Critical discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to find out the hidden values and beliefs that may be associated with the usage of accents in these movies (Jørgensen and Philips, 2012). I will be exploring connections between the characters possible accents and the social and economic context that they may occur in the movie. Jancsary,

Hollerer, and Meyer (2016) state that CDA is a “research program that encompasses a variety of approaches, theoretical models and research methods.”(p. 183).

The first concept that has to be addressed when referring to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discourse, the object being researched. Scholars around the world have different views of what is considered discourse. In a more German and Central European trend, discourse is viewed as text linguistics and rhetoric, in an Anglo-American perspective, discourse is related to written and oral texts (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). However, Van Leeuwen (2016) argues that a distinction must be made between text and discourse: he believes that discourse is embedded in the text. The author goes on saying that text refers to the written material while discourse is as Foucault states: “socially constructed ways of knowing some aspect of reality” (as cited in Van Leeuwen, 2016, p.138). In other words, it is the language used in a social context. Moreover, Jäger and Maier (2016) states that discourse in CDA is seen as a “material reality *sui generis*” (p.112), since discourse can’t be limited to a reflection of reality, but is also the tool that shapes reality and makes it possible for the social reality to exist.

A second concept that is implied in CDA is that it is critical. According to Jäger and Maier (2016), the term ‘critical’ in a CDA context refers to:

Expose the evaluations that are inherent in a discourse, to reveal contradictions within and between discourses, the limits of what can be said, done and shown, and the means by which a discourse makes particular statements, actions, and things seem rational and beyond all doubt, even though they are only valid at a certain time and place (p. 119.)

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), as explained by Wodak and van Dijk, “is therefore not interested in investigating a linguistic unit *per se* but in analyzing, understanding and explaining social phenomena that are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-

methodical approach” (as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 2). Jäger and Maier (2016) assert that CDA “aims to identify the knowledge contained in discourses and dispositive, and how these knowledge are connected to power relations in power /knowledge complexes” (p. 110).

Thus, a CDA of accent use in animated films aims to understand how the use of linguistic and non-linguistic features can reinforce certain stereotypes connected to certain varieties of English through the analysis of discourse (verbal and non-verbal) present in these films. Discourse tends to reflect and reproduce beliefs, and ideologies may be conveyed and reflect the type of language that is used in the films.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process encompasses watching each film and making general observations about characters that are presented as speaking a dialect different from Standard American English (SAE). SAE, as explained by *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, is a variety of American English “that in respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform (as cited in Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 57). Although the term SAE is difficult to define, I considered SAE all linguistic English features that are devoid of regional and social marks.

Characters. Firstly, I watched the entire film, and while watching I made general observations concerning the plot, setting and main theme. Further, I watched the movie for the second time, and I made a list of the character paying close attention to the role they were playing. If the characters I observed were having a collaborative relationship with the protagonist, I would label them as good. If characters were seen as acting against the protagonist I would label them as harmful to protagonists. Similarly, I paid close attention to the setting of the film in order to determine whether it was an imaginary setting.

Moreover, I described what was said and how it was said, aiming to find out a possible interpretation for such utterances and later provide an explanation of why such discourse was used in a particular situation and what ideologies they may convey.

Themes in this present study emerged after analyzing observation notes from each movie. I noted also if there was a dominance of SAE in these films and considered a possible explanation for such thing.

While I watched the movies, I used a chart similar to the one below to collect and organize data about the characters.

Character	Accent/Accent features	Gender	Ethnicity	+/- sophisticated

Table 2: Adapted from Sonnesyn (2011)

Accents and dialects identification. Phonological and syntactic characteristics, as well as the vocabulary of the characters' linguistic output, were analyzed to find out which dialect was used. In some cases, the dialect was easily identified due to the presence of obvious features that are primarily known, such as the usage of *ain't*, in the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or *Y'all* in Southern American English varieties. If I was not able to identify a particular dialect, I marked it as not clear. I consulted the following previous studies to identify phonological characteristics of accents and dialects in order to validate the data collected: Rosa (2006), Lippi-Green (2012), Sonnesyn (2011), Azad (2009), and Hughes et al. (2012).

Transcription of relevant words. In order to make the phonetic transcriptions of sounds' realization, I used the *International Phonetic Alphabet* (IPA), which can be used to symbolize sounds of all languages. Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2014) state that "each character of the alphabet had exactly one value across all the world's languages"(p.193). I used brackets ([]) to represent the realization of words in a sentence, and slashes (/) to represent American English sounds in general transcription.

I made a phonological analysis and transcription of relevant words or expressions that would help clarify what accent or dialect the characters were using. An example of such transcription is exemplified below:

Astronaut sheep: Yeah, I [a:] don't have to cower in a herd anymore.

The word in bold is the word I chose in order to highlight a relevant phonological feature of the dialect in question. Following the word, there is an IPA transcription in brackets of the realization of the word in the dialect identified in IPA.

Analysis and Discussion

Zootopia

Plot. *Zootopia* (2016) is an animated film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, a comedy-adventure that takes place in a city named Zootopia, where mammals from different habitats coexist peacefully disregarding their differences and inequalities. The protagonists are a rabbit whose dream is to become a police officer and a fox who is a hustler. The plot is about a rabbit police officer, who is willing to become a successful cop and break myths about what rabbits can or cannot do. Despite being the smallest mammal on the police force, she manages to pair up with Nick, a hustling fox to solve crimes.

Zootopia in numbers.

Ratings	Results	Number of Users
Rotten Tomatoes	98% out of 100	97,104 users
IMDB	8.1/10	289.829 users
Box Office Numbers	\$1,023,784,195	
Widest Release	3,959 theaters	
Box Office Numbers	\$1,023,784,195	
Budget	150 million USD	

Table 3: Box Office Numbers and Ratings

According to Box Office Mojo (2017) the film grossed at a total of 1 billion USD worldwide, demonstrating that this film draws the interest of many viewers around the globe. According to Artz (2004), Disney uses high-end technology to create and manipulate characters, using colorful imagery and voice effects in a manner that these films depict a perfect and attractive imaginary world to viewers. The film was reviewed by online viewers on the website Rotten Tomatoes (2017) with 98% of the total 97,104 users rating it as being positive. In the

Internet Movie Database (IMDb), 289,829 viewers rated the film 8.1 out of 10 (IMDb, 2017). So, *Zootopia* (2016) was a popular Disney film in 2016.

Zootopia: stereotypes, race, and racism. Several previous studies discuss the film's main theme: a utopian metropolis where mammals, prey, and predator live together in peace. Beaudine, Osibodu, and Beavers (2017) believe that the main message Disney examines in *Zootopia* involves stereotypes, race and racism. These authors assert that the relationship portrayed between predators and prey is intended to reflect the race-related problems in the US.

Moreover, Crewe (2017) adds that the film not only explores race-related issues in the guise of prey and predator relationship but also deals with the theme of sexism by portraying a female rabbit who tries her best to become a police officer. The female rabbit, Judy Hops is treated as a token female and sent to distribute parking tickets, even after having excelled in the police academy. Crewe (2017) notes that the film also explores how language can be used to diminish without being openly aggressive, how stereotypes are reinforced in the societal groups from birth, and how gender inequalities are spread in the society. "Discrimination, oppression, and inequality operate on multiple axes within the film: animals experience different treatment based on their size, their specific species, or more broadly, whether they fall into the category of prey or predator" (Crewe, 2017, p. 30).

However, the real dissemination of language stereotypes and language attitudes through the use of accent and dialects in *Zootopia* is more difficult to discern.

Zootopia: a critical analysis of accent and dialect use. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) observe that individuals tend to form impressions about what they hear, not only based on the conversation content, but on the how the utterances are formed:

Assessments of a complex set of social characteristics and personality traits based on language differences are as inevitable as the kinds of judgment we make when we find where people live, what their occupations are, where they went to school, and who their friends are. In fact, there are some who feel that language differences serve as the single most reliable indicator of social position in our society (p.1).

Furthermore, the language used in animated films is intentionally scripted to establish the background of characters and help viewers to infer and make judgments on the character's nature.

Southern American English in Zootopia. It is difficult to determine which specific variant of Southern American English (Southern AE) is presented in the following examples, taken from *Zootopia* since Southern American English is composed of a variety of dialects. However, Lippi-Green (2012) points out linguistic features that are common in many of the dialects from the South: "The merger of /i/ and /e/ before nasal sounds; the monophthongization of /ai/ to /a/; *you all* or *Y'all* for the second person plural pronoun (p.214).

Example 1.

- (1) Astronaut sheep: Yeah, I [a:] don't have to cower in a herd anymore.
[The Jaguar rips off his muumuu. She's wearing a homemade astronaut costume.]
- (2) Astronaut sheep: Instead I [a:] can be an astronaut.

In this example, the astronaut sheep character is using the phonological features that match the Southern AE dialect, such as instead of pronouncing *I* [aɪ], the character phonological output is *I* [a:], monophthongization of /aɪ/ to [a:] diphthong.

Example 2.

- (4) Gideon Grey: Gimme your tickets **right** [ɹa:t] now or **I'm** [a:m] gonna kick **your** [juə] meek little sheep butt.
- (5) Sharla: Ow! Cut it out, Gideon!
- (6) Gideon Grey: Baa-baa. What're **ya** gonna do, **cry** [kra:]?
- (7) Gideon Grey: Nice costume, loser. What crazy world are you livin' in where you think a bunny could be a cop?
- (8) Gideon Grey: Come and get 'em.... But watch out, 'cause I'm a fox-- and like you said in your dumb little stage [**sta:ɪdʒ**] play, us predators used to eat prey. And that killer instinct's still in our **Dunnah** [dʌnə] (DNA).

Example 3.

- (9) Adult Gideon Grey: Hey Judy—I [a:]'d like to say **I'm** [a:m] sorry for the way **I** [a:] behaved in **my** [ma:] youth. I had a lotta **self** [sɜlf]-doubt that manifested itself in the form of unchecked rage and aggression. I was a major ['**meɪədʒə**] jerk.
- (10) Adult Gideon Grey: Anyhow-- I brought **y'all** these pies.

Examples 2 and 3 relate to the speech style of the character of Gideon Grey, a fox, and Sharla, a sheep who wants to become an astronaut. At the beginning of the film, Gideon is portrayed as an insecure bully, a young teenager who uses force to intimidate his counterparts. Both Gideon and Judy are children raised on farms, which is confirmed by the scenery portraying farms, a *Carrots Days* festival, a Hay Maze and many other attractions in a farm fair.

Judy Hops, as well as Gideon Grey and his friends, are from the rural areas of Zootopia. However, Gideon Grey presents more phonological patterns that can be connected to the Southern AE than his counterparts do. Gideon Grey's phonological output makes use of Southern speech pattern such as 'right' [ra:t], I [a:], 'my' [ma:]. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) argue that "Southerners are more readily identified as Southerners by their /ai/ vowels than any other single dialect feature" (p.84).

Gideon also presents some non-standardized lexicon, such as '*gimme*' [gimi] instead of "give me", as well as "*Dunnah*" [dʌnə] instead of DNA and "*lotta*" ['lɒtə] instead of "a lot of". Although in the first scenes of the film, this character is portrayed as the least sophisticated character in comparison to his counterparts, at the end of the film he becomes a successful baker in his town. Yet adult Gideon maintains the same phonological features such as *y'all*, I [a:] which is part of the Southern American dialects. Lippi-Green (2012) mentions that Southern American English is a highly stereotyped variety, and its most salient stereotype is ignorance that is "disassociated from education and literacy" (p. 223). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) state that speakers of "(...) Southern American English are often stigmatized as "dumb" and "uneducated" and thus "slower" than speakers of non-Southern varieties" (p. 84). Additionally, Azad (2009) concludes in her study regarding accent use in Disney movies that people react

differently to various accents and explains that attaching different qualities to speakers based on language can perpetuate and reinforce social stereotypes such as Southerners being uneducated.

Interestingly, although Judy Hops shares the same background as Gideon, her character does not present any regional marks in her phonological output throughout the film. A similar situation was noted by Lippi-Green (2012) in *The Lion King (2000)*: set in Africa, this earlier Disney film's major character, Simba is voiced by a white actor who speaks SAE, while other characters are voiced by African American actors and use AAVE dialect. In *Aladdin (1992)*, the action takes place in a fictional Arabian city, and while Aladdin's counterparts speak Arabian-accented English, the main character, a poor kid from the streets, uses a speech style free of Arabian English features. It seems that for main characters Disney language choices tend to prioritize SAE over other English dialects; thus SAE is the desirable accent of characters who play a positive role in these movies. Lippi-Green (2012) asserts that Disney's agenda is the one of the dominant cultures, to ensure that the institutions in power still promote their own interests and exert dominion over less valued social groups.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Example 4.

- (11) Duke Weaselton: Have a donut, **coppah [kɔpə]!**
- (12) Duke Weaselton: It's Weaselton. Duke Weaselton. And I **ain't [eɪnt]** talking, rabbit. And **ain't [eɪnt] nothing [nʌfɪn]** you can do to make me.
- (13) Duke Weaselton: Aaagh! Agh! (to Nick)**Ya** dirty rat! Why **ya** helping her?!
She's a cop!
- (14) Duke Weaselton: All right, all right, please! I'll talk! I'll talk. I stole them night

howlers so I could sell ‘em. They offered me what I couldn’t refuse... Money.

- (15) Duke Weaselton: Hey, 15% off! 20! Make me an **offer** [‘ɔfə] Come on!
- (16) Duke Weaselton: What’s it to you, Wilde? Shouldn’t you be **meltin’** down a popsicle or **somethin’**?

Duke’s character is a smuggler who tries to earn as much money possible. Early in the movie, he is caught stealing a bag of night howlers and he is arrested by Judy Hopps. He knows Nick Wilde, one of the protagonist, from dubious hustling on the streets. Duke’s phonological features match linguistic characteristics from African American Vernacular English: r-deletion in **offer** [‘ɔfə], negation strategy in “**I ain’t**” instead of “I am not” (Lippi-Green, 2012), and the change of the phoneme /ŋ/ to [n] as in “**somethin’**” [‘sʌmθɪn], and “**meltin’**” [‘mɛltɪn] (Rosa, 2006).

Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2012) notes that such AAVE rhetoric is so often associated with lower classes in the mainstream media, including criminals or victimized individuals. Bearing in mind that the film takes place in a fictional setting, so there is no need for adherence to any particular language dialect, the AAVE is “likely being used not for conveying setting, but for aiding in character construction instead (Azad, 2009, p. 57). The usage of this variety in such context reinforces language-based stereotypes targeting AAVE speakers. AAVE is perceived as a broken English, a variety used by uneducated and lazy people (Lippi-Green, 2012, p.191).

Foreign Accents. However, not all dialect variants that distance themselves from SAE are perceived negatively. For instance, Chief Bogo, a gruff cape buffalo voiced by the British actor Idris Elba, presents an African-accented English, but he plays a very high-status role in the movie. The character is the Chief of the Zootopia Police Department, and his speaking style is very formal and sophisticated.

Example 4.

- (17) Chief Bogo: Life isn't some cartoon musical where you sing a little song and all your **insipid** dreams magically come true. So let it go.
- (18) Chief Bogo: There are some new recruits with us I should **introduce**. But I'm not going to because, I don't care.

Example 5.

- (19) Judy Hopps: [as Duke Weaselton rolls into the station, trapped in The Big Donut's sign] I popped the weasel!
- (20) Chief Bogo: [emerging from his office, yelling] Hopps!
- (21) Chief Bogo: [inside Chief Bogo's office where the Chief reads a list of Hopps's offenses] Abandoning your post, inciting a **scurry** ['skʌ.ɹɪ], reckless endangerment of rodents. But, to be **fair** [feə], you did stop a **master** ['mɑ:stə] criminal from stealing two dozen moldy onions.

Chief Bogo uses a formal English variant. He is the Chief of the police department, and his speech style goes according to his high position in that department. The language choices for this character intend to establish a distinction between a regular police officer (Judy Hopps) and the Chief of the Zootopia Police Department (ZPD). While Judy Hopps uses informal words such as “popped” instead of “arrested”, Chief Bogo uses legal terms such as “**inciting a scurry**”, “**reckless endangerment of rodents**”, and “**master criminal**”. He also uses formal words such as “insipid”, and “introduce”. Judy addresses Chief Bogo as “sir” to show respect for his position in the police force.

Adding to this, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) explain that people in higher social positions in the marketplace are likely to use more standard varieties than people with lower economic status. For instance, the language choices for this character are intended to show his important role. The desirable language for that position seems to be a formal SAE, even with a certain level of accented English.

Chief Bogo uses a non-rhotic accent which can be found in many parts of the world, including British and South African English accents (Hughes et al., 2012). He only pronounces it when the /r/ comes before vowels: for instance, fair [feə] and master [ˈmɑːstə], the /r/ is omitted, but in criminal [ˈkrɪmɪnəl] it is pronounced. This same situation occurs within the film when a bobcat news anchor uses a standard but non-rhotic dialect in a TV broadcasting set. The accented English variety, in this case, has high status. However, it is important to note that not all non-rhotic accents are regarded in the same way. Duke Weaselton uses a feature of AAVE in “offer” [ˈɔfə] in which he drops the /r/ sound. In the US, the non-rhotic accent is regarded as a marker of working-class or vernacular for instance New York City, New England, and AAVE English variety, while in England is a prestige feature of higher class status.

Throughout the film, accents are also used to give insights regarding aspects of the characters’ cultural background or to label them as foreigners. An illustration of this situation would be an elephant that speaks an Indian-accented English as a yoga instructor, and in another instance, an arctic shrew, Mr. Big, who happens to speak an Italian-accented English, who runs a dubious business that resembles a mafia organization:

Example 6.

24 Mr. Big: I trusted you, Nicky... I welcomed you into my home... we broke bread together... **Gram-mama** made you her *cannoli*. And how did you repay my

generosity? With a rug... made from the butt of a skunk. A skunk butt rug. You disrespected me. You disrespected my **gram-mama** who I buried in that skunk butt rug.

Example 6 contains vocabulary choices that can help one identify the language background of the character. Mr. Big refers to *cannoli* which is a typical Italian dish. The reference to this well-known dish along with the pronunciation of grandmother as “*gram-mama*”, implies that the character’s cultural background may be Italian-American. Also, Mr. Big character impersonates another character from a classic film, Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, a leader of an Italian mob. In fact, there is a whole scene in *Zootopia* that make reference to this classic movie.

Dragojevic et al. (2016) emphasize that foreign accents tend to be associated with “incomprehensible others” and standard varieties speakers are likely to be attributed good traits while foreigner speakers are often depicted as less favorable characters with lower status-related traits (p. 76). Beck (2000) notes that there is a generalized idea that “Italians were and are especially identified with organized crime, even as they have grown and prospered as an American group” (p.24). As consequence, “through the dissemination of American ideas in movies and popular culture, Italians have become to stand for organized criminality all over the world” (p.24).

Finding Dory

The plot. *Finding Dory (2016)* is a computer animated comedy-drama adventure film produced by Pixar, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Company, and released by Walt Disney in 2016. The animated production narrates a story about a regal blue tang fish who suffers from short-term loss. The movie is a sequel to *Finding Nemo (2003)*, in which the little blue fish Dory played an important role by helping Marlin, Nemo's father, to find the lost fish. In this sequel, Dory, who has always been lost, starts to have flashbacks about her childhood and her parents. Since she has not been able to remember where she is from, these memories are a sign of hope for her in helping her find her parents. Marlin and Nemo agree to help Dory find her parents since Dory was the key in helping the father and son reunite in *Finding Nemo (2003)*.

Finding Dory, family, and physical/ mental impairment. There are several themes addressed in this full-length animated film, for example, the theme of belonging; Dory -even after being adopted by Marlin and Nemo's family- decides after some memory flashbacks, to find her biological family. Another powerful theme involves overcoming and learning to cope with physical and mental impairment. Almost all the characters in the film suffer from some type of impairment; for instance, Dory suffers from short memory loss and insecurity, Hank, an octopus, is an amputee; Destiny is a whale who is short-sighted; Bailey a beluga whale who believes his sonar skills are damaged.

Finding Dory in Numbers.

Ratings and Box Office Numbers	Results	Number of Users
Rotten Tomatoes	98% out of 100	179.163 Users
IMDB	7.4/10	152.125 Users
Widest Release	4,305 theaters	
	\$ \$1,029,570,889 USD	
Total Box Office Numbers		
Budget	200 million Dollars	

Table 4 Box Office Numbers and Ratings

Finding Dory (2016) grossed 1 billion dollars and received noteworthy positive ratings: ninety eight percent of the total of 179.163 users rated it positively in *Rotten Tomatoes*, and in IMDb, 152.125 users rated *Finding Dory* 7.4 out of 10.

Accent and dialect in *Finding Dory*. In *Finding Dory* (2016), there are no good and evil characters; the only obstacles that characters have to overcome are related to their own physical and mental limitations. The movie takes place in a fictional ocean where fishes adopt human behavior and are able to convey their thoughts into words. However, it seems that the film's main purpose is to represent a range of disabilities that many individuals live with on a regular basis. The language choices in this film reflect the intent of the authors to explore how different individuals with certain limitations can, with patience and perseverance, do amazing things. This lack of a villain means less concern with characters speech style or which varieties of English they use in a given situation.

London Vernacular. Although there is not as great variety of accents and dialects in *Finding Dory* as there is in *Zootopia*, the filmmakers decided to use a stigmatized variety of British English to provide viewers with stigmatized features associated with speakers of London

Vernacular or, as it is known popularly, Cockney (Drobot, 2013). The London Vernacular (LV) is the variety of British English spoken by the poor working class in East London. In Great Britain, it is considered a language full of vulgarisms. Ayres (1939) claims that this variant was “the unprivileged slum cousin of “good” English”(p.127). After all, this less sophisticated variety used by people from a lower social class, the less educated people. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2006) assert that “socially stigmatized variants carry negative connotations through their association with low-status groups” (p.182).

Zacharek (2016) claims that Fluke and Rudder presented some characteristics of London vernacular. Sea lions Rudder and Fluke are voiced respectively by British actors Dominic West and Idris Elba, British English speakers. This example below attempts to highlight some important phonological feature of this variety:

Example 7.

- (25) Fluke: Oy! You two! Shut it! [ɔ:ɪ jʊ tu:ə ʃʌt it!]
- (26) Rudder: Yeah, we're **trying to** ['traɪ:nə] sleep! You interrupted **my** [mɑ] **favorite** ['faɪvərɪt] dream!
- (27) Fluke: Is that the one **about** [ə' bæət] you laying /'laɪn/ on this **rock** [rɔ:k]?
- (28) Rudder: Yeah.
- (29) Fluke: Oh, that is a good one.
- (30) Rudder: Oh yeah, isn't it?
- (31) Fluke: Yeah. It's one of my **favorites** ['faɪvərɪtz].

Example 8.

- (32) Fluke: **Lads** /lɜds/, meet Becky.

- (33) Fluke: Look, your friend is going to be in quarantine. That's where they **take** [tark] the sick fish.
- (34) Rudder: And the one and only one way into that place [plars] is Becky.
- (35) Fluke: Becky, **love** [lɛv]? These two nice fish need to get into quarantine.
- (36) Rudder: Are you free **today** [tədaɪ], Rebecca darling [dɑlɪn]?
- (37) Fluke: All you have to do is imprint with her, mate [mait].
- (38) Marlin: Imp... what?
- (39) Fluke: Imprint.
- (40) Fluke: This I've got to see.
- (41) Rudder: Yeah, yeah, me too!
- (42) Fluke: Oh boy, this is *gonna* be good! What the... Gerald! Have you lost your marbles?
- (43) Rudder: Don't get used to it, **Gerald** [ˈdʒero:ld]!
- (44) Fluke: Cheeky **joke** [dʒəʊk].

Fluke and Rudder use informal vocabulary such as “**leds**”. Also, they use “*tryna*” as the contraction of “*tryng to*” and “*gonna*” for “going to”. Informal styles also make use of substitutions such as /ŋ/ to [n] as in darling [dɑlɪn] and **laying** [ˈlaɪn]. Examples highlighted above demonstrate that the characters’ dialogue production presents some diphthong realizations that are common to LV, for instance, /ei/ in “**place**”, “**today**”, “**mate**”, and “**favorite**” is pronounced as [aɪ]. Another feature is the realization of the vowel sound /ɔ:/ and /ɑ/ to [o:] as in “**rock**” or “**Gerald**”. Also, the diphthong /aʊ/ is realized as [æə] in *about* [əˈbæət].

The language choices for these two characters serve as a cue to character construction. The presence of this London vernacular can be sufficient for viewers to draw conclusions

concerning these characters, based on the audience's own opinion about speakers of East End London (Zacharek, 2016). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) argue that "we make judgments about the regional background, social status, ethnicity, and a host of other social and personal traits base simply on the kind of language people are using"(p. 1). The traits related to this variety are less sophisticated in comparison to the other characters who do not have an LV accent.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study aimed to critically analyze the discourse in *Zootopia* (2016) and *Finding Dory* (2016) in order to find out if these animated cartoons use accent and dialects within the films, to what purpose they were used and how these portrayals of dialect accents help maintain or challenge societal stereotypes.

The major findings of this critical discourse analysis indicate that these specific Disney animated films used accented English and varieties of American English not only to build the setting of the movies but also to provide viewers with insights concerning the natures of the characters. These findings are demonstrated in *Zootopia* (2016), when certain English varieties are chosen to portray specific characteristics of characters, for instance, Gideon's lack of sophistication and literacy is demonstrated by using a Southern American English variety, as well as the use of AAVE with Duke Weaselton convey the idea of a less sophisticated character who is engaged with shady business and bootlegging. On the other hand, African-accented and formal English was used in the same movie to convey the idea of an elaborate and educated chief in the police force.

Since *Zootopia* (2016) takes place in a fictional setting, language choices are intended to build the scenario: *Zootopia* is an enormous metropolis where animals from different backgrounds coexist in peace, and the variety of dialects and accented English reflect the characteristics of such a fictional melting pot. However, in *Finding Dory* (2016), the language choices are not as clear. The majority of the characters speak in a less marked variety, and with a more standardized grammar and vocabulary relating more to the characteristics of a SAE than any other variety. The focus of this film was of the characters living with their disabilities rather

than on ethnicity, intergroup, social behaviors or even depicting multicultural settings as is the case with *Zootopia* (2016).

Nevertheless, the issue discussed here is not limited itself to language choices, or whether these animated films portray accents and dialects in these movies. As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) note “Language differences are unavoidable in a society of a variety of social groups. They are a fact of life” (p.1). The core of the problem is when these language-based stereotypes are repeatedly depicted in animated films, in a medium that has so much power in shaping younger viewers’ opinions concerning many important topics. Dragojevic et al. (2016) note that if the media repeatedly exploit these language stereotypes and present them to viewers, the audience may start to believe that these claims are true, and that “there are prototypical features (e.g. roles and traits) associated with different linguistic groups (p. 64)”. More specifically, when the only experience individuals have with different ethnic groups is through media, there is a higher chance of stereotype formation since the media tend to present just one side of a story that will often be generalized to the entire group. *Zootopia* (2016) was on view in 3,959 theaters around the globe, and it grossed over 1 billion dollars, reaching a vast number of viewers, and resulting in potentially promoting language-based stereotypes within this enormous audience.

Furthermore, the media not only promote these language-based stereotypes but also help reinforce them. Light-hearted stories such as *Zootopia* and *Finding Dory* are designed for a younger audience that may not be able to identify which assumptions are true or false, but are very likely to reproduce what they hear and see in these animated films: “children are not passive vessels who sit in front of the television and let stories float by them. What they take in is processed and added to the store of data on how things -and people- are categorized” (Lippi-

Green, 2012, p. 104). Dragojevic et al. (2016) observe that children make long-term memory associations during their childhood, and repetitively watching animated films which contain negative assumptions regarding languages may reinforce these stereotypes.

The constant association of good characters with SAE and bad characters with less dominant varieties of English can reinforce a system of language subordination which implies that there are languages or varieties of the same language that are essential and functional than others. Linguists have agreed that languages are equally functional, and these assumptions about subordination are rooted in beliefs individuals or institutions in power hold concerning languages in general (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Implication for English Teachers

Although animated films may promote stereotypes, they are attractive to young viewers, and teachers of English language learners could take advantage of these audiovisuals. For instance, they contain a wide range of vocabulary, can help students explore cultural contexts, and may be integrated easily into the curriculum. Such films can be entertaining, allow flexibility of materials and teaching techniques, relate to students' personal experiences, and act as a focus for teacher-student interaction. These animated films can also be used to promote awareness of the interrelationship between modes of discourse (picture, movement, language, sound, captions) (Bahrani & Sin, 2012).

Despite the fact that they may reinforce language-based stereotypes, these animated films can be authentic resources to foster discussions concerning linguistic stereotypes. With caution, English teachers can take advantage of these films in their classes to highlight implied language-based stereotypes and promote critical thinking skills among their students. Tavin and Anderson (2003) argue that teachers should raise awareness in classrooms on the existence of such

ideologies and the effects they can have on learner's self-identity. They conducted a study with 5th graders in which they were asked about what stereotypes are. After they were introduced to the stereotype concept, students analyzed Disney films to identify any type of prejudice related to the characters. At the end of these sessions, students created visual arts exposing stereotypes they identified in these films.

Not only English language learners may benefit from such discussions, but also students who speak dominant English varieties. These students as well could view and discuss these animated films in order to help them become more aware of their own privilege as speakers of a dominant variety. Young learners are among these students that could benefit from such discussions. Lippi-Green (2012) says that children "take in what they see and put it to use" (p.104). Thus, if a society wants to break stereotypes, they need to start with those individuals that will pass them down to the next generation.

Contribution for Future Studies

There are many issues concerning the portrayal of accents and variants of English portrayal in animated films that need more research. This study was limited to only the two animated films produced by Disney in 2016. However, there is a need to explore other recently-released animated films produced by *Disney* as well as by other studios such as *Pixar* and *Dreamworks*. Another topic interesting to explore is whether these animated films' subtitles in foreign languages reproduce the type of language-based stereotypes of the films' original language. One more area of interest to which similar analytical methods may be applied asks whether similar language-based stereotypes are reinforced and disseminated in comic books such as *Marvel*. It would further be interesting to explore how writers will convey such linguistic stereotypes in writing using only English orthography.

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Tables

Table 1

Films Selected

Movie	Year of Release	Studio
Zootopia	March 4 th , 2016	Walt Disney Studios
Finding Dory	June 17 th , 2016	Disney and Pixar

Note: The table presents movies analyzed in this study.

Table 2

Adapted from Sonnesyn (2011)

Character	Accent/Accent features	Gender	Ethnicity	+/- sophisticated
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Note: This table was an adaptation from Synnosyn (2011). I used this chart as a support to organize my notes regarding some characters' features I was interested in for the purpose of this study.

Table 3

Box Office Numbers and Ratings

Ratings	Results	Number of Users
Rotten Tomatoes	98% out of 100	97,104 users
IMDB	8.1/10	289.829 users
Google Users	96%	Not Available
Box Office Numbers	\$1,023,784,195	
Widest Release	3,959 theaters	
Box Office Numbers	\$1,023,784,195	
Budget	150 million USD	

Note: This table presents Zootopia's rating results. It also presents the amount Disney grossed with the production of this film.

Table 4

Box Office Numbers and Ratings

Ratings and Box Office Numbers	Results	Number of Users
Rotten Tomatoes	98% out of 100	179.163 Users
IMDB	7.4/10	152.125 Users
Widest Release	4,305 theaters	
Total Box Office Numbers	\$ \$1,029,570,889 USD	
Budget	200 million Dollars	

Note: This table presents Finding Dory's ratings. It also presents the amount Disney grossed with the production of this film.