

The Evolution of Gender Roles and Women's Linguistic Features in the Language of Disney

Dr. Mahmoud J. Itmeizeh
Assistant Professor in TEFL
Department of Applied English, Palestine Ahliya University College

Sandra Ma'ayeh
English Language & Literature, SOS Children's Village /Bethlehem

Abstract

The Disney Corporation is one of the largest media companies in the world. Disney adapted many of the cultural oral stories that were created by the Brothers Grimm into animated full-length movies which became a popular type of children's entertainment since the 70's. Various studies were conducted to examine the evolution in gender roles that was presented in Disney movies to understand whether or not they developed through time, and this study aims to identify gender stereotypes that were portrayed in Disney princess movies and to analyze how such stereotypes have evolved and changed over time, even if the change is minor. The movies that are analyzed by means of content analysis are *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Brave* (2012).

Keywords: Disney, gender, gender roles, stereotypes, women's language, culture, society feminism, Brothers Grimm, fairytales, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Brave.

1. Introduction

As with any society children from all around the world grow up with different backgrounds; languages, culture, religious beliefs and values. Despite the fact and generally speaking, there still remains a universal and common trend that unites these children, that trend is summarized in animation. Whether it is cartoons or full blown movies, children will know their favorite characters, storyline and events. Most distinct in this world of imagination is embodied by one word, that is: "Disney". Disney will be the main focus of this research paper, more specifically Disney movies. In this respect, when it comes to children and Disney movies it is safe to say they become fascinated by the movie and its characters. When asking little girls what they want to be in the future a majority will answer that they want to be princesses like Belle, Cinderella or Elsa and boys usually go with the male characters such as Aladdin, Tarzan or Peter Pan. I remember when I was a child that my sister, my brother and I used to glue ourselves to the television screen whenever a Disney movie is on and we even used to video tape it so as to watch it over and over again. So for us Disney was regarded as innocent family entertainment. Being a typical child of the eighties at that time I was not only guilty of wearing the most hideous outfits chosen by my lovely parents, or playing with Barbie dolls, I was also a big fan of Disney movies, of which its characters became our idols; they became everything that we wanted to be and in turn affect our identities. From that perspective I want to study the evolution of female gender roles in Disney movies.

During the initial stages of this research paper, I re-watched some of my favorite childhood Disney movies. However, as an adult a new message is conveyed, certain attentiveness to language is sensed which raises so many questions. Such questions, why were girls/women portrayed the way they were in such movies? What type of behavior do they display? Why wasn't there any cultural diversity in Disney movies? All of which influences the audience and their conceptions of gender and gender roles, forming in themselves an independent and universal culture. This section aims to present an introductory overview of my research study. It seeks to clarify my choice for addressing the field of the female gender role in the language of Disney in movies such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Brave* (2012) and many more well-known successful movies. However, due to the nature of this research paper I have chosen two Disney movies out of fifty-four other movies to further analyze and discuss. They are *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Brave* (2012), both movies show a drastic change in female gender roles in Disney throughout time.

2. Literature Review

This section aims to clarify the choice in addressing the field of gender roles in the language of Disney in two sections. The first section is a brief background surrounding the history of Brother's Grimm, Disney and certain definitions that can give a general understanding about the meaning of gender roles. The second part focuses on previous studies of female gender roles in Disney movies.

2.1 Background

Based on the baseline definitions of key concepts and terms that were published under the UNESCO's Gender

Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, they defined gender as the roles and responsibilities that are created in our societies for men and women, which includes the characteristics and behaviors of both men and women (UNESCO, 2003). Gender roles and expectations are learned through imitation and teaching of family members from an early stage, but they can change over time and they also vary within and between different cultures. The concept of gender is really important because based on social analysis, it reveals women's subordination or men's domination in society, and that such subordination can be changed through time, it is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever. So many elements can modify gender roles such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age, etc. (UNESCO, 2003).

There have been many definitions from different perspectives for gender and gender roles. Physiology professor Vicki Helgeson (2012) defines gender as "the social categories of male and female. These categories are distinguished from one another by a set of psychological features and role attributes that society has assigned to the biological category of sex." (Helgeson 2012, p. 3). Gender differs from one society to another because each society has its own perceptions for how women and men ought to behave. Moreover, Helgeson (2012) points out that there is another term that gives a clear picture of society's influence on the biologically based categories of female and male, this term is gender role, She defines it as "a social position that is usually accompanied by a set of norms or expectations" (Helgeson 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, Helgeson finds that gender roles refer to the expectations that go along with being male versus female. For the features of the male role we naturally expect men to be strong, independent, and competitive, and to keep their emotions hidden. While on the other hand, for the features of the female role, we expect women to be weak, caring, emotionally expressive, polite, and helpful (Helgeson 2012, p. 4). Moreover, I have to agree with the above definitions of gender roles, especially roles planted in all of Disney's movies where we can clearly see all of the behavioral norms that are assigned for both female and male characters that are based on Western cultures, rules and values. Most of the behaviors and attitudes give both men and women their own identities, but gender roles differ from one country to another, from a society's culture to another and they also evolve with time.

Brief History

Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, German authors from the 19th century are famously known as The Brothers Grimm. Together they published a collection of oral stories which they collected in their book titled *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales). The first volume was published in 1812 and later on followed by a child friendly second volume in 1815. Those tales became known as the Grimms' Fairytales, they were collected by the brothers sourced from German women under the influence of preserving the folklore and oral traditions of their region (Michaelis-Jena, 1971). Alice Neikirk points out that the Grimm's fairytales function as the base to many stories that are similar in a variety of mediums (Neikirk 2009, p.38). Fairytales were never considered as bedtime stories, in the 19th century they were told at night for the working women to keep them awake as they worked. Some of the well-known stories from the Grimms' Fairytales include Snow White (1812), Hansel and Gretel (1812), Rapunzel (1812), Little Red Riding Hood (1812), Cinderella (1812) and many more.

As time passed by the Grimms' Fairytales were re-written by different writers and in different ways, most of them were adapted into movies for children by different companies. One of the major companies for animation at that time was the Walt Disney Corporation. The Walt Disney Corporation is one of the largest media and entertainment companies in the world; it was founded in 1923, by brothers Walt Disney and Roy O. Disney, it was first known as Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio, later on the name changed to Walt Disney Studio and then ended up being called Walt Disney Productions. Mia Towbin, Shelley Haddock, Toni Zimmerman, Lori Lund and Litsa Tanner (Towbin et al. 2004) mentions in their paper "*Images of gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in Disney feature-length Animated Films*" that Disney's full-length movies have been a popular form of children's entertainment for more than 60 years.

2.2 Previous Studies

This section aims to show many different scholarly contributions to the evolution of the female gender roles in Disney movies.

Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003) explain in their study of the evolution of 168 tales originating from 1857, that there is a strong connection between the number of times a book was reproduced and the number of times the appearance of the female leading character was stated, and it conveys a significant message about the importance of the female beauty. They stated that "Recent Disney films and even contemporary feminist retellings of popular fairy tales often involve women who differ from their earlier counterparts in ingenuity, activity and independence but not in physical attractiveness." (Baker, 2003. P. 722)

Beth A. Wiersma (2001) on the other hand finds that gender role images did not evolve to match the changes that are currently happening within societies, but they remained the same as they were with the typical stereotypes and gender representations that started with the first animated movie done by Disney in 1937. Furthermore, in her analysis she highlights that the male Disney characters hold a diversity of jobs with 26 male job categories across 16 Disney films, while 4 of the female Disney characters have out of home employment,

whereas she found 24 examples of women performing domestic tasks. So in her point of view no evolution has happened in Disney movies.

Mia Towbin, Shelley Haddock, Toni Zimmerman, Lori Lund and Litsa Tanner (Towbin et al. 2004) highlight through their research findings that gender, racial and cultural stereotypes have persisted over time in Disney movies. And there were few positive portrayals that emerged but later on became very common in the movies that came after. Moreover, they explain that it is crystal clear that media portrayals influence children's developing beliefs and values. Research carried out by Signorielle and Bacue in 1999 and another done by Witt in 2000, indicate that many stereotypes are usually based on gender; race, age and sexual orientation represented in the media. They also mention that they found some positive changes that took place in Disney movies over time; many of the messages remain the same, such as gender stereotypes continue to be portrayed, and cultural minority groups are sometimes portrayed negatively as villains or not portrayed at all, or the messages are mixed with both positive and negative portrayals of gender and race with a twist in the plot that might show the female character as independent and later on she is placed in a position where she submit to a male character. When it comes to gender they argue "Female characters in several of the more recent films are shown as heroic and courageous" (p.36) they added that "A few male characters are shown as having an inner emotional life" (p.37) while related to race and culture they believe "Newer Disney films have incorporated some positive portrayals of non-Western cultures." (p. 37). All of that explains the evolution in gender roles in Disney movies but still with all of this development sometimes you can see the mixed messages that are shown in these movies.

Alice Nikirk (2009) states that change and evolution did happen in gender roles but it is based on the interrupter's own views. Fairy tales started with the Brothers Grimm collecting and documenting folk stories in their region, in those stories female villains were introduced into the stories with their own unique characteristics as being old, ugly and jealous of the protagonist female character. Then comes the phase where Disney took a step further, by giving the viewer's visual ideals of the beauty of the female characters and muscularity of the male characters. Most of the interpreters were men and their interpretation was based on the patriarchal society that they live in, which enhanced the characteristics that support stereotypical behaviors which reaffirms that women should be beautiful, helpless, have a youthful appearance and behave well while the evil female characters are unattractive, old, strong, determined, and take advantage of the heroine. On the other hand the male characters are always introduced at the end of the story where they use their masculinity to rescue the heroine. The hero is always described as brave and handsome, he always ends up marrying the heroine because her beauty is enough to ensure that their marriage will be a "happily ever after".

Nonetheless, Christine Yzaguirre (2006) believes that there is a division between "the old classical Disney heroines" such as Snow White and Cinderella, and "the new Disney heroines" that were created in the nineties such as Belle, Mulan and Pocahontas. Yzaguirre sees that the evolution of the characters interests and social status as shown in the new heroines displays eagerness for adventures and personal fulfillment, taking precedence over seeking to enter a romantic relationship like the old heroines did. Yzaguirre also mentions that evolution extended to embrace diverse ethnicities, which were included in the Disney world. She claims that the new heroines are more rebellious than the old passive heroines, and they also reject social roles instead of accepting them, and all of their actions are highlighted more than their physical beauty, so the new heroines no longer need nor depend on a hero to rescue them (Yzaguirre 2006, p31-32).

Kadek Satria Adidharma (2011) in his study argues that the power of storytelling is the main element that makes animation so popular, lovable, attracts viewers' attention and timeless. He also adds that without a great story animation with a non-conventional twist it would be meaningless. Nowadays with all the new technology the animation industry has grown more rapidly; it has developed from short clips to full movies. Animation targets not only children but also adults, with its unique character design and the variety of messages they carry in order to teach every individual something (Adidharma, p.766-767).

3. Significance of the Study

With major changes occurring in the world, many terms changed or let us say evolved with the developments that are taking place. Such a topic as the evolution in gender roles in the language of Disney is very beneficial, because these movies target children and it affects their conceptions of gender and gender roles, forming in themselves and their identity. Therefore, analyzing gender roles present in children's movies is particularly important. When analyzing gender roles, you form an understanding of the stereotypical depictions of gender present in these movies which can impact children negatively. Consequently, children are exposed to different kinds of media especially in the 21st century, with all of the technology that is available to them in an early age. It is beneficial to be aware if major media and entertainment companies are developing the image of gender and gender roles in their productions and staying up-to-date with the developments in cultures and societies worldwide when children's conceptions and future identities are at stake. Stacy Smith, Katherine Pieper, Amy Granados, Marc Choueiti (Smith, et al. 2010) clarify in their paper titled *Assessing Gender-Related Portrayals in Top-Grossing G-Rated Films* that "Children who watch skewed portrayals of males and females while they are

developing cognitively may organize their views on gender into schemas driven by these stereotypes” (Smith, et al. 2010. p. 783). As a result, if we encourage such stereotypes and present them to children we will be suffering from harmful consequences, they will not have the opportunity to be taught to look at the world from more than one perspective.

4. Statement of the Problem

Every researcher has his/her own perspective to the development of gender roles in the language of Disney, many stated that there is neither change nor development and the message is still the same, while others state that there is a change, the roles have evolved. Even if it is a minor change Disney is trying to get rid of the old stereotypes by finding a new voice that supports the changes that are happening in the world.

5. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to prove that gender roles in the language of Disney have evolved which implies alteration in the portrayal of female gender roles in Disney and also to display what type of values are reflected by the female language features. When comparing old movies to the more recent ones we can see many developments have occurred such as females roles are not defined as domestic, weak, emotional and controlled by other, but they are described as independent, brave, confident and intelligent. More focus will be on examining those changes that are exposed in Disney.

6. Research Questions

The study argues and examines the evolution of female gender roles through stereotypes and language portrayed in both movies. It aims to do so by answering the following questions:

1. How have gender roles been represented in old and new Disney films?
2. Have these roles developed and changed over time?
3. What characterizes women's language?

Furthermore, the study examines certain sociolinguistic elements within a social context, it benefits from various conversational patterns, adjacent pairs, turns or any spoken form of language. Included are certain tag questions, hedges and empty adjectives collected as data for more classifications, analyses and discussions from both movie scripts that were produced and written by Walt Disney Production authors, the two movies are “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937) and “Brave” (2012). In addition, themes related to the struggle between both sexes if any will be discussed. The findings of this study can benefit the field of sociolinguistics; the language displayed in the movies has a significant linguistic influence and the ability to reflect both cultural, social values and attitudes.

7. Methodology

The study utilizes text, “content analysis” for contextual interpretation and retrieving meaningful information from documents produced by communication processes such as written texts and audio-visual texts “movies”. As indicated by Carol Busch, Paul S. De Maret, Teresa Flynn, Rachel Kellum, Sheri Le, Brad Meyers, Matt Saunders, Robert White, and Mike Palmquist (Busch et al. 1994-2012), researchers use content analysis to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writers, the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part (Busch et al. 1994-2012). Texts can be defined broadly as books, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, informal conversation, movies, or really any occurrence of communicative language (Busch et al. 1994-2012).

Content analysis can be applied to examine any piece of writing or recorded communication; it is currently used in a variety of fields, extending from marketing and media studies, to literature and eloquence, ethnography and cultural studies, gender and age issues, sociology and political science, psychology and cognitive science, and many other fields of inquiry (Busch et al. 1994-2012). Additionally, content analysis reflects a close relationship with sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, and is playing an integral role in the development of artificial intelligence (Busch et al. 1994-2012).

A content analysis approach will be used on two Disney movies “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937) and “Brave” (2012). This will be conducted by watching the DVD movies and by reading the scripts of the movies in search for themes found in texts or images relating to gender roles. The scripts are available on the internet as pdf or word document on these links:
http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_script.php?movie=snow-white-and-the-seven-dwarfs
http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_script.php?movie=brave-2012.

These selected movies provide the primary source of material for this study.

Having decided on scripts “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937) and “Brave” (2012) out of fifty-four other movies, and discourse as the field of sociolinguistics for my research, two reasons were predominant in

choosing these movies. Firstly, these Disney movies focus on both male and female stereotypical relationships. Secondly, they feature both men and women, since “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” consists of two females and nine males, while “Brave” consists of two generations, and both leading roles are females (mother and daughter), which means there is no male lead character. Therefore, both movies will provide different data related to gender, this will help prove the development that has happened in representing female leading roles in Disney movies.

8. Discussion and Analysis

8.1 Content Analysis

This section aims to answer two of the research questions which are: How have gender roles been represented in old and new Disney films? And have these roles developed and changed over time?

Gender roles are obvious throughout all of Disney movies; the female main characters are usually portrayed as a royal decedent (princess or queen) or a housewife, like Snow White and Merida in Brave. After watching animation movies many children may become fascinated by the characters, they may even look up to them as role models. With this in mind, when looking at the female role, females are portrayed as the weaker sex and their roles did not change that much from 1937 till almost 2000. Focusing more on the female and male characters in both Disney movies you cannot fail to notice that both genders are portrayed in a stereotypical way; that men are strong, independent, intelligent, brave, confident and assertive while women are portrayed as weak, sensitive, emotional, controlled by others, tentative, romantic, domestic, affectionate and sometimes troublesome. This is a clear implication that women depend on men all the time, which is the main theme in the early Disney movies where we saw the princess in a situation where she needs to be rescued by a prince. In the case of Snow White she was incapable of helping herself to get out of her own troubles with her stepmother and needed to be rescued by a prince. The majority of Disney movies at that time (1937 - 2000) followed a similar format, that include a story or a plot that focuses on finding romance “love”, a princess in trouble or danger who needs to be rescued, and at the end a brave and handsome prince enters the picture to give meaning to her life, rescues the princess and they live happily-ever-after.

Moreover, as stated by Merriam-Webster dictionary, feminism is the theory that started originally in America which raises the voices of women who seek equality of the sexes on different levels such as political, economic and social levels. Feminism is a social movement started in 18th century. Stacey Young wrote in her book “*Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*” under the subtitle *Feminist Discursive Politics* she writes “... the women’s movement’s emphasis on consciousness and language, much feminist activism concentrates on changing how people think about gender, power, self-determination and so on.” (Young 1997, p.12). Young adds that “... any social movement organized or otherwise, mobilizes various linguistic and non-linguistic symbolic interventions” (Young 1997, p.13). Additionally Young talks about Radical feminism and says “Radical feminism, for example, has consistently emphasized the ways in which women’s subordination is secured through language and media images” (Young 1997, p.13). Radical feminism aims to make social change and to draw a line between biological behaviors and cultural behaviors of both men and women which have a major impact on their gender roles. Therefore, it can be argued that the Feminist movement influenced in one way or another the change that has occurred to the type of princesses portrayed in Disney movies. This consequently challenges the traditional princess role and offers a new perspective. One of the movies that we see such a change in is Brave, it was released in 2012. Brave presents a strong female protagonist and a really powerful plot that shows the healing of a mother-daughter relationship rather than a romantic love story, making this movie worthy of feminist interpretation.

However, when analyzing the script of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937) the movie opens with its famous line “Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?” asked by the evil Queen and sure the answer is familiar to everyone. According to Christine Yzaguirre (2006), Snow White is one of the old heroines, she is portrayed as a beautiful, obedient and sweet natured girl, as the mirror described her “hair black as ebony, lips red as the rose, skin white as snow” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). It was very important at that time to give details for the appearance of the heroine. We see many themes emerging throughout the movie that is related to gender (male and female), cultural representation, old characters portrayals. To go into deep discussions of the themes, we can see that men seem to lose their senses in the presence of a beautiful woman, in Snow White the prince falls in love with Snow White after glimpsing her “So beautiful, even in death, that the dwarfs could not find it in their hearts to bury her” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). Men are portrayed as strong and heroic, they are the rescuers, and they do not perform any domestic jobs. While on the other hand a woman’s value is determined by her beauty rather than her abilities or intellect, as we see in Snow White the Queen’s motivation to kill Snow White is derived from the Queen’s jealousy that “Snow White is the fairest in the land” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). Women here are portrayed as helpless and they need to be protected. The dwarfs realize how helpless Snow White is so they help her and offer her protection by having her stay in their house “The Dwarf’s told her ‘If you will keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, knit,

and keep everything neat and tidy, then you can stay with us, and we'll give you everything you need.' 'Yes, with pleasure,' Snow White replies, and she stayed with them" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). Women are always depicted as domestic and at the end they are likely to marry the prince, who rescues them "I'm wishing for the one I love to find me today ... that he will carry me away to his castle and that we will live happily ever after" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). The only noticeably dominant cultural representation present in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937) is western Christian values (Towbin et al. 2004). The only race that was presented is the white race; most of the characters in the movie are white, which is set by the stereotype at that time that the white man is the most powerful. Even though the main theme in Disney movies revolves around youthful characters, we can see in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" that old women characters were portrayed as ugly, mean and evil. The Queen, disguised herself as "an old granny who acts as if she knows a young girl's heart" tells Snow White that "It's apple pies that make menfolk's mouth water!" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*). The old lady pretends to share a secret with the girl whom is naïve at such a young age, "I'll share a secret with you. This is no good old apple, it's some magic wishing apple ... one bite, and all your dreams will come true ... Now, make a wish, and take a bite ... there must be something your little heart desires. Perhaps, there's someone you love?" (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937*).

On the contrary, when analyzing Brave's script (2012) you can sense that it is not filled with the usual stereotypes as the old princess Disney movies, starting with the appearance of the princess. Merida, the princess in Brave, refuses to be portrayed as less feminine and more masculine, she just wants to be a respected female and to have the freedom to choose whatever path she desires. Nearly all the princesses in Disney movies show a society that is governed by an eldest male who is the head of the family and express dominant norms about women's role in a script that is written with the aim of the princess finding true love. This reinforces the idea that women can find meaning to their life and to live happily only through marriage. In Brave (2012) the plot focuses more on healing the troubled relationship between a daughter and her mother, there is no romantic love story but one of instinctive and unconditional love. Merida does not want to be told what to do and she does not want to get married, so she has to fight for her right to choose whether marriage is the right path that she wants to follow, "Call off the gathering! Would that kill them? You're the queen, you can just tell the lords, the princess is not ready for this. In fact, she might not be ever ready for this! So that's that!" (*Brave, 2012*). With an unusual happy ending, Brave ends without having any kind of romantic love or marital relationship. At that we can see a changing point in Disney movies where it breaks stereotypes and traditional roles, this shows that women can choose whether or not they want to follow society's traditions and get married. Patriarchy is deeply rooted with the belief that women are inferior and have to give up their free will to the superior man. Disney took a big positive step when they produced and released Brave (2012); this step was towards positive representation of women fighting for their rights and choosing their own path in life. Furthermore, we can see many themes emerging throughout the movie that is related to gender (male and female), cultural representation, old characters portrayals. A woman's value is determined by her intelligence and intellect not her appearance, in Brave we go against the well-known stereotypical conception of female beauty, where Merida's most noticeable feature is her large mass of messy curly orange hair. Her messy hair is something odd when you compare it to the old princesses that have perfectly styled hair and appearance. Women are shown as strong, non-domestic and fight for their rights, in Brave we see Merida has a strong personality, determined and confident, this personality encourages her to go against traditions "No lessons, no expectations. A day when anything can happen. A day I can change my fate." (*Brave, 2012*), we can see that she does not have any domestic tasks like in the past portrayed by Disney princesses, such as Snow White clean, cook and sew. On the contrary, Merida enjoys physical activities such as horseback riding, archery and rock climbing "Merida: 'Mom, you'll never guess what I did today!'", Queen Elinor: 'Hmm?', Merida: 'I climbed the Crone's Tooth and drank from the Fire Falls', King Fergues: 'Fire Falls? They say only the ancient kings were brave enough to drink the fire'" (*Brave, 2012*). Women are shown as strong "Some say fate is beyond our command, but I know better. Our destiny is within us. You just have to be brave enough to see it." (*Brave, 2012*), they are able to make their own decisions, their thoughts and opinions are valuable, taking responsibility for their mistakes "Yours was an alliance forged in bravery and friendship and it lives to this day. I've been selfish. I tore a great rift in our kingdom. There's no one to blame but me. And I know now that I need to amend my mistake and mend our bond. And so, there is the matter of my betrothal. I decided to do what's right, and..." (*Brave, 2012*), and they fight for what they believe in, instead of being submissive to society or the dominant male figure, All of this defies the princess stereotypes.

"Merida: 'Just listen!'", Queen Elinor: 'I am the queen! You listen to me!'", Merida: 'Oh! This is so unfair!'", Queen Elinor: 'Huh! Unfair?\$', Merida: 'You were never there for me! This whole marriage is what you want! Do you ever bother to ask what I want? No! You walk around telling me what to do, what not to do! Trying to make me be like you! Well, I'm not going to be like you!', Queen Elinor: 'Ach! You're acting like a child!', Merida: 'And you're a beast! That's what you are!'" (*Brave, 2012*)

8.2 Features of “Women’s Language

This section aims to answer the third research question which is: What characterizes women's language?

The material for this study is available online; therefore, a PDF and DOC copies were obtained. Firstly, I applied concordance to both of the movie scripts to highlight the features of women’s language. The other types of “women’s language” features were excluded because they were a minority in materials used in this study; only questions (tag questions), empty adjectives and lexical hedges “fillers” were included.

Robin Lakoff ([1975]2004) clarifies in her book *Language and Woman’s Place* that the differences between male and female language are stressed because language reflects society (Lackoff (1975)2004. p.72). This paper features women’s language from a sociolinguistic perspective. For, systemic functional language (SFL) enables the researcher to check the organization of the text as well as the function of the unit of language used. So, the amount of questions asked in general -tag questions, in specific- lexical hedges and empty adjectives used by females in both movies are calculated manually.

8.2.1 Hedges

Hedges refer to words or phrases that represent uncertainty (Lackoff (1975)2004). Some examples of hedges are expressions like kind of, I think so, you know, sort of, uh, oh, you see and well. These words serve a ‘filler function’ in a sentence and are used to reduce the force of a statement. A manual count of the amount of hedges uttered by male and female characters is calculated with 192 frequencies. The amount of hedges spoken by females in both movies is 114 frequencies. The frequency of hedges uttered by female characters in the movies is as follows:

Table 1. Frequency of Hedges uttered by female characters

Movie	Frequency of hedges	%
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	45	39.47%
Brave (2012)	69	60%
Total:	114	59.37%

Extract 1, from Brave (2012):

Merida: **Ach (hedges)**, mom!

Queen Elinor: I would advise you to make your peace with this. The clans are coming to present their suitors.

Merida: It’s not fair!

Queen Elinor: **Oh (hedges)**, Merida! It’s marriage; it’s not the end of the world.

Extract 2, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937):

Snow White: **Well (hedges)**, aren’t you going to wash? What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue?

While on the other hand, the frequency of hedges used by the male characters is as follows:

Table 2. Frequency of Hedges uttered by male characters

Movie	Frequency of hedges	%
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	61	78.20%
Brave (2012)	17	21.79%
Total:	78	40.62%

Extract 3, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937):

Doc: Look! Our house! The lights lit, uh (**hedges**), the lights lit.

All Dwarfs: Jiminy crickets. The door is open. The chimney’s smokin’. Something’s (**hedges**), in there. Maybe a ghost or a goblin, a demon or a dragon

Grumpy: Mark my words, there’s trouble a-brewin’, felt it comin’ all day

Happy: Gosh!

Bashful: That’s a bad sign:

All Dwarfs: what’ll we do? Let’s sneak up in it

Doc: yes, we’ll, uh (**hedges**), squeak up

Extract 4, from Brave (2012):

Merida: The queen and I put the decision to you my lords. Might our young people decide for themselves who they will love?

Lord Dingwall: Huh? (**hedges**)

Lord Macintosh: Well (**hedges**), since you’ve obviously made up your minds about this, I have one thing to say. This is...

8.2.2 Questions

Lakoff ([1975]2004) points out that women tend to ask questions when they want to declare something or explanation is needed to clarify a certain case, because opposite to men, women are insecure about their opinions. This includes the use of tag-questions and rising intonation when giving a statement. The total number of questions asked by male and female characters in both movies is 172 questions. Nevertheless, in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), male characters ask more questions than the female characters, while in the other

we notice the opposite in Brave (2012). The frequency of questions asked by female and male characters is as follows:

Table 3. Frequency of questions asked by male and female characters

Movie	Frequency of tag questions used by males	%	Frequency of tag questions used by females	%
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	52	73.23%	35	34.65%
Brave (2012)	19	26.76%	66	65.34%
	Total: 71	41.27%	Total: 101	58.72%

8.2.2.1 Tag questions

Tag question is a syntactic device which expresses uncertainty and they may also express affective meaning functioning as a politeness device (Lackoff (1975)2004). The total number of frequency of tag questions used by male and female characters is 6 tag questions.

Table 4. Frequency of Tag questions used by male and female characters

Movie	Frequency of tag questions used by males	%	Frequency of tag questions used by females	%
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	2	100%	0	-
Brave (2012)	0	-	4	100%
	Total: 2	33.33%	Total: 4	66.66%

Extract 5, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937):

Sleepy: Its cold too!

Bashful: We ain't gonna do it, are we? (**Tag question**)

Doc: **well (hedges)**, it'll please the princess.

Extract 6, from Brave (2012):

Queen "referring to Merida's pile of pies on her plate": Hungry, aren't we? (**Tag question**)

8.2.3 Empty Adjectives

Lakoff ([1975]2004) categorizes a group of adjectives as empty, which are used when expressing admiration or consent. There are, actually, gender neutral adjectives which can express the same thing – cool, great and terrific belong to this group. Empty adjectives, however, are restricted for female use in the sense that men risk to damage their reputation if using them. Adorable, charming, divine and lovely are examples of adjectives belonging to this category (Lackoff (1975)2004:43, 78). The total number of empty adjective said by both male and female characters is 38 empty adjectives. The frequency of Empty adjectives used by both male and female characters is as follows:

Table 5. Frequency of Empty adjectives used by male and female characters

Movie	Frequency of empty adjectives used by males	%	Frequency of empty adjectives used by females	%
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)	7	46.66%	10	43.47%
Brave (2012)	8	53.33%	13	56.52%
	Total: 15	39.47%	Total: 23	60.52%

Extract 7, from Brave (2012):

Merida: You've changed!

Queen Elinor: Oh, darling (**empty adjective**). We both have

Extract 8, from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937):

Snow White: Oh, it's adorable (**empty adjective**). Just like a doll's house.

8.2.4 Politeness

Women usually use polite language more than men. They take special care to say please, thank you, and also to apologize during a conversation (Lackoff (1975)2004:77-80). When women use modal auxiliary verbs such as should, could, may, might and would more than men, they sound somewhat more polite. The polite language is visible in both movies such as the extract below.

Extract 9, from Brave (2012):

Queen: Your father doesn't believe in magic.

Merida: Well, he **should**. Because that's true.

9. Limitations

Since it was required to finish this study within three months, time was a limitation. Due to the short period of time this research is restricted to two movies produced by Disney. If time had permitted I would have studied more than two of Disney movies. Another limitation is that I did this study by myself and was the only person who chose both of the movies and the examples used in the analysis and discussion. This might reduce the objectivity of my study.

10. Conclusion and Implications

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to investigate the representation of stereotypical female gender roles in Disney movies; the evolution of such roles from 1937 till 2012, and how values are reflected in the features of women's language. The language of both female and male characters is studied from a sociolinguistic perspective where comparison or contrast is drawn between them. As a result we see balance in the usage of female speech elements by females and male characters in the movies.

After analyzing both of the movie scripts it became clear that the female characters in Disney 70 years ago create a very feminine portrayal of women, starting with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1937. As time passed we begin to notice that in more recent movies stereotypes and gender depiction are still visible yet have changed. With the production of *Brave* in 2012, Disney introduced a transformation in gender roles and the portrayal of females. Thus the results resemble the findings of some previous ones, which affirm a change in how gender roles are portrayed. Current changing gender roles may be a result to developments in societal expectations or even acceptance. In turn, this shift may explain why gender stereotypes in Disney movies have evolved over the years.

Finally, Walt Disney Productions have made major changes in the past 79 years in the production of movies and representation of female characteristics. This study provides an understanding of the lengths Disney has taken in producing modern movies, representing a new generation of princesses, who are no longer portrayed as weak and powerless. I believe it would be really interesting to see the future developments in the speech of such princesses, as more movies are produced under the Disney princess movie category and I suggest to have a further study of the male character roles and to see how they are represented in new Disney movies, since both parties are asking for equality in their roles.

References

- Adidharma, Kadek Satria. (2011, April). The Power of Story in an Animation Industry. *Humaniora*, 2. (1) Retrieved from <http://research-dashboard.binus.ac.id/uploads/paper/document/publication/Proceeding/Humaniora/Vol.%20%20No.%201%20April%202011/81%20-%20DKV%20-%20Kadek%20-%20ok.pdf>
- Andrews, M., & Chapman, B. (Directors). (2012). *Brave* [DVD]. USA: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Carol Busch, Paul S. De Maret, Teresa Flynn, Rachel Kellum, Sheri Le, Brad Meyers, Matt Saunders, Robert White, and Mike Palmquist. (1994 - 2012). Content Analysis. Retrieved from <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm?guideid=61>.
- Hand, D., Cottrell, W., Jackson, W., Morey, L., Pearce, P., & Sharpsteen, B. (Directors). (1937). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [DVD]. USA: RKO Radio Pictures.
- Helgeson, Vicki S (2012). *The Psychology of Gender*. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Lakoff, Robin. ([1975]2004). *Language and Women's Place*. Revised and expanded ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maldroid, Kirilgen. (2008-2009). Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in the Disney Princess Series. Retrieved from https://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/414/434/RUG01-001414434_2010_0001_AC.pdf
- Merriam-Webster. (2016). Definition of FEMINISM. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>
- Michaelis-Jena, R. (1971). Oral Tradition and the Brothers Grimm. *Folklore*, 82(4), 265-275. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1260545>
- Neikirk, Alice. (2009). "...Happily Ever After" (or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women). *Hohonu, A Journal of Academic Writing*, 7. Retrieved from <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/hohonu/documents/Vol07MASTER.pdf>
- Smith, S. L., Pieper, K. M., Granados, A., & Choueiti, M. (2010). Assessing gender-related portrayals in top-grossing g-rated films. *Sex Roles*, 62(11-12), 774-786. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9736-z
- Towbin, M. A., Haddock, S. A., Zimmerman, T. S., Lund, L. K., & Tanner, L. R. (2004). Images of gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in Disney feature-length AnimatedFilms. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 15(4), 19-44. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J086v15n04_02
- UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/1.%20Baseline%20Definit>

- ions%20of%20key%20gender-related%20concepts.pdf
- Young, S. (1997). *Changing the wor(l)d: Discourse, politics, and the feminist movement*. New York: Routledge, Inc. Retrieved from https://books.google.ps/books?id=TOVJN50paskC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Yzaguirre, Christine M. (2006). *A Whole New World? The Evolution of Disney Animated Heroines from Snow White to Mulan*. Retrieved from [http://domapp01.shu.edu/depts/uc/apps/libraryrepository.nsf/resourceid/8D8D980E43D9B0DE8525716800571571/\\$File/Yzaguirre-Christine-M-Masters6.pdf?Open](http://domapp01.shu.edu/depts/uc/apps/libraryrepository.nsf/resourceid/8D8D980E43D9B0DE8525716800571571/$File/Yzaguirre-Christine-M-Masters6.pdf?Open)