

Gendered compliment behavior in Disney and Pixar: A Quantitative Analysis

Children's animated films, such as those produced by Disney and Pixar, provide ideologies about gender that are presented to children and their parents as innocent and "safe." Studies in child development have shown that children use these films in playing with and constructing their gender identities (Änggård 2005, Baker-Sperry 2007). Little is known, however, about the specific ways in which they present language as gendered, and what children who watch these movies repeatedly are drawing on as a possible model for their own stylistic performances of gender, which is critical information in a "third wave" approach to sociolinguistics (see Eckert 2012).

The current study is part of a larger quantitative analysis of these films, looking at language use by (and to) male and female characters. One of the first critical results we found was that male characters vastly outnumber female characters overall in both Disney and Pixar films and disproportionately dominate speaking time. Male characters in Disney films spoke 61% of the total words, and in the Pixar movies they spoke 76%. This number rises to 80% if we exclude the most recent movie, *Inside Out* (2015). In other words, in the Pixar movies up to 2015, *only 20% of the dialogue* was spoken by women. We were curious about the presentation of masculinity and femininity in this highly imbalanced world.

Our paper focuses specifically on compliments, a discourse feature which has shown an association with gender in real-life conversations (Holmes 1986, Rees-Miller 2011), and on compliment responses (Holmes 1986, Herbert 1990). Our results show that female characters in the Disney films were more likely to receive a compliment on their appearance than on any other topic. In addition, they were more likely to be complimented on their appearance than on their skills (35% vs 29%). For male characters the trend was reversed; only 17% of compliments were on appearance, and an impressive 48% were on skill. This pattern changes slightly over time, with women in the most recent set of Princess films receiving proportionally more compliments on their skills. The Pixar films show a very similar pattern overall. Male characters received only 7% of compliments on appearance, with 52% on skills. Female characters received 25% of compliments on appearance and 30% on skills, which is comparable to the trend in the later Disney movies. The analysis of compliment responses is still in progress, but preliminary results suggest that they pattern with studies in real communities (e.g. Herbert 1990), where recipients are more likely to accept and affirm compliments from male givers.

Our results are discussed in the context of answering a number of key research questions: How has the presentation of masculinity and femininity in children's films changed over time, if at all, with respect to language? How are ideologies about language and gender packaged and presented to children? And how can the tools of linguistic analysis be used to present a more scientific evaluation of children's media?

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