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Discourse, Linguistic Production, and Subjectivity: Disney-fying Language

Joao "Jota" Rosa

Current conceptions of "curriculum" reflect historical tensions between various epistemological frameworks have historically been fused with an underlying subtext revolving around race, class, gender and ability (Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Kliebard, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Inasmuch as theorists and major pieces of literature have referenced one another and engaged in wider social conversations as to the nature of "worthy" knowledge and systems of dispensation and or creation of such knowledge (Apple, 2000), the curriculum has been incrementally constructed through the formation of categories that ultimately legitimize some forms of knowledge and in so doing systemically marginalize others. This process of curricular differentiation has over time created boundaries between the public pedagogic space and the school as distinct spaces leading to curricular segmentation. Not wanting to romanticize the notion of the public pedagogic space, in the same manner in which this space must be engaged such that we may usefully benefit from it, where it contributes to hegemonic forms of cultural reproduction that marginalize some while dialectically centering others, it must also be examined and if needed, challenged.

It is in this framework that the current project seeks to engage a public space that, while claiming a particular "innocence," is certainly profoundly pedagogical in its capacity to oppress and marginalize in sustaining and furthering hegemonic forms of cultural re-production. To the extent that this public pedagogical space is freely accessed and its commodified products are consumed, knowledge production is proceeding outside the traditional parameters of the classroom. Not focusing on the "control" of the public pedagogical space but rather its active engagement as ultimately a rival creator of knowledge, my aim is to blur the distinction between the public and the educational. This blurring of boundaries, while certainly redefining the pedagogic space, will most assuredly also have to take into account newer forms of thinking about curricular conceptualization and cohesion.

Having earned honorary degrees from many institutions of higher education (UCLA, Yale, Harvard, USC), and produced numerous films and documentaries, Walt E. Disney has had a tremendous impact on the lives of Americans for generations. This influence increases exponentially as parents who grew up on Disney films become advocates for Disney products, hence Disney ideology as embodied in commodity production and consumption. As an instrument of deliverance, language plays a fundamental role in oppression and or liberation in this public pedagogical space. In a sense then, language is not a neutral device devoid of ideological baggage but rather, its reflexivity constitutes the very reality within which we engage. As such, a central proposition of the current project is to undertake an evaluation of the use of language in the construction of subjectification in the Disney “curriculum.”

It is likely, indeed highly probable, that the reader of this project will inevitably position her or himself on one side or the other of an ideological divide. The subject of argumentation is such that ideological neutrality, if it exists, is simply not an option. Some theorists,¹ while referring to Disney have observed that:

Disney has been exalted as the inviolable common cultural heritage of contemporary man; his characters have been incorporated into every home, they hang on every wall, they decorate objects of every kind; they constitute little less than a social environment inviting us all to join the great universal Disney family, which extends beyond all frontiers and ideologies, transcends differences between peoples and nations and particularities of custom and language. (p. 28)

The act of trying to engage Disney is somewhat risky in that the historic development of the company has been such that it fundamentally represents a piece of Americana. The ostentatious act of attempting to question Disney ideology then becomes projected as an act of subversion that offends the sensibilities of what it means to be an American. Dorfman & Mattelart (1971) have concluded that:

We need not be surprised, then, that innuendo about the world of Disney should be interpreted as an affront to morality and civilization at large. (p. 28)

Fully conscious of the ideological divide, this project aims to look at the use of language in the creation of subjectivity in Disney animated films produced within a particular time frame. I will shortly detail the specificity of time and the parameters for the analysis that follows. At this point, it is vital that the reader understand that the Disney vision is being analyzed here as a particular Discourse that becomes embodied in visual form through a particular text.

As an inter-disciplinary and often contested term, Discourse is being articulated here as the

Different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language “stuff,” such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing and using symbols, tools and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of

meaningful connections in our experience and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others. (Gee, 1999, p. 13)

Disney produces a very particular type of Discourse. It is a specific Discourse in that there is a particular structure to the Disney vision; one that allows for some possibilities of outcome while simultaneously negating others. Some would argue that the Disney Discourse is in a sense heteroglossic² (Smoodin, 1994), however, inasmuch as the Discourse is itself constructed against the background of the Anglo-heterosexual-male-able-bodied-capitalist norm, it is very much unitary. This heteroglossic vision of the Disney Discourse may itself be an illusion created by the relative explicitness or implicitness of the Discourse as temporally set in a “changing” socio-historic frame, however, even as the context inevitably mutates and the form adjusts, Disney cultural reproduction remains fixed within particular boundaries.

While the object is to do a linguistic analysis, in this case looking at aspects of phonology and grammar, since these texts are intricately linked through content and form, the linguistic analysis cannot be divorced from the context of production. In this case, the production of discourse is inextricably linked to Discourse. While arguing for the need to explore the symbiotic relationship between form and content in discourse analysis, Fairclough (1999) notes that,

One cannot properly analyse content without simultaneously analysing form, because contents are always necessarily realized in forms, and different contents entail different forms and vice versa. (p. 184)

Since content in this case refers to a series of visual representations, the analysis must then include not only tools that allow for a linguistic analysis, but also provide a lens through which these representations can be analyzed at a semiotic level. The result is that the analysis ends up being and encompassing a hybridity of linguistics in a structural sense and a social approach capable of tackling issues of ideology.

It is of course impossible to delve into the dissection of Disney’s ideological linguistic apparatus without considering the socio-historical conditions under which it was created and is currently maintained. An understanding of the development of the company can provide a lens through which the intertextual nature of the discourse can be made more salient and linked synchronically.

Socio-Historic Development

The company begun by the Disney brothers, Walt and Roy, is today a media and entertainment-empire with a vast array of diversified commodity production targeted at multiple audiences. While the Discourse has remained more or less fluid without moving too far away from a core identity, the company has had its financial ups and downs and gone through a process of sanitization as it has progressed through time by being socially positioned against other types of discourses that inevitably had the effect of sanctifying the Disney image.³

From its inception in 1922, the Disney enterprise has had a somewhat turbulent history of vacillations from bare financial stability and profitability to near bankruptcy and back again (Taylor, 1987, Gomery, 1994). Through a series of strategic financial deals, including but not limited to alliances with more profitable movie companies (United Artists and RKO), Disney was able to survive several financial crises. By 1941, it took the Government's investment in using Mickey Mouse as a goodwill ambassador in the diffusion of ideological propaganda to save the Disney Company from financial extinction. Gomery (1994), is worth quoting at length here as he observes that:

The US government awarded Disney filmmaking contracts and authorized valuable access to chemicals to make movie film. From 1942 through 1946 the Disney studio produced numerous films for training and instruction. Disney serviced the departments of Agriculture, Treasury, and State and also the Army and Navy. Hundreds of thousands of feet were created on a wide variety of topics- from the topography of enemy-held islands, to support of new income taxes, to surveillance of enemy airplanes and ships. Disney came to rely on the government.

Historically this is of great interest in that it clearly reflects the government's understanding of the capacity of even animated films in shaping the subjectivity of a mystified population. While the animated films were shaping popular subjectivity and harnessing support for the war effort, Disney comics functioned with similar aims in ideologically undermining popular movements in Latin America (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971). For now however, let's focus on the historical construction of Disney as a business enterprise.

Disney's financial stability during WWII was somewhat undermined by the post-war years as the contracts with the government eventually ended, but Disney of course had already made its debut in many countries and clearly was an advantageous position vis-à-vis its global position prior to the war. Gomery (1994) notes that,

In 1976 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, long fully amortized, took in nearly two million dollars in one release in West Germany alone.

Even with spectacular revenues on hit years, the Disney company over the years fluctuated in terms of financial solvency as a result of not only bitter struggles between the Disney brothers, but also periodic creative slumps, particularly after the deaths of its founders (Smoodin, 1994). The arrival of Michael Eisner and Frank Wells in 1984 began a period of hit movies that was to re-position Disney as an entertainment power to be reckoned with by the beginning of 1990. An expansion into "R" rated movies, through the creation of Touchstone Pictures (distancing this genre from the Disney discourse) and an opening of Disney shares to upper-middle-class Americans (Gomery, 1994) brought in a new pool of investors capable of providing welcomed financial support to the company's filmmaking enterprise.

The opening of Disneyland in Japan, and the expansion of its US counterparts, Disneyland in California and Walt Disney World in Florida as well as the purchase

of the ABC and FOX television network allowed the company to continue to grow steadily; but reminiscent of earlier epochs of financial chaos, Disney is occasionally still plagued by diminishing profits and vicious battles among the executive staff (Taylor, 1987). The success story of the mid-80's was in troubled waters in 2002 when The Wall Street Journal was observing that:

Walt Disney Co-chairman and CEO Michael Eisner spent much of the past summer sparring with two key Disney Board members, Vice chairman Roy E Disney and his investment Adviser, Stanley Gold; both men have been critical of the company's faltering performance and lack of management depth; the board recently endorsed Eisner's strategic plan, but fallout from that meeting has continued.

By December of 2003, it was reported in the same journal that Roy E. Disney Jr. had sent a letter to Michael Eisner demanding his resignation and started a national web-based campaign to remove Eisner as chairman of Disney. Crystallizing this bitter feud among the executive staff, on January 30, 2004, the *Wall Street Journal* observed:

Pixar-animation studios, in a stunning blow to Walt Disney Co, has ended talks to extend their lucrative and long-running distribution deal for Pixar's computer-animated films; the move represents a high-profile setback for Disney chairman Michael Eisner, an opportunity for other Hollywood studios hopeful of striking a new film-distribution deal.

The lucrative partnership with Pixar-animation studios, the producers of such big hits as Toy Story I (\$191,796,233) and II (\$245,852,179), A Bug's Life (\$162,798,565), Monsters Inc. (\$234 million in 2001), and the latest release, Finding Nemo (\$339,714,978) with an overseas gross of \$523,096,000 has been terminated in just another round of Disney's financial ups and downs. Continuing the Disney financial saga, in February of 2004, *USA Today* was reporting that Commcast offered a reported \$54.1 billion for the entertainment powerhouse hoping to create a through global network and entertainment empire.

Although Disney's periods of financial stability and or turbulence are not the focus of this project, they nevertheless set a tone for the analysis of other facets of the Disney Discourse. In effect, periods of financial instability give glimpses into the disjunction between the projection of the happy, easy-going, cohesive camp and a reality of an ideologically and materially policed (internally and externally) social entity. The Discourse, instantiated as a text in the form of children's animated movies. is “policed” in multiple domains.

Whereas society at large becomes the ultimate regulator of the Disney Discourse in opting to spend or not spend ten dollars to sit in a movie theater (more often than not it is more since it implies bringing the kids) to be re-trained in the logic of being good consumer capitalists and socio-ideologically positioned so as to voyeuristically have dominant ideological narratives projected through the “innocence” of Disney animation, the company is more than willing to engage

in all that is legally allowable and enforceable (and sometimes even that which is unallowable) to protect the Discourse itself.⁴

Jon Lewis (1994) has noted that in 1987,

Disney filed seventeen major lawsuits, naming some seven hundred defendants in the United States and another seventy-eight overseas. The following year, one suit alone named four hundred defendants, claiming copyright infringement... (p. 93)

Perhaps the clearest indication of Disney's legal policing of the Discourse is the contentious battle over the fact that some day-care centers in Florida had painted Disney characters on their outer walls. Disney's legal staff of course filed lawsuits on the grounds that it was protecting the rights of the company. The centers were eventually forced to take the "Mouse" down and a rival company (MCA) eventually rescued the day-care by painting their own image (Flintstones) on the outer walls and throwing a party for the children at the school (Smoodin, 1994). What is of interest here is the extent to which Disney will go to protect the Disney Discourse. Clearly what Disney was protecting in this case was much more than whether or not the day-care could draw images of Disney characters on their walls. The fact of the matter is that those images represent a particular identity that Disney felt needed to be protected at all costs, or at least that they need to directly profit from their representation. The values and modes of being that become imbued in the characters become synonymous with Disney. This is reflected in Paul Hollister's observation in 1940 that,

Article I of the Disney constitution stipulates that every possible element of a picture shall be not a mere pictorial representation of the character or an element of scenery, but an individual, with clearly defined characteristics. Disney lieutenants have grown gray in the service of repeating that Mickey is "not a mouse, but a person. (p. 26)

The production of this or these characters constitute the creation of entities that embody and reflect particular values and ways of being that legitimize the familiar and de-legitimize alternatives. In fact, it is more pervasive in a sense in that the construction of self dialectically simultaneously constructs and projects the image of the other. It is in this spirit of rigorously policing the Disney Discourse and categorically bringing wrath on those who transgress the boundaries of Disney engagement (from consumption to critique) that Bell, Haas and Sells (1995) remark that,

When we corresponded with Disney personnel to gain access to the Disney archives in Buena Vista, California, we were informed that Disney does not allow third-party books to use the name Disney in their titles-this implies endorsement or sponsorship by the Disney organization. (p. 1)

In 2003, Disney filed numerous lawsuits to protect, police and enforce its values as transmitted through animated images. Legal actions however are not the sole recourse of the "Mouse." Let us not forget that policing must begin at home. If the

image is to be created and brought to life and imbued with particular characteristics that become synonymous with the “American way”, subversion cannot be tolerated, even if coming from one’s own. While this “policing” is more effective and efficient through a process of internalization, generated by a prior rigorous enforcement of company policy, the process of material commodification and the structuring of discourse can not be subjected to the possibility of ideological vacillations. It is in the context of establishing and policing boundaries to this discourse that David Kunzle (1991) observes:

The system at Disney productions seems to be designed to prevent the artist from feeling any pride or gaining any recognition, other than corporate, for his work. Once the contract is signed, the artist’s idea becomes Disney’s idea. He is its owner therefore its creator, for all purposes. (p. 16)

The fictitious image of the happy Disney production camp portrayed by Hollister, even as it is complemented today by the courteous smile with an accompanying “welcome to Walt Disney World” must be contextualized. To be sure, the creation of the Disney image of innocence and the abstraction of the human condition from the projection of that immaculate trouble free world can be contrasted with a sometimes-turbulent work history exemplified by worker strikes and management feuds (Smoodin, 1994; Taylor, 1987).

Smith and Clark (1999) background⁵ any information regarding this aspect of the Disney enterprise in their *Disney: The First 100 Years*. Out of 211 pages of information on the Disney company and its history of animation and entertainment, a single mitigated paragraph appears regarding any mentioning of conditions that deviate from the creation of a mythical happy camp. Referring to a strike that occurred *prior* to WWII, the authors note that,

At the same time that Walt and his artists were soaking up the culture in South America, a union problem that had been festering at the Disney Studio evolved into a bitter strike. The strike over wages and union representation, would cause strained feelings among Disney staff members for years to come and would forever change the atmosphere on the Studio lot. (p. 52)

We have to assume that the workers who were striking for better conditions were not “Walt’s workers” and that what caused the “strained feelings” was the fact and not the conditions that prompted the strike. Lest one feel caught up in a time warp, some other authors have occasionally brought the disjunction between the “happy camp” and the lived reality of its subjects to light.

During the 1999 Christmas season it was reported in the *Morning Star* (UK),

Thousands of workers at Euro Disney in Paris walked out on a Christmas strike yesterday in protest at Mickey Mouse pay. The move necessitated the mobilization of the managers to assume the roles of the striking workers so as to keep the operation flowing in spectacular capitalist adjustment to adverse conditions in capital accumulation. The strikers were referred to as “a small group of excited people.”

The article further observed,

Disney's current Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner reportedly earned \$14.7 million dollars in 1995. He earns more in one hour than a Haitian sweatshop worker making Disney T-shirts is paid in a year.

The strikers' demands were not met and business proceeded as usual much as they had in June of the preceding year when the strikers had lost a civil suit against Disney.

In 2000 the Hong Kong Industrial Committee (CIC) issued a report on 12 Disney contract factories in Guangdong Province, China. Needless to say, conditions were deplorable in every possible aspect. The range of infractions ranged from work safety to excessive working hours to the application of fines for talking during work hours etc. Since international conditions with Disney sub-contracted companies abstract the situation from a local level and project it to others (a dual victimization), even while the profits are clearly being reaped here, it might be helpful to remember that a few months after Eisner came to Disney in 1984, at \$750,000 a year and a performance bonus that could reach more than a \$1 million (Taylor, 1987, p.233),

Momentarily of course, the Smith and Clark (1999) text becomes somewhat contextualized in that the text was of course published through the Disney Company, hence the selective appropriation and dissemination of company history through foregrounding and backgrounding.

The availability of data on the Disney company is staggering to say the least, ranging from a narrow focus of analysis on particular movies, to company finances (Taylor, 1987), to the analysis of imperialist ideology as constructed in character subjectivity (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971), to gender construction and the policing of Disney Discourse (Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; Giroux, 1999; Smoodin, 1994; Wasco & Meehan, 2001; and many more).

One of the more interesting of these analyses on the level of ideology was that done by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart in 1971. The authors of *How To Read Donald Duck* build a convincing case for the functioning of ideology through Disney comics in Latin America. They assert that,

Disney characters only function by virtue of a suppression of real and concrete factors; that is their personal history, their birth and death, and their whole development in between, as they grow and change. (p. 34)

In fact, the world of Disney can only exist to the extent that it is able to suppress all that entails struggle in the human condition. As in the case of the theme parks with the underground network of tunnels that prevent access to a daily reality of actual life and work abstracted from fantasy, the authors proceed to layout a complex formulation through which Disney, controlling for biological relationships, continuously extolling the image of the noble savage as being in a sense foreign and subject to domination, is able to intricately weave a process of gender domination fused into colonialist practices. In contrasting this idea of the child as innocent

with the theme of the foreigner’s innocence, Dorfman and Mattelart (1971) observe that,

There are two types of children. While the city-folk are intelligent, calculating, crafty and superior; the third worldlings are candid, foolish, irrational, disorganized and gullible (like cowboys and Indians). The first are spirit, and move in the sphere of ideas; the second are body, inert matter, mass. The former represent the future, the latter the past. (p. 46)

The projection of the “foreign reality” onto the noble savage is of course that which is commensurate with exploitative capitalistic practices in which the crafty theft of the valuable is justified by the moral and intellectual superiority of the central western characters. In fact it is not very different from the current opposite portrayal of the Middle Eastern as violent and unable to administer his own affairs, thereby legitimating the exploitation of the people of that geo-region by Halliburton. In either case, the media ultimately plays a central role in legitimating the dominance of western ideology and simultaneously ensuring the exploitation of the “foreigner.” In a brilliant analysis, the authors again observe that,

This world of projection and segregation is based upon the role and concept of entertainment as it has developed in capitalist society...all the conflicts of the real world, the nerve centers of bourgeois, are purified in the imagination in order to be absorbed and co-opted into the world of entertainment. (p. 76)

This projection, under the guise of innocent fun, must be contextualized within a matrix of the legitimization of differential power relations. Giroux (1995) cautions that,

As an ideological construct that mobilizes particular cultural practices in diverse regimes of representations, whether they be theme parks, comics, or movies, Disney’s appeal to pristine innocence and high adventure is profoundly pedagogical in its attempt to produce specific knowledge, values and desires. (p. 48)

As Wasco and Meehan (2001) have concluded, among the resisters (to Disney discourse) participating in the Global Disney Audiences Project, “Besides criticizing Disney’s corporate synergy and pricing, many resisters found fault with both Disney’s narratives and its depictions of women.” This is evidence of the changing nature of the contextual frame under which the Disney characters operate. While some may opt to see recent heroines (Esmeralda, Pocahontas, and Mulan) as independent and more aggressive compared to the older more subdued images of Cinderella, these traits are in fact contained in the realization of the final typical romance that must re-instate the dominance of the male character. This dynamic becomes pervasive in that even as these heroines are psycho-socially demonstrative of cultural shifts of acceptable norms for females, they remain bound to an idealized, sexualized aesthetic that itself becomes an entrapment. Clearly this dynamic reinforces the notion that even as the contextual frame explicitly changes, the underlying themes

of female subservience remain implicit in the character's relation to the politics of the body and sexuality.

Cultural insights however, even among those who resist "Disneyfication", are not without their share of contradictions. As in the Gramscian notion of hegemony, many of the participants in the Global Disney Audiences Project were able to mediate the psychological dissonance created by a nostalgic reminiscence of childhood by fracturing the Disney Discourse into the classic Disney (Walt's characters and values) with the new Disney (commercialism and hyper-consumption). But even as the authors go on to observe that, "Thus, the new Disney- with its emphasis on synergy across media and heavy merchandising—is seen as the merchandisation of culture, and is rejected" (p. 335), such views did not necessarily lead to non-consumption but rather moderated consumption.

What the above referenced studies indicate is that there is clearly a particular discourse that is instantiated in the production of Disney animated films and that this discourse is not in any sense arbitrary. It follows a particular logic that is built into the company vision and that does not stray from what is deemed appropriate to be presented as Disney material. Departing from the ideological position that indeed only some alternatives are possible in the construction of this overall narrative, we are still left with a pragmatic problem; that is to say: it is one thing to say that such a discourse exists because of historic patterns and the impossibility of the existence of multiple alternatives and another to say that this discourse in some ways correlates with language as it is built into character subjectivity. In fact, one can even question the overall significance of language as an indicator of individual subjectivity in any sense.

Does Language Really Matter?

The question could only come from someone who has never had to deal with the issue in any meaningful sense, either as the speaker of a dominant language or as never having to be in a linguistically subordinated position. There is a vast array of literature (Baugh, 2000; Dillard, 1972; Fanon, 1952; Labov, 1966; Macedo, 2003; Pennycook, 2001; Rickford, 1999) that positions language as a fundamental aspect of identity. To ignore this body of literature is to invariably dismiss a plethora of research that situates language within a complex framework, whereby it is simultaneously constitutive of and constitutes differential power relations that are inevitably legitimized in hegemonic forms that legitimate particular realities and materialities.

Referring to the importance of language (Linguistic Capital) as a key component of one's identity Bourdieu notes,⁶

Discourse always owes its most important characteristics to the linguistic production relations within which it is produced. The sign has no existence (except abstractly in dictionaries) outside a concrete mode of linguistic production relation.

All particular linguistic transactions depend on the structure of the linguistic field, which is itself a particular expression of the structure of power relations between the groups possessing the corresponding competences (e.g., “genteel” language and the vernacular, or, in a situation of multilingualism, the dominant language and the dominated language).

It is important to note however that Bourdieu draws a distinction between competence (in a Chomskyan sense) and linguistic capital, which is directly tied to the dimension of power one is able to instantiate in a particular linguistic transaction. For Chomsky the notion of competence relates more to an ideal speaker/hearer situation in which human beings are seen as capable of generating an infinite sequence of grammatical constructions. Bourdieu on the other hand expands this notion to one of Linguistic capital, where the linguistic construction and non-construction (in the case where silences are significant) must be contextualized appropriately to command authority. One’s ability to command a particular form of linguistic capital becomes central in the identity one wishes to project in a given situation, however, this capacity to instantiate a particular form of linguistic capital can only function where there is a legitimated unified linguistic field that itself presupposes a stratification of the dominant and dominated. In other words, the only way linguistic capital (LCAP) can function is if there is a differentiation in the linguistic field where linguistic variants occupy hierarchical power positions circumstantially, but where they are simultaneously brought under an umbrella of a master narrative. As Bourdieu explains,

The products of certain competences only yield a profit of distinctiveness inasmuch as, by virtue of the relationship between the system of linguistic differences and the system of economic and social differences, we are dealing not with a relativistic universe of differences that are capable of relativizing one another, but with a hierarchized universe of deviations from a form of discourse that is recognized as legitimate. (p. 655)

This concept is crucial for an understanding of the way language functions with respect to the identities one instantiates. In this respect, linguist J.P. Gee (2001) observes a similar phenomenon with the construct of social languages and the creation of situated identities. For Gee, the social languages that we use are able to create particular identities that we either identify with or upon reflection distance ourselves from. In either case, both theorists see the linguistic field as overlapping in a sense, yet both would agree that while different social languages may be needed in different situations to achieve different results. In a calculation of “linguistic profit,” it is certainly the case that outside of specialized fields (e.g. Air Traffic Controller speech, video game experts, etc) the language of authority is that of “mainstream” society.

Take the case of accents for example. At the level of linguistic differentiation, as social beings we are constantly evaluating, hence contextually adjusting, self

vis-à-vis others' linguistic variations. Our adjustments, of course, create the very context which we either take part in or dismiss. At the most explicit level, the recognition of a speaker's language as being different than ours becomes quite evident and positions the hearer for adjustment. Often this adjustment is of a more subtle nature, involving differentiation of linguistic varieties or specific accents. In either case, it is a fact that these adjustments are made and that whatever form of interaction occurs subsequently take these variations into account.

Accents, whether we like it or not, convey particular histories about us to listeners. In linguistic terms, an "accent" is the creation of linguistic stress in units of speech that deviate from that which is the norm in a given society. It is somewhat irrelevant whether we revel in our unique accents as identity markers (Brown, 2000), or whether we ardently attempt to neutralize them so as to socio-historically situate ourselves in a class-conscious society that equates phonological command of a "mainstream" variety of English a permanent marker of our social subject position. The fact of the matter is that one's accent is uniquely meaningful in conveying an image of one who possesses a particular linguistic capital that may or may not be valued in a given society. It is certainly the case that the linguistic capital that one's accent is able to instantiate is very much situational, though generally related to the hierarchical power relations associated with the speaker's dominant language.

Consider the following scenario. Former Secretary of State (and shady political figure) Henry Kissinger, while clearly having experienced phonological fossilization (Selinker, 1972), in learning English, is generally thought of as an articulate and intelligent (even if somewhat shady) political figure. The fact that his "accent" is so pronounced does not prevent most people from ascribing these characteristics to the man. This is of course largely due to the type of accent that the man has; a German one to be precise. After all, most people do not know the man's educational background in listening to him. The socio-historic positioning of German vis-à-vis English as far back as the colonial epoch (Crawford, 1992), functioned to create a situation where German is thought of as being a relatively high-status language. Although this status position has fluctuated temporally, particularly during America's involvement in WWII, it has overall maintained a particular cache that other languages (and their speakers) have not always enjoyed.

Contrast this position with that of a Spanish speaker, and a clear difference emerges. While in the former phonological fossilization is experienced as a sign of intelligence and "high-culture", the latter is clearly a situation in which the speaker would be interpreted (and often treated) as relatively inarticulate and "uneducated". This subject position would be assigned as much through the historic background of colonization (and neo-colonization) as it would be by a conservative socially constructed xenophobic fear of hordes of Latin American immigrants who are supposedly at the immigration gates just waiting to barge down the door and take away working class jobs (Never mind the fact that they were here first). In either case, the fact remains that "accents" carry a particular cache that, if not *determines*, at

the very least *imposes* particular subject positions on the speakers through social conventions and biases. It is in this frame that Bourdieu observes:

... We know that properties such as voice setting (nasal, pharyngeal) and pronunciation (“accent”) offer better indices than syntax for identifying a speaker’s social class; we learn that the efficacy of a discourse, its power to convince, depends on the authority of the person who utters it, or, what amounts to the same thing, on his “accent,” functioning as an index of authority. (p. 653)

This constant or general attitudes towards “accents” must be differentiated of course from the construction of socially-situated identities (Gee, 1999) in the case of Anglo speakers of Spanish, in which case the “accent” is perceived as an asset. Whether they are perceived as assets or hindrances, numerous studies (Anzaldúa, 1990; Bourdieu, 1977; Brown, 1994; Labov, 1966; Pennycook, 2001) have attested to the importance of accents in affecting not only our perceptions of self but also how others perceive and react to us.

The case being made in this project is that Disney, being fully aware of these subtle but general attitudes, fully exploits them in the construction of character subjectivity and that in doing so, not only contributes in the perpetuation of these attitudes but also indirectly structures the materiality associated with the attitudes. Of course Disney is not the only contributor to this process, nor by any means the principal one, however, Disney’s wide reach in terms of audience gives it a particularly strong role in maintaining these linguistic attitudes, which are embodied in material effects. In this sense, critical theorist Henry Giroux’s notions of public pedagogy become central in illustrating the pedagogical force of spaces that exist outside the social sphere of schooling as a transmitter of cultural knowledge.

Methodology

To ascertain the role of Disney in the maintenance of these stereotypes, this study was divided into multiple components, including the use of the analytical tool of Discourse Analysis (Gee, 1999) in examining the construction of character subjectivity in the movies *Aladdin* and *Mulan*, and a separate but related component focusing on undergraduate students, aimed at investigating general attitudes towards the linguistic variations represented in Disney films.

The use of Discourse Analysis would require a dual approach based on structural linguistics focusing on phonological and syntactic variations (Halliday, 1984) and a social approach (Gee, 1999) aimed at analyzing the identities enacted by the characters in relation to these variations.

Cormack and Green (2000) clearly illustrate the possibility of conceptually using discourse analysis in examining the production of historical texts as intertextual in nature; that is to say, as speaking to each other in time inasmuch as such texts participate in wider “big C” Conversations (Gee, 1999) that originate prior to the text itself. This notion becomes highly relevant in that such intertextuality

simultaneously offers the possibility of assessing the “visible invisibility” of themes in textual productions. It is this possibility that allows an epistemological window on the identification of the “invisible.”

Prior to initiating the analysis however, it is important to point out that several key determinations went into the option of choosing these particular movies for analysis. No doubt, the reader can have reservations as to the “objectivity” of selecting these movies arbitrarily. Such reservations of course would operate from a framework that would suppose that any choice made could be truly “objective,” that is to say, it would establish the parameters of dialogue in a duality of “objective” versus “subjective” research; an entirely fruitless endeavor that occupies much graduate school discussion and is ultimately circulatory in nature as the very choosing of the topic of analysis is a supreme manifestation of subjectivity at play. Linguist Donaldo Macedo invokes the absurdity of this common debate when he notes that,

The pseudoscientists who uncritically embrace the mantra of scientific objectivity, usually find refuge in an ideological fog that enables educators to comfortably fragment bodies of knowledge when they conduct their research. (p. 76)

Having said this, the limited scope of the research would invariably require the narrowing of the research to two or at most three movies, of which any two or three would suffice, providing that the chosen texts would have as objects of analysis clearly delineated characters throughout the development of the text. In other words, whatever text was chosen, the investigator wanted to be certain that there was no possibility of an ambiguous relationship with the characters. The characters would have to be clearly represented as “good” or “bad” as articulated in the ultimate victory or destruction of a character in the finality of the text.

Another aspect of the determination of the chosen texts was that the investigator wanted to choose texts that represented (at least visually) a living culture that was outside of the social context of the United States. This was primarily to ensure that the syntactic and phonological variations and cultural assumptions encountered would have to be projected onto the characters, hence the possibility of examining existing cultural models as native to the United States or as text driven. These two parameters were clearly met by the texts under analysis, since in both characters are very clearly delineated and the settings outside of the “life-worlds” of the average American consumer.

In *Aladdin*, the character requirement is ultimately satisfied with the banishment of the character Jaffar through the astute context manipulation of Aladdin himself. The ultimate demise of Jaffar leaves no doubts as to the construction of morality in the text. There is a coveted prize (the lamp and subtly the affection of Jasmine) and two antagonistic forces in the personas of Aladdin and Jaffar. The development of the plot ultimately leads to the triumph of one and the decimation of the other, hence the resolution of the plot and the attainment of the prizes, the lamp and Jasmine. For the second requirement, the setting being located in India

fulfills the location of the plot development in an ostensibly different environment. The mythical city of Aggrabah necessitates the historical imposition of particular cultural norms, since the interpreter of the text hypothetically has no schema to draw from in the interpretation of form and context.

Mulan again repeats this sequence, though in a more intricate manner. In Mulan, the objective becomes the saving of the town, an objective that positions this character against the villain Shan-Yu. The plot development is ultimately resolved with the saving of the town, the banishment of the villain and the ultimate reduction of the lead character into a bride (the natural sequence of the Disney heroine). Regardless of the ideological apparatus that allows for gender dynamics to be constructed as such (that is to say, for her to save the town and the population only to be diminished and held captive to the status of “bride”), the banishment of Shan-Yu clearly satisfies the first condition.

In satisfying the second requirement, the setting is ancient China. The setting again forces the text creator to impose particular historical constructions in a geographical space that is outside the norm of white middle class America. This imposition of course, not only positions the interpreter in an imaginary locale, outside her or his immediate norm of reference, but even where an interpreter might have an understanding (albeit already tainted) of historical conditions relative to the geographic space, this understanding is played upon in the construction of character and national identities.

A methodological consideration in this endeavor is the unit of analysis. Why choose a particular set of stanzas for analysis as opposed to another? After all, although character construction must be fluid in the sense that the overall structure of the character must remain whole, throughout the textual construction different character facets must be foregrounded and backgrounded so as to portray the character as somewhat “life-like.” The methodological dilemma associated with this fluidity is resolved through an a priori establishment of analytic parameters.

In this case, the use of language in the construction of character subjectivity is being analyzed through particular “tools” of discourse analysis, namely, *identity construction, relationship forming and the distribution of social goods* (Gee, 1990). *Identity construction* as a constant in character creation is particularly relevant, as the using of “Cues or clues to assemble situated meanings about what identities and relationships are relevant to the interaction, with their concomitant attitudes, values, ways of feeling, ways of knowing and believing, as well as ways of acting and interacting” (Gee, 1999, p. 86).

As a category of analysis, “stanzas” relating to the *distribution of social goods* implicitly embed dominant values in character construction. In this particular case, rather than breaking down the dialogue into stanzas, in an effort to understand the visual representation of the linguistic interaction, I have opted to compliment the linguistic component with a physical description of the represented frames. It would be somewhat problematic if values embedded in the characters directly contra-

dicted master narratives of how characters should or should not behave. Likewise, the *foundation of relationships* is observed in stanzas that embody both of these former categories. Several conversational sequences reflecting these three modes were selected for analysis. Although this analytical format attempts to fragment these categories for the sake of analysis, often in everyday speech these categories overlap into a symbiotic relationship that allows for multiple functions to be carried on simultaneously; as such, the separation of these categories is an artificial construction, a tool to assist in analysis as it were. Figure 1 attempts to visually represent the format of analysis.

As the diagram attempts to convey, it is through language, or specific forms of language that identities are created, adjusted and re-created. At this point in the analysis, it is important to point out that we do not see an inherent systematicity of language that would “naturally” lead one character to speak in one way as opposed to another (hence the segmented connection between character and language). This being the case, the syntactic and phonological choices made in the process of character construction become meaningful in that they are one among a range of possible alternatives. In the first section of the analysis we focus specifically on the link between language and identity construction.

Units of Analysis

The first unit of linguistic analysis embodies two of these building tasks while alluding to the third; both identity and social relationships are central to Chapter Thirteen of Disney’s *Mulan*. Through this initial interaction between Mushu and Mulan, subjectification becomes crucial in that the characters are in a sense embodying, through linguistic interaction, their primary role positions. Mushu establishes itself primarily as a guardian of family honor and protector of Mulan. Mulan in turn has the responsibility of substituting the father’s role in the army thereby characterizing a dutiful daughter (even as the “substitution” would traditionally be fulfilled by sons). This subject position must be understood under a wider ideological frame where family honor becomes the distributed social good; that is to say, in one way or another, it is not only the cathartic agent but remains perpetually that which is coveted. It symbolizes Mushu’s return to an honored position with the ancestors as well as Mulan’s redemption with the family for transgressing her filial obligations as well as the established regulatory patterns of a gendered reality. Conversational

Figure 1.
Analytic Model

sequence “A1” exemplifies the contradictions between gender relations and filial duty to family honor and wider social responsibility with the subordination of the former.

“Sequence A1”

Chi Fu: By order of the Emperor, one man from every family must serve in the Imperial Army. The Xiao family [a family member steps up, bows to the guard and takes the conscription notice from the guard]. The Yi family.

Yi’s Son [holding his old father back]: I will serve the Emperor in my father’s place.

Chi Fu: The Fa Family.

Mulan: No.

[Fa Zhou gives his cane to Fa Li and walks toward Chi Fu. Fa Zhou bows before the horsemen]

Fa Zhou [standing proud]: I am ready to serve the Emperor. [Fa Zhou reaches for the conscription notice]

Mulan [running outside to keep her father from taking the conscription notice]: Father, you can’t go.

Fa Zhou [turning to see his daughter]: Mulan!

Mulan: Please sir, my father has already fought bravely--

Chi Fu: Silence! You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man’s presence.

Fa Zhou [looking away from Mulan]: Mulan, you dishonor me.

[Grandma Fa guides Mulan back away]

In terms of linguistic production, Chapter 13 (conversation sequence A and B) is particularly fascinating with respect to stylistic registers (Halliday, 1985) or social languages (Gee, 1999), syntactic distributions and the use or non-use of post-vocalic R. Stylistic registers or social languages refer to the types of languages we use in a given situation. These registers serve to create socially situated identities in everyday interactions. Lexical choice and syntactic construction are some distinct ways of identifying social languages or variations in registers. As Gee (1999) notes,

Each social language has its own distinctive grammar. However two different sorts of grammars are important to social languages, only one of which we ever think to study formally in school. One grammar is the traditional set of units like nouns, verbs, inflections, phrases and clauses...[T]he other- less studied, but more important- grammar is the “rules” by which grammatical units like nouns and verbs, phrases and clauses, are used to create patterns which signal or “index” characteristic of whos-doing-whats-within-Discourses. (p. 29)

*Conversational sequence “A” & “B”
(identity construction & social relationships)*

Conversational sequence “A” clearly demonstrates the use of language in the representation of a collective.

[Mushu appears as a giant shadow being cast on a rock with flames on either side. Mushu’s real appearance remains out of sight]

Mushu [in a Southern Baptist Preacher’s voice]: Did I hear someone ask for a miracle!? Let me hear you say aye!

Mulan [Running and hiding behind a rock]: Ahhhhhh.

Mushu: That’s close enough.

Mulan [from behind a rock]: Ghost.

Mushu: Get ready Mulan your **serpentine salvation is at hand**. For I have been sent by your ancestors-- [notices Cri-Kee making a hand shadow of a dragon on the rock and stamps him down with his foot] to guide you through your masquerade. [bending down to Cri-Kee] **C’m on, you’re gonna stay you’re gonna work**. [returning to Mulan] **Heed my word, ‘cause** if the army finds out that you are a girl, the penalty is death. [big flames shoot up from the rocks]

Mulan: Who are you?

Mushu: Who am I? Who am I? I am the guardian of lost souls. [Mulan smiles big in anticipation of seeing her guardian] I am the powerful, the pleasurable, the indestructible [coming out from the rocks to show his real size] Mushu! Oh hah, hah, pretty hot, huh? [Khan stomps on Mushu. Mulan pushes Khan back]

Mulan: Ah, my ancestors sent a little lizard to help me?

Mushu: Hey, dragon, dragon, not lizard. I don’t do that tongue thing [flips out his tongue to show Mulan what he means].

Mulan: You’re uh...

Mushu: **Intimidatin[g]? Awe inspirin[g]?**

Mulan [making a hand gesture to denote his smallness of size]: Tiny.

Mushu [with a look of disappointment]: Of course. I’m travel size for your convenience. **If I was my real size**, your cow here [patting Khan on the nose] would die of fright. [Khan tries to bite Mushu] [pointing to the ground speaking to Khan] Down Bessy. My powers are beyond your mortal imagination. For instance, [leaning in and looking at Mulan’s chest] my eyes can see straight through your armor. [Mulan cover her bust with her left arm and slaps Mushu with the right] Ow. [angrily] All right, that’s it! Dishonor! Dishonor on your whole family. [aside to Cri-Kee] Make a note of this [Cri-Kee grabs a leaf and a pen and starts writing]. [Loudly with gusto] Dishonor on you. Dishonor on your cow. Dis-

Mulan [pleadingly while covering Mushu’s mouth]: Stop! I’m sorry, I’m sorry [kneeling down in front of Mushu]. I’m just nervous. I’ve never done this before.

Mushu: Then you’re gonna have to trust me. **And don’t you slap me no more, we clear on that?** [Mulan nods emphatically]. All right. Okey dokey, let’s get this show on the road. Cri-Kee, get the bags [Mushu starts walking to the camp]. [to Khan] Let’s move it heifer.

In this case, the register or social language used by Mushu in meeting Mulan and establishing its own identity is an intertextual nod to an inflamed southern preacher who admonishes of the dangers of the situation while characterizing its own position as the salvation to possible doom. In effect, Mushu’s register or social language, as evidenced by phonological and syntactic output, is more or less static throughout the textual construction, becoming cemented to characteristics like copula deletions and uses of post-vocalic R’s characteristic of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). By phonology I refer to the production of sound units or phonemes. The critical reader may immediately question the notion of an “essentialized” AAVE, yet as many linguists have observed, AAVE is characterized by distinct linguistic productions. Wolfman (1991) observes:

Phonological patterns can be diagnostic of regional and social differences, and a person who has a good ear for dialects can often pinpoint a person’s general regional and social affiliation with considerable accuracy based solely on phonology. Certainly, the use of a few critical pronunciation cues can narrow down a person’s place of origin to at least general regions of the United States, if not the precise county of origin. (p. 51)

In the last “stanza” of this scene, for example, Mushu’s phonological output makes use of a common AAVE speech pattern when the character states:

And don’t you slap me no mo[r]e, we clear on that?

The “dropping” of the “R” in “more” is characteristic of AAVE. While the dropping of this phoneme appears to be a minute phonological difference, it certainly is sufficient to establish contrast with the subsequent vowel thereby producing a distinct speech pattern.

In a similar instance of dropping a phoneme, when Mushu responds: “Intimidatin[g]? Awe Inspirin[g]” we note the phenomenon of consonant neutralization common to AAVE. Wolfman (1991) notes, that in these cases,

When the nasal segment represented phonetically as [ng] (often spelled ng) occurs at the end of a word in an unstressed syllable (as in fighting) it can be produced as the sound [n] (fightin). This process is in fact characteristic of AAVE speech patterns. Reflecting on this particular exchange we also note another common AAVE speech pattern, in a relationship of syntactic agreement. In this case, the negative in the sentence guides the use of indefinite form. In this case, the character could have perfectly well stated, “And don’t slap me any more.”

Wolfman (1991) further observes that,

In standard dialects, *any* is used in the postverbal indefinite (that is, the form comes after the verb in the sentence, such as He didn't have any money) whereas *no* may be used in most vernacular dialects (e.g., He didn't have no money) ... Many of the distinctive dialect differences of syntax involve agreement patterns between words or morphemes, and *they are the most prominent social markers within American English [emphasis added]*. (p. 59)

Similarly, Rickford (1999) has pointed out that among the features of AAVE are the realization of the final "NG" as "N" in gerunds, deletion or vocalization of "R" after vowel, more varied intonations with "higher pitch range and more rising and level final contours than other English varieties" (Wolfram et al. 1993:12; see also Rickford 1977:205). Certainly these linguistic features are abundantly exemplified in these textual productions.

Why are these features particularly important in this context? Such an inquiry is anchored in an ideological frame where lexical choice (content and form) is ultimately meaningful. If the reader will recall, one of the pre-conditions for the unit of analysis was that the setting and context would have to be imposed; that is to say, the phonological qualities of the voices would have to be "constructed." This being the case, the register used by the character Mushu becomes even more problematic. The textual production in fact contains other comedic characters, yet these characters, while relieving structural tension through humor, are not ultimately portrayed as "bungling fools" phonologically and syntactically linked to a particular racial collective. The linking of character subjectification and a racialized group becomes more striking in the absence of similar constructions with the supporting characters.

The Disney textual presentation in effect supports and perpetuates this link with long-term effects as to our perceptions of subjectification and linguistic production. Theorizing this link cannot be abstracted from the structured materiality of the linguistically oppressed. In fact, Disney accomplishes this task selectively with Mushu's character. If the characterization were done to resemble common speech patterns generally we would have to wonder why the supporting comedic characters did not for instance represent the common "R" "W" substitutions so commonly found in Chinese English speakers. The social languages used by the characters are structured so as to either conform or deviate from dominant linguistic conventions. Whereas Mushu's speech continuously reflects characteristics like morphological irregularities such as syntactic contractions of "going to" to "gonna" and "want to" to "wanna," as well as the substitution of "am not" for "ain't," other characters reflect more "standard" Anglo middle class discourse. Consider for example a sequence of dialogue where General Li (the hero's father) and Chi Fu are debating the General's choice in promoting Shang to the rank of Captain. This sequence of dialogue in a sense disrupts the hierarchical relationship of Shang to Chi Fu while solidifying the relations between father and son.

Conversational Sequence B

[Chi Fu watches and then walks into the tent. General Li and Li Shang are in the tent.]

General Li [motioning with his pointer to a map of the region]: The Huns have struck here, here and here. I will take the main troops up to the Tung Shao Pass and stop Shan-Yu before he destroys this village.

Chi Fu: Excellent strategy, Sir. I do love surprises, Ha ha, ha, ha.

General Li: You will stay here and train the new recruits. When Chi Fu believes you're ready, you will join us...Captain. [General Li hands a sword to Shang]

Shang: Captain?

Chi Fu: Oh, this is an enormous responsibility, General. Uh, perhaps a soldier with more experience--

General Li: Number one in his class, extensive knowledge of training techniques, [leaning back smugly stroking his chin] an impressive military lineage. I believe Li Shang will do an excellent job.

Shang [excitedly]: Oh, I will. I won't let you down. This is, I mean, I...[somerly] yes sir.

Several factors are apparent in this sequence. First and most obvious in this sequence, is the choice of lexicon used to establish these relationships. The dialogue certainly omits syntactic contractions like “gonna” in the place of “will.” The general could have in fact just as easily said “You’re gonna stay here and train the new recruits,” however this construction would not have been consistent with the image that Disney is attempting to project of standard versus non-standard speech patterns. Even more commonly accepted contractions like the “You’ll” for “You will” are reduced to the point where they appear non-existent. In fact, the very lexical choices, “Impressive military lineage, extensive knowledge, enormous responsibility” are those that reflect a more Anglo middle class discourse.

The coherence of dialogue is in fact momentarily broken by Shang in the last line of the dialogue while expressing surprise at the unexpected promotion. This deviation from the norm not only heightens the awareness of the formal speech patterns of the General through contrast, but also attest to a particular fluidity in the use of social languages that is absent from other characters. The linguistic disfluencies have a mediating role in the dialogue, they attest to Shang’s “normality” in being able to socially position himself and adjust to the on-going dialogue. This adaptation is non-existent with the character Mushu as it is also non-existent with the central evil character Shan Yu. The effect of these non-adaptations in speech is that Mushu is portrayed as being a familiar yet not to be taken seriously character who is constantly joking and shirking responsibilities while Shan Yu becomes so stilted and stiff through lexical hyper-correction as to appear “abnormal.” The

“stiffness” of Shan Yu’s speech can be clearly seen in a conversational sequence where his relationship to his soldiers is being constructed. In this scene, Shan Yu presents some materials to his men and in a pedagogic manner creates a socially situated identity of group leader.

[Cut to Shan Yu sitting on top of a tree. He cuts off the very top with his sword. His falcon swoops by and drops a doll. Shan-Yu takes the doll, sniffs it, looks surprised, and drops down to the ground]

Shan-Yu [tossing the doll to Hun Strong Man]: What do you see?

Hun Strong Man [feeling the doll]: Black pine, from the high mountains. [Long Hair Hun Man takes the doll from Hun Strong Man. Bald Hun Man #1 takes a hair as it passes by him]

Bald Hun Man #1: White horse hair. Imperial stallions.

Long Hair Hun Man [sniffing the doll]: Sulfur, from cannons.

Shan-Yu: This doll came from a village in the Tung Shao Pass, where the Imperial Army’s waiting for us.

Hun Archer: We can avoid them easily.

Shan-Yu [shaking his head]: No, the quickest way to the Emperor is through that pass. Besides, the little girl will be missing her doll. We should return it to her.

[End Interlude]

Anyone engaged with this text will certainly understand that these are the “bad” characters in the production not from the visual representations themselves but rather from the phonological and syntactic constructions; the voices are lower and syntactic construction is again stilted by the hyper-adherence to conventional morphological rules.

These constructions create a triad in terms of possibility of being. Mushu’s position is highly racialized and even where somewhat familiar is projected as a mischievous trickster who is certainly not the ideal. The main “good characters” are projected as being able to flexibly adjust their social languages in creating varied socially situated identities, and the “evil” characters are projected as in a hyper-corrective mode that becomes “abnormal” in its linguistic inflexibility. One can visualize this dynamic on a continuum of linguistic production, ranging from highly systematized (from the racialized character) to flexible (good character) and ultimately to a structured production (bad character).

In the second textual production (below) the same methodological pattern was followed. Again we see patterns developing in the analysis of the sequences relating to the construction of character subjectivity. In this production the distributed social good becomes power; that is to say, this is situational since power symbolizes something different for each of the main characters. For Jaffar, power is literally the

power of the sorcerer to command the kingdom, for Aladdin power is the possibility of transforming self to obtain the object of his desire (Jasmine), and for Jasmine power is the ability to control who she will marry, in possible violation of the law. Conversational sequence “B” is important in this production to the extent that it captures the flouting of Aladdin’s newly found “power” as a transformed Prince, hence the creation of a new socially situated identity on the part of this character. Interestingly, the scene also embodies a triad of relationships in Jaffar’s challenging of the legitimacy of the new Prince as well as Jasmine’s assertion of individuality and refusal to be represented as a “prize.”

Conversational Sequence “C” (Identity/Relationship Building)

You need to say what’s being signaled by the bolding. (More and more fanfare build up until ALADDIN flies off ABU’s back on MAGIC CARPET and flies down to the SULTAN. JAFAR slams the door shut.)

SULTAN: (Clapping) Splendid, absolutely marvelous.

ALADDIN: (Takes on a deeper voice.) **Ahem. Your majesty, I have journeyed from afar to seek your daughter’s hand.**

SULTAN: Prince Ali Ababwa! Of course. I’m delighted to meet you. (He rushes over and shakes ALI’s hand.) This is my royal vizier, Jaffar. He’s delighted too.

JAFAR: (Extremely dryly) **Ecstatic. I’m afraid, Prince Abooboo--**

ALADDIN: --Ababwa!

JAFAR: **Whatever. You cannot just parade in here uninvited** and expect to--

SULTAN: ...by Allah, this is quite a remarkable device. (He tugs at the tassels, and they tug his moustache.) I don’t suppose I might...

ALADDIN: Why certainly, your majesty. Allow me. (He helps the SULTAN up onto the CARPET, and he plops down. JAFAR pins the CARPET down on the floor with the staff.)

JAFAR: **Sire, I must advise against this--**

SULTAN: --**Oh, button up, Jaffar.** Learn to have a little fun. (He kicks away the staff and CARPET and SULTAN fly away. IAGO, who was standing on the head of the staff, falls down, repeatedly bopping the staff with his beak as he descends. SULTAN and CARPET fly high into the ceiling, then begin a dive-bomb attack, flying under ABU, scaring him. The flight continues in the background, while JAFAR and ALI talk in the foreground.)

JAFAR: Just where did you say you were from?

ALADDIN: Oh, much farther than you’ve traveled, I’m sure. (He smiles. JAFAR does not.)

JAFAR: Try me. (IAGO lands on the staff.)

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SULTAN: Look out, Polly! (They all duck in time as the CARPET whizzes centimetres over their heads. CARPET returns and the SULTAN chases IAGO around the room.)

IAGO: Hey, watch it. Watch it with the dumb rug! (The CARPET zooms underneath IAGO, who sighs, wipes his brow, and crashes into a pillar. He crashes to the floor, and his head is circled by miniature SULTANS on CARPETS, saying “Have a cracker, have a cracker. The real SULTAN begins his final approach.)

SULTAN: Out of the way, I’m coming in to land. Jaffar, watch this! (He lands.)

JAFAR: Spectacular, your highness.

SULTAN: Ooh, lovely. Yes, I do seem to have a knack for it. (CARPET walks over to ABU dizzily, then collapses. ABU catches it.) This is a very impressive youth. And a prince as well. (Whispers to JAFFAR) If we’re lucky, you won’t have to marry Jasmine after all.

JAFAR: I don’t trust him, sire.

SULTAN: Nonsense. One thing I pride myself on Jaffar, I’m an excellent judge of character.

IAGO: **Oh, excellent judge, yeah, sure...not!!!**

(JASMINE walks in quietly.)

SULTAN: Jasmine will like this one!

ALADDIN: And I’m pretty sure I’ll like Princess Jasmine!

JAFAR: **Your highness, no. I must intercede on Jasmine’s behalf. (JASMINE hears this and gets mad.) This boy is no different than the others. What makes him think he is worthy of the princess?**

ALADDIN: Your majesty, I am Prince Ali Ababwa! (He pricks JAFFAR’s goatee, which springs out in all directions.) Just let her meet me. I will win your daughter!

JASMINE: How dare you! (They all look at her surprised.) All of you, standing around deciding my future? I am not a prize to be won! (She storms out.)

SULTAN: Oh, dear. Don’t worry, Prince Ali. Just give Jasmine time to cool down. (They exit.)

JAFAR: I think it’s time to say good bye to Prince Abooboo. Do something with the formatting—in the above scene, the right margin varies all over the place!

As we can see in this scene, multiple effects are being achieved through linguistic production. When Aladdin states, “**Ahem. Your majesty, I have journeyed from afar to seek your daughter’s hand**” linguistic dis-fluencies are used to displace the former identity of a common street boy to the embodiment of a Prince. In fact, while this appears to be a relatively minute change in dialogue, it signals that the producers

of the text certainly are aware that there needs to be variation in the social language used to make the character “fit” the scene or in the very least make it appear convincingly that the character is projecting this change. Not only is this done in terms of the syntactic construction with the dis-fluency, but, the phonological output (pitch) is controlled to indicate status differential in speech. Lexical choice also indicates an adjustment in social language, “journeyed,” “afar,” and “seek” are certainly part of a lexicon that a common “street-boy” would not be projected as routinely using.

This sequence clearly demonstrates some of the characteristics found in the previous analysis in that the central “good” characters are represented as having the capacity to moderate the social language to flexibly adjust to new scenes and interactions, while the “bad” characters are projected as relatively inflexible in linguistic output to the point of seeming “abnormal.” Jaffar exemplifies this alternate modality when he greets Aladdin by stating, “Whatever. You cannot just parade in here uninvited and expect to—” The character certainly could have used “You can’t just come in here” or “you can’t just walk in here,” but of course the substitution of “cannot” and “parade” for these other more quotidianous linguistic productions would have in effect diminished the capacity of language to shape the subjectivity of the character in accordance with the parameters set forth for “bad” characters. Lexical choice then indicates a difference of being. In fact, where as Jaffar’s character produces highly stilted speech as “Sire, I must advise against this” and “Your highness, no. I must intercede on Jasmine’s behalf,” the King, certainly portrayed as a “good” character, is able to respond to Jaffar’s admonition by stating, “Oh, button up, Jaffar,” a clearly flexible use of language that is certainly reflected in the productions of all of the “good” characters yet is virtually non-existent in Jaffar’s language. Iago, the meddling parrot, a mediating character who by the end of the movie is incorporated into the camp of the “good” guys, is also able to play with syntax and in so doing is able achieve a type of generational bonding with the audience, particularly the younger viewers. When Iago right dislocates the negative in an interaction with Jaffar by stating, “Oh, excellent judge, yeah, sure...not!!!”, the pattern resembles a common linguistic output in adolescents’ slang in emphasizing the improbability of the statement. These fluctuations in language production are selectively evident in the characters and as such create the “normal” and “abnormal,” the “standard” and the “non-standard,” identities that Disney projects as “good” or “bad.”

As we look at another conversational sequence, we see some similar links between character development and language use. In this case, the scene reflects interactions relating to the *distribution of a social good*, namely the power sought after by Jaffar and contested by Aladdin.

Conversational Sequence “D”

(They both look up and see a gigantic GENIE lift the palace into the clouds..
ALADDIN whistles and CARPET flies up to greet him. They fly up near the
GENIE’s head.)

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ALADDIN: Genie! No!

GENIE: **Sorry, kid—I got a new master now.** (He places the palace on top of a mountain.)

SULTAN: Jaffar, I order you to stop!

JAFFAR: There's a new order now--my order! Finally, **you will** bow to me!

(The SULTAN bows, but JASMINE does not.)

Jasmine: We'll never bow to you!

IAGO: Why am I not surprised?

JAFFAR: **If you will not bow before a sultan, then you will cower before a sorcerer!** (To GENIE) Genie, my second wish—I wish to be the most powerful sorcerer in the world!

(GENIE extends his finger. ALADDIN tries to stop him, but he cannot, and another GENIE (tm) brand lightning bolt strikes JAFFAR, returning him to his normal look.)

IAGO: Ladies and gentlemen, a warm Agrabah welcome for Sorcerer Jaffar!

JAFFAR: Now where were we? **Ah, yes—abject humiliation!** (He zaps JASMINE and the SULTAN with his staff, and they both bow to him. RAJAH comes running at him. He zaps RAJAH, and the tiger turns into a kitty-cat.) Down, boy! Oh, princess—(lifts her chin with his staff)—there's someone I'm dying to introduce you to.

ALADDIN: (off-camera) Jaffar! Get your hands

In this sequence, Jaffar is engaging in the construction of a new socially situated identity as the new authority figure. This conversational sequence reflects some of the linguistic structures that we have seen in some of the other sequences. As we can clearly see, Jaffar's lack of use of contractions help to create the linguistic "stiffness" or inflexibility that becomes attached to his character. At several points during this sequence he could have very well opted to contract his speech as in an everyday conversational style by substituting "you'll" for "you will" as an example. Yet the character's inability to manipulate syntactic construction creates a distance and formality that positions this character as outside the norm of familiar linguistic interactions. This positioning is also reflected again in the lexicon that the character draws from in the dialogue. "**You will cower before a sorcerer**" and "**abject humiliation**" are certainly lexical choices that we don't readily find in the other characters. Contrast this with the Genie's response to Aladdin's plea to stop assisting Jaffar, "**Sorry, kid—I got a new master now.**" The use of "sorry kid" in this sequence organizes Genie's actions as not entirely menacing in the sense that the very word "kid" connotes a friendly and informal relationship with Aladdin. The Genie is transgressing out of duty or obligation but not necessarily malice. In a

certain sense, it is as if the language that Genie uses allows the viewer to empathize with the socially situated identity enacted by Genie even as it is doing damage to the kingdom. This is yet another case where lexical choice indicates the ability of the character to moderate social language so as to appear “normal.” Whereas in *Mulan*, Mushu becomes a highly racialized character, the Genie in *Aladdin* breaks this mold to the extent that it is part of the construction of the character that it is able to mutate and morph into different personas thereby allowing the character to escape the process of racialization.

Although Disney is operating within an “English Domain,” the selective variation in the linguistic construction of character subjectivity suggests that these wider social attitudes structured in a binary of “Standard English” as familiar and “Non-standard” variations as foreign or alien, have been absorbed by the company and in fact become part of the apparatus of the construction of normalcy (Disney discourse), hence, they display Disney’s complicity in the perpetuation of xenophobic attitudes towards all that is constructed as being outside the parameters of “standard” white middle class linguistic variations. The Disney textual presentation in effect supports and perpetuates this link with long-term effects as to our perceptions of subjectification and linguistic production.

Disney-fying Language: Assessing Linguistic Differentiation

To test the systematicity between character development and language use, a study was designed to investigate not only the reactions that undergraduate students in a Mid-Western University had to different linguistic variations, but also the attitudes that prompted these reactions. The study was primarily survey research. The students were exposed to three sets of voices from the two Disney films and subsequently asked to qualify their attitudes about the voices heard. The first set consisted of three voices of animated characters from the movie *Aladdin*. The second set of three voices from the movie *Mulan*, and the last voice set consisted of a combination of voices from both movies. After the presentation of each voice set, students were asked a series of questions aimed at discovering which voices the students attributed to “bad” and “good” characters as well as their reasons for these choices. The results were later coded and statistically analyzed to determine the propensity of choice relative to linguistic variation.

In the first set of voices the students were asked to identify the voice belonging to the “good” character. In this series of voices, the investigator included as the first voice an excerpt with phonological stress on particular syllables deviating from “standard Anglo middle class” linguistic output, as a result this particular character appeared to have an “accent.” The second voice was that of the main character or hero of the movie and the last was that of the villain. As much as possible the investigator minimized the context by limiting the exposure so that the context or frame could not be derived simply from listening to the voices.

Sequentially the voices presented were those of (The street seller, Aladdin and Jaffar).

In the second set of voices, the objective was to single out the “bad” character. In this sequence, the “bad” character was in the first position, with the remaining voices belonging to the heroine and a mediating supporting character. Sequentially the voices were represented as Shan-Yu, Mushu and finally Mulan. In the last sequence, the investigator included all “good” voices, that is to say, no villains were included in the samples. The subjects were asked to identify the good character. The voices presented were those of Aladdin, Mulan and Mushu.

As is clearly evidenced by the corresponding graphs, the students were for the most part able to discern which of the characters had been assigned “bad” roles simply by listening to a sentence or part of a sentence from the characters. In fact as can be seen from the identification of the villain in graph 2, the students were able to unanimously identify the character. More problematic was the identification of the “good” character once the voices in the sample included only “good” characters. When this scenario was presented, some students had such difficulty choosing that they opted to label all three samples as belonging to “good” characters. Graphs 1, 2 and 3 represent these results.

Just as interesting as the individual identification of the roles assigned to the characters were the descriptors that students used in referring to the characters. Table A includes some of the more common descriptors for the “good” character while table B refers to the “bad” character based solely on listening to the voices.

This limited yet telling study clearly shows that particular phonological productions are being attributed positive characteristics while others are being perceived

Graphs 1, 2, and 3.

Table A	Table B
Friendly, smooth, soft tones, clear, higher tones, compassionate, innocent, moderately pitched, perhaps White, White American, no apparent discernable accent, comforting, Mid-west or West coast accent.	Deep, dark, low pitch, threatening, no clear discernable accent, sinister, vicious, deceitful, low, coarse, mean, vicious.

as negative. Further, these attributions are systematic and as such indicate a particular complicity on the part of Disney. How else can we explain the systematic correspondence between character production and linguistic output?

Any socio-positioning that allows the privilege of being unperturbed by the systematic way that students are able to identify these voices and the manner in which characteristics are assigned simply by listening to specific voices is deeply troubling in that it certainly reflects and even perpetuates a lack of empathy for the linguistically oppressed. Clearly language is playing a mediating role in the way that reality is being constructed so as align with dominant “mainstream” narratives, hence “white American, comforting and compassionate are diametrically opposed to “threatening, sinister and deceitful.” Linguo-racism⁷ is grounded in material realities and inextricably linked to dimensions of power that ultimately reproduce hegemonic forms of control through forms of cultural reproduction.

The filtering of these pervasive ideological discourses in the reproduction of cultural forms necessarily creates an exigency for the production of counter discourses that strategically undermine econo-viability of sustaining these Discourses while simultaneously positing alternate possibilities grounded in more humane representational forms. The point of this entire project is not to say in any way that there are specific people in the Disney company that are systematically conspiring to create these images through the use of language, but rather that Disney, to the extent that it appropriates a wider discourse on what is the norm in terms of language attitudes, *fully exploits these attitudes and in so doing perpetuates stereotypes which in the long run structure the very materiality of those who find themselves subordinated linguistically.*

The linking of the ideological positions espoused here with curricular practice sets forth a synergy between the public sphere and curriculum development and implementation. This link allows for a re-conceptualization of curriculum through an explosion of possibilities that would create a new type of cohesion in curricular development; one that would necessarily venture beyond the educational sphere as currently conceptualized to disrupt the linearity of curriculum as currently conceived while creating a pedagogical space where the boundaries between the public and the educational spheres become fragmented. This fragmentation would then allow a permeability of content that allows for the re-conceptualization of curricula. This disruption however, would not only require an alternate way of conceptualizing curricular cohesion, hence appeasing those who favor the primacy of regulation and

governmentality as structured into the current mode, but simultaneously require a post- progressive pedagogy that is willing to not only use rival epistemological frameworks but also open possibilities as to new methods of conceiving and evaluating what gets counted as knowledge.

Once we break down the barriers between the public and the educational, possibilities become limitless in that reality can better be engaged from multiple dimensions without limiting the inherently pedagogical space of the public through the fragmentation of knowledge. Given the adjustments and mutations of market economies that ordinarily seek to increase commodification and consumption, it only seems fitting that the educational establishment capitalize on the availability of these culturally embedded texts for an active engagement with a vast array of social justice themes such as the permanence of racism through linguistic production. The analysis of language production in the public pedagogic space can lead to a creative tension that ultimately opens spaces of dialogue, a necessary step toward transformative change.

Notes

¹ Dorfman & Mattelart, (1971) have articulately argued that Disney's system of cultural reproduction are in fact far from innocent in that in the Latin American context they were strategically used to undermine popular movements and the development of a popular consciousness that questioned American social, cultural and political ideology.

² The term is used here in the Bakhtinian sense of the language of texts as being composed of multiple competing genres.

³ Dorfman & Mattelart (1971) have argued Disney's "clean" image as it is experienced today is the result of the positioning of Disney films against a different genre of films following World War II.

⁴ Henry Giroux argues that some of the practices engaged in by Disney in some respects including the acquisition of land in central Florida were legally questionable.

⁵ In a linguistic sense, backgrounding here refers to the organizational manner in which information is linguistically coded and subordinated to other textual information as to appear to be minimally relevant in relation to the main idea of a text.

⁶ Bourdieu conceives the operationalization of language as contained within a linguistic field that is unified thru the stratification of linguistic variants.

⁷ Macedo, Gounari & Dendrinos (2003) define Linguo-racism as a process whereby language becomes associated systematically with racial collectives.

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