Abstract

KAREN EISENHAUER. A Quantitative Analysis of Directives in Disney Films. (Under the direction of Agnes Bolonyai)

Children's animated films provide ideologies about gender that are presented to children and their parents as innocent and "safe." However, construction of "goodness" in these movies often rely on normative sex-role stereotyping, especially for women (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek 2011; Junn 1997). Studies in child development have shown that children use these films in playing with and constructing their gender identities (Baker-Sperry 2007, Coyne et al. 2016). 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. To address this, my research focuses on applying quantitative language and gender methodology to analyze speech in Disney Princess films. In this study, I focus on directives, defined by Searle (1975) as a speech act which gets a hearer to do something. Directives have been decisively correlated with intersections of gender, power, and politeness in previous studies (e.g. Aronsson & Thorell 1999; Goodwin 1980, 1983 1990, 1998; West 1990). I quantify directive use in these films through methodology previously used to analyze real-life speech communities, focusing mainly on mitigation and aggravation strategies. Results suggest that gender, urgency, and power dynamics all play a significant role in determining mitigation strategies applied to directives. Qualitative analysis reveals that gender and power are closely intertwined as they affect directive use. Men generally tend to mitigate less than women, and, additionally, their direct and aggravated displays of power are ratified by unmarked compliance. Women, on the other hand, mitigate more heavily even in positions of power, except in the case of villains. Domestic situations uniquely qualify "good" women to enact authority through bald directives. These findings quantitatively triangulate previous observations about sex-roles in children's films and confirm the legitimacy of using linguistic methodology to examine media artifacts.