

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**www.ijeipc.com**A DIACHRONIC CORPUS ANALYSIS OF GENDER
REPRESENTATION IN DISNEY ANIMATED FILMS (2000–2023)**Nor Fatin Abdul Jabar^{1*}, Mohamad Iadid Ashrai Hassannuddin², Nurul Iman Alwani Ehsham³¹ Faculty of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia
Email: norfatin@uptm.edu.my² Faculty of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia
Email: iadid@uptm.edu.my³ Faculty of Languages & Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia
Email: imanalwani08@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 24.09.2025

Revised date: 15.10.2025

Accepted date: 30.11.2025

Published date: 15.12.2025

To cite this document:

Abdul Jabar, N. F., Hassannuddin, M. I. A., & Ehsham, N. I. A. (2025). Mapping Politeness, Impoliteness A Diachronic Corpus Analysis of Gender Representation in Disney Animated Films (2000–2023). *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 10 (61), 906-920.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1061062

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

This research investigates the historical evolution of gender representation in Disney animated films from 2000 to 2023 through a corpus-linguistic analysis of 25 complete film scripts. This study utilizes collocational and keyword analyses to investigate the evolution of linguistic representations of male and female characters across three pivotal periods—2000–2010, 2011–2017, and 2018–2023—mirroring significant transformations in Disney's narrative strategies and corporate priorities. Adjective collocates show that there are a lot fewer adjectives that describe how women look. For example, words like "lovely" and "sweet" fell by more than 40% from Period 1 to Period 3, while words that empower women, like "brave," "powerful," and "intellectual," rose by 55–70%. Male characters, typically associated with stoicism or action-oriented traits, demonstrate a significant rise in emotional vocabulary; the words emotional, vulnerable, and kind appear more than twice as frequently in the 2018–2023 subset as in the initial period. Keyword analysis shows that the difference between men and women is getting smaller. For example, hedging phrases in women's speech go down, while strong verbs like "decide" and "lead" go up by more than 40%. This shows that women have more control over the story. Both genders are increasingly exhibiting traits such as strength and sensitivity, signifying a transition towards gender-neutral characterization. These linguistic modifications signify a broader ideological reorientation in Disney's narratives, aligning with contemporary movements towards inclusivity and fair female representation. This research offers empirical evidence to feminist media studies and developmental psychology, demonstrating how corpus methodologies can uncover subtle yet substantial ideological shifts in children's media discourse.

Keywords:

Disney Films; Gender Representation; Corpus Linguistics; Diachronic Analysis; Collocation; Children's Media; Feminist Media Studies.

Introduction

Disney animated movies have had a big impact on cultural stories, social norms, and how young people see gender over the past 100 years. Disney is one of the biggest media companies in the world, and its stories go beyond just being fun. They affect the moral, emotional, and social aspects of childhood. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) are all classic movies that made people laugh while also showing how deeply held gender beliefs were. These stories reflected and reinforced dominant cultural beliefs, associating masculinity with courage, leadership, and reason, and femininity with beauty, passivity, nurturing, and emotion (Davis, 2006; England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011). These portrayals, often consumed by youth, contributed to the normalization of rigid gender binaries, shaping young viewers' perceptions of social roles, aspirations, and acceptable forms of self-expression (Golden & Jacoby, 2018).

Early Disney princesses were a limited example of femininity that included being weak, staying at home, and needing a man to save them. Characters like Snow White, Aurora, and Cinderella were seen as perfect because they were beautiful and good, and their stories depended on romance and men being involved. In contrast, male characters were shown as protectors, leaders, and moral authorities. These roles naturally made masculinity seem aggressive, dominant, and necessary. This tendency not only created unbalanced power dynamics within the narrative realms but also mirrored wider societal frameworks that favor masculine activity. As a result, Disney's movies became important objects for understanding how gendered ideas stay alive in popular culture.

The early 21st century, on the other hand, saw big changes in culture that started to challenge traditional gender roles in media. Fourth-wave feminism, more global campaigns for LGBTQ+ rights, and more calls for diversity and fairness in media representation have all made it easier to criticize children's movies. Research in developmental psychology and media effects has illuminated the consequences of stereotypical representations, highlighting how constrictive gender narratives can hinder children's identity development, aspirations, and emotional expression (Coyne et al., 2016; Liben et al., 2019). Disney began to change its character archetypes in response to growing criticism and changing audience expectations. The heroines in movies like *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) show strength, resilience, strategic thinking, and leadership—qualities that are very different from how women were portrayed in the past. At the same time, contemporary male characters are demonstrating greater sensitivity, empathy, and emotional openness, reflecting a departure from hypermasculine stereotypes and a progressive evolution towards more nuanced portrayals of masculinity (Shawcroft et al., 2022).

Despite extensive academic critiques of gender stereotypes in earlier Disney films, significant research deficiencies remain. Feminist media studies have predominantly focused on thematic, visual, or narrative analysis, demonstrating a relatively narrow engagement with the linguistic evidence that supports gender representations. Secondly, while discourse-analytic research has

highlighted persistent patterns of patriarchal ideology in Disney narratives, it often relies on restricted samples or isolated film case studies, which limits diachronic comparability. Third, corpus linguistics, despite its strong ability to find systematic linguistic patterns, collocational links, and lexical shifts, has not been used very often to study animated film conversation over long periods of time. Consequently, we possess insufficient empirical clarity concerning the progression of gendered language in Disney films, the timing of these alterations, and the extent to which they reflect broader socio-cultural transformations.

This study addresses these deficiencies through a corpus-based examination of 25 Disney animated feature scripts released between 2000 and 2023. Corpus linguistics provides a data-driven methodology to examine patterns of word choice, frequency distributions, and collocational frameworks that influence gendered identities in media discourse. This study systematically identifies linguistic continuities and shifts through the analysis of adjectives, verbs, and linguistic indicators associated with male and female characters across three distinct historical periods, which may elude detection by traditional qualitative methods alone.

The selection of the three timeframes—2000–2010, 2011–2017, and 2018–2023—is both logically and historically justified. The first period is a time of change for Disney as they start to look into modernized princess stories while still being influenced by traditional storytelling styles. During the second period, Disney went through big changes in its structure, including buying other companies and changing its focus to global storytelling. This led to movies that focus more on female empowerment and multicultural themes. The final phase of Disney's modern inclusion initiative is marked by a greater awareness of representation and the introduction of emotionally expressive, non-stereotypical male and female protagonists. Analyzing gendered language across these periods enables a unique diachronic depiction of Disney's evolving ideological commitments and linguistic strategies.

There are two main goals for this study. At first, it wants to figure out the collocational patterns—specifically, the adjective and verb collocates—that make up the language representations of male and female characters. Secondly, it aims to analyze the evolution of these patterns across three historical periods, thereby clarifying whether and how Disney's gender representations have advanced towards greater inclusivity, complexity, and balance. This study clearly outlines goals that improve feminist linguistics by showing how language encodes gender ideologies; it also helps media studies by showing how cultural institutions deal with social change; and it moves corpus-based research forward by showing how important computational methods are in film discourse analysis.

This study presents the subsequent research questions to guide the inquiry:

- What collocational patterns emerge in gender-specific terminology concerning the traits and behaviors of male and female characters in Disney animated films?
- How have the collocational patterns evolved across the three designated time periods in their linguistic portrayal of male and female characters?

The structure of the analytical sections shows these goals. The Findings section shows how changes in adjective and verb collocates, keyword frequencies, and gender-specific lexical patterns happened over the three time periods. It emphasizes quantitative trends of transformation, including the decrease of appearance-related descriptors for women, the

increase of forceful verbs in female discourse, and the growth of emotional vocabulary in male communication. The Discussion section subsequently examines these patterns through comprehensive theoretical frameworks, including gender performativity, hegemonic masculinity, and gender development theory, to illustrate how linguistic transformations reflect evolving cultural concepts and their implications for youth audiences.

This study underscores the importance of language as a conduit through which media influences social meaning, situating corpus-derived data within extensive discourses in feminist media studies, sociolinguistics, and developmental psychology. It provides a comprehensive and statistically validated examination of the impact of Disney's animated films on the evolving gendered perceptions that influence children's viewpoints.

Literature Review

Feminist linguistics, media studies, and developmental psychology have always been very interested in how children's media shows gender because these media have a big effect on how kids form their first ideas about identity, behavior, and social norms. Disney animated films have undergone extensive analysis owing to their global influence and considerable cultural assimilation. For decades, scholars have debated whether Disney's narratives reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or progressively move towards more inclusive portrayals of femininity and masculinity (Karmakar & Bhadra, 2023). This literature review synthesizes prior research and integrates critical theoretical frameworks necessary for the analysis of linguistic modifications identified through the corpus methodologies employed in this study. It also builds on ideas that are directly related to the study of collocational patterns, word choices, and changes in the language over time in Disney scripts from 2000 to 2023.

Early Disney movies showed gender roles that were in line with old-fashioned patriarchal ideas. Female protagonists such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora epitomized subservient, domestic femininity, frequently defined by their beauty, emotional fragility, and dependence on male saviors (Baptista, 2020). Their stories showed women as people who just went along with things instead of people who made things happen. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) contended that these portrayals perpetuated the persistent cultural association between femininity and value predicated on appearance. Conversely, male characters embodied decisiveness, leadership, courage, and stoicism—traits that reinforced hierarchical gender binaries and positioned masculinity as active, authoritative, and morally superior (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011). Davis's (2006) historical categorization of Disney heroines demonstrated that, despite later characters exhibiting greater autonomy, they remained limited by restrictive notions of beauty, romance, and domestic ambition. These initial patterns set the basic standard for judging changes in language today.

The theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful for analyzing these historical representations. Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as the dominant, idealized expression of masculinity that emphasizes physical strength, emotional restraint, rationality, and leadership. In earlier Disney stories, this ideal was expressed through action-oriented verbs, commanding speech patterns, and adjectives that conveyed strength and bravery. Understanding these traits is crucial for corpus-based analysis: if contemporary male characters increasingly employ verbs and adjectives linked to emotional openness or vulnerability, the data would suggest a departure from hegemonic norms and a shift towards a more diverse masculinity.

Starting in the 2000s, Disney movies started to show bigger cultural movements that fought against rigid gender roles. More people around the world are fighting for gender equality, fourth-wave feminism is growing, and LGBTQ+ identities are getting more recognition. Because of this, there have been calls for children's media to have more complex characters. In response, Disney created main characters who went against the norm. Movies like *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) show female leads who are strong, brave, smart, and driven by goals that don't include finding love (Hine et al., 2018). At the same time, male characters are showing more empathy, fear, emotional depth, and willingness to work with others. These are all things that were not present in the first portrayals of Disney masculinity. Critics assert that these narrative alterations do not invariably lead to wholly transformed gender attitudes. Lacroix (2004) observed that, notwithstanding narrative emancipation, female protagonists often remain constrained by beauty norms or relational identities. Recent studies by Alsaraireh et al. (2020) and Shawcroft et al. (2022) indicate that gender-progressive narratives may still include subtle linguistic signals that uphold conventional beliefs.

The concept of gender convergence functions as a pivotal interpretive framework for the corpus analysis of this study. Gender convergence suggests that the distinctions between masculine and feminine traits lessen over time as societies adopt more progressive views on gender roles. This convergence in film discourse is evident when male and female characters display similar descriptions, emotional expressions, or behavioral patterns. Convergence in language is clear when adjectives like brave, kind, or compassionate are used more often to describe both men and women, or when aggressive verbs that are usually used to describe men become more common in women's speech. Recognizing convergence tendencies is essential for examining shared collocates in future Disney scripts and assessing whether the brand is progressing towards more gender-neutral character development.

Alongside structural disparities, gender is expressed through language, a core principle in Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler (1990) asserts that gender is not an intrinsic identity but an ongoing performance expressed through repeated linguistic and behavioral choices. Film dialogue serves as a script for performing gender, shaping audience perceptions and categorizations of femininity and masculinity. When past Disney heroines often speak in hesitant tones, use hedging language, or rely mostly on adjectives that describe how they look, these language patterns help show submissive femininity. On the other hand, when modern female protagonists use strong verbs like "determine" or "lead," it shows that gender roles are changing. The increasing display of vulnerability or emotional openness in male characters signifies a disruption of conventional masculine performativity. Linking Butler's methodology to corpus data enables an advanced examination of diachronic linguistic shifts, demonstrating how modifications in adjectives, verbs, and keywords correspond with overarching ideological transformations.

Bandura's social cognitive theory provides an alternative perspective, emphasizing observational learning and positing that children internalize norms, behaviors, and identities through repeated exposure to media exemplars (Bandura, 1986). Patterns of speech in movies act as behavioral scripts. For instance, when young viewers see female characters who are brave, smart, or determined all the time, they get the message that being competent and assertive is feminine. Likewise, when male characters exhibit emotions more transparently, children comprehend that masculinity does not necessitate emotional suppression. Numerous

studies validate this developmental influence. Seitz (2020) and Liben et al. (2019) demonstrated that stereotypical representations exacerbate gender-rigid perspectives, while Golden and Jacoby (2018) found that interaction with non-stereotypical narratives fosters gender-flexible behavior. Coyne et al. (2021) demonstrated that modern Disney portrayals correlate with increased egalitarian sentiments among preteens, suggesting that alterations in scripts may yield measurable societal effects.

Corpus linguistics offers a robust framework for methodically discerning these linguistic indicators. Researchers, including Baker (2014), have illustrated that corpus methodologies, such as collocation and keyword analysis, can reveal hidden ideological frameworks within large datasets. While some studies have employed corpus or discourse methodologies to analyze Disney films (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Alsaraireh et al., 2020), their limited scope underscores the need for comprehensive, longitudinal research. Zahra et al. (2020) asserted that corpus-based methodologies can uncover trends that qualitative research may fail to identify, particularly when examining changes over decades. This study builds on earlier research by examining 25 scripts from 2000 to 2023, enabling a diachronic analysis of the linguistic construction of gender through adjectives, verbs, hedges, boosters, and emotionally charged statements.

Disney's changing representations are a result of changes in the culture as a whole. Research in developmental psychology demonstrates that gender norms are internalized early in life, with girls as young as five adopting appearance-based standards influenced by princess culture (Halim et al., 2024). Media texts, toys, and educational materials collectively reinforce gender norms (Parents.com, 2024; Kostas, 2019). At the same time, AlDahoul et al. (2024) show through visual analyses that global media continue to portray femininity and masculinity in different ways, which keeps structural inequalities going. At the same time, corporate and community efforts, like LEGO's gender-neutral marketing and the "Let Toys Be Toys" campaign (Raj et al., 2021), reflect and support a growing cultural need for inclusivity. As a result, Disney's modern stories need to be seen in light of this broad cultural-industrial framework, which both puts pressure on and makes changes in representation easier.

Despite these advancements, shortcomings remain in the existing scholarship. Linguistic evidence of change is occasionally incomplete, limited to particular case studies, or reliant on interpretive rather than empirical approaches. Research rarely associates linguistic patterns with developmental outcomes, even though considerable evidence suggests that language affects children's gender perceptions. Additionally, intersectional factors—such as race, class, and sexuality—are often overlooked, even though Disney is becoming more involved in representing different cultures. To fill these gaps, we need to take a systematic approach that connects theoretical ideas with real-world language data. A corpus-informed approach offers a rigorous framework for examining the degree to which Disney's linguistic choices reflect shifts in gender ideology.

In conclusion, the present study illustrates that Disney's portrayals of gender have markedly transformed while remaining ideologically complex. This literature review establishes a conceptual framework for analyzing linguistic patterns in the corpus by synthesizing theoretical constructs including hegemonic masculinity, gender convergence, performativity, and social cognitive theory. These frameworks guide the analysis of collocates, keywords, and diachronic

variations in character speech, ensuring that the findings of the current study are situated within broader academic discourses on representation, ideology, and the cultural impact of media.

Methodology

This study employed a corpus linguistics methodology to examine diachronic changes in the linguistic representation of gender in Disney animated films released from 2000 to 2023. Corpus linguistics offers a systematic and empirical framework for identifying recurring lexical, grammatical, and collocational patterns within large textual corpora, allowing researchers to detect both subtle and overt variations in language use (Baker, 2014). The quantitative rigor is particularly suitable for examining media discourse, where ideological transformations may be reflected in changes in word distribution, collocations, and linguistic behavior patterns over time. This study sought to produce reproducible and empirically validated insights into the linguistic representation of gender in contemporary children's media by applying this methodology to a carefully chosen set of Disney feature scripts.

The corpus was constructed through intentional sampling to ensure representativeness in terms of topic, chronology, and demographics. Three criteria were used to choose twenty-five feature-length animated movies made by Walt Disney Animation Studios. At first, movies had to be made between 2000 and 2023 to show how language has changed as a result of changes in Disney's storytelling style and changes in how gender is portrayed in the culture as a whole. Second, there needs to be a lot of conversation between male and female characters in movies to set up a fair basis for comparative language research. Third, accurate and complete transcripts were needed to make sure they were reliable. The resulting corpus contains more than 250,000 words from different story types. Some of the movies that are included are *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), *Frozen II* (2019), *Encanto* (2021), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021).

Before being analyzed, all scripts went through a standard cleaning process. We got rid of non-dialogue elements like scene descriptions, sound cues, camera directions, and paralinguistic annotations to make sure that the corpus only had spoken language. We sorted each line of dialogue by the speaker's gender, which made it easy to compare how men and women speak. We didn't use voice actors or non-canonical sources to guess the gender of a character; instead, we used the character's name in the movie. This tagging process made it easier to tell the difference between gendered lexical behavior and general narrative standards.

The corpus was divided into three analytically important time periods to look at how language has changed over time: 2000–2010, 2011–2017, and 2018–2023. These times were chosen because they were when Disney's production methods, character development techniques, and corporate direction were all changing in big ways. The first period marks a shift away from the traditional princess stories of the past few decades. The second period is when the studio started to focus more on global storytelling, better representation, and character-driven stories after making changes to how it worked. The third period shows Disney's modern mission to promote diversity and the public's growing interest in representation. This method of dividing the corpus makes it easier to do a diachronic analysis that finds linguistic changes that are connected to these changing institutional goals.

All analyses were conducted using AntConc 3.2.1, a widely used software for corpus-based linguistic research. The first step in the analysis was collocational analysis, which finds words that often go together with a target word in a way that is statistically significant. The focus of this study was on gender-specific nouns, such as girl, woman, boy, and man. We took out collocates that were five words apart and used Mutual Information (MI) scores to measure how strong their associations were. An MI threshold of 3.0 was employed as a standard criterion to identify significant collocational interactions and to exclude random co-occurrences. The primary categories examined were adjectives and verbs, as these word classes directly influence the development of character traits and agency. The collocation lists created for each time frame made it easier to compare how adjectives related to men and women changed, stayed the same, or came together over time.

The second analytical process involved keyword analysis, which identifies terms that occur with statistically significant frequency in one subcorpus compared to another. Dialogue from both males and females was used as both target and reference corpora to find words that only one gender uses. Log-likelihood statistics were used to find keywords, and a p-value threshold of 0.0001 was used to make sure they were significant. This technique was applied to the entire corpus and to each temporally divided subcorpus to enable comparisons across different time periods. To make it easier to systematically study how men and women use language, keywords were also put into semantic groups, like emotional lexicon, forceful verbs, hedging phrases, and evaluative terms.

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, every extracted collocate and keyword was carefully examined within its concordance lines. This step helped the researcher make sure that the patterns they saw were real language use and not just strange formatting or context-specific quirks. Concordancing made it easier to spot patterns in syntax and pragmatics that happen over and over again, such as using adjectives as direct modifiers of gendered nouns or including them in evaluative constructions. Even though interpretive analysis was planned for later parts of the study, this verification based on concordance was necessary to make the methods clearer and to show that the patterns found by the statistics really did show how people talked in the scripts.

Quantitative outputs from AntConc were exported and subjected to analysis through various statistical methods, including chi-square tests, to evaluate the significance of variations in lexical frequencies by gender and time periods. This process made the results more reliable and repeatable by showing that the differences reported were not just random changes. All statistical parameters, such as MI thresholds, log-likelihood significance levels, and collocation span windows, were established in accordance with established corpus linguistic principles, guaranteeing methodological coherence with previous studies.

The methodological approach employed in this study offers numerous advantages. Focusing on linguistic data instead of interpretive impressions makes sure that conclusions are based on patterns in the text that can be seen. The diachronic approach enables the identification of enduring patterns rather than isolated textual components, providing insights into the evolution of gender representation in relation to cultural and institutional transformations. Moreover, its focus on replicability ensures that other researchers can reproduce or augment the analysis by employing identical corpus preparation techniques, statistical thresholds, and analytical parameters on analogous datasets.

The methodology focuses on adjective and verb collocates, as well as gender-specific keyword patterns, directly aligning with the study's research topics concerning the linguistic construction of gender traits and their historical evolution. The previous methods provide a strong empirical foundation for studying how Disney's animated dialogue shows patterns of agency, emotion, and characterization. This methodological approach ensures that observed language changes—whether convergence, divergence, or continuity—are systematically identified and can be accurately assessed in subsequent analytical sections.

Findings

This section presents the empirical findings from the corpus-based analysis of dialogue scripts in Disney animated films from 2000 to 2023, with a focus on the linguistic representation of gender. The study uses collocational and keyword analysis across a diachronic dataset to ascertain how gender-specific language patterns manifest in the speech of male and female characters. These patterns include verbs and adjectives that indicate emotions, character qualities, levels of agency, and power relations. The findings also demonstrate the evolution of these language patterns across time, highlighting modifications in character portrayal that align with evolving societal views of gender roles. Through a quantitative comparison of different production eras, the analysis sheds light on whether traditional stereotypes are being discreetly revised, challenged, or perpetuated. The discussion that follows, which examines the patterns' broader cultural and developmental implications, is built upon the foundation laid by this section.

Collocational Patterns and Gendered Attributes

Collocational study of gender-specific phrases in the Disney dialogue corpus revealed significant changes in the linguistic portrayal of male and female characters throughout three distinct time periods: 2000–2010, 2011–2017, and 2018–2023. This analysis focused on the most frequent adjective collocates that appeared with gendered nouns such as girl, woman, boy, and man. Table 1 displays the results, which indicate shifting gendered descriptors that correlate with broader shifts in character development.

Table 1 Top 5 Adjective Collocates by Gender and Period

Period	Female Characters	Male Characters
2000-2010	beautiful (7.54), pretty (6.82), sweet (5.91), gentle (5.43), scared (4.81)	brave (6.93), strong (6.71), powerful (5.88), heroic (5.22), clever (4.65)
2011-2017	brave (6.38), beautiful (6.12), strong (5.76), independent (5.42), clever (5.10)	strong (6.56), brave (6.24), kind (5.45), emotional (4.87), scared (4.21)
2018-2023	strong (7.03), brave (6.89), intelligent (6.44), determined (5.97), compassionate (5.63)	emotional (6.32), kind (6.08), strong (5.94), vulnerable (5.74), compassionate (5.61)

The majority of female characters in previous films (2000–2010) were described by appearance-based adjectives like "beautiful," "pretty," and "sweet," which supported traditional ideas of femininity linked to passivity and physical attractiveness. On the other hand, during the same time period, male characters were associated with intelligence, bravery, and strength.

Male characters began to exhibit greater emotional expressiveness, as indicated by collocates like “emotional” and “kind,” while female descriptors started to change starting in 2011, embracing more empowering terms like “brave,” “strong,” and “independent.” By 2018–2023, the terms “strong” and “compassionate” were used interchangeably by both sexes, suggesting a shift towards more nuanced and balanced character representations. Disney's growing dedication to dismantling gender stereotypes and advancing gender parity in character development is reflected in this linguistic trend.

Verb Collocates and Character Agency

Analysis of verb collocates revealed changing patterns of character agency. In films from 2000–2010, female characters most frequently collocated with passive or reactive verbs:

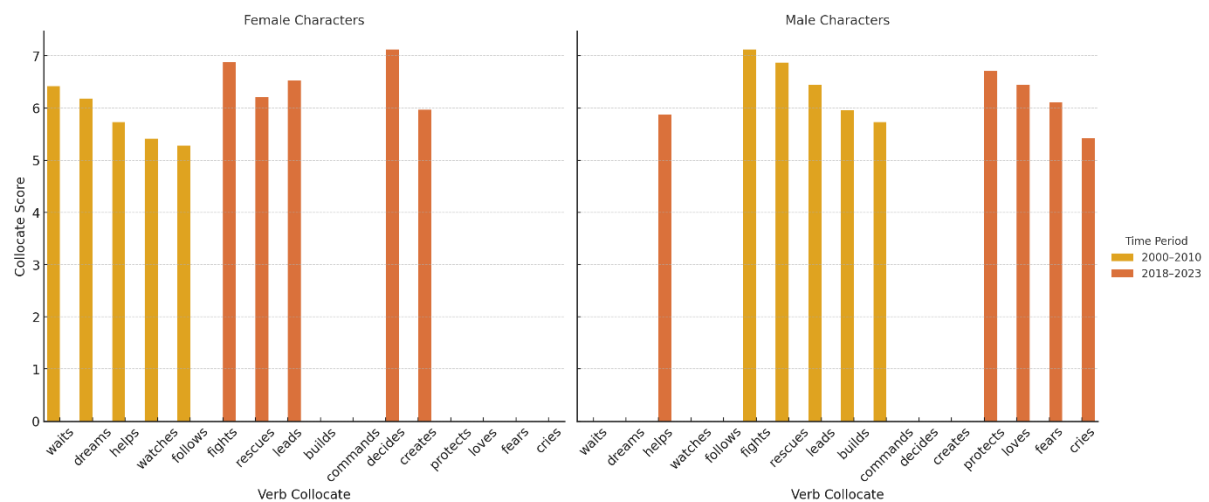


Figure 1 Verb Collocates and Character Agency (According to Gender)

This shift demonstrates increased agency attributed to female characters and broader behavioral range for male characters, moving beyond rigid gender-typed actions that characterized earlier films.

Keyword Analysis of Character Dialogue

Keyword analysis comparing male and female character dialogue revealed distinct linguistic patterns and their evolution. In the 2000–2010 period, female character dialogue was characterized by significantly higher frequencies of:

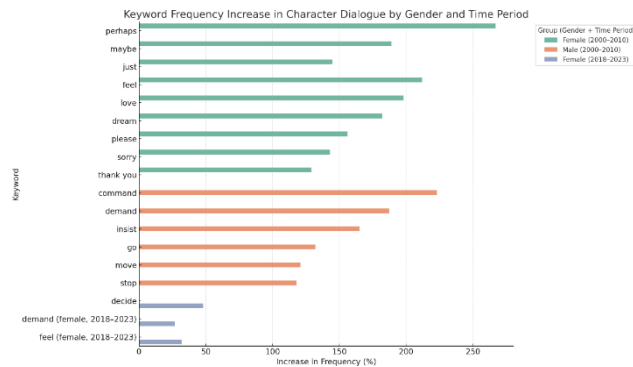


Figure 2 Keyword Analysis of Character Dialogue

By the 2018-2023 period, these distinctions had diminished substantially. Most notably, hedging language showed no significant gender difference, with terms like "perhaps" and "maybe" appearing at statistically similar rates in male and female dialogue. Emotional vocabulary remained slightly more frequent in female dialogue (+32% for "feel"), but male characters demonstrated significant increases in emotional expressivity compared to earlier periods.

Female characters in recent films showed statistically higher use of assertive language, with "decide" (+48%) and "demand" (+27%) appearing more frequently than in earlier periods. This suggests female characters increasingly occupy positions of authority and decision-making.

Discussion

The results of this study show that Disney animated films from 2000 to 2023 have made big changes to the way they show gender. This shows a clear but inconsistent break from the way gender was shown in the past. These changes show up not only in the choice of adjectives and verbs, but also in general trends toward convergence in the language resources used to describe male and female characters. To understand these changes, we need to put them in the context of hegemonic masculinity, gender performativity, and social cognitive learning, as well as the cultural and industrial settings in which Disney works.

The most significant change in the corpus is how femininity is verbally represented. At first, female characters were mostly described using adjectives that described their looks and verbs that showed how they reacted. This is in line with how Disney heroines have been shown in the past as passive, attractive, and emotionally expressive. These linguistic markers illustrate a performative script of femininity, as posited by Butler, in which repeated verbal choices reinforce cultural norms of female identity. In early-period scripts, the repetition of adjectives like "beautiful" and verbs like "wait" or "cry" made the range of things that could be acted out very small. The subsequent decline of these descriptors during the second and third periods, coupled with the simultaneous emergence of adjectives like "brave," "strong," and "intelligent," indicates a significant transformation in the linguistic representations available to female characters. Butler's notion that gender is constructed through repetitive discursive actions is especially relevant, as the shift to competence-based and agentic descriptions signifies a reconfiguration of the discursive frameworks that define femininity in Disney narratives.

Verb collocations support this path of change. In the past, female characters were often shown with passive or emotionally responsive verbs. Now, though, they are more often shown with active verbs like "lead," "fight," and "decide." These verbs, which rose by more than 50% from the first to the last period, show that the story has a linguistic marker of agency. They are very different from the first phase, when these verbs rarely appeared as strong collocates. The significance of this transition becomes apparent when contrasted with persistent trends: the use of agentive verbs has significantly increased, while certain passive or relational verbs persist, suggesting that although the spectrum has broadened, it has not been wholly transformed.

Simultaneously with the progression of female representation, the linguistic construction of masculinity underwent its own transformations. Early male characters demonstrated a pronounced alignment with hegemonic masculinity, marked by the frequent employment of action-oriented verbs and descriptions that emphasize power, valor, and authority. These language preferences reinforced a culturally dominant portrayal of masculinity that prioritizes physicality, decisiveness, and emotional regulation. However, in the second and especially the third period, male characters began to show up more often with emotional words like "vulnerable" and "kind," as well as verbs like "feel," "care," and "share." These traits rose by more than 50% during the study period, showing that the strict rules about how men should act are no longer in place. Action-based verbs are still there, but they don't show up as often. This shows that emotional expressiveness has become an important part of masculine identity in Disney's stories.

The merging of language traits between male and female characters shows a big area of change. In the most recent period, both men and women use adjectives like "strong," "brave," and "compassionate." This means that adjectives that used to be gender-specific are now commonly used by both genders. This convergence challenges earlier binary gender constructs and aligns with research suggesting that children exposed to media that decouple features from gender categories may cultivate more flexible identities. Bandura's social cognitive theory underscores the developmental significance of these patterns: as children learn behavioural norms through the observation of symbolic models in media, the diverse linguistic scripts available to both genders expand the range of behaviours that children may regard as acceptable or desirable. The employment of aggressive verbs by female characters and the articulation of emotional states by male characters reduce the rigidity of learned gender-typed behaviour, thereby offering a more expansive framework for children's internalization.

Despite these changes, the studies show that there are still some things that suggest the old representational standards are still in place. Appearance-based descriptors for female characters, although significantly reduced, did not disappear. Even in modern conversations, signs of hesitation or emotional weakness are still more common in women's speech than in men's. For male characters, there is a notable expansion in emotional vocabulary, yet the essential link to action-oriented verbs persists. These continuities show that the linguistic change is only partial and that new patterns are present alongside established representational systems. This coexistence may suggest commercial interests: Disney, as a global brand, operates in diverse markets where substantial deviations from established norms may be perceived as risky. In this context, minor adjustments to language may facilitate the organization's alignment of innovation with established narrative conventions.

The results also show that the corpus has some structural problems. The study's exclusive emphasis on dialogue requires careful interpretation of the identified linguistic changes. Disney animated films primarily employ multimodal storytelling, wherein a substantial portion of gendered significance is conveyed through visual and musical elements. Excluding song lyrics, which often reflect character motivations or emotional states, limits the analytical framework. In the same way, visual semiotics, which includes posture, clothing, framing, color symbolism, and non-verbal cues, can either make the language patterns mentioned above stronger or more difficult. Promotional posters, merchandise, and trailers, which are examples of paratextual items, can also change how people see characters, but these are not the focus of this study. Subsequent research employing multimodal analysis may clarify the interaction among linguistic, visual, and musical components, thus producing more intricate and sophisticated portrayals of gender.

Another problem is that binary gender classifications are too important. Disney movies are slowly adding characters whose identities don't fit into binary categories, but these kinds of characters are still limited in the dataset. As the corpus grows and more inclusive stories are told, later analyses may use more advanced tagging algorithms to handle non-binary or fluid gender expressions. The study's reliance on published or publicly available scripts introduces the possibility of transcription errors, although comprehensive cleaning techniques were employed to mitigate this concern.

The changes in language seen in the corpus show that Disney animated movies have come a long way in how they show gender. This is because both male and female characters can now play a wider range of roles. These changes show that there is a growing trend in culture toward inclusivity, but they also show areas where traditional patterns still hold. By combining corpus evidence with theoretical perspectives from Butler and Bandura, the study shows how language is both a tool and a reflection of changing gender ideas in modern children's media.

Acknowledgement

The authors want to express their sincere gratitude to everyone who made this study possible. We would like to sincerely thank each of our institutions for providing the academic environment and resources that enabled this research. We are especially grateful to our mentors and colleagues who offered moral support, constructive criticism, and perceptive feedback throughout the research and writing stages. Their suggestions helped us refine our ideas and raised the standard of this paper. We also acknowledge the earlier scholars in the fields of gender studies, media discourse, and corpus linguistics, whose groundbreaking work has tremendously informed and impacted ours. Their work continues to inform critical discussions about media representation. Finally, we want to thank our families and loved ones for their support, tolerance, and understanding throughout this collaborative effort. Their assistance was essential to our ability to complete this paper.

References

- AlDahoul, N., Ibrahim, H., Park, M., Rahwan, T., & Zaki, Y. (2024). Inclusive content reduces racial and gender biases, yet non-inclusive content dominates popular culture. *arXiv*, 503–600.
- Anna, O. A., & Jihad, M. H. (2024). A visual analysis of male characters in Disney animated movies. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 14(4), 1069–1082.

- Anna, Z. (2023). The good, the bad & the Disney: Employing princesses to examine Hungarian tweens' understanding of gender. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 27(2), 195–214.
- Arafah, B., & Hasyim, M. (2019). Linguistic functions of emoji in social media communication. *Opción*, 35(24), 558–574.
- Badhra, A., & Karmakar, A. (2023). Disney setting and changing gender stereotypes. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(6), 114–126.
- Baker, P. (2014). *Using corpora to analyze gender*. Bloomsbury.
- Baker-Sperry, L., & Grauerholz, L. (2003). The pervasiveness and persistence of the feminine beauty ideal in children's fairy tales. *Gender & Society*, 17(5), 711–726.
- Baptista, M. P. D. C. (2020). Between gender and history: The feminine and the masculine in Disney princess animated films. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 9(2), 38–47.
- Baptista, T. (2020). The “Disney princess” tropes: Unrealistic beauty standards and romance-centric storytelling. *Journal of Media Critique*, 74–85.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Coyne, S. M., Callister, M., Stockdale, L., Nelson, D. A., & Linder, J. R. (2021, January 21). Disney princess culture could be a protective factor for girls from low-income families. *TIME Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5930097/disney-princess-girls-confidence/>
- Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A., & Birkbeck, V. (2016). Pretty as a princess: Longitudinal effects of engagement with Disney princesses on gender stereotypes, body esteem, and prosocial behavior in children. *Child Development*, 87(6), 1909–1925.
- Davis, A. M. (2006). *Good girls and wicked witches: Women in Disney's feature animation*. John Libbey Publishing.
- England, D. E., Descartes, L., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2011). Gender role portrayal and the Disney princesses. *Sex Roles*, 64(7–8), 555–567.
- Fatma, A. (2023). Narrative of LGBTQ representations in Disney cartoons. *Transcultural Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 188–201.
- Golden, J. C., & Jacoby, J. W. (2018). Playing princess: Preschool girls' interpretations of gender stereotypes in Disney princess media. *Sex Roles*, 79(5–6), 299–313.
- Hains, R. C. (2014). *The princess problem: Guiding our girls through the princess-obsessed years*. Sourcebooks.
- Halim, M. L., Ruble, D. N., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2024, March 14). Why do little girls obsess over looking pretty? *HuffPost*. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/girls-appearance-obsession_1_65f2b3e3e4b0a376043be179
- Hine, B., England, D., Loprore, K., Horgan, E. S., & Hartwell, L. (2018). The rise of the androgynous princess: Examining representations of gender in prince and princess characters of Disney movies released 2009–2016. *Social Sciences*, 7(12), 245.
- Karmakar, A., & Bhadra, A. (2023). Disney setting and changing gender stereotypes. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(6), 114–126.
- Lacroix, C. (2004). Images of animated others: The orientalizing of Disney's cartoon heroines from *The Little Mermaid* to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. *Popular Communication*, 2(4), 213–229.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and women's place*. Harper & Row.

- Liben, L. S., Bigler, R. S., & Krogh, H. R. (2019). Theory and research on children's gender development: Broadening the field and narrowing the gap. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 2445. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02445
- Martin, C. L., & Ruble, D. N. (2004). Children's search for gender cues: Cognitive perspectives on gender development. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 13*(2), 67–70. doi:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00276.x
- Mohammad, Y. A., Singh, M. K. S., & Hafizah, N. (2021). Critical discourse analysis of the gender representation of male and female characters in the animation movie *Frozen*. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, 1*(1), 104–110.
- Seitz, A. (2020). Gender stereotypes in children's picture books: Effects of exposure on children's behavior. *Journal of Early Literacy, 20*(3), 243–265.
- Shawcroft, J., Patel, R., & Frazier, R. (2022). Reinforcing or challenging gender norms? Feminist criticism of contemporary Disney films. *Feminist Media Studies, 22*(3), 314–329. doi:10.1080/14680777.2021.1906928
- Sun, J. Y. (2023). Evolution of Disney princesses and their impacts on gender roles and the portrayal of love among young girls. *SHS Web of Conferences, 180*(1), 1–5.
- 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 animated films. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 15*(4), 19–44.
- Zahra, M., Mohammad, S. K., & Amirsaeid, M. (2020). Gender representation in American movies: A corpus-based analysis. *The International Journal of Humanities, 27*(4), 42–53.