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# Hedges in Fiction: gender and hedge use in four Disney movie screenplays

Master thesis

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# 1. Introduction

## *1.1 Overview*

This thesis focuses on gendered speech in the media and its diachronic change in the use of hedges. Specifically, this thesis will analyze the use of hedges produced by characters in a selection of animated Disney movies targeted towards children twenty years ago and compare them to a selection of contemporary Disney movies. This thesis will explore whether there has been a significant change in gendered speech in popular animated movies aimed at children. This study will use hedges as a marker of gendered speech. This will be further explained in the literature review, where I will explore R. Lakoff's (1973) claims that female speech is characterized by certain properties, under which hedges are a part of this. Furthermore, with this thesis I want to showcase whether there have been any significant changes over the last twenty years in the scripts of animated Disney movies when it comes to female and male characters.

## *1.2 Theoretical Background*

A big portion of the literature overview of this thesis will discuss the notion of hedges—I will describe how their definition has expanded over time and their varying functions in speech. This basic explanation is of importance to my thesis, as I analyze the use of hedges in movies with the aim to showcase a larger pattern of gendered speech. The prototype theory, formulated by Eleanor Rosch (1973), is briefly discussed in this thesis as it aids to explain the semantic functions of hedges in speech. However, G. Lakoff (1972) is a key name for the theoretical structure of this thesis as he has developed and expanded the concept of hedges. The literature review of this thesis therefore relies partly on G. Lakoff for the explanation of hedges. As this thesis aims to explore the various relationships between gender and hedges in children's

animated movies, the work done by R. Lakoff (1973) also contributes greatly to the developments in this thesis.

*1.3 Previous research*

There has been very little research done on the use of gendered speech by characters in animated Disney movies. Only a few studies have investigated the characterization of male and female characters in Disney movies. England, Descartes and Collier-Meek (2011) examined gender role portrayals in Disney movies by identifying a list of stereotypical male and female characteristics and observing whether these characteristics match up with the characters of the chosen movies. However, their study was not necessarily linguistic as much as it involved behavioral aspects of gender. Despite this, their study has been a helpful addition to the research part of this thesis as it aided in shedding more light on the gender dynamics of male and female Disney characterization. The study conducted by Coyne, Linder et al., (2016) examined the effects of Disney products (this includes movies and toys) on children of preschool and kindergarten age. This study points to the idea that Disney products are presented to children as innocent yet influence children in potentially negative ways by subtly persuading them to act in stereotypically gendered ways.

*1.4 Research questions and hypotheses*

With my thesis I aim to look at three main research questions:

- Does the use of hedges increase in frequency in the speech of female characters compared to male characters?
- Does the number of hedges increase or decrease according to the depiction of a character?
- Is there a significant change in hedge use in Disney movies?
    - If so, what does this change look like?

The thesis statement of this thesis is: the use of hedges will appear to be more frequent in the speech of female Disney characters compared to the male characters in the script, as

Disney scripts aim to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Subsequently, the use of hedges will decrease in the speech of female characters over time, resulting in less hedges present in contemporary Disney movies overall and more hedges present in older Disney movies.

### *1.5 Relevance*

I have chosen to focus on Disney movies as a variable to do research on the relation between hedges and gender because, as I further elaborate on in my literature review, animated Disney movies are immensely popular and have a great impact on its audience. Disney movies are also easily available and have a large history; their rapid movie releases create an optimal corpus to compare aspects of older and newer released movies.

### *1.6 Thesis overview*

This thesis will be organized into chapters with its own sections. The first chapter comprises of the literature overview. In this chapter I will also introduce some key figures that have been essential to the formation of the hedge as a notion in speech. As this thesis explores language used in movie scripts, this chapter also briefly discusses the effects of media on young children to showcase the importance of researching language use in media. Additionally, I will describe the dynamics of gender roles in Disney movies by providing more literature on this topic. Chapter 3 is the methodological part of this thesis where I will outline the corpus, explain the motivation for the movie selection and motivation for character selection. After that I will explain the tools I will use for my study and how I will conduct data analysis. Chapter 4 contains the findings of my thesis. In this chapter I will present the results of my study. Chapter 5 is made up of the conclusion. This chapter will discuss the findings, conclude the study, discuss some limitations and suggest some improvements for future research.

## 2. Literature review

*2.1 Semantic definition of hedges*

a. "A penguin is sort of a bird" (Lakoff, 1972)

Hedges are an inevitable part of language use. G. Lakoff was one of the first authors to define hedges and to explain their significance in natural speech. For Lakoff, hedges were part of understanding fuzzy language. "Fuzziness can be studied seriously within formal semantic, and when such serious approach is taken, all sorts of interesting questions arise. "For me, some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words who's meaning implicitly involves fuzziness—words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy. I will refer to such words as "hedges"". (Lakoff, 1972). As can be seen in example (a) above, Lakoff mainly focuses on the semantic functions that hedges have; their ability to make a statement clearer or vaguer. To support this idea, Lakoff describes semantic category membership as being "not a simple yes-or-no matter, but rather a matter of degree. Different people may have different category rankings depending on their experience or their knowledge or their beliefs, but the fact of hierarchical rankings seems to me to be indisputable" (Lakoff, 1972). As Lakoff explains the inevitability of fuzziness in language, it becomes apparent that hedges have the ability to mark these fuzzy statements. A good example of Lakoff's description of hierarchical rankings is Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory (1973), where some words belong more to a certain category compared to others. In "Women, Fire and Dangerous things", Lakoff talks further about the inevitability of categorization in speech: "Most categorization is automatic and unconscious, and if we become aware of it at all, it is only in problematic cases. In moving about the world, we automatically categorize people, animals, and physical objects, both natural and man-made" (Lakoff, 1973). According to Lakoff's definition of hedges, they are thus linguistic phenomena that help to specify the placement of an utterance in the hierarchical

ranking taking place in our minds. Others, such as Skelton (1988), have observed the importance of categorizing these utterances through the use of hedges. “With a hedging system, language is rendered more flexible and the world more subtle. Indeed, it is impossible to avoid hedging, yet describe or discuss the world: the reader is invited to try and debate a controversial subject without recourse to the system. “(Skelton,1988). Hedges are therefore not just a way to fill in speech gaps; they are much more than that, as they are an essential part of nuance in speech.

*2.2. Other approaches to hedges*

After Lakoff’s description of hedges in the 70s, other authors have widened the definition of the notion, making way for explanations of other functions it might have. Kaltenbock, Wiltrud and Schneider (2010), describe hedges as “a discourse strategy that reduces the force or truth of an utterance and thus reduces the risk a speaker runs when uttering a strong or firm assertion or other speech act”. With this definition Kaltenbock et al. (2010) describe hedges as not only having an effect on the statement but also having an effect on the perception of the speaker; namely, that of saving face and diminishing any consequences that the speaker may face due to the statement they make. The latter perception of hedges has expanded the view on their use, as Kaltenbock et al. state that “ Along with these studies has come an increasing awareness of the close interdependence of hedging and context, in particular how the use of hedges is shaped to a large extent by the expectations and requirements of a particular discourse community”(2010). The requirements of said discourse community can sometimes demand more hedges. This discourse community could take place at the workplace, where explicit language could be of importance and therefore the number of hedges that mark explicitness might increase. In the medical field, for example, clear language use in conversation with a patient or another colleague is critical (Bosk et al., 1982).

Certain discourse communities prefer the use of language that is more indirect, possibly because politeness is valued a lot more compared to those discourse communities. Hedges are beneficial in this case, as they can be used as a strategy to mitigate discourse that would otherwise be perceived to some to be too direct, and therefore impolite. Hedging as a strategy of mitigation leads me to the topic of vagueness in language. The use of hedges can sometimes create a tentative statement-- one that does not communicate any specific, detailed information. Just as a hedge can be a part of a precise statement, it can also be used to reinforce vague speech. Because of this, the perception of certain hedges is sometimes negative as it is seen as a deficiency in language, making language appear to be vaguer. Despite the relevance and necessity of them in language, hedges are not often explicitly taught. "The use of hedges in writing may even be discouraged, perhaps because many of the words and phrases used as hedges are seen as empty fillers. Judging by the guidebooks for good writing, these items may be commented on in passing but not systematically taught. Teaching the appropriate use of hedges, like other pragmatic phenomena can be very problematic for several reasons. One reason is that, as suggested above, hedges get their meaning through the contexts in which they occur. Another reason is that their use is often connected with the speaker/writers' value and beliefs, even in their personalities, which makes teaching them a delicate matter." (Markkanen and Schroder, 1997). But, as I've outlined above, hedges are both inevitable and useful for successful speech. Furthermore, as hedges are part of natural speech, their use in works of fiction are also significant as they can create a narrative that mimics natural speech, thereby creating a more believable story and avoiding a narrative that seems artificial. This is equally the case for foreign language learners who aim to reach for higher competence levels in their target language--the correct use of hedges in the target language is a sign of comprehending the nuance of said target language. Markkanen and Schroder (1997) mention this point: "To

sound native-like in a foreign language, a speaker or writer should, then, have a rich repertoire of hedging expressions at his/her disposal and use an appropriate amount of them."

## *2.3 Categorization of hedges*

### 2.3.1 *Challenges of hedge identification*

To begin the task of identifying and categorizing hedges it is useful to recognize the challenges that come along with doing so. The first challenge has to do with the comprehensive list of definitions that fit the term. Some authors like Markkanen and Schroder (1997) have expressed the complexities that broadening the definition of hedges bring with it, explaining that " [...] its use originates in logic and semantics, but has lately been developed further in pragmatics and discourse analysis so far that it now extends to areas like metacommunication and to communication strategies like mitigation and politeness. Through this extension the concept has lost some of its clarity and sometimes seems to have reached a state of definitional chaos, as it overlaps with several other concepts". It is true that it is often hard to clearly categorize the function of hedges and their effects on speech into clear categories. "Hedging is a pragmatic function that involves all levels of linguistic analysis from prosody to morphology, syntax and semantics" (Kaltenbock et al., 2010). The all-encompassing nature of hedging makes the task of identifying them quite challenging. Related to this is the idea that anything can be a hedge. "As suggested by Markkanen and Schroder (1997), 'almost any linguistic item or expression can be interpreted as a hedge'. Despite the difficulties involved, it is clear that classificatory frameworks are necessary heuristic devices." (Kaltenbock et al.2010). Depending on how it is interpreted, a vast list of linguistic items can be classified as hedges, especially when used in a context that allows it to appear so. A saying, for example, can mitigate a part of speech and therefore be defined as a hedge. However, a saying is not recognized as being a typical hedge. This is why attempting to classify hedges is important. "There are a very large number of ways

in which one can hedge in English. among them, for instance, are the use of impersonal phrases, the modal system, verbs like ‘ seem, ‘ look’, and ‘ appear’, sentence-introductory phrases like ‘ I think’, ‘ I believe’, and the addition of -ish to certain ( but not all) adjectives[...]” ( Skelton, 1988). On the other side of the spectrum, no linguistic item is an inherent hedge, as hedges are very context-dependent. “In this context it should be emphasized that no linguistic items are inherently hedgy but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context of the co-text. This also means that no clear-cut lists of hedging expressions are possible. However, the advantage of functional definitions is that they make it possible to draw attention to an important aspect of communicative behavior.” (Markkanen and Schroder, 1997). Although Markkanen and Schroder (1997) mention that it is impossible to provide a clear-cut list, I do believe that it is possible to create a list of hedges that are frequently used and often recognized as hedges, at least in the English language (as hedges differ per language).

2.3.2 *Types of hedges*

G.Lakoff ( 1972) divided hedges into intensifiers and de-intensifiers, explaining that “ Just as *very* is an intensifier in that it shifts values to the right and steepens the curve, so *sort of* is, in part at least, a de-intensifier in that it shifts the curve to the left and makes it less steep”. As explained in 2.1, G. Lakoff (1972) explained hedges in terms of their ability to reveal “distinctions of degree of category membership” (Lakoff, 1972). Skelton (1988) further divides hedges into approximators and shields. “In shields, they suggest, the speaker is hedged: his or her degree of commitment to a proposition is stated. In approximators, the proposition itself is hedged: the extent to which it is true is stated.” (Skelton, 1988). Skelton states that G. Lakoff (1972) only defined hedges as approximators. Skelton (1988), on the other hand, recognizes that hedges have the ability to shield the speaker as well. As stated in the previous subchapter, it is possible to create a list of hedging devices that are frequently used. However, the fact that

hedges depend greatly on their context should always be kept in mind. The following list will showcase and explain a list of hedges that are of importance to this thesis:

- *Just*: when used as an adverb modifying a verb or adjective, *just* can be described as a hedging device. It belongs to the group of approximators as this linguistic device has the ability to intensify or de-intensify a statement. The following example shows this: "Elsa: I'm **just** trying to protect you." (*Frozen* 2013).
- *So*: when used as an adverb, this hedging device can be categorized as an intensifier as it has the ability to reveal a degree of category membership. The following example shows how this hedging device works in a sentence: "Anna: No. Why? Why do you shut me out?! Why do you shut the world out?!What are you **so** afraid of?! (*Frozen* 2013)". This example shows how the hedge *so* intensifies the utterance, posing an emphasis on the adjective 'afraid'. Apart from that, *so* is also often used at the beginning of a sentence and may come off as a tentative way to start conversation. Example: "Kristoff: **So,** you're not at all afraid of her?" (*Frozen* 2013). In this instance the hedge can provide the speaker with the chance to think before saying something else or it is used as an announcement that the speaker has something important to say.
- *Little:* this adjective can be used in different ways. When it is used in its literal sense; to express the quantity or size of something or someone, like in the following example: "Scuttle: Maybe you could make a **little** planter out of it or somethin'." (*The Little Mermaid* 1989). In other instances, it is used more abstractly like in the following example: "Mushu: Our **little** baby is all grown up and saving China! [To Crickee] Do you have a tissue?" (*Mulan*, 1998).
- *Kind of*: this expression denotes an inexact degree of membership, therefore also belonging to the category of approximators. In addition to that, this hedge can also be defined as a shield as it allows the speaker to say things that they do not have to be fully

responsible for. The following example shows how this hedging device is used in one of Disney's scripts: "You **kind of** set off an eternal winter...everywhere." (*Frozen* 2013). Here, a character is making a very serious statement but by using the hedging device *kind of,* the statement is mitigated, making the accusation of the character seem less harsh. In this case, the hedge should be defined as more of a shield than an approximator, as the speaker is using the hedging device to make her utterance appear less like an accusation.

- *May*: this verb is usually used to ask for permission. when it is used in the third person (*might*) then it can be used to express possibility. It can be categorized as a hedging device because it is an indirect way of asking for something and therefore usually denotes politeness or tentativeness. The following example shows this: "I mean...Queen...Me again. Uhm. **May** I present Prince Hans of the Southern Isles." (*Frozen* 2013). In this example this verb is used as a marker of politeness and therefore shields the speaker from potentially saying anything inappropriate.
- *You know*: a hedging device that has the ability to shield the speaker. An example of the following hedge use: "I got engaged but the she freaked out because I'd only just met him, **you know**, that day. And she said she wouldn't bless the marriage---" (*Frozen* 2013). The use of *you know* denotes tentativeness in the speakers' speech.
- *Well*: when not used as an adjective or an adverb, *well* can be used as a hedge to introduce a sentence or to link utterances. "**Well**, he was sprightly" (*Frozen* 2013).
- I think: this hedge denotes tentativeness in the literal sense. An example of the use of this hedging device can be seen in the following sentence: "No, you may not. And **I think** you should go." (*Frozen* 2013). Here, the hedge is used as a way to decrease the harsh tone of a sentence.

*2.4 Hedges and gender*

Discussions around gendered speech have been going on for a very long time. R. Lakoff (1973) was one of the first linguists to write about the characteristics of women's speech and its characteristics. According to her, hedges are a part of women's speech and is "one way of sounding feminine and thus reflecting their position in society" (Markkanen and Schroder,1997). From this point of view, hedges can be seen as devices used to mark discourse that is gendered. However, the question of whether gendered speech exists is, for many, not completely clear as it is argued that there are often other variables that potentially impair the argument of the existence of gendered speech. About this Preisler (1986) says:

As far as language use and sex are concerned, then, the contention is based, not on stereotypes of male/female speech, but on theoretical necessity: if language is both the symbol and instrument of existing, and changing, social relationships--if communicative behavior both conveys and constructs social relationships in terms of variables such as power, status, formality, etc.-- ( and the field of sociolinguistics is based on those assumptions), then it is inconceivable that language use should not reflect such fundamental and all-pervasive differences as those described by feminists regarding the sexes ( p.7)

*2.4.1 Hedges used by women*

If gender is a construction based on society, then language will automatically reflect aforementioned society. Hedges are therefore a discourse marker that can be studied in terms of gender. Lakoff (1975) stated that "women's speech lacks authority because, in order to become 'feminine', women must learn to adopt an unassertive style of communication. That is, they must learn to denude their statements of declarative force" (p.89). Employing linguistic devices in speech is one of the ways declarative force can be stripped from a statement. Hedges that shield the speaker have the ability to mitigate speech and make it less direct. However, even the notion that hedges are used by women only to mitigate their speech can be argued. Holmes (1990) argued that hedges are "frequently used by women as 'positive politeness

devices signaling solidarity with the addressee, rather than as devices for expressing uncertainty (Holmes 1990, 202)'" (Markkanen, Schroder 1997). From this point of view hedges can also have a positive effect on speaker and listener. Moreover, it shows that women's speech can be complex and is more prone to pick up on subtle social cues. As mentioned in subchapter 2.3.2, hedges are very context-dependent. Hedges are also not an inherent part of women's language. The use of hedges in women's language therefore differ per culture, society and language. Language is always a reflection of what is currently happening in society and "gender differences in communication mirror and reproduce broader political inequalities between the sexes" (Dixon and Foster, 1997). Naturally, hedges are not inherently a part of women's speech or any other speech. They are merely a linguistic phenomenon that serves as a marker of a speech that represents a larger gender dynamic in society. As the culture within a society is constantly changing it is natural that "gender differences in hedging are subtle and subject to marked variation across speakers and contexts of use" (Dixon and Foster, 1997). Some authors have argued that increased hedge use is not merely a characteristic of women's speech, but that hedge use is more connected to power dynamics. Especially when observing hedge for mitigation purposes, "tentative language is not necessarily characteristic of the feminine-stereotyped communication style. Rather, tentative language is used when someone--either male or female--is in a subordinate position" (Leaper and Robnett, 2011). From this perspective, the best way to study hedge use is from a more holistic standpoint. Gender is a significant factor when observing language but other factors such as age and occupation, to name a few, also play a role in the way that women and men communicate. Nevertheless, gender differences in speech reflect the larger power dynamics of society making gender a significant variable in the observation of speech.

### *2.4.2 Women's hedge use compared to men's hedge use*

Comparing male use of hedging to female use of hedging is a complex task. It is now obvious that the topic of hedge use in gendered speech is much more nuanced. Preisler (1986) explains Trudgill's (1975) description of gendered speech, stating that

Women's traditional social position has prevented them from being rated socially by what they do (i.e. by their occupation), they have had instead to be rated on how they appear, which includes the way they speak. Trudgill also finds evidence of an opposing male 'covert prestige' norm based on working class speech, which carries connotations of masculinity and signals group solidarity. (p.4).

Trudgill's explanation (1975) refers to certain speech patterns present in male and female speech due to social conditioning in western society. However, there are times when hedge use might decrease or increase, depending on the situation. According to Leaper and Robnett (2011), one of the reasons for these changes has to do with how a person chooses to present themselves through speech. Hedges, then, become devices to emphasize feminine or masculine qualities in conversation and, depending on the situation, these qualities become useful tools. "Self-presentation is one kind of interpersonal goal that may underlie gender-related variations in the use of tentative speech. In this regard, researchers find that self-presentational concerns tend to be heightened in unfamiliar situations. When this occurs, people sometimes rely on gender-role stereotypes to guide their behavior (Deaux & Major, 1987) (Leaper and Robnett, 2011).

If hedges are markers of gendered discourse, then women might tend to increase their hedge use in conversation with people that they are unfamiliar. On the contrary, their hedge use might decrease when talking to a person that they are very familiar or close with. This correlation between increase in hedge use and unfamiliar conversation partners could possibly have to do with an approval from society which often prefers clear signs of gender roles. How both genders speak is also associated with what they speak about or, more appropriately, what

they are conditioned to speak about with others. Leaper and Robnett (2011) found that "on average, women are more likely than men to prefer personal topics and socioemotional activities, whereas men are more likely than women to prefer impersonal topics and task-oriented activities" (Robnett, 2011). These topics often require certain ways of talking and hedges that denote tentativeness often do not fit into "impersonal conversation topics and task-oriented activities". However, the dynamics of gender differences in communication changes when cross-sex conversation occurs. Sometimes, gender differences are partly mitigated (Leaper and Robnett, 2011). In other cases, men might tend to use more hedges in mixed-sex conversation as a way to "converge toward a more 'feminine' speech style" (Dixon and Foster, 1997, p.102). This convergence is often a convenient tool for the male speaker as it allows the speaker to "win the approval of their female dyad partners, to proclaim common ground and shared experiences" (Dixon and Foster, 1997, p.102). In this case, men might even employ more hedges in their speech than women in cross-sex conversation as an attempt to appeal to the female speaker. From these observations, it could be argued that men, generally, do not necessarily use less hedges than women in speech but that they use it differently. Dixon and Foster (1997) state that "although locating few global sex differences in the frequency of hedging, she has demonstrated that men and women use hedges in distinct ways. Women typically employ them as strategies of 'positive politeness' (Brown and Levinson, 1987)" (p.91). The way that women are said to use hedges have partly to do with the topics that they speak about as pointed out by Leaper and Robnett (2011). "Men's use of *sort of* and *you know,* on the other hand, generally serves goals of an epistemic nature; that is, men hedge in order to register degrees of verbal hesitancy and uncertainty" (Dixon and Foster, 1997). Men's use of epistemic (or approximator) hedges also have to do with the conversation topics that they tend to interact with more on a daily basis.

*2.4.3 Critique on defining women's speech*

Lakoff's (1973) claims of gendered speech are, in part, true. The way that women interact on a daily basis does, to a certain extent, reflect women's position in society. However, the topic of gendered speech is a very complex one and is in a constant state of transformation. Cross-sex conversation differs from same-sex conversation and affects the way that women and men choose to communicate. Familiar and unfamiliar conversation also affects the way that women and men choose to present themselves through speech. One of the critiques against Lakoff's claims is that tentative language is not used by men (Leaper and Robnett, 2011) when it has been observed that men do use tentative language, especially when talking to people that they are more familiar with or when in cross-sex conversation. "A related criticism is that she overemphasized gender differences and thereby failed to acknowledge common similarities between men's and women's communication patterns." (Leaper and Robnett, 2011). Hedges are not solely used by women and they are not exclusively part of women's speech. Moreover, they do not solely reflect tentativeness in speech as they have the ability to communicate much more than that. Hedges are devices that can be used to relate to the speaking partner, communicate tentativeness, politeness, accuracy and can serve as filler words for the speaker, among other abilities. Therefore, critics of R. Lakoff's claims "have worried that Lakoff's proposals imply that tentative language is somehow deficient; that is, tentative language might be viewed as substandard because it lacks assertiveness. A deficiency model plays into the greater social tendency to perceive feminine-stereotyped acts as problematic because these behaviors deviate from the masculine norm [...]" (Leaper and Robnett, 2011). Hedge use, and especially female hedge use, does not necessarily have to be seen as deficient. Despite women's speech as emerging from a social conditioning and reflecting gender stereotypes, hedges can often have positive effects on conversation and on the conversation partner.

*2.5 The effects of animated shows on children's gender roles*

Animated television shows marketed towards young children always contain gender stereotypes in the form of dress, behavior, manners and language. The effects of the gender stereotypes portrayed in shows catered towards younger children is often challenging to discern. Most of all, it is hard to draw a clear line between gender portrayals on television and behavior in young children as there are often more variables that affect child behavior. However, the understanding of gender roles starts in early childhood and they acquire this knowledge from numerous sources of information (Durkin and Nugent, 1998). Meek et al. (2011) state that "consistently portrayed gender role images may be interpreted as 'normal' by children and become connected with their concepts of socially acceptable behavior and morality" (p.557). The processing of gender portrayal by young children happens by watching shows and movies catered to them but it also happens when children interact with the media outside of their home. About this Wohlwend (2012) says "when young children pretend to be their favorite media characters, whether princesses or superheroes, their play brings together each child's understanding of well-known gendered expectations for the character's traits and actions within a narrative circulated through global media networks." (p.598). It is possible that gendered speech is among one of the ways that children are able to mimic the characters from their favorite movies which in turn might bring with it larger notions of gender.

*2.5.1 Disney as a pedagogical tool*

Durkin and Nugent (1998) have argued that young children acquire their knowledge of the world from numerous sources which then shapes their behavior and how they view the world. Disney is a brand that provides entertainment catered to children of all ages. Yet, some scholars have argued whether this entertainment is also a means to educate children through television. Giroux (1999) has argued that "pedagogy, for Disney, was not restricted to schooling, and schooling did not strictly define the contexts in which children could learn, make affective investments, and reconstruct their identities" (p. 18). The argument could be made that Disney

does not present itself as a tool of pedagogy, yet children retain information from the brand and consequently have the ability to internalize that information. From this point of view, Disney can be treated as another tool of pedagogy whose methods can be studied.

*2.5.2 Gendered stereotypes in Disney movies*

Wohlwend (2012) claims Disney shapes children's view of gender stereotypes through "extensive and immersive engagement with commercial transmedia" (p. 593). According to her claims, Disney controls the narrative of gender through movies but also through toys and costumes, among other things. She also states that there is a need for a "nuanced understanding of the complex ways that young children take up, replay, or revise the gendered messages designed into their favorite media" (p.594). The way that children take up these messages may therefore not be overtly, but instead appear subtly through the language, clothing or actions. Lacroix (2004) claims that the "cultural legitimacy and authority" of many Disney movies go "largely unquestioned" (p.214). Much like Wohlwend (2012), Lacroix (2004) states that children "come very close to, at least, materially, recreating" the lives of Disney princesses and princes (p.217). The Disney brand, in general, has a big influence on children and how they interact with the movies produced by Disney. This influence has made many authors question how they portray gender.

Lacroix (2004) has examined six Disney characters and found that there was a "focus on their sexuality and the 'exotic', particularly in characters of color" (p. 556). Collier et al. (2011) conducted an extensive study on the depiction of gender in Disney characters. This was done by creating categories of stereotypically female characteristics and categories of stereotypical male characteristics. These characters were then analyzed on the basis of these characteristics. What they found was that there were more gendered attributes in earlier Disney movies (from the 1950s and 1960s) compared to recent Disney movies, as was expected by Collier et al. (2011). They found some gendered characteristics in their corpus of recent Disney movies. One

of these characteristics is assertiveness, which they found was higher in characters from more recent movies. Additionally, they observed a change towards a more androgynous princess. Their corpus categorizes Mulan (1998) as belonging to the most recent movies, observing the main character to possess "more masculine than feminine characteristics" (p.567). The main character in Mulan (1998) herself through acting as the opposite gender, fighting for her country and going against her father's wishes. Yet, at the end of the movie she goes back home and falls in love with a man. Collier et al. (2011) mention that the problem with androgynous princesses is that they are still expected to fulfil stereotypically feminine activities (p.563). A closer look at the inclusion of princesses that took on more masculine traits shows that there are still "messages that are reminiscent of traditional roles, and there are many contradictory gender messages in the later movies that should not be discounted despite evidence of overall improvement in egalitarian content" (p.564). These result in mixed messages and a change that is perhaps present on the surface but still stereotypically gendered when looked at more closely. What should also be taken into account is that change in Disney's portrayal of gender stereotypes is not necessarily linear as more contemporary movies still display stereotypical behavior. However, there have been examples of shifts in the narrative of Disney plots. Collier et al. (2011) give the example of the portrayal of domestic work as "an expression of servitude and a way to gain love" which Disney discontinued in their movies (p.563). Despite these changes, many authors have pointed out that characters are often still "defined by male standards and goals" (Lacroix, 2014).

## 3. Methodology

This chapter showcases the corpus that was used for the research of this thesis. The motives for movie and character selection will also be given and explained in this chapter alongside the tools used to obtain the data. Lastly, the procedure will be outlined in this chapter, providing the variables that were observed for this study, which will also briefly be discussed.

*3.1 The corpus*

The corpus of this thesis comprises of four Disney movies. In this thesis each movie is paired to another movie of the same genre but of a different time period. The reasons for these choices will be explained in subchapter 3.2. The following table demonstrates the movies that are part of the corpus in this thesis:

| **Genre** | **Movie** | **Release date (year)** |
|---|---|---|
| Adventure | *Frozen* | 2013 |
| Action/Romance | *The Little Mermaid* | 1989 |
| Adventure | *Mulan* | 1998 |
| Action | *Brave* | 2012 |

*Table 3.1 The corpus*

*3.2 Selection*

In this thesis the movie *Frozen* (2013) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989) are paired together as they share a very similar genre, and both portray female protagonists in their lead roles. *Mulan* (1998) and *Brave* (2012) are paired up for the same reasons and because both of their plot lines concern a young girl trying to break out of stereotypical gender expectations. Additionally, the research conducted for this thesis involves a comparative study of contemporary Disney movies and older movies. For this reason, as well, the four movies presented in table 3.1 have been paired up in order to provide data that could possibly demonstrate change over time. Between the earliest released movie (1989) and the latest released movie (2013) there is a 24-year gap.

*3.2.1 Movie selection*

As was briefly explained earlier, the movie selection was based on genre, similar plot lines and release dates. *Mulan* (1998) and *Brave* (2012) share similar elements in their plot lines; both

present tough female characters that have to fight internal and external battles against expectations of themselves. In chapter 2, Collier et al. (2011) state that there are mixed messages conveyed by *Mulan* (1998) on gender roles, claiming that the princess in *Mulan* (1998) breaks traditional gender roles yet towards the end of the movie still fulfils stereotypical gender roles of going back home and falling in love with a prince. *Brave* (2012) seems to challenge this plot line as the main character saves herself and her mother and does not marry a prince at the end of the plot. A similar contrast can be observed in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Frozen* (2013), where the main characters of the newer released movie appear to have a bit more agency than the main character in the earlier released movie. The plot line will not be discussed in great detail. The mention of the plot line is merely significant as it is interesting to compare the outcome of the results to the way that the movies portray gender roles in their plot lines.

Furthermore, all four movies contain song lyrics; these were automatically deleted from the corpus. Narration was only included in the corpus when it was narrated by a character that was part of the corpus. Anything outside of the movies, such as bloopers, were not taken into the corpus either.

### *3.2.2 Character selection*

Not all characters were part of the corpus. In order to analyze the speech of the characters of the above-mentioned movies, the following list was created:

1. Characters can be human animated characters, animated animals or creatures but need to have the ability to speak with other humans.
2. Characters have to produce at least more than five sentences.
3. Characters need to be at least a secondary character in the movie and therefore have a significant role.
4. Characters need to engage in cross-sex conversation at least twice.

5. If characters are animals or creatures, they need to have conversation with human characters as well.

In order to make a selection of characters whose speech would be analyzed for the use of this thesis, the following list was made to eliminate the characters that would not be suitable for the corpus:

1. The character cannot be a minor character in the movie.
2. The character cannot be under the age of five.
3. The character cannot speak another language or speak another language alongside English.

After this procedure, the corpus comprised of 16 characters in total from all four movies combined. This means that there were exactly four characters per movie. The following table provides the entire list of characters selected from all four movies for the purpose of this thesis:

| Movie | Characters | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Mulan* | Mulan | Mushu | Shang | Yao |
| *Brave* | Merida | Queen Elinor | King Fergus | The Witch |
| *Frozen* | Elsa | Anna | Kristoff | Olaf |
| *The Little Mermaid* | Ariel | Ursula | Eric | Flounder |

*Table 3.2 Character list*

It is also important to note that *Brave* (2012) is the only movie where the characters do not have an American accent as the movie takes place in Scotland and all characters speak with a Scottish accent. In subchapter 3.4.2, one of the hedges that is part of the list is "little". In *Brave* (2012) "wee" is used instead. This is further explained in subchapter 3.4.2. Additionally, accent has not been taken into account as a variable that could potentially affect hedge use, as that is not the aim of this thesis.

### *3.3 Tools*

Movie scripts posted online served as the basis of the corpus for this thesis. These scripts were checked for errors by watching all four movies on Disney Plus, an official online streaming service owned by the Walt Disney Company. Disney Plus provides subtitles, which facilitated the process of checking the scripts. Once the scripts were checked for errors, Microsoft Word (version 16.2) was used to edit the script. The editing consisted of deleting characters, narration and song lyrics that did not belong to the corpus. The software AntConc, a concordance program, was used to collect the data that was useful for the study. Excel (version 16.32) was used to create basic figures and graphs. The software SPSS (version 26) was used to calculate the correlation coefficient between different variables, the results of which can be observed in chapter 4.

### *3.4 Procedure*

There are four main variables that have been discussed and observed to answer the research questions posed in the introduction of this thesis.

#### *3.4.1 Gender*

Table 3.2 shows the character list used for the corpus. This character list is divided into 8 female characters and 8 male characters, resulting in a total of 16 characters. This division is showcased in chapter 4, table 4.4. The selection of gender for each character was made on the gender of the actor who voiced the character, the personal pronouns that were used to refer to

the character in the movie and the ways that the character was characterized in the movie. The latter way of determining gender was usually simple, unless the character was portrayed as an animal. In this case, gender was assigned by observing the name used for the character, the actor that voiced the character and the personal pronouns used by other characters to refer to the character in question. Non-human characters that were part of the corpus include: Mushu, Flounder and Olaf. Mushu, the dragon character in *Mulan (*1998*)* is voiced by a male actor. Flounder, the fish that accompanies Ariel in *The Little Mermaid (*1989*)*, is also voiced by a male actor. Olaf, the snowman in *Frozen,* carries a more traditionally male name and is also voiced by a male actor. For the sake of this thesis, these three characters have therefore been categorized into the "male" division of the corpus.

*3.4.2 Hedge use*

The use of eight hedges have been examined. These hedges can furthermore be divided into sets of four; the first set being defined by G. Lakoff (1973) as approximators and the second set as shields. The following lists showcases these hedges:

Approximators

1. "Just"
2. "So"
3. "Wee"/ "Little"
4. "Kind of"

Shields

1. "Might"
1. "You know"
1. "Well
1. "I think"

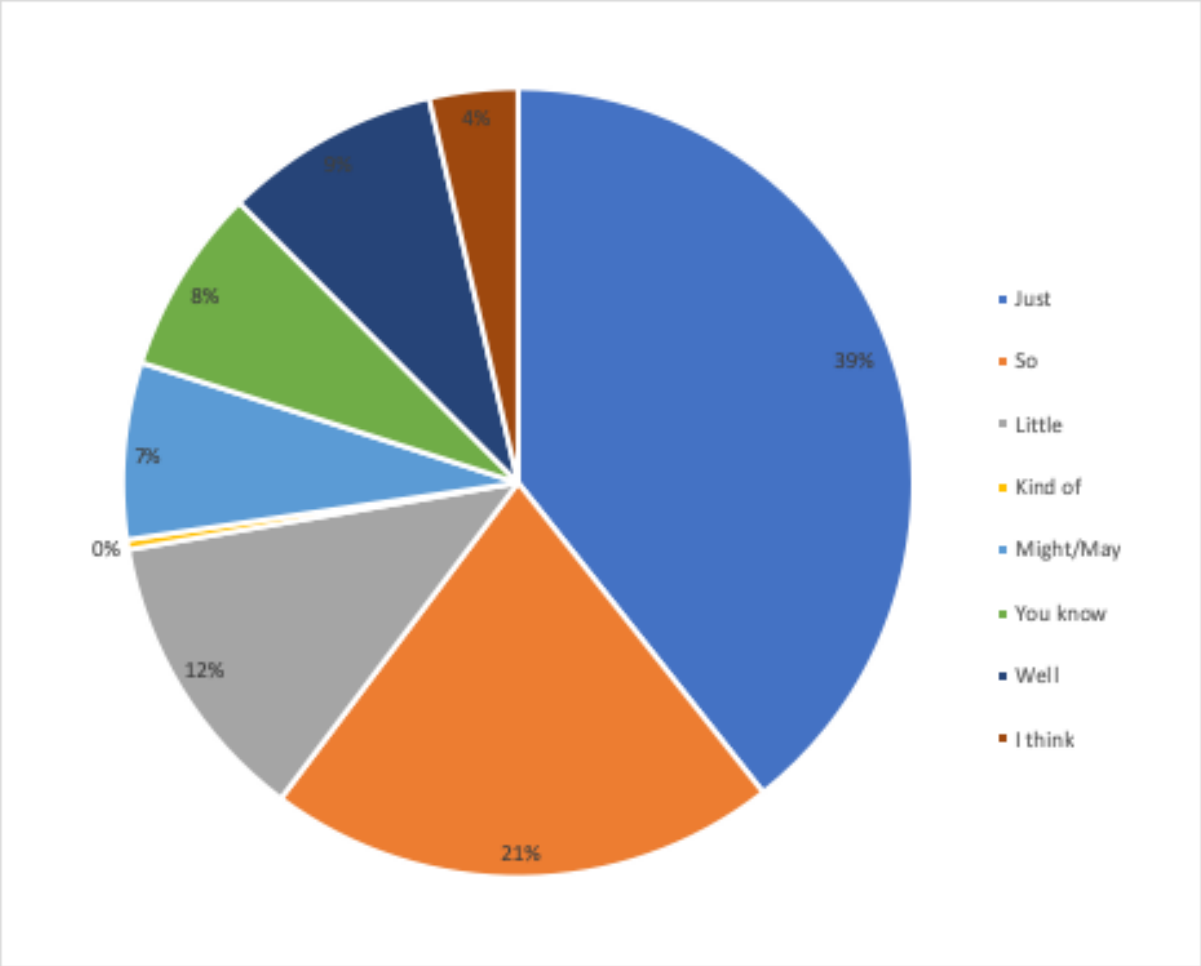
These hedges are explained more in depth in subchapter 2.3.2. Number three on this list, “wee/little” is seen as one word as they both convey the same meaning. The reason that two words are used in this list is because of the Scottish accent of the characters used in *Brave* (2012). The use of “may” was also recorded under number five on this list, “might”.

*3.4.3 Time*

The corpus of this thesis comprises of four movies. Two of them have been put into the category of “earlier released movies” and the other two have been categorized as “contemporary released movies”. This has been done to measure the variable of time. *Mulan* (1998) and *The Little Mermaid* (1989) belong to the group of “earlier released movies” and *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013) belong to the group of “contemporary released movies”.

## 4 Findings

The following chart showcases the number of hedges present in the four Disney movies combined. This chart offers a broad visual report of the hedges that have appeared most frequently and less frequently in these movies. *Just* is used most frequently followed by *so*, both hedges are used interchangeably as approximates, ways to start a sentence or ways to mitigate a sentence.




| Hedge type | Amount of hedges |
|---|---|
| | |
| Just | 98 |

| | |
|---|---|
| So | 52 |
| Little | 30 |
| Kind of | 1 |
| Might/May | 18 |
| You know | 19 |
| Well | 22 |
| I think | 9 |

*Figure 4 The number of hedges in all movies*

*4.1 Earlier released movies versus contemporary released movies*

The graph below shows a visual comparison of hedges used in contemporary Disney movies and in earlier Disney movies. The earlier movies are displayed by the blue color and the contemporary movies are displayed by yellow.

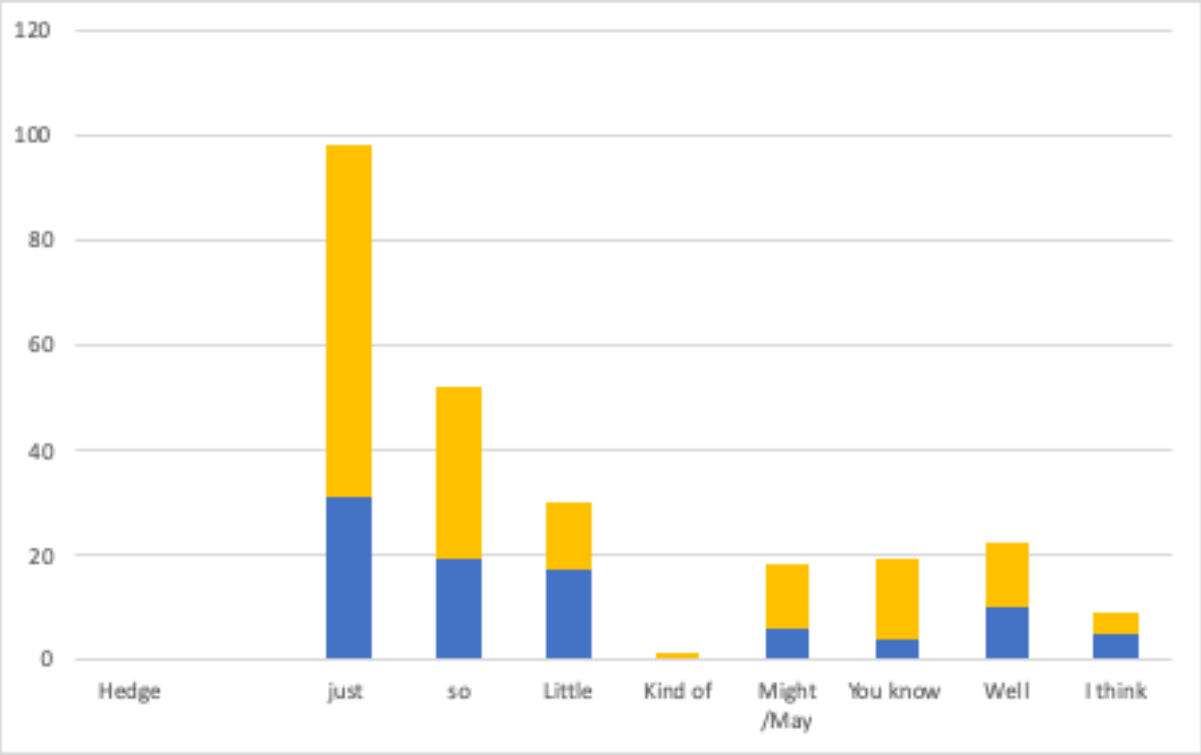



*Figure 4.1 Comparison between the number of hedges in earlier movies versus contemporary movies*

One of the hypotheses of this thesis is the notion that hedges decrease in Disney movies as they become more contemporary. To analyze the validity of this hypothesis, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient test was calculated through SPSS to assess the relationship between these two variables. The following figure displays the results computed by SPSS:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Movie Year | Hedges |
| Movie year | Pearson correlation | 1 | .628 |
| Movie year | Sig. ( 2-tailed) | | .372 |
| Movie year | N | 4 | 4 |
| Hedge | Pearson correlation | .628 | 1 |
| Hedge | Sig. ( 2-tailed) | .372 | |
| Hedge | N | 4 | 4 |

*Figure 4.2 Pearson correlation table showing relationship between time of movie release and number of hedges used*

As can be observed in Figure 4.2, the Pearson Correlation amounts to 0.628. This means that there is a significant correlation between the release year of the movie and the number of hedges used. Additionally, the correlation is also positive, pointing to an increase in hedge use in contemporary Disney movies and a decrease in hedge use in earlier Disney movies. The Sig ( 2-tailed) value is greater than the p-value ( 0.05). As there is only statistical significance if $p<0.05$, the increase of hedges in the more contemporary movies do not necessarily correlate to a decrease in earlier movies. Meaning, the increase of hedges in the contemporary movies is not a result of a decrease of hedges in earlier released movies. The following scatterplot is a

visual direction of the relationship between time and hedge amount. It summarizes the results produced by the Pearson Correlation.

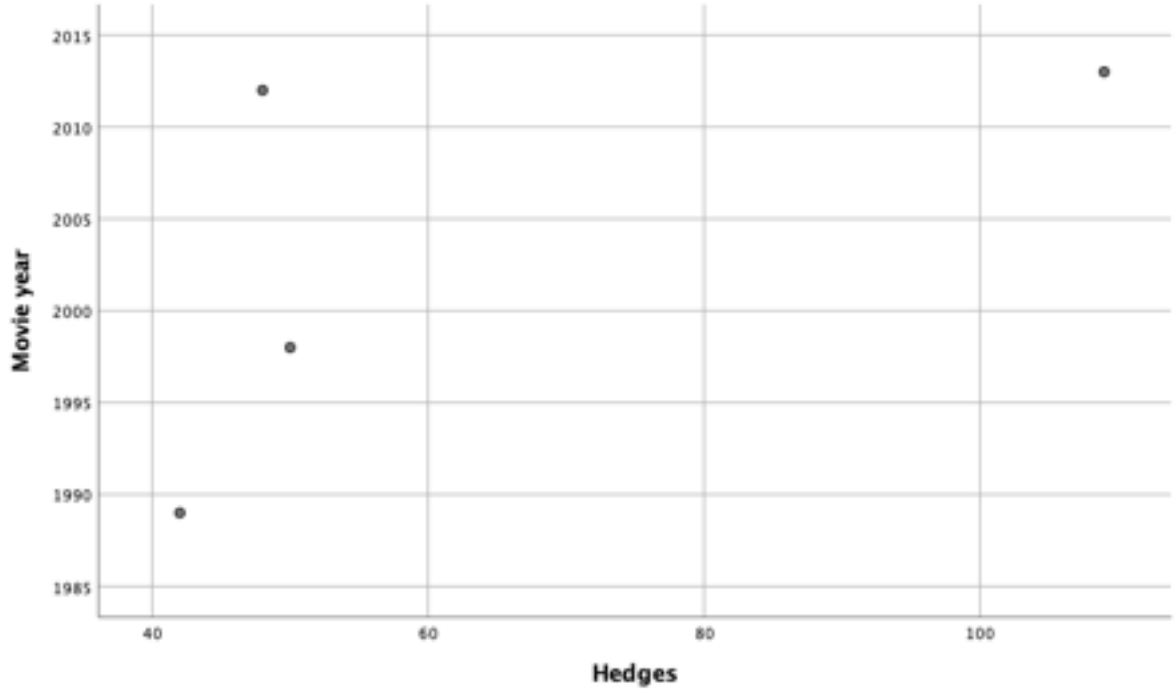



*Figure 4.3 Scatter Plot graph of Pearson correlation showing relationship between time of movie release and number of hedges used*

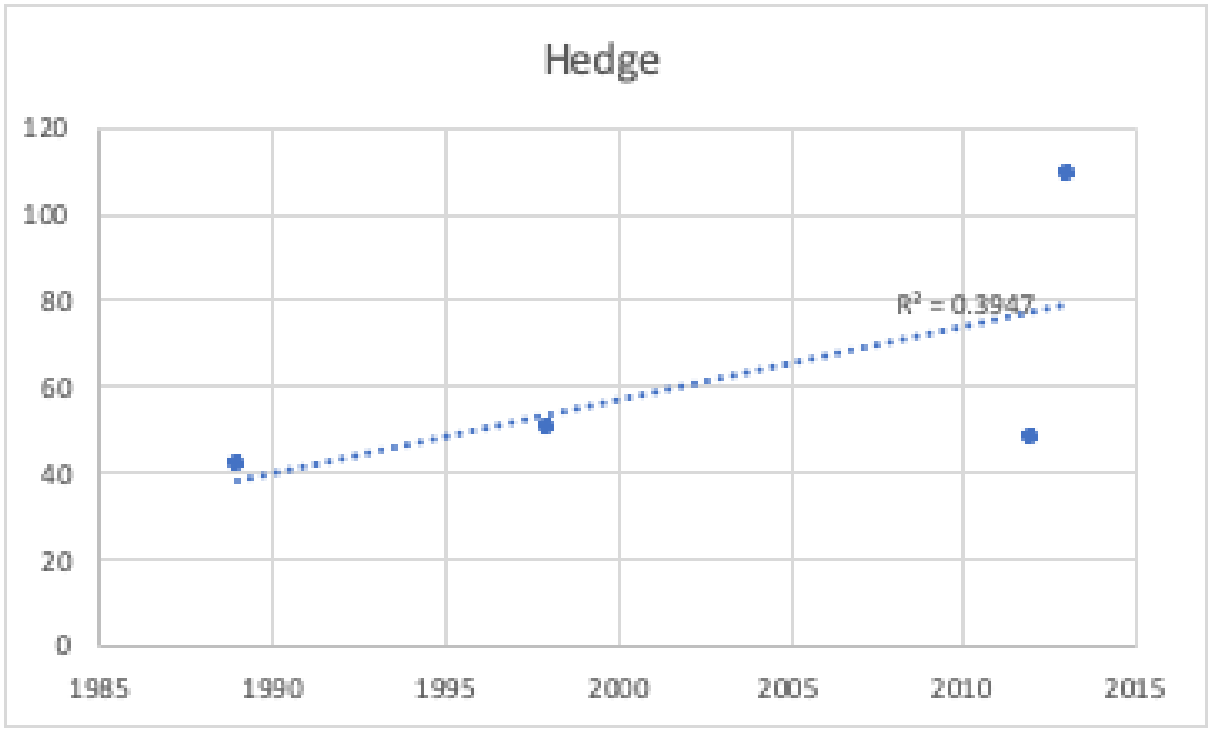


*Figure 4.4 Hedge use over time*

The above graph shows the number of hedges per movie.

*4.2 Gender*

| Movie | Character | Gender |
|---|---|---|
| *Mulan* | Mulan | Female |
| *Mulan* | Yao | Male |
| *Mulan* | Shang | Male |
| *Mulan* | Mushu | Male |
| *The Little Mermaid* | Ariel | Female |
| *The Little Mermaid* | Ursula | Female |
| *The Little Mermaid* | Eric | Male |
| *The Little Mermaid* | Flounder | Male |
| *Brave* | Merida | Female |
| *Brave* | Elinor | Female |
| *Brave* | Fergus | Male |
| *Brave* | The Witch | Female |
| *Frozen* | Anna | Female |
| *Frozen* | Elsa | Female |
| *Frozen* | Olaf | Male |
| *Frozen* | Kristoff | Male |

*Table 4.5 List of female and male characters and the movies that they appear in*

This list shows the eight male and eight female characters selected from the four Disney movies. The hedge use of these characters will be investigated in the following pages.

The following pie chart showcases the percentages of the types of hedges used by all female characters in all the four movies:

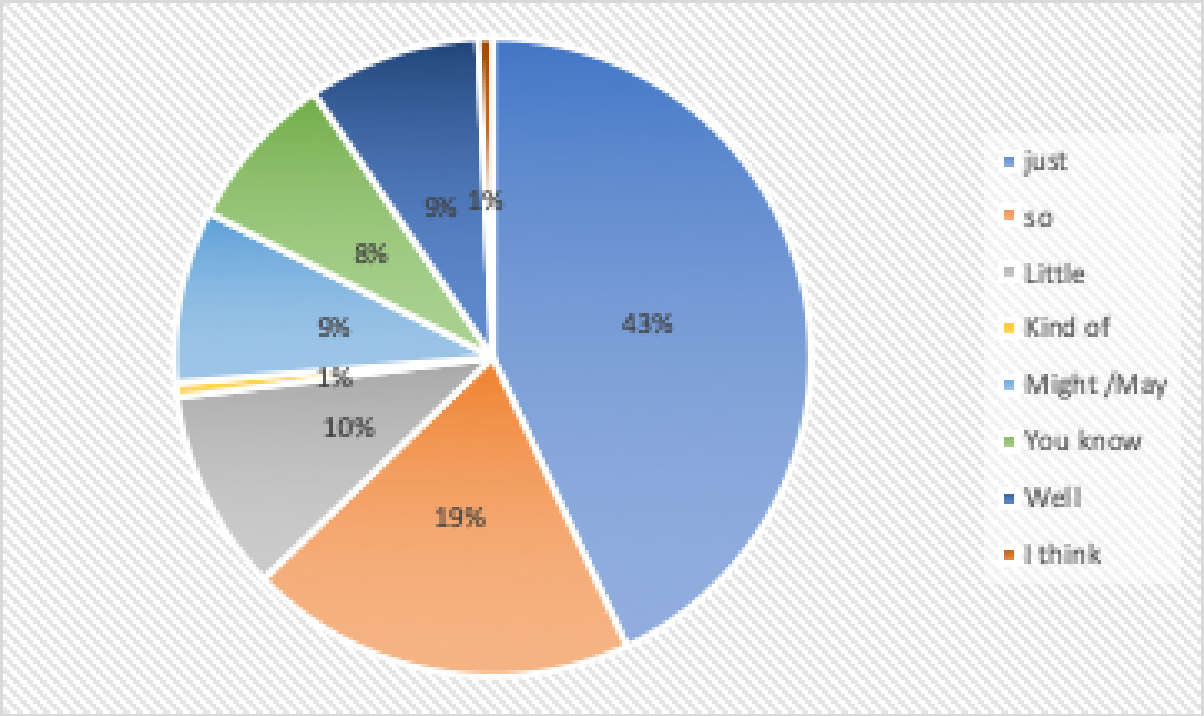



*Figure 4.6 Percentage of hedges used by female characters in all four Disney movies*

The following pie chart shows the percentages of types of hedges used by all the male characters in all the four movies:

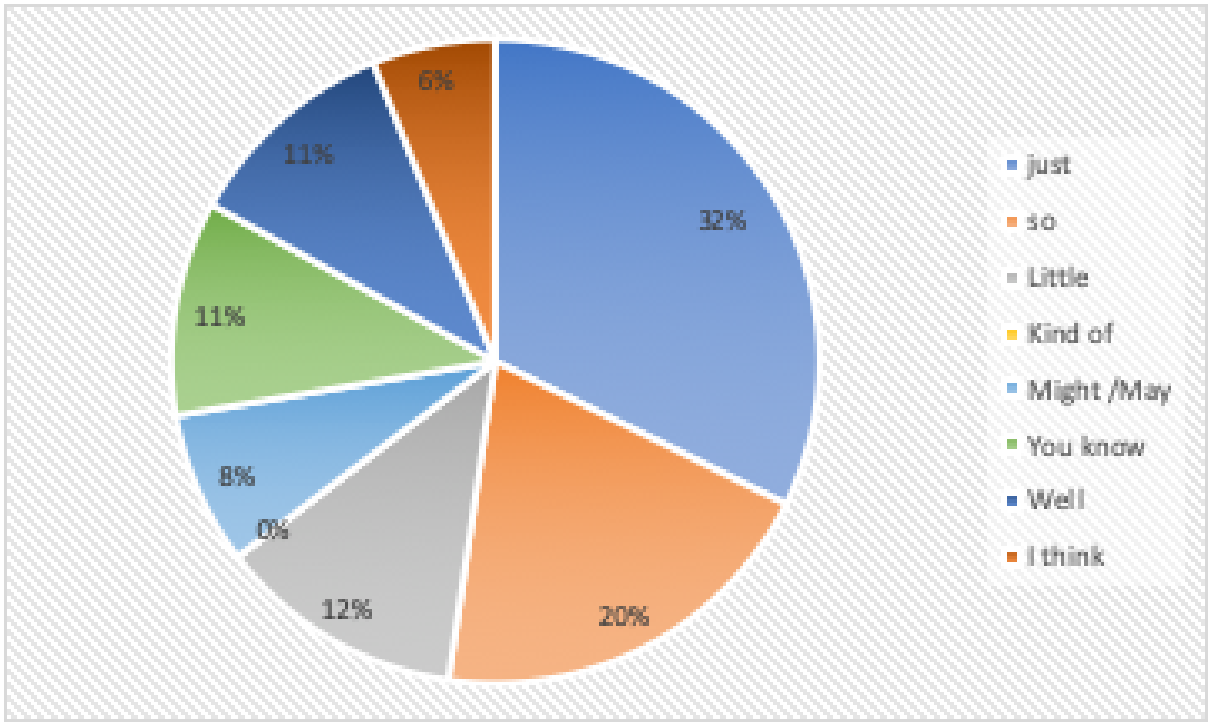



*Figure 4.7 Percentage of hedges used by male characters in all four Disney movies*

The following pie chart showcases the percentages of hedges used by female and male characters in all four movies:

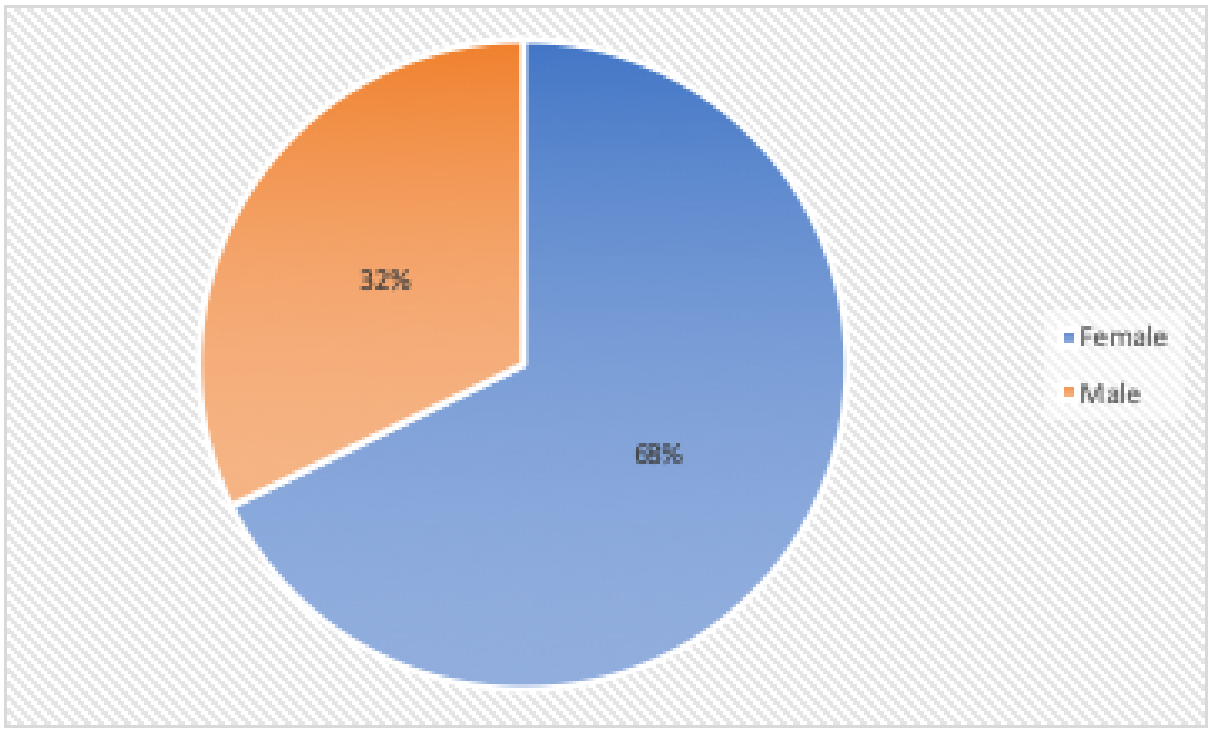



*Figure 4.8 Percentage of hedges used by male and female hedges in all movies*

Female characters use 34% more hedges than male characters in all four movies combined. This unbalanced use in hedges possibly points to a correlation between gender and hedge use in all Disney movies. The following pie charts showcase the use of hedges by male and female characters in earlier released Disney movies and in contemporary released Disney movies.

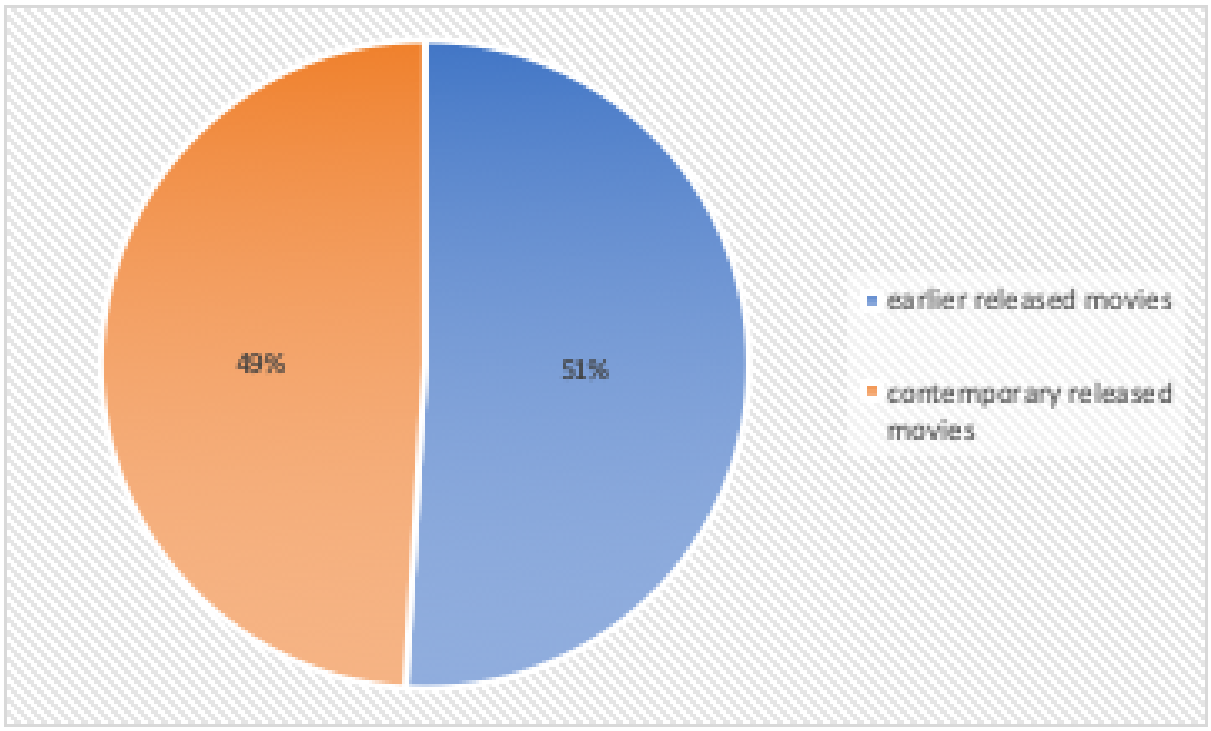



*Figure 4.9 Percentage of hedges used by male characters in earlier released movies and latest released movies*

Figure 4.8 represents an almost balanced use of hedges by male characters in both earlier released movies and contemporary released movies. This differs greatly when compared to figure 4.9 presented below, which showcases a 38% increase in female hedge use in contemporary released movies. These results point to an increased use of hedges produced by female characters in the contemporary released movies compared to the earlier released movies. Additionally, female hedge use is lower in earlier released movies when compared to male hedge use in earlier released movies, further pointing to a general increase in female hedge use over time.

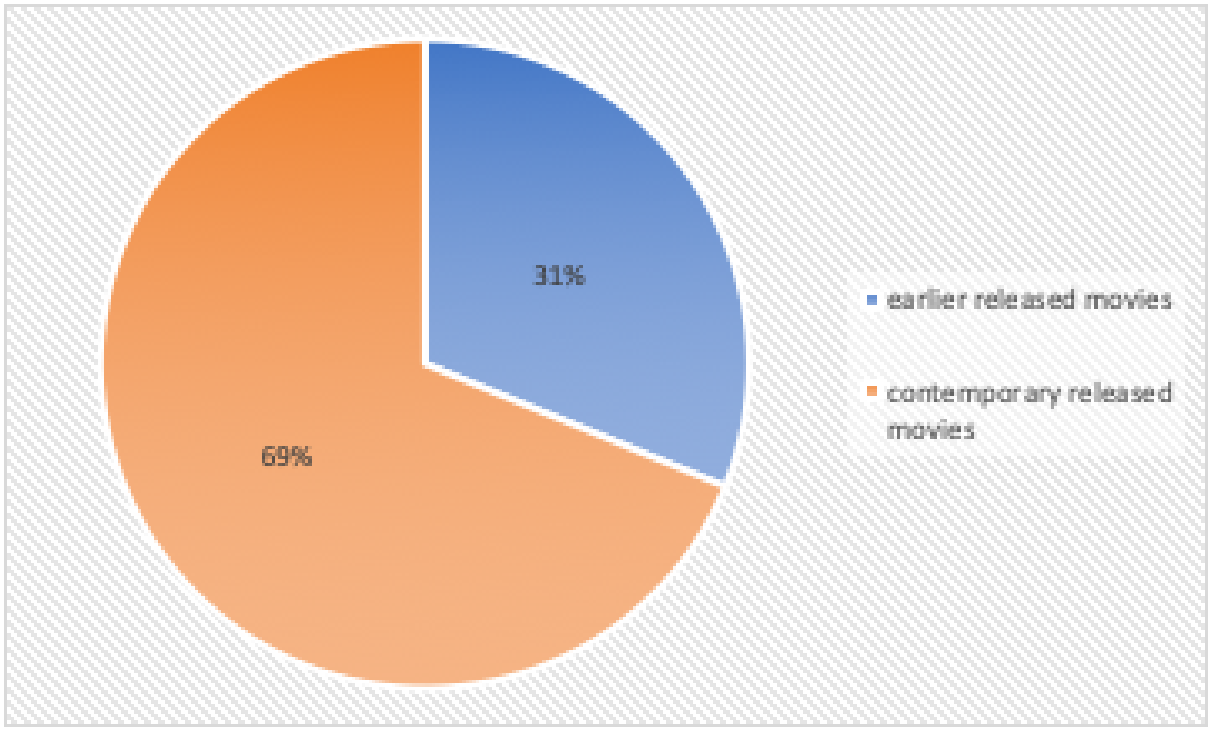



*Figure 5 Percentage of hedges used by female characters in earlier released movies and latest released movies*

### *4.2.1 Epistemic hedges versus hedges that shield the speaker*

The following graphs showcase the number of epistemic hedges used by each gender and the amount of shield hedges used by each gender in all 4 Disney movies. As Dixon et al. (1997) have pointed out, and as is explained in detail in chapter 2, both genders tend to use hedges differently. Male speakers tend to use hedges to explain degree of certainty while women tend use hedges to convey tentativeness or to soften a statement. To examine the way whether there has been any variation in the way that male characters use hedges in Disney movies, the hedges were split up into epistemic (approximators) hedges and shields. The first category is often used to describe the exactness of something while the latter category is more often used to convey tentativeness. Chapter 2 describes the differences between these two hedges in depth. The results of the following graphs will show whether there is a significant difference between the use of shield hedges and epistemic hedges by each gender in all movies combined:

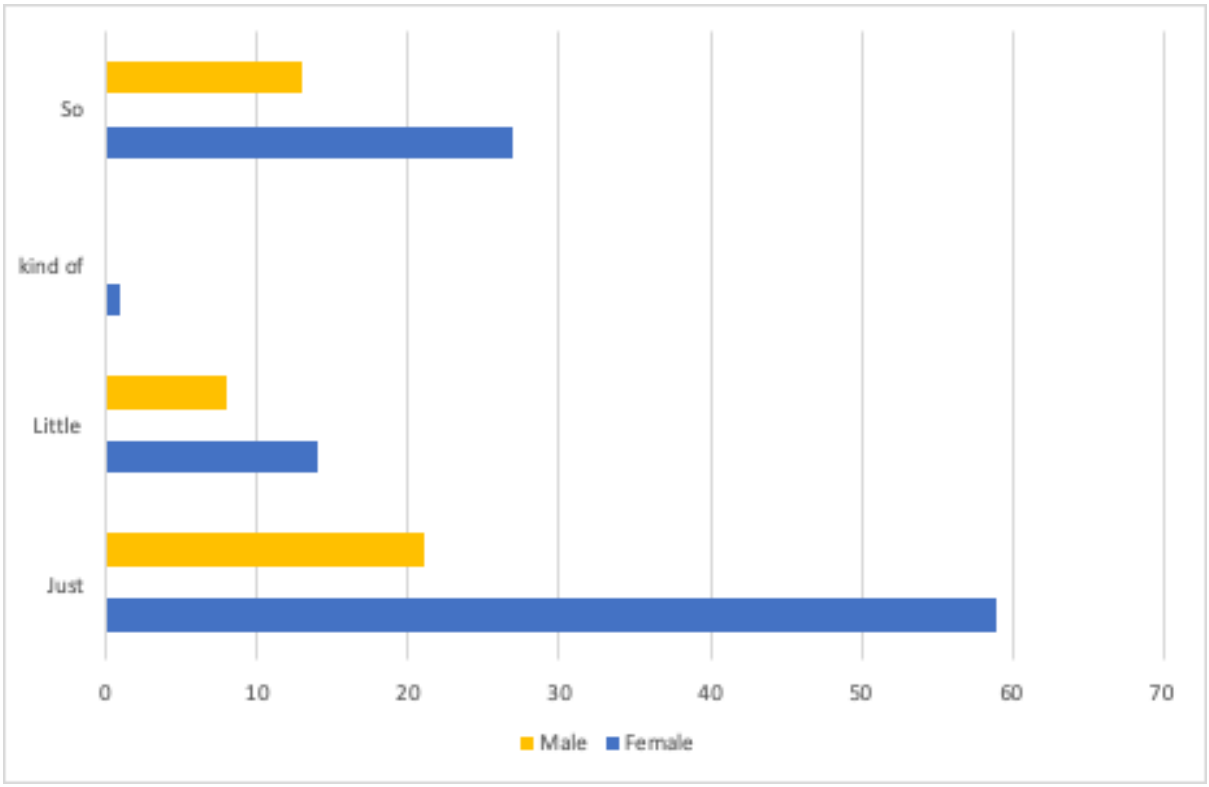



*Figure 5.1: Number of epistemic hedges used by male and female characters in 4 Disney movies combined*

Figure 5 shows that female characters use epistemic hedges more than male characters, despite the notion that male speakers use hedges as approximators more than female speakers, who tend to use it as shields. The following graph will showcase the comparison between female and male character's usage of shield hedges:

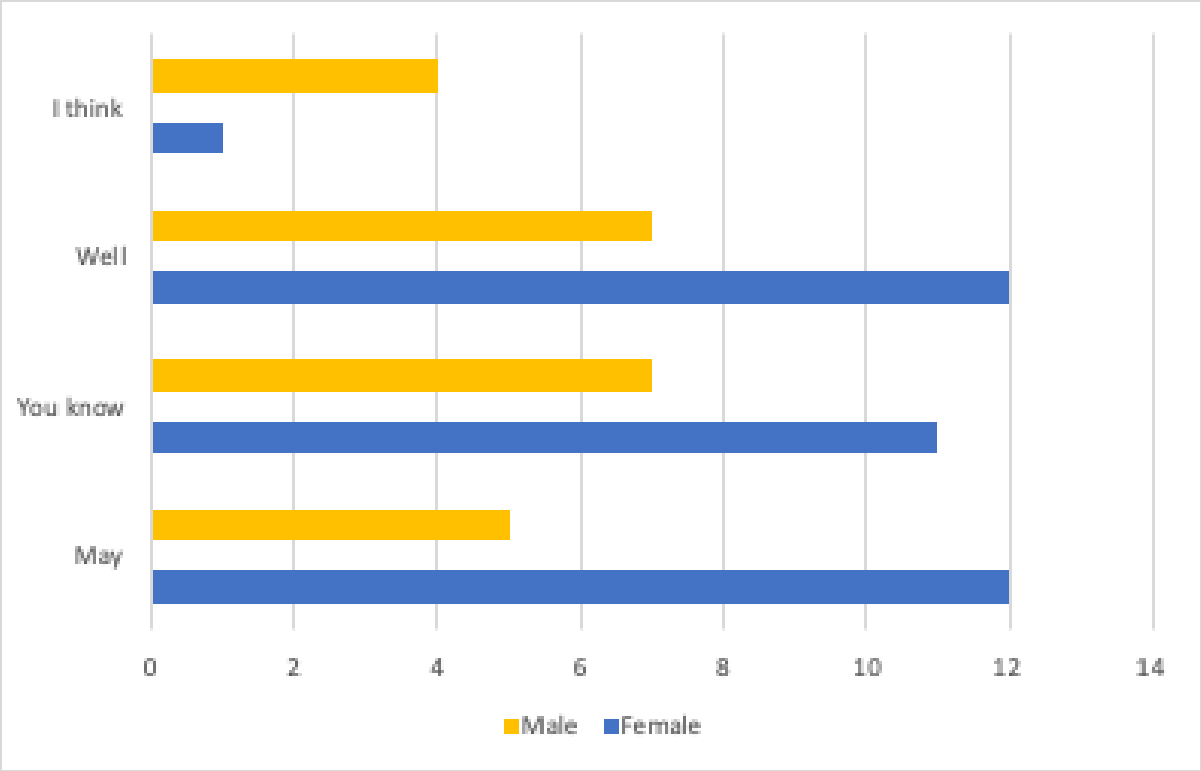



*Figure 5.2 Amount of shield hedges used by male and female characters in 4 Disney movies combined*

This graph also shows that female characters used more shield hedges than male characters in the four Disney movies combined. The difference between male and female epistemic hedge use in figure 5 is 41%, which is larger than the difference between male and female shield hedge use in figure 5.1, which is 22%. This means that shield hedges were used a bit more equally by both genders compared to epistemic hedges, which is seen to be used significantly more by female characters. However, it should be noted that the list of epistemic hedges can also be used as shields to denote tentativeness as hedges are oftentimes dependent on context. These results yielded from figure 4.9 and figure 5 therefore only represent an indication of the way that female and male characters use hedges in Disney movies. This is an issue that is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

*4.2.2 Diachronic change of epistemic and shield hedge use*

The following graphs will showcase how male and female characters have used approximators and shield hedges over a period in time in Disney movies. To display this, Pearson Correlation coefficient graphs were conducted through SPSS.

| **Correlations** | | Movies | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| Movies | Pearson correlation | 1 | .346 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .654 |
| | N | 4 | 4 |
| Amount | Pearson Correlation | .346 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .654 | |
| | N | 4 | 4 |

*Figure 5.3 Pearson correlation table for male use of epistemic hedges in movies over time*

Figure 5.2 displays a Pearson correlation of 0.346, which points to a weak positive correlation between the male use of epistemic hedges and the variable of time. This means that epistemic hedge use by male characters do not significantly increase or decrease in relation to the time of release of Disney movies. The following scatter plot graph exhibits the visual representation of epistemic hedge use by male characters and movie release year.

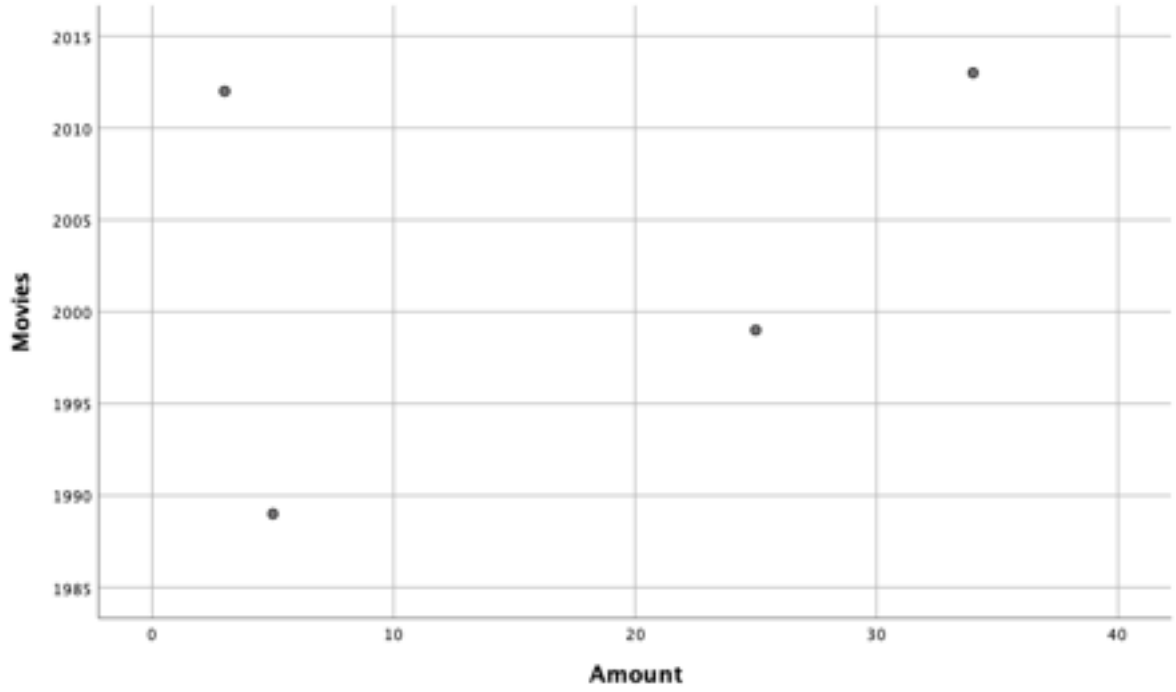



*Figure 5.4 Scatterplot graph of correlation between epistemic hedge use of male characters over time*

There are therefore no statistically significant correlations between epistemic hedges used by male characters and the year that the movie was released. The following figures show the relationship between epistemic hedge use by female characters and movie release date.

| Movies | | | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| Movies | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .720 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .280 |
| | N | 4 | 4 |
| Amount | Pearson Correlation | .720 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .780 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | N | 4 | 4 |

*Figure 5.5 Pearson correlation table for male use of epistemic hedges in movies over time*

Figure 5.3 shows a correlation of 0.720, indicating an increase in epistemic hedge use by female characters over time. The following scatter plot exhibits this increase:

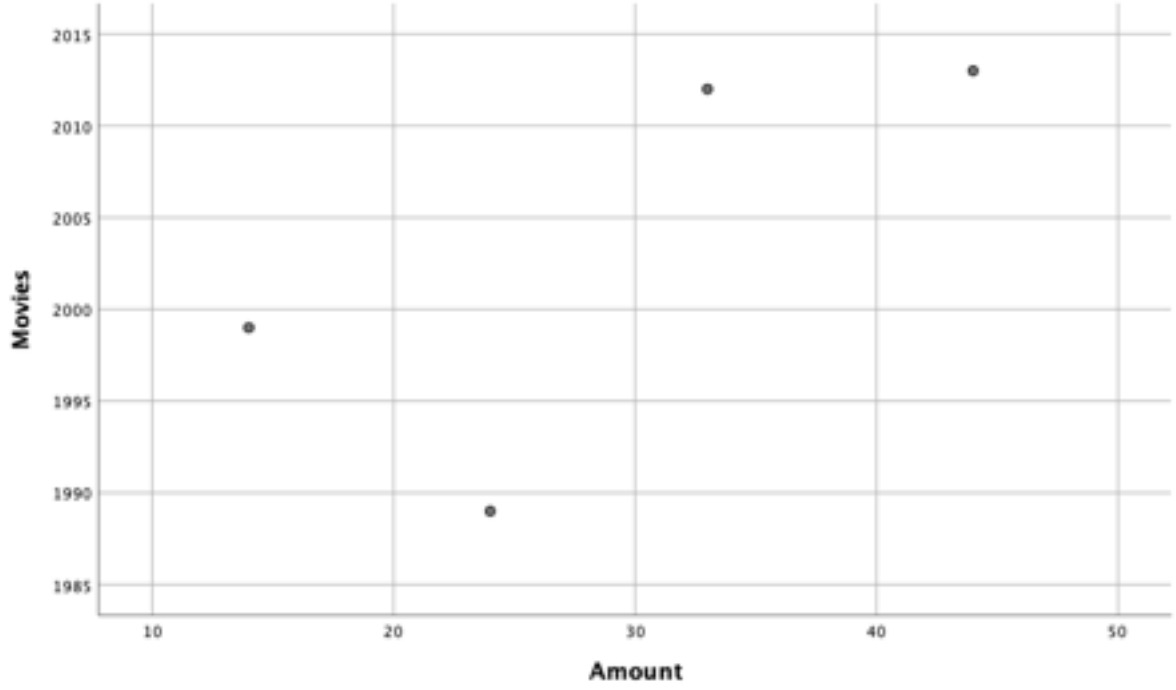



*Figure 5.6 Scatterplot of correlation between epistemic hedges used by female hedges over time*

The following graphs exhibit the use of hedges that have the ability to shield the character and how they relate to movies produced over a 24 year span.

| | | Movie | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| Release year | Pearson correlation | 1 | 0.783 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.217 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amount | Pearson Correlation | 0.783 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.217 | |

*Figure 5.7 Pearson correlation table for female use of shield hedges over time*

This table shows that there is a strong positive increase in shield hedge use by female characters over time, yet no significant statistical correlation between this increase and modernization of Disney movies. The following graph showcases shield hedge use in male characters over time:

| | | Movie year | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| Movie year | Pearson correlation | 1 | -.179 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .821 |
| Amount | Pearson correlation | -.179 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .821 | |

*Figure 5.8 Pearson correlation table for male use of shield hedges over time*

The table above demonstrates a Pearson correlation of -0.179, pointing towards a decrease in shield hedge use by male characters in the movies over time. Figure 5.7 showcases this decrease:

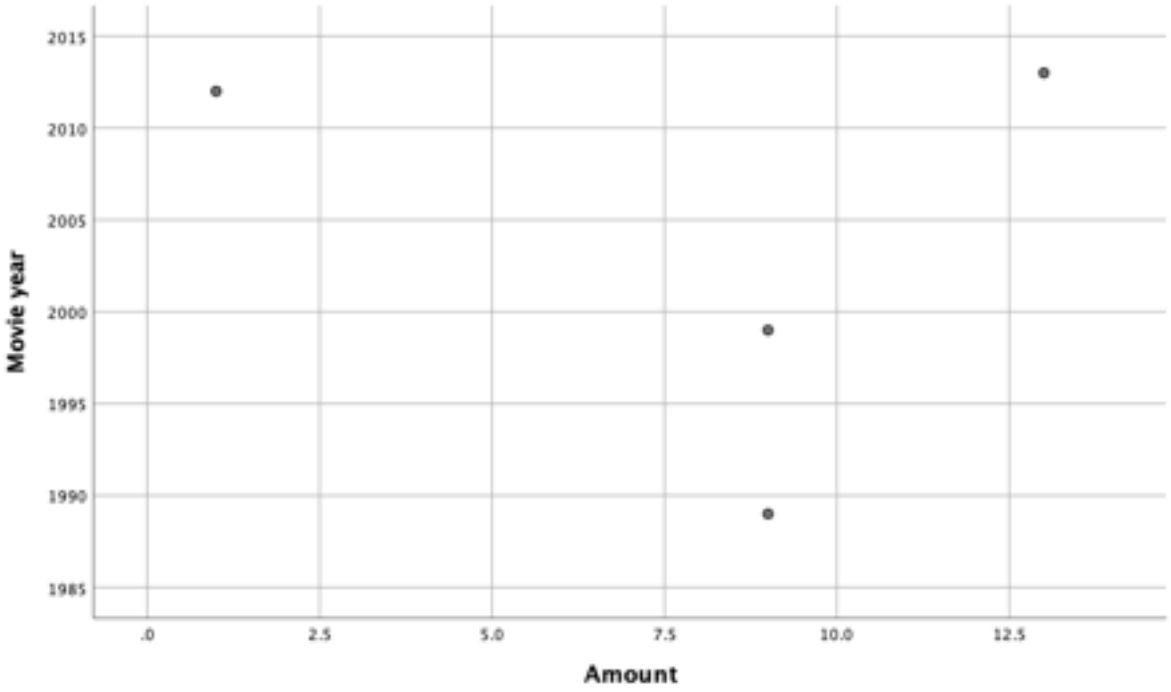



*Figure 5.9 Scatterplot of correlation between male use of shield hedges over time*

### *4.3 Characterization and gender*

This subchapter examines the number of hedges used by the individual characters of each movie and how they are characterized in the movie. In order to characterize the characters, two groups have been created. The first group has been named “traditional” and the second group has been named “modern”. The definition of both groups is based on four masculine and feminine characteristics that Collier et al. (2011) use as gender codes to study stereotypical gender roles in Disney movies. The gender characteristics that have therefore been used to define whether a character belongs to the “traditional” or “modern” group can be seen below:

- Traditional male character:
    1. Shows curiosity in princess (if the male character is a prince).
    2. Is physically very strong. This is portrayed in Disney movies through the depiction of an athletic build or through the victory of a battle.
    3. Is unemotional; does not display a lot of emotion.

4. Shows bravery. This is depicted through the victory of a battle or by saving someone.

The following list shows 4 characteristics pertaining to female characters:

- Traditional female character:
    1. Shows affection or is generally affectionate.
    2. Physically weak and/or asks for help.
    3. Shows a lot of emotion (through emotional outbursts).
    4. Described by other characters as attractive. This also pertains to a mention or focus on the character's beauty.

The category "traditional" specifically refers to the way that Disney movies traditionally portrayed their characters in their earliest movie plots from the 1950s and 1960s, which often contained gender stereotypes. When a character cannot be described by more than two of these behaviors or characteristics, the character gets categorized into the "modern" group. When a character has a balanced amount of "traditional" and "modern" characteristics, this will be noted by writing down "balanced". There is potential arbitrariness between hedge use and gender when other factors are not taken into consideration. For this reason, this list is of significance as it will allow for a deeper understanding of gender and hedge relations.

*The Little Mermaid* (1989)

This movie is the earliest released movie in this thesis. The following table showcases the selected characters of this movie, their characterization, gender and number of hedges used:

| **Name of characters** | **Characterization** | **Gender** | **Number of hedges** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ariel | Traditional | F | 13 |
| Ursula | Modern | F | 19 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Flounder | Modern | M | 7 |
| Eric | Traditional | M | 5 |

*Table 6 Character, gender, hedges and characterization in The Little Mermaid (1989)*

This table shows that the female characters in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) use significantly more hedges than male characters. Particularly, the antagonist of the movie (Ursula) uses the highest number of hedges. Ursula, however, is not characterized as a traditional female Disney princess in this movie. Instead, she plays the evil character and her way of using hedges reflects this. The following quote of Ursula talking to Ariel, the protagonist, is an example of how she uses the hedge "might" as a way add satire to her expression: "Come in. Come in, my child. We mustn't lurk in doorways--it's rude. One **might** question your upbringing...Now, then. You're here because you have a thing for this human." (Musker et al, 1989). In this instance the hedge is used to emphasize the maliciousness of the character, as it allows the evil antagonist to subtly imply something about the protagonist without directly saying it. In this case, the hedge is used to create a character that is mysterious and untrustworthy as her hedge use softens her statements yet imply maliciousness. The two male characters in this table use less hedges. Eric, the prince of the movie, uses the least hedges.

*Mulan (1989)*

As with *The Little Mermaid* (1989), most male characters use significantly less hedges. The exception is Mushu, a character who has the highest number of hedges. He is characterized as a non-traditional male figure in the movie. He is displayed as a character who shows a lot of emotion and is often scared. However, he also offers comedic relief to some of the serious themes presented in *Mulan* (1998). When he uses hedges, it is often to express uncertainty or bring humor to a situation as can be examined in the following example:

"I knew you could do it! You the man! **Well**, sort of." (Coates, 1999). Mushu uses hedges to denote uncertainty and add humor. On the contrary, the female protagonist of the movie uses

hedges mostly to soften her expressions. The following table showcases the number of hedges used by each character:

| **Name of characters** | **Characterization** | **Gender** | **Number of hedges** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mulan | Traditional | F | 17 |
| Mushu | Modern | M | 31 |
| Yao | Traditional | M | 1 |
| Shang | Traditional | M | 2 |

*Table 6.1 Character, gender, hedges and characterization in Mulan (1989)*

*Brave (2012)*

The following table showcases the number, gender and characterization of the characters in *Brave* (2012):

| **Name of characters** | **Characterization** | **Gender** | **Number of hedges** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Merida | Modern | F | 28 |
| Queen Elinor | Traditional | F | 17 |
| King Fergus | Traditional | M | 2 |
| The Witch | Modern | F | 1 |

*Table 6.2 Character, gender, hedges and characterization in Brave (2012)*

In this movie, again, most hedges are used by the female characters. Compared to *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the evil protagonist in this movie produces a very small number of hedges. The most hedges are used by the two female protagonists.

The following table showcases the characters of *Frozen* (2013):

*Frozen (2013)*

| Name of characters | Characterization | Gender | Number of hedges |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elsa | Modern | F | 12 |
| Anna | Traditional | F | 49 |
| Olaf | Modern | M | 17 |
| Kristoff | Modern | M | 30 |

*Table 6.3 Character, gender, hedges and characterization in Frozen (2013)*

In this movie the main protagonist, Elsa, is displayed as a modern princess as she does not fall in love with a prince, shows bravery and does not have random outbursts of emotions. Contrary to Elsa, Anna is another main character who has been categorized as 'traditional' as she displays more emotion and is saved by a prince. She also uses more hedges compared to the other characters. The two male characters utilize a high number of hedges when compared to the above-mentioned movies. Olaf and Kristoff have both been categorized as modern male characters, as they do not possess many qualities of the traditional Disney prince. Olaf can be compared to the character of Mushu in *Mulan (1989)* as he offers some comedic relief to some serious scenes. He is also displayed as a very friendly character. The following quote from the movie Frozen (2013) is an example of how the hedge *so* and *little* perpetuate the friendliness and humor of Olaf as a character: "**So** cute. It's like a **little** baby unicorn." (del Vecho, 2013).

*4.3.1 Summary*

The above tables show the number of hedges used by all the selected characters. However, some characters speak less while others speak more, with the consequence that the number of hedges is a result of the amount of times that the character speaks. This subchapter will therefore briefly discuss the percentages of hedges produced by each character.

*The Little Mermaid* (1989)

Ursula produces 2.4% of hedges; the highest number of hedges compared to the other three characters. However, there is a 0.3% difference between Ursula and Ariel in terms of hedge production showing that there is not a big difference in the amount of times they use hedges regardless of the number of words that they speak throughout the movie. Despite this, Ursula and Ariel use hedges differently (this is briefly explained in the above table). At 0.01%, Eric produced the least number of hedges.

*Mulan* (1998)

Mulan produces the highest percentage of hedges (2%) followed closely by Mushu (1.8%). The other male characters, Yao and Shang produce less than 1% of hedges in their speech.

*Brave* (2012)

Merida produces 1.6% of hedges and Elinor produces 1.7% of hedges. Fergus and the witch both produce less than 1% of hedges.

*Frozen* (2013)

Elsa, Anna and Kristoff all produce 3% of hedges in their speech. On the other hand, Olaf produces 2% of hedges in his speech.

# 5 Discussion and conclusion

## *5.1 Discussion*

The findings of chapter 4 have displayed the answers to the research questions that were posed in chapter 1. This chapter will revert back to these questions and discuss their answers.

Question 1: *Does the use of hedges increase in frequency in the speech of female characters compared to male characters?*

Chapter 4 shows that, overall, female characters use more hedges than their male counterparts. In total, female characters use 34% more hedges than male characters in all four Disney movies. This means that, in general, female characters do use more hedges when

compared to male characters. However, it should be noted that female characters were often the lead role in the selection of movies. Additionally, despite an equal amount of male and female characters present in the corpus, some movies had more female characters that played bigger roles compared to male characters, who often played minor roles and were therefore not included in the corpus. The opposite also occurred, as some movies had more male characters playing protagonist roles. An example of this is *Mulan* (1998), where Mulan was the only female character playing a big role while the other female characters occupied smaller roles and were therefore not included in the corpus. On the other hand, *Brave* (2012) included substantially more female characters than male characters and only included one male character playing a leading role. It is important to note that, despite the discrepancy between hedges used by male characters and hedges used by female characters, these results alone do not declare anything about a relation to gender. However, the fact that female characters used hedges 34% more than male characters in Disney movies can be linked to previous claims made by authors such as R. Lakoff (1973) that state that hedges are part of what make up women's speech.

Question 2: *Is there a significant diachronic change in hedge use in Disney movies?*

- *If so, what does this change look like?*

The results from this study were found to be significant but did not increase or decrease in a linear form due to fluctuations in hedge use throughout time. The latest released movie, *Frozen* (2013), had the most hedges compared to the earliest released movie, *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Female hedge use underwent more change over time compared to male hedge use, which remained more or less similar over time. By calculating the amount of times hedges were used by male characters in earlier released movies and comparing them to the number of hedges used by male characters in the latest released movies, it could be observed that the number of hedges used by male characters stayed mostly the same. On the other hand, female characters produced more hedges in the newer released movies.

Furthermore, the amount of shield hedges and epistemic hedges were observed. The results show that the number of shield hedges used by female characters increase contemporary movies. Male characters appeared to be using less shield hedges in the more contemporary released movies when compared to the earlier released movies.

Question 3: *Does the number of hedges increase or decrease according to the depiction of a character?*

In general, male characters that were depicted as traditional princes or love interests produced less than one percent of the selected hedges in their speech. In this case the number of hedges used by these particular male characters decreased. The exception to this was Kristoff, a male character who played the love interest of the protagonist in *Frozen* (2013). There is a 0.8% difference between the amount of hedges his character uses and the female characters use in this particular movie. This shows that male and female characters, on average, use hedges more equally in the movie *Frozen* (2013). Additionally, Kristoff is a character that is not portrayed as a traditional male Disney prince. On the contrary, the male characters that used less than 1% of hedges were all depicted as the traditional Disney male character. Apart from these characters, another distinction was made which was that of the friendly character that always accompanied the protagonist. This type of character appeared in three movies and used more hedges than the other male characters but less hedges than the female characters, with the exception of *Frozen* (2013), where the number of hedges used by the character is a little less compared to the other characters. The characters that were depicted as stereotypically female in all four movies also used the highest percentage of hedges compared to the male characters or characters that were not categorized as stereotypically female. However, it should be noted that *Frozen* (2013) was the movie were the percentage of hedge use was most balanced among all four characters. Additionally, *Frozen* (2013) did not show the same patterns that movies such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Mulan* (1998) and *Brave* (2012) show, where the

stereotypically male characters often use significantly less hedges compared to other characters.

The thesis statement that was posed in the introduction stated that female characters use more hedges in the selected Disney movies compared to the male characters in the same movies. This part of the thesis statement was supported by the findings in chapter four. Female characters did use more hedges than male characters, with the exception of the characters in *Frozen* (2013), where female and male characters used approximately a similar number of hedges each. The thesis statement also stated that the hedges would decrease in the speech of female characters over time. This was refuted by the findings in chapter 4, as hedge use by female characters did not increase. Instead, male characters sometimes used more hedges which resulted in a somewhat balance percentage of hedge use.

*5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research*

All four movies contain linguistic and non-linguistic elements of stereotypical female and male characteristics. This is a limitation of the study because where speech might lack in emphasizing gender, other non-linguistic factors such as the appearance of a character or hand gestures, might express traditional gender stereotypes. In short, hedges are only one way of potentially pointing out movies that perpetuate gender stereotypes. From this viewpoint, the absence of hedges does not necessarily signify that there is an absence of traditional gender stereotypes. Additionally, hedges are context-dependent. The context of conversation is therefore very important as it adds to the meaning of a hedge. Other aspects of speech in Disney movies, such as tone of voice, have not been recorded in this thesis but have the ability to influence whether a word becomes a hedge or not. Lastly, the definition of epistemic and shield hedges obtain their definition from, again, context. This makes relating the use of shield hedges to tentative language challenging and subjective at times.

For future research I suggest using a bigger corpus to analyze hedge use. This will potentially provide a better understanding in the way that hedges change in Disney movies over time. With this I suggest not only a bigger selection of movies but also more variety ( in terms of genre and release year) in the movies that are selected. I also suggest this when it comes to character selection-- a larger selection of characters will allow for a deeper understanding of hedge use. To elaborate on this, observations of hedge use when characters engage in mixed-sex and same-sex conversation will be able to show how hedges are used differently by each gender. Moreover, I suggest selecting a larger list of hedges to provide results that are more detailed. However, this would also require more careful observations of the context of the conversations, as hedges are often context dependent. Lastly, I suggest the addition of non-linguistic gender variables such as clothing or mannerisms to create a correlation between hedge use and these variables. These suggestions will create a more comprehensive view of how hedges are used in Disney movies over time and in relation to gender.

*5.3 Conclusion*

Change in hedge use over time is not linear in Disney movies. There are numerous other variables that affect the number of hedges used by Disney characters. From this thesis it can therefore be concluded that the use of hedges by Disney characters is not solely associated with earlier released movies or later released movies. Instead, what has been concluded is that men and women use hedges for a variety of reasons and this is reflected back into scripts written for Disney movies. The role of a character plays a very important part in whether that character will use a lot of hedges or not. Hedges are part of other linguistics tools used to create a believable character. As a result of this, a female character might be expected to use a high number of hedges but instead, because of the way that she is characterized, use less hedges than the male protagonist of the same movie. Although hedge use increase was not linear, the findings from chapter 4 did show that the latest released movie, *Frozen* (2013), contained the

largest number of hedges compared to all the other movies. This movie also showcased an almost balanced amount of hedge use across all selected characters. The answer to what hedge use will look like in the future in fiction is challenging to predict as there are many other variables that affect the way hedges are used and how many times they are used. However, the results shown in the previous chapters of this thesis have showcased that hedge use is commonly portrayed differently according to the portrayal and gender of the character speaking.

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