

A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Language Patterns and Rhetorical Strategies of Intellectual Independence in Disney Princess Characters

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Abstract

The research investigates how Disney princess films throughout three time periods (Classic 1937-1950, Renaissance 1989-1991, Modern 2013-2021) create linguistic structures to express female intellectual independence and agency. The research uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis together with psycholinguistic theory and intersectionality to examine speech acts and rhetorical strategies in chosen film scripts. The research shows how Disney princesses have evolved from passive romantic figures into independent protagonists who demonstrate both assertiveness and cognitive independence through characters like Elsa and Moana. The research investigates cultural identity and leadership in non-Western contexts while adding to gender, media, and psycholinguistic studies by showing how language shapes female autonomy and agency.

Keywords: Disney princesses, gender representation, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, intersectionality, female agency

Аннотация

Бұл диссертациялық жұмыс Дисней ханшайымдарының үш дәуіріндегі, классикалық: 1937-1950, ренессанс: 1989-1991 және заманауи: 2013-2021, интеллектуалдық тәуелсіздігі мен агенттігін тілдік тұрғыдан зерттейді. Зерттеу Фэрклоудың сыни дискурс талдауына, психоллингвистикалық принциптерге және интерсекциялық тәсілге негізделеді. Мәтіндердегі сөйлеу актілері мен риторикалық стратегияларды сапалы талдау арқылы кейіпкерлердің пассивтіліктен көшбасшылық пен когнитивтік дербестікке дейінгі даму жолы көрсетіледі. Сонымен қатар, Моана мен Рая сынды заманауи кейіпкерлердің мәдени сәйкестігі мен қауымдастыққа негізделген көшбасшылығы талданады. Зерттеу тілдің әйел агенттігі мен интеллектуалдық

тәуелсіздігін қалыптастырудағы рөлін, сондай-ақ жаһандық медиа арқылы Қазақстан сияқты контекстерге әсерін айқындайды.

Түйін сөздер: Дисней ханшайымдары, гендерлік репрезентация, дискурстық талдау, психоллингвистика, интерсекциялық тәсіл, әйел агенттігі

Аннотация

Данная диссертация рассматривает, как женщины изображаются в фильмах о принцессах от Диснея в разные временные периоды: классический (1937-1950), ренессансный (1989-1991) и современный (2013-2021). С использованием критического анализа текстов Фэрклоу, психоллингвистической теории и интерсекционального подхода производится детальное изучение речевых поступков и стилей обращения в сценариях выбранных фильмов. Результаты указывают на изменение образа женщин от пассивных героинь к персонажам, которые обладают когнитивной независимостью и уверены в себе, например, Эльза и Моана. Исследование также уделяет внимание влиянию культурной идентичности и лидерства в контекстах за пределами классических (не западных), таких как Казахстан. Особое внимание уделяется роли языка в формировании женской и автономии.

Ключевые слова: диснеевские принцессы, гендерная репрезентация, дискурсивный анализ, психоллингвистика, интерсекциональность, женская агентность

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Introduction

Disney princesses have played a very important role in the formation of cultural perceptions of gender roles and are therefore discussed rather often in media studies. They are the narratives that have changed a lot through the years and thus reflect the shifting point of view of the society on femininity, agency, and independence. The early versions, for example, Snow White and Cinderella, continued the gender roles by presenting women as passive, obedient and dependent on men to rescue them (Davis, 2006).

On the other hand, more recent princesses, for instance, Elsa from Frozen (Walt Disney Productions, 2013) and Moana from the film Moana (Walt Disney Productions, 2016), are autonomous, resilient, and leaders. Elsa's story is based on the theme of accepting oneself and becoming stronger, while Moana is depicted as a determined leader who goes against the norms of her society in order to save her people (Hine et al., 2018). These characters depict a change from the passive femininity to the active and independent heroines.

However, the development of Disney princesses is not straightforward. Today's portrayals are more independent than before, but the earlier stereotypes are still observable, and the intersectional representation is scarce. This complexity suggests that further investigation is needed to understand how gender and agency are depicted in Disney narratives. A psycholinguistic approach, which examines the use of language and rhetorical devices, can offer meaningful insights into how these characters voice their intellectual independence and manage their power within the story (Gee, 2014).

Problem Statement

The presentation of intellectual freedom in Disney princess narratives has not been fully analyzed from a psycholinguistic perspective. Even though prior research focuses on

changing gender roles and visual representations, very few studies have been conducted on how linguistic and rhetorical choices affect the depiction of independence, self-reliance, and intellectual toughness in these characters (Hine et al., 2018). Since language is a tool for identifying self and others, and for inviting people to believe certain versions of events, the missing gap limits understanding of how Disney princesses convey independence through conversation, relationships, and control of choice.

Research indicates that Kazakhstani animated films mostly depict male characters instead of female leads. According to Baskynbayeva et al. (2024), the local production Zhumbaksai okigasy maintains its focus on male heroes while providing limited female role models for girls.

The Disney princesses function as unofficial educational resources about gender roles because they introduce new independent models, yet sometimes contradict traditional cultural values in the region (Times of Central Asia, 2021).

Furthermore, the local traditions and the gender identity formation cultural dynamics of a complex landscape are created by the intersection of global media content. Understanding how language contributes to constructing agency in Disney narratives is necessary to analyze these cultural dynamics. Enriching psycholinguistic and media studies as well as offering insights into how global narratives shape perceptions of gender, independence, and cultural identity in non-Western contexts such as Kazakhstan, addressing this gap (Fairclough, 1995).

The Disney narratives reach audiences worldwide, but Kazakh cartoons depict female characters who do not have their own independent actions. The female characters in traditional Kazakh stories like “Er Tostik” and the animated film “Karlygash Nesting Again” show passive behavior while being virtuous and communal, but they never use language to

solve problems. The cultural conflict emerges from Kazakh storytelling traditions based on collectivist values versus the individualistic agentive storytelling style of modern Disney narratives.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to perform a psycholinguistic analysis of the linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies that Disney princesses employ to build intellectual independence. In this research, dialogues, songs, and narrative structures of classic and modern Disney films will be analyzed in order to determine how agency, autonomy, and problem-solving are reflected through linguistic choices.

In analyzing assertive statements, self-referential language, and cognitive framing features, the study will seek to reveal how language contributes to the depiction of female independence and, in turn, to the construction of gender perceptions in media (Guillén Serna, 2021). This analysis will also determine whether the recent portrayals are actually progressive depictions of intellectual independence or if they are subtly perpetuating traditional gender norms in a different way (Gee, 2014).

Furthermore, the research explores how these linguistic portrayals of independence are culturalized in non-Western contexts, such as Kazakhstan, where global media is impacting local gender norms (Yamamoto, 2020). As this paper explores how language constructs agency, the study is designed to help ongoing discussions about gender representation, cultural identity, and the role of media in shaping societal perceptions of independence.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic features and psycholinguistic patterns do Disney princesses employ to assert their intellectual independence in their conversations and songs?

2. How are rhetorical strategies and language-driven narrative devices employed to portray agency and autonomy in Disney princess narratives?
3. How do the constructions of intellectual independence using linguistic and rhetorical tools change across the Classic, Renaissance, and Modern Disney princess films, and how does this correspond to the changing societal perceptions of gender roles?

Significance of the Study

This paper adds to the increasing literature on the representation of gender in media through a psycholinguistic analysis of Disney princess stories. Previous research has also considered gender roles and the visual representation of femininity, but very little has been done to analyse how linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies build up intellectual independence (Towbin et al., 2004). In this way, through an analysis of language use, such as assertive statements, self-referential discourse, and problem-solving rhetoric, subtle mechanisms of character construction, which are usually overlooked in visual or narrative analyses, are revealed.

This approach is novel in that it looks at the cognitive and linguistic processes through which Disney princesses negotiate agency and autonomy. Identity, however, has been constructed through language as a primary medium, and this has not been fully explored in Disney narratives. This research therefore seeks to contribute to this gap in the discourse on media representation, while at the same time exploring how gender norms are both perpetuated and subverted through linguistic means (Gee, 2014).

The study is also of particular importance for non-Western contexts such as Kazakhstan where the global media entangles with the local cultures and norms (Yamamoto, 2020). Exploring how language creates intellectual independence helps in understanding the

cultural significance of such narratives especially in shaping the changing perceptions of gender roles and identity. In the end, this research offers a way of thinking about the bigger picture of media's impact on societal norms and, therefore, on ongoing discussions on gender, language, and cultural representation (Fairclough, 1995).

The research holds special significance for Kazakhstan because its media system maintains traditional gender norms and communal values, but Disney and other global media present different female empowerment models. The research compares Disney princesses to Kazakh folklore and animation female characters to show how independence portrayals in psycholinguistic content affect cultural expectations and young Kazakhstani views of femininity, leadership, and self-expression.

Literature Review

Research on Disney princess narratives demonstrates how the franchise impacts cultural gender norms and agency development. According to Fairclough (1995), agency describes a character's power to choose independently while shaping the story. During the initial stages of representation, female characters received minimal agency because they remained static objects. The portrayal of princesses in media evolved from helpless submission to display leadership abilities and intellectual autonomy, according to Towbin et al. (2004). Research about the language patterns and rhetorical methods that reinforce or challenge these representations remains scarce.

This review examines psycholinguistic elements, which include assertive language, modal verbs, self-referential statements, and problem-solving rhetoric to identify agency markers. Traditional femininity expresses itself through language features that include hedging, passive sentence structures, and politeness strategies. The lines "I'm sure I'll get

along somehow” from Snow White (Walt Disney Productions, 1937) and Cinderella’s “What’s a royal ball?... completely wonderful” (Walt Disney Productions, 1950) demonstrate submissive behavior which upholds dependence while restricting mental autonomy (Heath, 2021).

The modern princess characters in these stories use language to demonstrate both self-assurance and personal independence. The character Moana asserts her identity by saying “I am Moana of Motunui” before issuing the order “You will board my boat...” (Walt Disney Productions, 2016) while Elsa declares “Let it go... I am one with the wind and sky” (Walt Disney Productions, 2013) which demonstrates her cognitive independence and emotional strength (Guillén Serna, 2021).

Research that examines visual or narrative aspects of Disney princesses commonly disregards the psycholinguistic elements. The research investigates the essential role of language in creating agency according to Gee (2014). The analysis includes intersectionality to study how race and class, together with culture, influence gendered identities within these narratives (Yamamoto, 2020). The review establishes a basis for studying how Disney princesses use language to manage intellectual independence and gender norms through its examination of linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies.

Traditional Gender Portrayals & Early Linguistic Patterns

During the mid-20th century, Snow White, along with Cinderella and Aurora, displayed traditional feminine values which emphasized beauty and domestic duties and emotional work according to Towbin (2004). The stories presented passive female characters who depended on rescue instead of taking action, as demonstrated by Cinderella’s statement, “They can’t order me to stop dreaming” (Walt Disney Productions, 1950). The characters

expressed their speech through deferential language, which included gratitude and apologies and conditional statements, while their rhetorical agency remained restricted by external validation (Heath, 2021).

The musical numbers in these films reinforced romantic dependency through songs that included “Someday My Prince Will Come,” which established male rescue as the ultimate feminine objective (Hine, 2018). The characters displayed self-effacing speech while using minimal dialogue and avoiding problem-solving, which strengthened the social expectations of obedience and patience (Gee, 2014).

Renaissance Princesses: Emerging Linguistic Agency

During the Disney Renaissance period, Ariel and Belle became two of the first princesses who displayed complex personalities, intellectual curiosity, and occasional control over their language (Davis, 2006). The characters displayed more forceful statements together with cognitive verbs, which indicated their developing independence. Belle’s love of reading and Ariel’s drive to explore demonstrated a transition from passive behavior to goal-oriented actions, yet their stories maintained romantic endings, which confirmed male approval (Rudloff, 2016).

The characters demonstrated rising self-referential language and emotional expression, yet their ability to solve complex problems remained restricted. The characters demonstrated their desires yet failed to use strategic dialogue, which limited female agency to romantic fulfillment instead of intellectual independence (Gee, 2014). The period brought about a shift between the initial submissive nature of female characters and the developing yet restricted forms of linguistic self-expression.

Modern Princesses: Intellectual Independence through Language

The modern princesses Elsa, Moana, and Merida demonstrate linguistic agency through their intellectual independence and leadership abilities. Through assertive speech acts and self-referential language, and modal verbs, these characters establish their narrative control according to Guillén Serna (2021). Through her declaration “I am Moana of Motunui,” Moana demonstrates problem-solving discourse together with self-affirmation as Elsa expresses emotional liberation through “Let it go” while rejecting societal norms (Hine et al., 2018).

The characters participate in reflective dialogue and cognitive processing, which reveals psychological depth that previous films typically lacked (Gee, 2014). Through their language, these characters establish their independent agency, which goes beyond traditional feminine traits of beauty and romance. The modern depictions of femininity show cultural developments toward gender equality by presenting women as autonomous decision-makers who demonstrate strategic thinking and intellectual power (Yamamoto, 2020).

Gaps and Contributions

The analysis of Disney princess films primarily focuses on their visual aspects and narrative structures, yet the impact of language on character agency and mental autonomy needs further investigation. According to Fairclough (1995), language functions as an essential instrument for building identity structures and power dynamics, yet most research fails to examine how speech acts, pronouns, and modality convey intellectual independence.

The research investigates this knowledge gap through psycholinguistic and discourse analysis to demonstrate how Moana employs assertive language while previous princesses use passive, deferential speech (Guillén Serna, 2021). The research investigates a deficiency in intersectional analysis. The Disney studio maintains Eurocentric values despite its diversity

initiatives, according to Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2021), while Yamamoto (2020) and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory demonstrate the need for cultural complexity.

The research investigates language usage in songs, dialogue, and secondary characters to demonstrate how changing discourse patterns mirror evolving gender norms and power dynamics (Hine et al., 2018), especially in non-Western regions such as Kazakhstan. The combined research method delivers fresh perspectives about gendered communication and media representation.

Methodology

Research Design

The research employs a qualitative design, which combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with psycholinguistic principles to analyze how Disney princess stories use language to build agency and intellectual independence. The research employs qualitative methods because they enable deep investigations into language mechanisms that form social gender and power norms beyond superficial observations (Fairclough, 1995).

The research uses CDA as its main framework to study language structures that operate within social and ideological systems (van Dijk, 2009). The psycholinguistic framework enhances analysis by identifying how different linguistic elements, such as modalities, pronouns, and speech acts, demonstrate cognitive states as well as emotional responses and self-determination (Gee, 2014).

The analysis examines key linguistic elements by evaluating declarative statements and interrogative questions alongside modalities and active/passive voice construction to determine character agency levels. Musical sequences receive analysis because they function as narrative elements which portray inner emotions and identity transformation.

The research incorporates an intersectional perspective from Crenshaw (1989) to examine how cultural expectations merge with gender expectations in Tiana and Moana, who face dual racial and gender identity expectations in a Eurocentric Disney universe (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2021).

The study investigates power dynamics through dialogue analysis of turn structure and resistance patterns alongside deference indicators to study contemporary princesses versus their early counterparts. Cinderella relies on conditional language and polite statements, yet Moana uses direct commands and forceful statements (Heath, 2021).

A purposive sample of seven films from three key eras is used to trace diachronic changes: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). These films showcase progressive cultural shifts regarding female independence along with changing rhetorical methods (Towbin et al., 2004).

The dataset includes written dialogue and song transcripts, which have been coded thematically to reveal patterns regarding intellectual independence, emotional labour, and relational dynamics (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis utilizes Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model through textual examination of the material, followed by analysis of discursive practice, reception practices, and finally the social practice of ideological context.

The research contains no ethical risks because it makes use of publicly accessible sources. The research maintains constant levels of reflexivity and transparency to guarantee credibility along with analytical integrity.

The research design establishes an effective framework to investigate how language represents female independence and intellectual freedom in Disney movies, alongside the observation of cultural evolution and diverse representation.

Sampling Strategy and Data Sources

The research uses purposive sampling to choose seven Disney princess movies which showcase important stages in the franchise's historical progression. The research design allows researchers to study linguistic patterns, rhetorical strategies, and gendered representations across different time periods (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The selected films include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021).

The selected films demonstrate the evolution of traditional feminine portrayals into contemporary female leadership and autonomy. *Snow White* and *Cinderella* demonstrate passive communication methods, and they use hedging statements and magical solutions to achieve their goals during the mid-20th-century gender norms period (Towbin et al., 2004). *Cinderella* expresses hope through conditional statements while displaying submissive conduct (England et al., 2011).

The contemporary princesses demonstrate directive communication while using assertive speech and statements that affirm their identities. Ariel communicates her emotional wants by using personal pronouns (Davis, 2006). Belle demonstrates her intellectual independence and self-reliance through her dialogue (Guillén Serna, 2021). Elsa demonstrates empowerment through metaphors and declaratives in "Let It Go" (Hine et al., 2018). Moana demonstrates leadership through her direct statement, "I am Moana of Motunui" (Guillén

Serna, 2021). Raya employs reframing approaches and ethical thought processes to handle trust and leadership issues (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2021).

The sequential selection of films enables researchers to study the linguistic development of female agency and intellectual independence across different time periods. The evolution of Disney princess narratives shows how these stories have adapted to new social norms and feminist movements throughout history (Rudloff, 2016).

Data Collection

The data collection procedure establishes a complete basis for analyzing Disney princess stories through psycholinguistic and rhetorical methods. The research uses both primary and secondary sources to achieve a comprehensive evaluation of language, together with character agency and gender representation.

The primary data consists of Disney princess film scripts obtained through purposive sampling. The research examines dialogues together with song lyrics and essential narrative sequences, which show characters expressing desires, facing challenges, and demonstrating resilience. A thorough analysis of linguistic elements, including pronouns, sentences, modality, and rhetorical tools such as metaphor, repetition, and problem-solving discourse, becomes possible through this examination. Through their word selection, tone, and structural patterns in Disney dialogues and songs, language reveals how psychological states and social identities get encoded (Heath, 2021).

The analysis of primary data receives additional depth through the use of secondary data, which includes academic critiques together with scholarly articles and audience reviews. The linguistic analysis benefits from secondary sources, which deliver cultural reception insights while linking the findings to broader societal discussions about gender roles, media

influence, and representation. Audience perceptions help researchers understand how viewers process and retain the stories they watch (Heath, 2021).

The data collection process maintains both rigor and coherence through three systematic steps. First, each film undergoes transcription to capture dialogue and song lyrics from relevant scenes where princesses express goals, make decisions, or show emotions. The transcription method records both verbal content and non-verbal elements such as pauses and intonation because these features reveal cognitive and emotional aspects of speech, according to Gee (2014). Next, the transcribed data receives thematic coding through Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework. The analysis reveals recurring themes which include intellectual independence and agency, together with resilience, emotional labor, and relational dynamics. The analysis uses specific codes to study language patterns through categories that include assertive language, emotional appeals, problem-solving discourse, and deferential speech for character and film comparison. Finally, linguistic instances receive evaluation based on their cultural background and historical period. The analysis of language requires this step because social norms during specific time periods strongly influence language development. Snow White's apologies match the gender norms of the 1930s, yet Moana's assertive behavior demonstrates the influence of modern feminist movements. The analysis of discourse within its social framework reveals how language functions to reflect and influence power dynamics and ideological systems (Fairclough, 1995).

Through this multi-faceted approach, researchers can observe the development of rhetorical strategies which correspond to different time periods within Disney history. Through an analysis of early Disney characters like Snow White, who used deferential language and emotional appeals versus modern heroines like Moana, who employ directive

speech and problem-solving rhetoric, the study demonstrates evolving discursive representations of femininity and self-determination. Through time-based research, the study demonstrates how language adjusts to demonstrate changing cultural patterns and mainstream media integration of feminist principles (Towbin et al., 2004).

The research benefits from additional sources, which enhance its analysis. Critical academic studies deliver theoretical understanding of narrative systems, character evolution, audience feedback, and social media analytics demonstrate how viewers perceive independence and agency in characters. The combination of media production and reception data enables researchers to observe how audiences connect with or oppose gender role expectations in society (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2021).

Reactions from modern audiences towards princesses Elsa, Moana, and Raya hold special importance since they differ from classic romantic storylines. Real-time audience responses provide direct evidence that contemporary rhetorical methods create new expectations regarding female independence and intellectual empowerment. The study's psycholinguistic research gains added strength from this connection because it shows how people interpret linguistic patterns in real-world conversations (Yamamoto, 2020).

The data collection process relies solely on publicly accessible media content and academic critiques, which removes privacy and consent risks from the research. The research team maintains an accurate depiction of how characters speak and how their stories unfold. The research gains credibility and allows for reproducibility because the researchers explain their data selection process along with transcription and coding procedures.

The study's data collection method provides thorough support for its analysis of Disney princess narratives through psycholinguistic and rhetorical methods. Through the

combination of primary and secondary materials, this research reveals the multifaceted mechanisms that establish intellectual independence and agency. Through its methodical approach, the analysis both breaks down linguistic patterns while positioning them within cultural, historical, and social frameworks to deliver a detailed examination of gender representation in this influential media franchise (Rudloff, 2016).

Data Analysis

Using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study explores how Disney princess narratives construct intellectual independence and gendered agency through language. The framework by Fairclough is particularly appropriate for media texts because it shows how linguistic features work with discursive and sociocultural practices to make audiences perceive certain things and to confirm or challenge dominant ideologies.

The first dimension, textual analysis, focuses on micro-level linguistic elements such as word choice, sentence structure, modality, and rhetorical devices. Special attention is given to assertive verbs (e.g., "I am," "I will," "I can"), which convey self-determination and agency (Guillén Serna, 2021). Elsa's lyrics in *Let It Go* contain active verbs like "stand" and "stay," framed in declarative sentences that assert autonomy (Heath, 2021). Instead, early princesses such as Cinderella use passive or conditional constructions like "If you'd lost all your faith, I couldn't be here," reflecting dependence and emotional subordination (Towbin et al., 2004).

Pronoun usage and self-referential language further signal agency. Moana frequently uses first-person pronouns like "I," "me," and "my" to assert identity and internal resolve (Guillén Serna, 2021). Her statement, "I am Moana of Motunui," functions as a clear identity claim and

signals narrative control. Instead of being grammatically positioned as passive recipients of action, early princesses are often positioned as active agents of action.

Metaphor and symbolism can help understand emotional and cognitive states. Elsa's line, "The cold never bothered me anyway," operates as both a literal and figurative declaration of emotional strength (Heath, 2021). The desire for "adventure in the great wide somewhere" of Belle expresses a metaphorical longing for intellectual freedom (Davis, 2006). These rhetorical strategies help construct both emotional independence and cognitive depth.

The second dimension, discursive practices, addresses how language is produced, distributed, and received within its cultural context. The early Disney films supported the prevalent mid-twentieth-century views on gender, which emphasized domesticity and romance as the core of feminine identity (Wiersma, 2000). The Renaissance and modern films integrate feminist ideals by framing princesses as decision-makers and initiators of change. Moana, for instance, directs Maui to return the heart of Te Fiti, reflecting a narrative shift toward female-driven action (Guillén Serna, 2021).

Audience reception and intertextuality are key components here. Young girls, along with other audiences, derive meaning from how characters model empowerment and self-worth. By modifying traditional fairy tale structures – such as Elsa rejecting a romantic partner in favor of ruling alone – Disney reshapes expectations of female agency (Zipes, 2006).

The third dimension, social practices, situates these texts within broader cultural and ideological systems. The assertive and solution-oriented language used by Moana and Elsa reflects evolving beliefs about women's autonomy and leadership (Hine et al., 2018). Disney's global reach means these messages extend beyond Western contexts. Princess narratives can

affect perceptions of female leadership and intellectual independence in regions like Kazakhstan, where traditional values coexist with globalized media (Yamamoto, 2020).

This CDA framework allows the study to trace how language constructs and reflects changing ideals of femininity. It provides a structured lens through which to analyze how textual features, media production, and social context converge to influence public understanding of gender roles and empowerment (Fairclough, 1995).

Analytical Framework

The research combines discourse analysis with psycholinguistic principles to study how Disney princess films present female agency and intellectual independence through their use of language. This research applies Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory to analyze utterances into five communicative functions: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, which provide different information about character control and autonomy and psychological expression.

Self-definitions, together with desires and beliefs, emerge through Assertives. Through her persistent statements, Moana demonstrates her personality, yet Belle expresses her ambition for intellectual exploration by saying, "I want adventure in the great wide somewhere" while rejecting traditional domestic roles (Towbin et al., 2004). The actions demonstrate the extent to which characters maintain control over their actions.

The power relationship between speakers becomes apparent through directives, which act as commands and requests because they establish the speaker as the person who initiates communication. The character Moana demonstrates both leadership and decisiveness when she orders Maui to join her on her boat through direct speech, according to Guillén Serna (2021).

The narrative path that a character controls becomes evident through their commissives that include promises and future intentions. External saviors serve as the primary plot devices for traditional princesses because they do not possess this kind of control. As described by Hine et al. (2018), Raya demonstrates her moral agency through the statement “I’m going to make this right”.

Expressives reveal emotional states. Ariel shows romantic dependence when she exclaims, “Daddy, I love him!” According to Towbin et al. (2004), Elsa shows emotional resilience through her statement, “The cold never bothered me anyway,” which also contributes to her identity formation (Heath, 2021).

The most forceful communicative act among declaratives functions to create personal truths and establish factual information. Elsa demonstrates complete self-acceptance and narrative control by saying, “Here I stand, and here I’ll stay,” according to Guillén Serna (2021).

The research analyzes rhetorical strategies by studying self-referential language together with metaphor and problem-solving discourse. Metaphors like Elsa’s repeated use of “cold” (Heath, 2021) encode emotional transformation into strength while first-person pronouns (Gee, 2014) demonstrate cognitive independence.

Each film analysis takes into account its cultural and historical background to recognize how social norms shape linguistic behavior. The mid-20th-century princesses embody the passive stereotypes of their time (Davis, 2006), but contemporary heroines show feminist development through their empowered language, which represents leadership (Yamamoto, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

The research focuses on Disney princess films that are available to the public to avoid ethical issues involving human participants and their privacy. The research focuses on the ethical use of copyrighted materials. The research follows fair use guidelines by making brief references to film dialogues and lyrics only for academic purposes without excessive copying of material (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research critically examines gendered and racial representations while recognizing Disney's influence on societal norms regarding femininity and race. The initial princess stories presented Eurocentric beauty standards and passive behavior, which generated worries about traditional gender representation (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2021).

The research maintains cultural sensitivity through the inclusion of non-Western perspectives because global audiences might understand these narratives in different ways. According to Yamamoto (2020), Western media products such as Disney generate distinct cultural meanings which differ per cultural setting. The analysis includes cross-cultural critiques to prevent the continuation of Western-centric perspectives.

The research study monitors the development of gender and racial representation throughout its duration. The research approaches these narratives with careful analysis of linguistic choices and cultural contexts as described by Guillén Serna (2021).

Anticipated Challenges and Limitations

Multiple factors during this study's implementation might influence both the research scope and interpretation of results. Qualitative discourse analysis and psycholinguistic examination carry inherent risks of researcher bias because these methods depend on personal interpretation. The identification of speech acts and rhetorical strategies in emotional or metaphorical language becomes subject to interpretation based on context, according to Searle

(1969). The study uses triangulation between scholarly critiques and audience reviews, together with linguistic analyses to improve validity (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The analysis of intersectionality in films that depict culturally diverse princesses presents an additional analysis challenge. Western storytelling conventions continue to influence the storytelling of characters like Moana despite their representation of progress (Yamamoto, 2020). The dual nature of this analysis demands careful examination to evaluate both cultural worth and potential imperial biases in the framing (Rudloff, 2016).

Changing social standards affect how people understand empowerment, together with agency. Belle's independent character in *Beauty and the Beast* (Walt Disney Productions, 1991) appeared advanced at its time but appears restricted today because of its romantic plot (Davis, 2006). Each film receives detailed historical context in the study to prevent readers from making anachronistic evaluations (Fairclough, 1995).

The indirect nature of audience reception measurement produces certain study limitations. The research uses secondary sources but cannot include empirical studies about viewer interpretations because it does not extend to age groups or cultural evaluations.

The application of Western theories such as Searle's Speech Act Theory and Fairclough's CDA to global media might fail to recognize non-Western narrative structures. The research maintains critical reflexivity by showing cultural sensitivity throughout its analysis while acknowledging its limitations in Western theory application.

Trustworthiness and Validity

The study implements strict analytical procedures across all stages of data collection and interpretation to build trustworthiness and validity. The research uses systematic member checking through academic critique evaluation and audience reception studies as its first step.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest this validation method to confirm research findings while making sure they align with overall academic discussions.

The research design includes a coding reliability check as part of its methodology. The study conducts multiple checks of its emerging themes, speech act patterns, and rhetorical strategies by examining them across various films and secondary data sources to establish consistency and coherence. The research uses an iterative method to enhance finding credibility through error reduction and bias minimization during initial coding phases (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Throughout the research process, the researcher maintains reflexive practices. The researcher conducts a continuous evaluation of their personal role in the study and their possible prejudices, especially when analyzing independence and agency through cultural lenses. The researcher recognizes their academic and cultural origins to include multiple viewpoints and maintains respect for alternative perspectives when studying films from different cultural backgrounds (Yamamoto, 2020).

The research design incorporates a broad range of scholarly sources, which include feminist media studies, together with critical discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, and cultural studies. Multiple theoretical perspectives, together with empirical research, support the conclusions through an interdisciplinary framework that validates the findings

Findings

This chapter reveals the outcomes of the study, providing an in-depth examination of the linguistic features, rhetorical devices, and visual semiotic elements that help create intellectual independence and female agency in selected Disney princess films. The research was based on the analysis of the language of Disney princesses in their dialogues, songs, and

narrative structures with the objective of understanding how these languages embody the changing social norms about gender roles, autonomy, and leadership. This study aims to identify the implicit ways through which these narratives shape perceptions of female intellectual independence from a psycholinguistic and critical discourse analysis standpoint.

The research is based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which enables the study of text-level linguistic features, production and consumption discursive practices, and broader socio-cultural implications. Fairclough's model is particularly useful for the analysis of how Disney films, as globally popular media texts, construct and reconstruct cultural representations of gender, power, and agency. The analysis of text focuses on the micro-level language elements, including lexical choices, modality, syntactic organization, and speech act types, that determine the level of character's agency. Discursive practice analysis discovers how these linguistic choices conform to or deviate from social expectations about femininity and intellectual independence. Lastly, social practice analysis frames the results in the context of historical and cultural contexts, with particular emphasis on the impact of changing feminist ideologies and global media consumption on the image of the Disney princesses.

In addition to CDA, the research incorporates psycholinguistic principles by examining how language is connected with internal cognitive processes, emotional resilience, and intellectual abilities of female characters. The study employs Searle's (1969) speech acts, such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, to assess the extent to which princesses exhibit agency in their speech. Psycholinguistic analysis also enables the assessment of problem-solving discourse in characters, the use of metaphors, and self-referential language to establish identity and autonomy.

Moreover, the study recognizes the value of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in grasping how gender, race, and cultural identity intersect in these narratives. As Disney introduces more racially diverse princesses in its modern films, it is important to analyze not only gendered language but also how race and cultural heritage influence linguistic and rhetorical strategies. This approach makes sure that the analysis is sensitive to the complexities of representation, especially in films like *Moana* (Walt Disney Productions, 2016) and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (Walt Disney Productions, 2021), where cultural identity is central to the characters' narrative and linguistic expression.

The results are presented in chronological order according to the three distinct periods of Disney princess films: the Early Classic Era, the Renaissance Era, and the Modern Feminist Era in order to see how linguistic patterns, power relations, and rhetorical strategies have developed throughout the years. This organization makes it possible to observe the transition from princess characters as passive romantic figures to independent characters who exhibit intellectual independence and leadership. Within each era, the analysis is further organized thematically around key linguistic features, including speech acts, pronoun use, metaphorical language, and rhetorical strategies such as reframing and problem-solving discourse.

The chapter starts with the analysis of the Early Classic Era, focusing on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Walt Disney Productions, 1937) and *Cinderella* (Walt Disney Productions, 1950), where findings indicate the prevalence of emotional expressions, passivity, and romantic dependency. It then proceeds to the Renaissance Era, where *The Little Mermaid* (Walt Disney Productions, 1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (Walt Disney Productions, 1991) are analyzed, and it can be observed that there is a growing interest in intellectual curiosity and linguistic assertiveness, still limited by romantic narratives. Finally,

the Modern Feminist Era – Frozen (Walt Disney Productions, 2013), Moana (Walt Disney Productions, 2016), and Raya and the Last Dragon (Walt Disney Productions, 2021) – presents a significant shift, where princesses employ directive language, self-referential statements, and moral reasoning to exercise cognitive agency and leadership.

Overall, the results show a clear linguistic and rhetorical development in line with the changes in gender representation in society. This chapter provides a detailed examination of how Disney princesses' language choices embody their intellectual independence, resilience, and leadership capacity in complex narrative worlds by integrating CDA, psycholinguistics, and intersectionality.

Early Classic Era (1937–1950)

The passive feminine and romantic-dependent characters in the narrative

During the Early Classic Era of Disney princess films, beginning with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Walt Disney Productions, 1937) and ending with Cinderella (Walt Disney Productions, 1950), the representation of female characters in the society showed passive, emotional, and beauty and compliance-oriented behavior. The analysis of these films reveals that language serves to affirm the established gender roles in which princesses demonstrate minimal intellectual autonomy and their stories follow romance-driven narratives instead of self-directed plots.

The Speech Act Theory of Searle (1969) reveals that speech patterns from this period feature mostly expressives and conditionals, which show minimal agency and continuous external validation needs. The prevalence of expressives and conditionals emerges from Table 1, which shows how these speech acts dominate the dialogue of Snow White and Cinderella. The princesses in these stories frequently use emotional utterances that establish their

vulnerability and need for others' support. Snow White consistently shows fear, gratitude, and happiness through statements addressed to others, indicating that her personality stems from emotional responses instead of problem-solving capabilities. Her communication with the dwarfs contains repeated statements such as "Oh, I'm so sorry! I apologize deeply because I didn't want to startle you," which demonstrates both her sorry nature and her habitual self-deprecation (Wiersma, 2000).

Cinderella's speech contains numerous conditionals expressing her hopes for change, yet she lacks the powerful statements needed to effect that change. Her most famous tune, "A dream is a wish your heart makes," represents this conditional thinking by showing that dreams can become reality only through magical intervention or male rescue. Such speech acts underscore the characters' lack of internal agency, as they rarely produce assertives or directives that could drive the narrative forward. Their communication patterns show an outside source of control because they seek fulfillment and action through other people, including male characters and magical entities (Heath, 2021).

The princesses use language through consistent hedging and apologetic expressions along with future conditional constructions, which reduces their ability to shape the story. The frequent occurrence of hedging phrases such as "maybe", "I suppose", and "if only" creates an impression of uncertainty and emotional vulnerability rather than decisiveness. Through psycholinguistic means, these phrases establish the speaker as unthreatening yet submissive and submissive. Snow White displays her socialised gratitude through continuous requests for approval and thanks towards the dwarfs, which demonstrates the societal expectation of female politeness and gratitude (Wiersma, 2000).

Through linguistic patterns in Cinderella, the audience observes both her social and emotional subordination. Through all the abuse she faces from her stepfamily, Cinderella never uses direct confrontation in her speech. She expresses her distress through singing “Oh, sing sweet nightingale,” which shifts her emotional pain into a song instead of verbalizing it directly. The rhetorical approach uses a beautification strategy to present female suffering in a palatable form while avoiding confrontation or self-assertion.

The main linguistic characteristic of this period focuses on romantic dependency as the primary plot and language objective. The futures of Snow White and Cinderella unfold through their pursuit of marriage alongside the arrival of their respective princes. The story reinforces its themes through constant musical and dialogue elements, which focus on romantic rescue. Through her song “Someday my prince will come,” Snow White presents a thesis statement about her life and happiness depending on male rescue. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this demonstrates a fantasy-based cognitive process that requires another person to make desires achievable instead of self-initiated action (Heath, 2021).

The princesses lack directives or assertives in their speech, which shows their powerlessness in the narrative world. The majority of directives that serve to command or request action go to secondary characters like the evil Queen and the Stepmother, who demonstrate authority through their verbal control. Snow White and Cinderella both demonstrate no ability to influence others or change their circumstances through linguistic means. When the princesses make requests, they phrase them as polite appeals rather than commands because their status in the story’s power structure is low (Fairclough, 1995).

The language structure demonstrates Fairclough’s (1995) theory about power dynamics, which exist within discourse because language functions to sustain social

structures. Due to their restricted linguistic range, which includes only emotional statements, grateful expressions, and passive dreaming, they cannot establish intellectual or moral authority. Power exists with those who use forceful speech to issue commands, thus upholding traditional gendered hierarchies, which position women as recipients of action rather than agents of transformation.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the princesses' language reflects an emotional labor model, wherein their primary function is to manage emotions - their own and those of others - rather than engage in problem-solving or intellectual reasoning. The social construct known as emotional labor typically affects women because it requires them to hide their wants for maintaining social order (Heath, 2021). Snow White and Cinderella display this pattern through their actions of providing care to the dwarfs and maintaining kindness toward their abusers. The princesses use language that includes singing to animals and offering comfort words while avoiding confrontations, which shows their speech functions to reduce social stress instead of solving problems or displaying independence.

These narratives show no evidence of problem-solving discourse, which demonstrates the restricted view of female intellect in their storytelling. The princesses Snow White and Cinderella achieve solutions to their challenges through magical interventions, including the prince and the fairy godmother. Their language shows no evidence of rhetorical strategies, which include reasoning, negotiation, and planning, because these elements represent essential markers of intellectual independence. The complete absence of intellectual elements in their narratives confirms that these first princesses function only as emotional characters who need external solutions to advance their stories (Wiersma, 2000).

The Early Classic Era of Disney princess films presents female characters through language patterns that demonstrate passive behavior, emotional expression, and romantic dependence. The narratives establish their heroines as emotionally rich but intellectually passive through expressives and conditionals while removing assertives and directives and relying on external rescue. Through their speech acts, these princesses exhibit the societal expectations that demand women to function as caregivers, dreamers, and objects of male desire instead of autonomous agents. During this era, women primarily functioned socially to achieve beauty while showing compliance and seeking marriage as their main purpose. The period establishes fundamental knowledge that helps analyze language evolution alongside changing agency patterns and intellectual autonomy found in subsequent Disney princess films.

Renaissance Era (1989–1991)

New language abilities alongside intellectual ambitions start to form.

The Little Mermaid (Walt Disney Productions, 1989) and Beauty and the Beast (Walt Disney Productions, 1991) mark the Disney Renaissance Era, which stands as a fundamental time of evolution in Disney princess character development. Linguistically, the period brings forward self-referential language along with cognitive verbs and assertiveness that indicate developing intellectual agency. The dominant narrative objective throughout this period remains romantic fulfillment, although these advancements bring progress to the story. This section demonstrates through speech act analysis and psycholinguistic evaluation how these films both challenge and reinforce traditional gender norms by analyzing linguistic patterns.

Ariel and Belle differ from the Classic Era heroines because they use a wider variety of speech acts (Searle, 1969), which includes a rise in assertives that communicate personal

beliefs, desires, and intentions. Ariel expresses her desire to experience human life through forceful statements, which function both as declarations of identity and assertive statements (Davis, 2006). Ariel demonstrates cognitive independence through her assertives because she creates mental pictures of alternative lifestyles while actively desiring them. In her words, “I want much more than this provincial life.” Belle frequently expresses her discontent with the limited nature of her current environment. The multiple instances of ‘I want’ demonstrate both growing personal awareness along with increasing self-determination.

Expressives remain key elements when the characters face emotional challenges that drive their romantic stories. Ariel demonstrates her emotional need for paternal approval by exclaiming, “Daddy, I love him!” which establishes her story around family-based and romantic approval (Rudloff, 2016). The emotional outbursts reveal that intellectual desire exists but remains linked to emotional satisfaction and social approval.

The speech patterns used in this era introduce major shifts in how female characters express their thoughts. Self-referential language using first-person pronouns such as “I”, “me”, and “my” controls most of Ariel and Belle’s spoken lines, which demonstrates their developing sense of self. The rise of self-referential language, together with cognitive verbs such as ‘think’ and ‘know,’ indicates how Renaissance princesses gain intellectual agency according to the data presented in Table 2. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the language feature is vital because it indicates a transition from passive to active thinking. Through her declaration, “There must be more than this provincial life,” Belle shows intellectual curiosity while positioning herself as an outside observer who critiques her environment (Fairclough, 1995).

Belle uses cognitive verbs such as “think”, “know”, “learn”, and “understand” in rising frequency to show internal thinking and intellectual involvement. The love for reading, which defines Belle as a character, functions as a story element that enables her to present sophisticated ideas while she compares her present reality to other possible worlds. The persistent depiction of reading as well as intellectual exploration functions as a metaphor for cognitive agency, which represents a major departure from earlier princesses’ limited emotional range (Davis, 2006).

The princesses from this period brought sarcasm and irony into their dialogue, which demonstrates their rising linguistic complexity. Through her sarcastic dialogue, Belle expresses her feelings about Gaston through lines such as “I just don’t deserve you” in her rejection of him. The first impression of politeness hides an ironic meaning that reveals her intellectual superiority. This rhetorical approach demonstrates how Belle strategically positions herself against Gaston to demonstrate intellectual dominance since he represents traditional gender norms and toxic masculinity (Rudloff, 2016).

The stories present deep romantic fulfillment as their final resolution, even though intellectual independence displays growing signs throughout the narratives. Ariel gives away her voice as her main tool for self-expression and agency to get legs, which demonstrates an unacceptable exchange between independence and romantic love. Ariel’s linguistic transformation mirrors her loss of power because losing her voice means losing her ability to express herself rhetorically, thus showing female autonomy remains contingent on male approval during this emerging era of independence. The narrative device through which Ariel loses her voice demonstrates psycholinguistic evidence of her cognitive abilities, yet her story silences her intellectual potential to pursue romance (Fairclough, 1995).

Belle's love story, while presented through intellectual and moral introspection, remains a tale of transforming the Beast, a symbol of changing harmful male behavior through female love and virtue. Belle functions as the story's "savior" largely through her emotional work and intellectual involvement, but the story concludes by showing that a woman's intellectual abilities are most powerful when used to improve her male partner. The romantic structure restricts female autonomy even though it advances beyond Classic Era gender dynamics (Davis, 2006).

The power dynamics within the dialogue show advancements as well as existing barriers. Belle shows stronger linguistic resistance than Ariel through her interactions with male authority figures. Throughout her encounters with Gaston, Belle uses rejection alongside sarcasm and assertive denials to establish her intellectual and moral superiority. The statement "I'm sorry, Gaston, but I'm not going to dinner," which Belle delivers, serves as an infrequent directive statement indicating her refusal to follow societal norms. Even though the narrative advances through a heteronormative plot it ends with the conclusion that true happiness leads to finding romantic love (Rudloff, 2016).

Ariel, along with Belle, shows advanced cognitive agency through their actions when studied from a psycholinguistic perspective, in contrast to the characters of the Classic Era. Ariel's attraction to the human world alongside her hidden collection of artifacts demonstrates both curiosity and intentional learning behavior. Belle establishes herself as an intellectual heroine by demonstrating her love for books and her analytical thoughts about her surroundings. The characters progress through narratives that use emotional rather than cognitive conclusions to determine their success, since Ariel needs Eric and Belle needs to save the Beast.

The Renaissance Era demonstrates an intricate view of female agency, which recognizes intellectual desire yet frequently weakens it through conventional romantic plots. At this time, princesses demonstrate more advanced linguistic capabilities through their complex vocabulary. The princesses of this era communicate their desires while questioning traditional norms through strategic rhetoric, which demonstrates their psychological growth and increasing independence. The continued emphasis on romance as the final goal restricts female agency because it demonstrates that women must fit within male-dominated narratives (Fairclough, 1995).

The Little Mermaid and Beauty and the Beast demonstrate important progress in building female agency through language and psychological language systems. The princesses demonstrate their developing self-awareness through assertives and cognitive verbs and rhetorical devices, including irony. Their stories continue to follow traditional romantic arcs because the cultural conflicts of late 20th-century society maintained strong ties between feminist progress and established gender norms. This time period creates conditions for the contemporary Disney princesses to develop distinct narratives which focus on intellectual independence alongside leadership roles.

Modern Feminist Era (2013–2021)

Full Intellectual Independence and Leadership

The Modern Feminist Era in Disney princess narratives – exemplified by Frozen (Walt Disney Productions, 2013), Moana (Walt Disney Productions, 2016), and Raya and the Last Dragon (Walt Disney Productions, 2021) – marks a decisive shift in the portrayal of female characters from emotionally driven figures dependent on romantic resolutions to autonomous agents of change, leadership, and problem-solving. These modern heroines

linguistically and psycholinguistically display evolved speech patterns that contain assertives, directives, and commissives to show their internal cognitive agency and independence.

Through their words and actions, these characters form their own destinies in a way that demonstrates the result of decades-long narrative development of Disney's feminine and powerful character representation.

A comprehensive speech act analysis (Searle, 1969) shows that modern princesses use assertives and directives much more often than their predecessors and effectively claim intellectual space in their narratives. In *Frozen*, Elsa delivers the important line "Here I stand" that functions both as an assertive declaration and a psychological declaration of independence from societal restrictions. The statements make declarations of independence, which also perform a linguistic shift of agency from being controlled by external forces toward self-actualization (Guillén Serna, 2021). Moana asserts her leadership through commands such as "You will board my boat, sail across the sea, and restore the heart" when addressing even demigod characters. The use of directives here is crucial, as it positions Moana not as a passive participant but as the narrative's driving force.

Speech acts that commit the speaker to future actions are abundant in this era, thus reinforcing intellectual independence. Raya shows her personal commitment to conflict resolution through her repeated statement, "I'm going to fix this," which does not need romantic or magical solutions. This self-directed future orientation displays both linguistic confidence together with a deep internal locus of control since characters demonstrate ownership of their narratives (Hine, 2018). The portrayed princesses need speech acts to show their status as decision-making agents who base their actions on reason instead of emotional reactions.

The linguistic patterns in this era show complex problem-solving discourse together with metaphorical reframing that indicates both high cognitive processing and emotional resilience. The data in Table 3 shows how assertives and directives, together with commissives and metaphorical reframing, have increased to signify the development of cognitive agency. Elsa's anthem "Let It Go" illustrates this by transforming the negative aspect of isolation into a powerful statement of independence. The cold that used to symbolize emotional suppression now represents strength and liberty through a metaphorical transformation. Through this reframing, Elsa shows her ability to transform her reality using language which demonstrates both rhetorical and psycholinguistic abilities as well as cognitive flexibility and resilience (Guillén Serna, 2021).

Throughout Moana's story, she demonstrates leadership through assertive language usage and strategic communication. She declares her identity repeatedly as Moana of Motunui, which serves to declare her identity while reinforcing both her heritage and moral obligations. The language positioning of herself in this way holds significant psycholinguistic value because it shows Moana's intellectual grasp of her position in her society and her natural environment. Through her dialogue, she uses first-person pronouns and assertive verbs and future-oriented statements to build up her intellectual autonomy and leadership abilities (Hine, 2018).

Romance completely disappears as the primary plot element during this time, which demonstrates a basic change in story direction. The main characters, Elsa, Moana, and Raya, distinguish themselves from Ariel and Belle because their stories focus more on personal missions and communal objectives than on romantic love. The language patterns of their conversations completely avoid romantic themes, along with expressions of longing for

romantic partners. Their verbal interactions focus on resolving moral conflicts and leadership dilemmas and interpersonal challenges, which require negotiation skills together with critical thinking abilities and empathy. Raya faces her main challenge through issues of trust and betrayal, along with uniting others rather than romantic issues, since her language demonstrates these priorities through statements like “Maybe the world’s broken because you don’t trust anyone” (Yamamoto, 2020).

In this era, however, the power dynamics have shifted in favor of the princesses who do not wait to be rescued nor seek validation from anyone, but rather take the initiative, solve problems, and challenge the established norms. Unlike the first princesses, whose speech was characterized by apologies and deference, today’s heroines interrupt, command, and debate. In *Frozen*, Elsa’s direct confrontation with Anna on the issue of love at first sight is both a narrative and linguistic challenge to traditional Disney plots. On the other hand, Moana can converse with demigods and monsters, and persuade them based on argument and reason, which places her in a position of power, and her intellectual and verbal abilities determine the course of events.

From a psycholinguistic standpoint, these characters are characterized by high-level cognitive processes, emotional toughness, and moral autonomy. They are able to make their own decisions, think critically about ethical problems, and engage in strategic conversation, which shows that they have an inner sense of self-efficacy. Elsa’s story is as psychological as it is physical; her power to control her powers is also her emotional growth and acceptance of herself. Her linguistic shift from “I can’t” to “Here I stand” is a psycholinguistic shift from self-doubt to cognitive empowerment (Guillén Serna, 2021).

Moana's persistent questioning and exploration demonstrate not only curiosity but also a sophisticated understanding of responsibility and legacy. Her language shows a communal orientation in which individual wants are subordinated to the wants of her people. This is a very different approach from the individualistic and romance-based narratives of the past. Psycholinguistically, it is a manifestation of mature moral reasoning where problem solving is done with empathy and strategic foresight (Hine, 2018).

Raya also exhibits this cognitive maturity. Her pessimistic outlook that stemming from betrayal, makes her participate in intricate ethical deliberations. Language-wise, Raya speaks in conditional sentences and hypotheses, which shows high cognitive processes as she considers the consequences of trust and cooperation. Her speech patterns are not those of a naive character, but rather those of a critical thinker, which makes her one of the most intelligent princesses that Disney has produced so far (Yamamoto, 2020).

Another important linguistic feature of this generation is the use of declarative statements that serve not only as narrative tools but as performative acts of self-definition. Elsa's "The cold never bothered me anyway" or Moana's "I am Moana" are not just statements; they enact identity, express agency, and establish autonomy. Such performativity is in line with Fairclough's (1995) idea of language as social action, where speech acts are located within the power relations and ideological struggles.

Moreover, the intersectional analysis is crucial in making sense of these modern narratives. Moana and Raya, as non-White princesses, bring in cultural background and communal values into their language systems. Their dialogues are filled with cultural allusions, leadership that is drawn from tradition, and moral lessons that are not confined to personal ambition. This incorporation of cultural identity into rhetorical strategies adds layers

of meaning and strengthens their intellectual independence in diverse cultural contexts (Yamamoto, 2020).

Therefore, the Modern Feminist Era is a pivotal time in the way Disney has linguistically and psycholinguistically portrayed female protagonists. With assertives, directives, commissives, and other sophisticated rhetorical devices, Elsa, Moana, and Raya redefine princesshood as equivalent to intellectual independence, leadership, and emotional strength. These narratives focus on the development of the self, ethical thinking, and conflict solving, and thus, they differentiate themselves from the previous works that were centered on romantic relationships. Linguistically, these heroines exercise agency not only in deed but also in mind and speech, and thus, they represent the most advanced female characters in the Disney universe.

Cross-Era Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of speech acts, linguistic patterns, and rhetorical strategies across the three Disney princess eras reveals a clear and deliberate evolution in the construction of female agency, shifting from emotional labor and romantic dependency to cognitive agency and intellectual independence. This section uses a comprehensive method to analyze changes in speech act frequencies, modal verb occurrence, pronoun utilization, and rhetorical devices to show how language displays shifting gender norms and power structures in Disney stories.

A thematic comparison of speech acts – assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives – demonstrates the progression of princesses' linguistic power. The Early Classic Era features expressives as the primary speech act category because characters mainly express emotions rather than control story developments. Snow White

together with Cinderella mainly produce speech acts that show reactions to their situations through statements like “I’m so sorry” or “Someday my prince will come,” because they demonstrate minimal control over their circumstances. The complete absence of directives and commissives in the data shows the characters cannot issue orders nor enter into binding commitments.

During the Renaissance Era, the number of assertives and commissives in the narrative grows while the characters begin to express their desires and mental states. Ariel sings “I want to be where the people are,” and Belle sings “I want adventure in the great wide somewhere,” which demonstrates the emergence of self-referential language to express personal awareness. Both characters maintain their speech within romantic frameworks, but assertive statements mainly target emotional or romantic objectives.

During the Modern Feminist Era, the speech act distribution undergoes substantial changes. The prevalence of assertives, together with directives and commissives, leads to high cognitive agency in this era. Elsa asserts “Here I stand,” and Moana declares “You will board my boat,” and Raya states “I’m going to fix this,” which showcase princesses who both reveal personal thoughts and lead others while making commitments to action. Directive speech acts increase in number to demonstrate princesses transitioning from emotional reactivity toward problem-solving and leadership, thus establishing their role as active agents in their stories.

Linguistic patterns and narrative agency show distinct modal verb trends throughout the periods according to the data presented in Table 4. The princesses of earlier times used modal verbs such as “might”, “could,” and “would” to show their powerless state and dependence on outside factors. Cinderella uses the phrase “If only” multiple times in her dialogue because she dreams rather than takes charge. During the Renaissance, princesses

used the assertive modal verb “will” to convey their desires and intentions. The statements still express aspirations instead of actual actions.

Modern princesses use certain modal verbs less frequently because they prefer to use statements that express certainty and control. The assertive future plans of Moana and Raya become evident through their statements “I will sail across the sea” and “I’m going to,” which show their internal control. These modal choices express linguistic certainty, which fits their position as leaders and problem-solvers, while creating an opposite effect from the passive dreaming of earlier characters.

The analysis of pronoun use further supports this trajectory. During the Early princess era, characters frequently employed third-person pronouns and neutral subject references as a way to prevent direct self-expression. The first-person singular pronoun “I” becomes a common expression in Renaissance heroines who use it to state their desires and thoughts, although these statements frequently focus on romantic aspirations. The Modern Era shows “I” as a standard expression that demonstrates both personal independence and identity development. Through repeated statements of “I am Moana of Motunui,” Moana creates a performative declaration that claims both space and power to establish her position as a cognitive and moral agent.

Rhetorical strategies also evolve significantly. The princesses of the Classic era express their emotions through appeals while maintaining polite submissions, which prevent confrontational situations. During the Renaissance Era, Belle and other heroines use irony and sarcasm to express their intellectual independence as they reject Gaston’s advances. The rhetoric of modern princesses includes problem-solving along with metaphorical reframing and leadership assertions. Elsa transforms “cold” into power, and Moana discusses terms with

Maui, and Raya transforms trust relationships through sophisticated rhetorical strategies, which indicate advanced cognitive processing.

The power relations between characters experience fundamental changes through these developments. The Classic Era establishes princesses who function as emotional caregivers while performing emotional work, but they have little control over their life course. During the Renaissance era, romantic goals limited the growing resistance, yet women gained occasional linguistic power. Contemporary princesses demonstrate complete cognitive agency since they lead quests and solve intricate problems while using their words and actions to build their domains.

The greatest transformation occurs when characters evolve from pursuing romantic objectives to achieving personal growth. Snow White and Ariel base their success on romantic fulfillment, yet Elsa, Moana, and Raya focus on leadership and community restoration, and personal identity development. The modern narratives show no romantic discourse, which makes way for goal-oriented dialogue that focuses on moral and communal concerns.

The linguistic construction of Disney's current princesses demonstrates their development into independent individuals who display resilience and empowerment. The shift from emotional expression to cognitive problem-solving and leadership demonstrates a fundamental transformation in how popular media defines femininity through language.

Kazakhstani Context and Global Media Influence

This global evolution in linguistic representations of female agency takes on particular significance in Kazakhstan. Local media continues to portray women largely within traditional gender roles, emphasizing family, humility, and supportiveness over independence and

leadership (Baskynbayeva et al., 2024). Animated content such as “Zhumbaksai okigasy” centers on male protagonists, reinforcing a lack of local female-led narratives.”

“In this vacuum, Disney princesses, especially characters like Moana, Elsa, and Raya, have become primary reference points for girls in Kazakhstan. However, localized interpretations often adapt these empowered figures to fit existing cultural norms. For instance, viewer comments on platforms like YouTube and TikTok frequently praise these characters for their balance between strength and kindness, reflecting a preference for relational harmony alongside autonomy (Zhabayeva, 2020).”

“While these narratives introduce possibilities for cognitive and moral leadership, the softening of assertive language in Kazakh translations and cultural expectations can dilute the feminist potential of these figures (Astana Times, 2021). The influence of Disney princesses, therefore, represents both an opportunity and a challenge for gender socialization in Kazakhstan.

Intersectional Analysis

The intersectional analysis based on Crenshaw’s (1989) overlapping identities shows that modern Disney princesses in *Moana* (Walt Disney Productions, 2016) and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (Walt Disney Productions, 2021) demonstrate how race, cultural heritage, and class become embedded in their language and rhetorical strategies. These characters differ from their white predecessors because their unique cultural backgrounds shape their language, which affects how they construct agency, leadership, and identity.

The story of *Moana* includes numerous references to Polynesian cultural values, which emphasize communal responsibility, ancestral heritage, and natural harmony. The narrative uses collective pronouns like “we” and statements about “We were voyagers” to express a

perspective that focuses on group identity instead of individual romantic ambitions. The language of earlier princesses focused on personal wants, whereas their self-referential speech differed from the language used by these new characters. The rhetorical strategies of Moana demonstrate psycholinguistic moral reasoning, which emphasizes cultural pride and responsibility to establish leadership as a communal practice (Yamamoto, 2020).

The linguistic methods Raya uses in *Raya and the Last Dragon* reflect Southeast Asian cultural values about trust, unity, and survival. The conditional sentence “Maybe the world’s broken because you don’t trust anyone” presents moral challenges through cultural values that emphasize healing as a collective effort. Raya’s story eliminates romantic elements to focus on moral decision-making and complex problem-solving which demonstrates how race and cultural identity broaden the definition of intellectual independence in Disney productions (Al-Yasin & Rabab’ah, 2021).

These contemporary narratives introduce class differences through subtle plot elements. The leadership positions Moana and Raya hold in their communities grant them linguistic authority to lead and negotiate, which previous Disney characters like Cinderella lacked. Their speech contains confident statements, certain declarations, and moral authority, which demonstrates how social status and class power impact rhetorical authority.

The worldwide reach of Disney creates complexities in how these representations are received. The culturally authentic leadership displayed by Moana and Raya in non-Western societies, including Kazakhstan, presents alternative feminine roles that challenge traditional gender expectations in these regions. Through these narratives, female agency appears as culturally valid leadership and resilience instead of rebellious behavior, which challenges traditional norms (Yamamoto, 2020).

Discussion

This chapter presents the interpretation of the study's findings and relates them to the research aim, objectives, and the theoretical frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), psycholinguistics, and intersectionality. Goes beyond description to critically assess how language patterns, speech acts, and rhetorical strategies that Disney princesses use to reflect changing gender norms and to construct intellectual independence and agency. The study was designed to investigate how female intellectual independence is linguistically represented in Disney princess narratives across various eras. These research questions were prompted by this exploration.

The first research question was to identify what linguistic patterns and speech acts characterize Disney princesses throughout various eras. As the findings showed, the Early Classic Era (1937-1950) was ruled by expressives and conditional statements, and princesses like Snow White and Cinderella had low agency. Their language also manifested emotional labour, compliance, and the necessity of outside rescue, mainly by male characters or by magical means. This linguistic passivity was in accord with the cultural norms of the time, which defined the role of women through emotional expression and romantic dependence.

The Renaissance Era (1989-1991) showed a gradual change. Assertives and self-referential statements were used more often in the dialogues of characters like Ariel and Belle, which showed the beginning of cognitive independence. However, the results of the study showed that while these princesses were curious and intelligent, their linguistic agency was restricted by stories that continued to center on the romantic plot. This supported the idea that whilst the speech patterns were evolving, they were still constrained by gender norms that limited autonomy for women.

In the Modern Feminist Era (2013–2021), the findings showed a clear linguistic change. Princesses like Elsa, Moana, and Raya used assertives, directives, and commissives to the full extent of their cognitive and moral agency. Their language was also reflective of leadership, problem solving, and emotional strength, with romance either reduced to the minimum or completely absent from the stories. This showed that in recent narratives, Disney princesses have become autonomous leaders rather than romantic objects, a significant shift from the earlier portrayals.

The second research question investigated how power relations in dialogues are depicted as changing over time to portray women as independent thinkers. The findings showed a significant change in the power relations that are encoded in language. In the Classic Era, power was held by external forces, and princesses did emotional labour without being able to control the narrative they were telling. However, the Renaissance Era brought linguistic resistance into moments, with Belle's sarcasm and assertiveness. But real power dynamics changed most dramatically in the Modern Era, when princesses not only broke social conventions but also created their worlds using speech acts, from commands to moral reframing and problem-solving rhetoric. Characters like Moana not only led quests independently but also made independent decisions, which showed complete narrative and linguistic empowerment.

The third research question focused on how intersectionality, including race and cultural identity, impacts language use and rhetorical strategies in modern Disney princesses. The results also revealed how cultural heritage, race, and communal values are represented in the speeches of Moana and Raya. For instance, Moana frequently uses collective pronouns like "we", and her moral reasoning is based on Polynesian values. Likewise, Raya's

conditional statements and her negotiation of trust are consistent with Southeast Asian cultural norms. Each is intellectually independent not only as an individual but as a leader of her people, and they present more intricate depictions of female agency than do earlier, Eurocentric narratives.

The analysis was conducted using Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework to examine power relations and societal ideologies in Disney princess dialogues. The findings of the study showed that shifts in linguistic patterns are in tune with changing cultural expectations of femininity and leadership. The psycholinguistic analysis also helped to understand the cognitive processing, emotional resilience, and moral reasoning of these characters and how language is both a reflection and a creator of internal states. Intersectionality was important in adding one more important layer to the analysis to see how race, class, and cultural identity affect rhetorical strategies and agency.

In summary, the discussion confirms that Disney princess narratives have undergone a profound linguistic and rhetorical transformation. The shift from emotional expressiveness and romantic dependency to cognitive agency and leadership is indicative of broader socio-cultural shifts in the representation of gender. The next sections will explore these findings in more detail, link them to existing scholarship, and discuss their implications for media representation and global gender perceptions, especially in non-Western contexts such as Kazakhstan, where the influence of Western media on traditional gender norms is widespread.

Interpretation of Key Findings

Evolution of Linguistic Patterns and Speech Acts

The first research objective was to explore how linguistic structures and speech functions change through Disney princess films to portray cognitive and behavioral autonomy

of women. The results clearly show a progressive change in the use and role of speech acts from the use of emotionally oriented language (expressives) in the Early Classic Era to the use of assertive, directive, and commissive speech in the Modern Feminist Era.

In the Early Classic Era, Snow White and Cinderella, and others used expressives and conditional statements, which showed a low level of agency. They exchange dialogues such as Snow White's "Oh, I'm so sorry!" and Cinderella's "A dream is a wish your heart makes." This is in concordance with their passive narrative roles and dependence on external saviors as depicted in Table 1.

However, the Renaissance Era introduced some rather subtle but important changes. Ariel and Belle, however, exhibited increasing levels of intellectual curiosity and self-awareness through the use of assertives such as "I wish to be where the people are" and "I wish for something more than this provincial life" (See Table 2). These statements reflect the emerging agency as the characters are able to express their own wants and needs and begin to question the roles that have been assigned to them. The increase in the usage of self-referential language and cognitive verbs such as 'I think' or 'I know' shows the beginning of a linguistic shift. But, like the findings showed, romantic happiness was still the center of these stories, which prevented them from fully expressing their independence.

The Modern Feminist Era finished this progression, as princesses like Elsa, Moana, and Raya used assertives, directives, and commissives to a heavy extent. The language of declarative, future-oriented speech acts such as Elsa's "Here I stand," Moana's "You will board my boat," and Raya's "I'm going to fix this" are also employed to express internal states, but also to act upon one's world (See Table 3). The princesses are no longer dependent on outside influences; they seize control of the situation and lead the way.

The cumulative effect of this shift is visualized in Table 4, which compares the eras' frequencies. It shows a decrease in emotional expressives and conditionality and an increase in speech acts related to decision making and problem solving. This evolution is a direct reflection of how female characters in Disney films have gone from being passive objects of desire to being autonomous agents in their own stories. These shifts in speech acts are linguistic proof of increasing levels of female agency, intellectual independence, and narrative power.

Shifts in Power Dynamics and Narrative Agency

The second research objective was to explore how power relations in dialogue shift across the eras, and how this mirrors shifting perceptions of female agency and intellectual independence. Using Fairclough's (1995) concept of power relations as being embedded in discourse, the findings indicate a clear redistribution of narrative power.

In the Classic Era, power was physically and verbally exercised by male characters or antagonists. Snow White and Cinderella were also linguistically passive, they could not take charge of other people. They had no directives and assertives, which made them to be at the lowest rank in the narrative hierarchy. The conversations were controlled by authority figures like the Queen or Cinderella's stepmother through commands and explicit directives while sustaining gender roles (See Table 1).

The Renaissance Era presented brief scenes of linguistic resistance and negotiation. For instance, Belle also argued with Gaston, saying, "I'm sorry, Gaston, but I'm not going to dinner." Although such instances denote the increasing level of autonomy, it was still not the rule. The general story still upheld men's control of women, because women's liberation was conditional on romantic comedy resolutions (See Table 2).

In the Modern Feminist Era, there was a significant transformation. Princesses not only took part in the discourses and, in some cases, they determined what happened in the narratives. The use of assertives and directives by Elsa and Moana made the two female characters less submissive and more powerful in their roles as leaders and problem solvers. Raya's use of moral framing in statements like 'Maybe the world's broken because you don't trust anyone' is an example of how the modern princesses use discourse to exercise moral authority, challenge social norms, and discourse with other characters (See Table 3).

This change supports Fairclough's claim that power is exercised and challenged in discourse. The modern princesses take the narrative, make the decisions, and carry out the cognitive and moral work that was previously done by male characters. As shown in Table 4, their speech acts move from the purely emotional to the strategic leadership, which reflects a broader cultural shift towards recognizing female agency and intellectual capacity.

Rhetorical Strategies and Psycholinguistic Markers

The third research objective was to explore how rhetorical strategies and psycholinguistic markers such as self-referential language, metaphorical reframing, and leadership assertions are used in portraying intellectual independence. This analysis focuses on the characters' internal cognitive processes and emotional resilience, and develops them as more complex protagonists.

In the Early Classic Era, rhetorical strategies were minimal. Snow White and Cinderella both employed hedging, apologies, and indirect requests, which revealed their emotional labor but not their intellectual engagement. They had no cognitive verbs, self-referential assertions, or problem-solving discourse, implying limited mental processing or leadership potential (see Table 1).

Ariel and Belle in the Renaissance Era exhibited increasing psycholinguistic complexity. Belle's repeated self-references and the use of cognitive verbs such as "think" and "know" demonstrated intellectual desire and internal reflection. Her reading habit, of course, is a symbol of cognitive agency. Furthermore, sarcasm and irony, such as Belle's conversations with Gaston, were some of the advanced rhetorical strategies that subverted the patriarchal norms in a subtle way (see Table 2).

In the Modern Feminist Era, these strategies were at their highest level. "Let It Go" by Elsa is a perfect example of rhetorical and psycholinguistic analysis. The song changes the negative meaning of the concepts of isolation and coldness to the positive concepts of liberation and might. Moana's repeated line, "I am Moana of Motunui," is a declarative speech act and a performative assertion of identity, heritage, and leadership. The language used by Raya is reflective and conditional, which shows moral reasoning and critical thinking.

Furthermore, the modern princesses employ problem-solving discourse, hypothetical reasoning, and metaphorical framing, which are the hallmarks of the sophisticated psycholinguistic processing. These strategies are illustrated in Table 3 and summarised in Table 4, through which the modern heroines manifest emotional strength, cognitive self-determination, and moral power. They don't only tell their stories but also tell them critically, that is, in relation to their environments, audiences, and themselves.

This is a significant step from the earlier depictions and is in sync with the present day feminism, where female characters are not depicted as emotionally charged or as having romantic interests, but as intelligent, decisive, and morally sound characters.

Therefore, the analysis of the results for the three objectives shows that the language used to portray princesses in Disney productions has changed from emotional to cognitive

control. Each era represents changes in the society, and the present stories unveil multifaceted female characters who take the lead, think, and transform the Disney princess archetype. The integration of Fairclough's CDA, psycholinguistic markers, and intersectionality has offered a solid tool for analyzing this change in language as well as in cultural representation.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The results of this study are in accordance with and build on the previous research findings discussed above, including the studies by Towbin et al. (2004), Wiersma (2000), Davis (2006), and Hine et al. (2018). The first research question was about how language patterns manifest the concept of female agency, and the results agreed with Towbin et al. (2004) that early Disney princesses were created to maintain conventional gender roles. In both Snow White and Cinderella, language was mainly emotional and submissive, as verified by Wiersma (2000), who stated that these characters represented the conventional female gender roles of their era. Standard dialogues of expressive speech acts, frequent apologies, and romantic dreams were central to their dialogues, as supported by the claim that classic princesses had no narrative and linguistic agency.

However, this study brings a psycholinguistic level to the discussion that has not been investigated in previous studies. This thesis goes beyond content analysis and applies speech act analysis to the data, and examines cognitive verbs. The result of this is that this paper has not fully captured Cognitive agency linguistically, as Towbin et al. (2004) or Wiersma (2000) did not fully address this. For instance, while other scholars identified Belle's love of reading as a narrative trait, this study shows how her speech acts, especially her cognitive verbs like "think" and "know," construct her intellectual independence (Davis, 2006). Therefore, this

research supports Davis's findings but goes further to explain the psychological and linguistic processes that underpin them.

The findings also closely match those of Hine et al. (2018), who claimed that contemporary princesses such as Moana depict a new kind of leadership and empowerment. Indeed, the analysis reveals that assertives, directives, and commissives are the prevailing types of modern princess discourse, which align with the characters' inner cognitive processes and their leadership positions. However, this thesis goes beyond Hine's findings by explaining how particular speech acts and psycholinguistic markers like declaratives and metaphorical reframing create these traits linguistically and psychologically.

Furthermore, where previous research had focused primarily on gender representation, this thesis draws on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1995) and psycholinguistic frameworks to offer a richer, layered account of how power, cognition, and emotional resilience are infused into dialogue. This contribution helps to address a gap in the scholarship by shifting the attention away from what princesses do to how they think and speak, so that language is considered both as the product and producer of female agency.

In sum, the study supports the linear progression that Towbin et al. (2004) and Davis (2006) reported but contributes new insights into the psycholinguistic construction of female intellectual independence, a perspective that has not been explored in the Disney princess literature.

Intersectionality and Cultural Context Discussion

An additional layer that has emerged from the intersectional analysis is the one that is not always addressed within the framework of mainstream Disney scholarship: the role of race, cultural identity, and class in the increasing use of linguistic strategies and agency,

especially in the non-Western princess narratives such as *Moana* (Walt Disney Productions, 2016) and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (Walt Disney Productions, 2021). This is in line with Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality that explains how gender, race, and cultural identity simultaneously shape experiences and representations.

Linguistic patterns of *Moana* and *Raya* show how cultural rhetoric and communal values redefine agency. Whereas the early princesses had personal romantic objectives for their journeys, *Moana* is prone to employ collective pronouns, whose identity is grounded in Polynesian heritage and communal responsibility: "We were voyagers." In the same manner, *Raya* employs rhetorical strategies that are entrenched in the culture of Southeast Asia, such as moral reframing of trust and unity. Her line, "Maybe the world's broken because you don't trust anyone," presents a complex moral reasoning that has been influenced by cultural trauma and collective healing.

These findings build on Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah's (2021) claim that modern Disney narratives are trying to expand the representations of femininity. This thesis shows that this variety is not only a matter of story but also of language, the characters' speech acts, and their rhetorical strategies. They do not just embody their cultures; their language models culturally informed worldviews where leadership is a group activity and moral dilemmas are solved by the collective reason, not by individualistic heroism.

Significantly, this linguistic-cultural connection has important consequences for non-Western contexts such as Kazakhstan. In a society where traditional gender roles are still active, mass media products, including Disney films, can either support or go against local perceptions. *Moana* and *Raya* present different versions of a strong female character who is not only a leader, but also a morally wise and eager learner, and not just a love interest. They

can indeed serve as potential role models for local audiences to rethink the definition of femininity as a combination of strength, tenacity, and cognitive autonomy, violating the patriarchal stereotypes still prevalent in Central Asia.

On the other hand, there is a concern about cultural homogenization related to the global influence of Disney. While Moana and Raya embrace the non-Western identities, they embrace them within the Disney's narrative confines, which may not always result in a fully authentic cultural portrayal. Hence, these films enable and at the same time perpetuate the local gender discourses in such non-Western societies as Kazakhstan.

The intersectional analysis reveals that race, culture, and class are now central to how Disney princesses are linguistically and narratively constructed. Exemplifying a cultural and intellectual shift away from traditional Disney princess tropes, Moana and Raya star culturally grounded, intellectually independent heroines whose stories transcend personal romance and grapple with complex social and moral issues. This progression aligns with global feminist shifts and provides valuable, nuanced representations for audiences worldwide, including in Kazakhstan.

Implications of the Findings

This is because the consequences of this study are significant and can be applied across all fields of knowledge, especially in the construction of female agency in Disney princess stories and the use of language in shaping cultural perceptions.

This research also builds on previous studies that explored how media, particularly global brands like Disney, is remolding the portrayal of women in the stories they tell. The change in the linguistic pattern from passive expressives to assertives and directives shows a change in the way female characters are created by global media. They are not just cannon

fodders for emotional labour or romantic relationships; today's princesses, like Moana and Raya, are the leaders with cognitive control. This change and, perhaps, the change of the world around us show that cultural trends have begun to acknowledge women's leadership, moral reasoning, and problem-solving as the main themes of the stories. Therefore, as a social institution, media continues to play a significant role in shaping cultural perceptions, and these changes show that Disney princesses are no longer portrayed as objects of beauty or romance, but as intelligent and morally upright characters.

To the field of gender studies, the research has provided solid evidence of the continuing process of decoupling of female agency from romantic satisfaction. Classic Disney stories had presented marriage or romantic love as the highest achievement for women. But the Modern Feminist Era films explored in here do so as well: What was once considered traditionally feminine – leadership, emotional resilience, and cognitive independence – have now become the new standards of femininity, which coincides with the contemporary feminist goals of self-actualization, community leadership, and moral agency as valid female goals. The absence of romantic subplots in Moana and Raya, however, presents a new paradigm in which a woman's narrative does not depend on the attention of a man for it to be complete.

From a psycholinguistic point of view, this study reveals how language is a means of building up intellectual independence. Using speech acts, self-referential language, and metaphorical reframing as an analytical tool, the research establishes that the cognitive processes and emotional resilience of female characters are directly intertwined with their language choices. Such findings are important for education and media literacy programs to understand how dialogue and rhetorical strategies in media contribute to the construction of intelligence, leadership, and gender roles. For the educators, these findings raise the

possibility of using critical discourse analysis and psycholinguistics as a way of teaching them through popular media, so that students can learn to identify how language represents and creates societal norms.

The findings also have implications for real life as for future Disney productions and global media literacy initiatives. Since the audiences now desire diverse and empowered female characters, Disney and other like studios can embrace these linguistic strategies to create more princesses with complex cognitive and moral agency. Also, media literacy programs, particularly in non-Western contexts, can use these narratives to subvert conventional gender roles and encourage young viewers to think critically about how language creates identity and agency.

Recommendations for Future Research

Classic Disney princess films like *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid* have been recently adapted into live action and present rich material for examining whether the notions of agency, linguistic, and psycholinguistic have changed or stayed the same in the remakes. Research could be useful to see how much or how little contemporary values are incorporated into the remakes of the films.

Future research could turn the lens around to examine the language patterns and rhetorical strategies of male characters. This would provide a more complete view of gender roles in Disney stories and would allow us to determine if male characters also demonstrate the same shifts in cognitive and emotional sophistication with time.

Since Disney is an international company, audience analysis in Kazakhstan or any other non-Western country(ies) would be relevant. Through surveys or interviews, young viewers' perceptions of the agency and leadership of the modern princesses can be studied,

and the impact of such narratives on the prevailing gender roles, aspirations, and attitudes of young consumers can be explored.

Lastly, a quantitative, corpus-based psycholinguistic analysis could be used to build on this research. Using larger sets of Disney film scripts, frequencies of speech acts, cognitive verbs, and rhetorical strategies can be statistically measured, thus providing empirical evidence for the trends identified in this study and extending the psycholinguistic analysis to media studies.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Disney princess stories build up girls' intellectual independence and agency through language, speech acts, and rhetorical devices. The research thus contributes a new methodological approach to the existing literature by also adopting CA, psycholinguistic approaches, and intersectionality to the analysis. Importantly, the present study presents a psycholinguistic analysis which has been underemphasized in previous research and sets these results in a non-Western context, with possible implications for other societies, including Kazakhstan.

The research has successfully established a distinct progression in the linguistic depiction of Disney princesses across the last three decades. The results showed a transition from emotional work and romantic dependence to intellectual autonomy, ethical reasoning, and management. Speech acts had also changed from expressives and conditionals to assertives, directives, and commissives, which defined the new version of femininity in global media. The power relations in the dialogues also changed; the latest princesses are more controlling in the story and have more cognitive power, which reflects changing cultural norms regarding gender.

Furthermore, the intersectional analysis revealed increasing race, class, and cultural identity as influential in contemporary narratives. Not only do princesses like Moana and Raya exhibit individual leadership, but they also exhibit communal values that are rooted in their cultural heritage, offering more diverse and complex models of female agency than we have seen before. This is a significant step forward in global media's ability to represent multifaceted female protagonists, and one that is already resonating with audiences in non-Western contexts.

As with any research, this study is not without certain limitations, which are inherent to qualitative research. The analysis is interpretative, which may well be subjective, and the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population due to the small sample size of six films. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on linguistic patterns, with the visualization of signs and the audience's reaction being outside the scope of the study.

Future research can be extended to live-action remakes of Disney princess films to see if the same trend holds true for language change. An analysis of male characters' speech would also give a more accurate picture of gender roles. Moreover, audience reception studies – especially in Kazakhstan – could give useful information on how the global media impacts local gender norms. Finally, a large-scale psycholinguistic corpus analysis could strengthen this paper's qualitative findings with quantitative evidence.

Finally, this research emphasises the importance of language in the construction of female agency in global media narratives. The modern Disney princesses linguistically claim their intellectual independence and leadership by moving away from the traditional depictions of emotional expressiveness and romantic goals. This evolution is not only important for media and gender studies or for Western countries – for global audiences, especially in non-

Western societies, these narratives can serve as a challenge and means to reshape gender ideologies. Language, as this study shows, is still a means of redefining what it means to be a female protagonist in contemporary storytelling.

The psycholinguistic portrayals show significant differences from female characters in Kazakh animation and folklore. Kazakh cultural narratives show family honor and communal harmony and humility, but they do not show women as active agents who make decisions independently. The female characters in *Er Tostik*, *Muzbalak*, and *Karlygash Nesting Again* show resilience through their language, which remains submissive and emotional instead of strategic and commanding. The difference between these narratives shows how global stories can transform traditional patriarchal societies of post-Soviet Kazakhstan into more empowered female cultures.

The redefinition holds special importance for non-Western societies, including Kazakhstan. The psycholinguistic patterns in Disney narratives serve as both a reference point and a cultural reflection tool for local media, which currently lacks strong female voices. The analysis of imported narratives concerning Kazakhstani traditional values provides essential knowledge for educators, media producers, and gender advocates who want to develop balanced, diverse role models for future generations.

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Appendix 1

Cartoon and Year	Context	Example Quote	Linguistic Code / Strategy	Emerging Theme	Psycholinguistic / Power Interpretation
Snow White (1937)	The Great Depression time in 1930s/ Patriarchy/ The idealised domesticity	<i>“I’m awfully sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”</i>	Apology / Politeness / Hedging	Passive Femininity / Emotional Labor	Submissive, overly polite language reinforces traditional femininity. Low self-assertion.
		<i>“Someday my prince will come.”</i>	Future Conditional / Romantic Dream Motif	Romantic Dependency / Waiting Trope	Future hope anchored in male rescue. Power remains external. No self-driven action.
		<i>“I’m wishing for the one I love – to find me today.”</i>	Wishful Thinking / External Rescue	External Validation / Love as Goal	Language frames female success as being found or chosen, reinforcing passivity and societal ideals of love as destiny.
Cinderella (1950)	Post-WWII / Women pushed back into domestic roles	<i>“They can’t order me to stop dreaming.”</i>	Conditional / Dream Motif	Romantic Dependency / Soft Resistance	Minimal assertion. Dreaming replaces action. Conditionals express lack of control over reality.
		<i>“If you’d lost all your faith, I couldn’t be here.”</i>	Conditional / Magical Validation	External Validation / Magical Rescue	Cinderella’s agency outsourced to Fairy Godmother — personal power replaced by supernatural intervention.
		<i>“Oh, it’s a lovely night.”</i>	Observational / Emotional Softness	Emotional Labor / Gratitude	Language reflects gratitude for simple pleasures; stays within emotional/relational sphere rather than self-assertion.

Table 1. Thematic and Psycholinguistic Analysis – Early Classic Era (1937–1950)

Appendix 2

Cartoon and Year	Context	Example Quote	Linguistic Code / Strategy	Emerging Theme	Psycholinguistic / Power Interpretation
The Little Mermaid (1989)	1980s: During this time individualism started to rise but romance remained the main focus.	<i>“I want to be where the people are.”</i>	Aspirational / Self-Referential / Declarative	Emerging Agency / Curiosity / Desire for Change	Use of “I want” signals internal desire, marks the shift toward personal agency — but goal is still romantic/relational validation.
		<i>“Daddy, I love him!”</i>	Emotional Appeal / Conflict Framing	Emotional Dependency / Familial Conflict	Emotional language overrides rational argument. The character maintains his power through control of the male figure represented by the father and the prince.
		<i>“What would I give if I could live out of these waters?”</i>	Hypothetical / Dream-like Future Thinking	Desire for Autonomy / Escape	Reflects longing for change, but expressed through hypothetical mode , showing unfulfilled agency.
Beauty and the Beast (1991)	During the early 1990s feminist movements expanded while women pursued intellectual independence.	<i>“I want adventure in the great wide somewhere.”</i>	Declarative / Aspirational / Intellectual Desire	Intellectual Independence / Self-Discovery	Strong personal goal-setting and cognitive engagement. The character Belle expresses her need for adventure beyond domestic life which demonstrates the growing independence of women.
		<i>“I just don’t deserve you.” (to Gaston)</i>	Sarcasm / Irony / Deflection	Rejection of Patriarchy / Critical Thinking	Belle uses sarcasm to reject Gaston’s advances. Linguistic resistance represents cognitive agency and control over relational dynamics.
		<i>“He’s no monster Gaston; you are!”</i>	Accusation / Moral Judgment / Reversal	Moral Reasoning / Assertive Agency	Belle reverses social narrative, displays moral agency. The character demonstrates advanced cognitive independence because she

					evaluates situations independently from social norms.
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Table 2. Thematic and Psycholinguistic Analysis – Renaissance Era (1989–1991)

Appendix 3

Cartoon and Year	Context	Example Quote	Linguistic Code / Strategy	Emerging Theme	Psycholinguistic / Power Interpretation
Frozen (2013)	Post-2010s global feminism / Individual empowerment / Rejection of romance tropes	<i>“Here I stand, and here I’ll stay.”</i>	Declarative / Self-affirmation / Finality	Autonomous Identity / Emotional Independence	Powerful internal locus of control. Linguistic rejection of external judgment. Complete cognitive and emotional agency.
		<i>“The cold never bothered me anyway.”</i>	Metaphor / Emotional Detachment / Resilience	Emotional Strength / Resilience	Metaphoric language reframes social isolation into personal strength. Psychological independence is fully realized.
		<i>“You can’t marry a man you just met.”</i>	Rational Rejection / Critical Thinking	Rejection of Romantic Trope / Logic over Emotion	Breaks the historic romantic framework with logic-driven language. Assertive cognitive processing of relational decisions.
Moana (2016)	Focus on leadership, heritage, and self-identity / Minimal romance	<i>“I am Moana of Motunui.”</i>	Declarative Identity Claim / Leadership Assertion	Leadership / Communal Responsibility	Strong declarative reinforces leadership, self-definition, and agency. Centers identity in culture and duty, not romance.
		<i>“You will board my boat, sail across the sea, and restore the heart.”</i>	Directive Speech / Problem-solving Rhetoric	Problem-solving / Commanding Leadership	Proactive, task-oriented language. Demonstrates cognitive agency and independence, shifting female role from follower to decision-maker.
		<i>“The ocean chose me.”</i>	Passive to Active / Reframing	Destiny and Choice Reframed	Reflects complex agency – initial framing as 'chosen,' but later reclaims personal ownership of the mission.

Raya (2021)	Post #MeToo, collective feminism / Trust, unity, and relational growth	<i>“The world’s broken. You can’t trust anyone.”</i>	Realist / Strategic Observation	Collective Agency / Realism	Language acknowledges broken systems. Moves female speech from emotional dependency to analytical reasoning.
		<i>“Maybe it’s broken because you don’t trust anyone.”</i>	Reframing / Collaborative Rhetoric	Relational Growth / Empathy	Language of reframing promotes emotional intelligence and shared responsibility. Highlights the shift to collective problem-solving.
		<i>“I’m not like Namaari. I’m going to make this right.”</i>	Moral Judgment / Declarative Responsibility	Personal Accountability / Moral Agency	Raya takes ownership of mistakes, marking full intellectual and emotional independence — morality-driven rather than romance-driven.

Table 3. Thematic and Psycholinguistic Analysis – Modern Feminist Era (2013–2021)

Appendix 4

Feature	Early Classic Era	Renaissance Era	Modern Feminist Era
Dominant Speech Acts	Expressives, Conditionals	Assertives emerging, still many expressives	Assertives, Directives, Commissives dominant
Pronoun Usage	Limited first-person, mostly third-person	Rise in self-referential “I” statements	Strong, repeated use of “I” and “we”
Modal Verbs	“Might”, “Could”, “If only” (tentative)	Some “will”, but still aspirational	“I will”, “I’m going to” (high certainty)
Rhetorical Strategies	Hedging, emotional appeals	Sarcasm, irony, self-reflection	Problem-solving, metaphorical reframing
Narrative Agency	Low, external dependency	Growing, but tied to romance	High, focused on leadership and problem-solving

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Linguistic Patterns and Agency across Disney Princess Eras