

South Asian Representation on Disney Channel: A Corpus-Informed Sociolinguistic Content Analysis on Disney Channel Live-Action Comedy Shows and Their Dialogues

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May 2026

Abstract

Despite the vast scholarship on The Walt Disney Company, subsidiaries of the conglomerate such as Disney Channel remain understudied, especially regarding the role of language. Both ethnicity-oriented and ethnolinguistic discussions on Disney subsidiaries lack, including those surrounding South Asian (SA) representation, which may be attributed to exiguous SA representation in Disney televisual communication at large. I address this composite research lacuna by quantifying the amount of SA representation in the most popular Disney Channel comedy shows from 2000-2021, analysing SA characterisation, and examining synchronic and diachronic change. This was achieved by constructing a specialised corpus containing lines of SA characters in selected episodes. I provide a quantitative account enhanced by a qualitative exploration, which reveals a sheer absence of SA lead characters with 12/14 minor characters conforming to existing SA stereotypes. 5/14 adhered to an avaricious stereotype of SAs that was reinforced by South Asian English (SAE) in 80% of characters. Other personality traits such as deception and intelligence and/or nerdiness were also interweaved. However, recent hyphenated SA American depictions, although are broadly rooted in SA stereotypes, do not associate SAE with specific characteristics. My project is rooted in a media modified version of Social Identity Theory to highlight the importance and potential impacts of televisual media representations of ethnicity, both on the self-identities of young SAs growing up in the Western diaspora and non-SAs, whose self-esteems may be increased through the non-identification of the, sometimes negatively, othered SAs. My findings shed light on the use of SAE as a racialising trope on Disney Channel to associate SAE speakers with particular dispositions. This project adds to the current state of knowledge on Disney Channel's tendencies to illustrate ethnicity and is one of the first attempts in the study of Disney Channel to analyse ethnicity through a linguistic lens.

Keywords Disney Channel, ethnicity, South Asian (SA); South Asian English (SAE), SA representation, stereotypes

Queen Mary's OPAL #58

Occasional Papers Advancing Linguistics

I am grateful to my supervisor, Agnieszka Lyons, for her guidance throughout my undergraduate degree and writing this dissertation, as well as to the linguistics department at Queen Mary, University of London. This paper would not have been possible without the exceptionally high-quality and supportive teaching that I have been lucky enough to encounter at Queen Mary. I also thank Joe Sutliff Sanders and Zoe Jaques at the University of Cambridge for their judgements on my earlier dissertation ideas and for suggesting a more unique angle to the study of Disney.

1. Introduction

The media is an agent of socialisation (Gluszek & Hansen 2013) that holds important pedagogic value by perpetuating stereotypes (Bleichenbacher, 2008; Bucholtz, 2011; Higgins & Furukawa, 2012), thereby influencing the worldviews and ideologies of media consumers (Morgan, 2009), especially for children due to their impressionableness (Day, 1980; Dobrow and Gidney, 1998; Hensch, 2016; Lippi-Green, 1997). There has been plenty of research on the role of language in characterisation in televisual communication and stereotype reinforcement, which instils language attitudes in viewers as a result (Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink, 2016; Lippi-Green, 1997; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2013). Scholars such as Shohat and Stam (2014) and Stuart-Smith (2011) have urged for more attention to linguistic film elements, including the accents and dialects of characters and more diverse foci in different genres and formats, which are concerns that this project fulfils.

Literature has shown that South Asians (SA)² tended to be represented with SA accents in mainstream televisual media (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010; Thakore, 2013), which became “a cultural object, such as a hairstyle or a piece of clothing [...] that adds to the overall picture” (Davé, 2013, p. 2). SA stereotypes are highly multifaceted (Davé, 2013; Jiwaani, 1988; Menon, 2010; Ramasubramanian, 2005; Thakore, 2013). However, Davé (2013) and Nadal (2019) highlight that there was once little SA representation in mainstream media, which forms grounds for an extension of this marginalisation to children’s television.

A mass of existing scholarship on children’s television focuses on The Walt Disney Company’s portrayals and stereotyping of ethnicities through language, such as by presenting African American English (AAE) speakers as evil in *The Lion King* (Lippi-Green, 1997; Van Wormer & Juby, 2015) and Latino-accented speakers as physically and sexually violent criminals in *Oliver and Company* (Barnd, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2000; Martín-Rodríguez, 2000). However, to my knowledge, there is an omission of SA-oriented research due to minimal SA representation in animated Disney films. Even when considering *The Jungle Book* (1967), a film based on an Indian feral child, a leading SA in the Disney princess franchise still lacks (Suryavanshi, 2022). This is evidenced in the animation work of the general public as SA youths collectively yearn for an inclusion of their community in Disney’s world (see Figure 1 and 2). “Growing up I searched for characters who mirrored the people in my community and reflected the values and aesthetics of the Other, in this case, African, Latino, Asian [...]” (Willetts, 2013, p. 9). More specifically, Menon (2010) asserted that “representations of South Asians in [mainstream] media [are] important to South Asian youth in the formation of their own identities, and to defining South Asian identity in general for mainstream Western audiences” (p. 51). Ethnic media representations and a lack thereof can thus affect the self-identity formations and self-concepts of young viewers (Day, 1980; Lippi-Green, 1997). It was only in 2022 that rumours of Disney’s first SA princess, one of the only missing ethnicities from the Disney princess franchise, were sparked (Basu, 2022) and is yet to be executed.

Recently, there has been a surge of research surrounding live-action remakes of traditional Disney films (for example, Ingrid, 2019; Rowe, 2022; Urke, 2019), in which discussions of SAs are also omitted, likely due to exiguous SA representation in the originals, with the exception of Naomi Scott from the live-action *Aladdin* remake. However, Scott has Indian and British heritage (IMDb, n.d.) even though the tale has Arabian and Middle Eastern origins, which sparked controversy (Gayathri, 2021).

² In this project, I use *SA* to refer to those with ethnic roots in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, or Nepal (Purkayastha, 2005).



Figure 1: Animations by the General Public Envisaging SA Inclusion in animated Disney films (Disney, 2023).

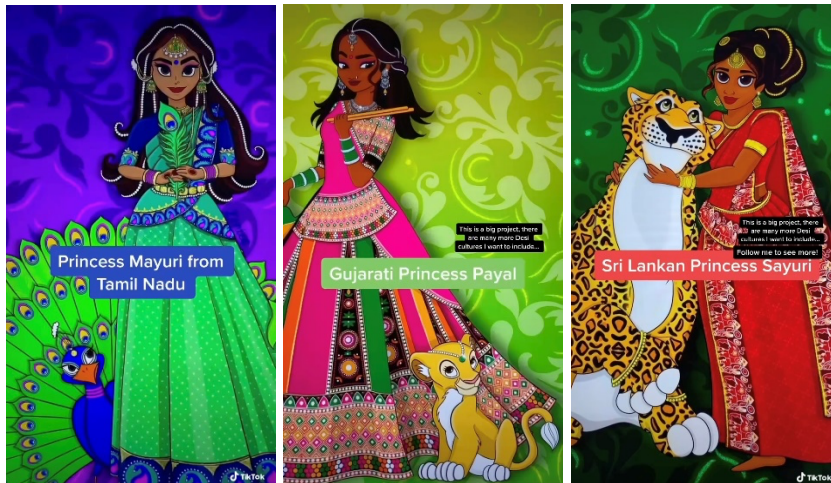


Figure 2: Drawings by the General Public Envisaging SA Inclusion in animated Disney films (ZenTee, 2021)

To examine whether the SA exclusion from animated Disney films extends to other children’s televisual media, I decided to focus on Disney Channel. This is because of its domestic and international prominence (Guttmann, 2024) and the underrepresentation of such Walt Disney subsidiaries in existing scholarship. Additionally, according to Blue (2017), there is a wealth of White starring Disney Channel representation with English and German descent, such as Miley Cyrus from *Hannah Montana* and Dylan and Cole Sprouse from *The Suite Life* sequels respectively. She pointed out that there is also Black and African American representation through Raven-Symoné from *That’s So Raven* and Chine Anne McClain from *A.N.T Farm* respectively; Chinese representation through Madison Hu from *Bizaardvark* and Peyton Elizabeth from *Andi Mack*; mixed-race representation through Zendaya from *K.C Undercover*; and mixed-ethnic representation through Selena Gomez, of Mexican and Italian ancestry, from *Wizards of Waverly Place* (Blue, 2017). This raises the question as to whether the oversight of SA representation, that was once discerned in mainstream media (Davé, 2013; Nadal, 2019) and currently recognised in animated Disney films, can also be seen on Disney Channel, hence my first research question: how much SA representation is there on Disney Channel shows?

The work of Sharma (2016) outlines a stereotypical instance of SA representation on Disney Channel through the portrayal of Ravi from *Jessie* as nerdy, socially awkward, and emasculated,

which is strengthened by an Indian English (IE) accent and dialect. This corresponds with stereotypical SA representations in the wider media (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010), giving rise to my second research question: how is SA identity portrayed on Disney Channel shows and how is this achieved through language? In many cases, SA English (SAE)³ is not the natural language variety of the actors/actresses (Sharma, 2016), which discloses its purposeful implementation as a racialising trope to create a sense of othering and enhance a caricatured perception of characters (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010). This, combined with my own observations of similar stereotypical SA portrayals on Disney Channel that have been exaggerated by SAE reveals the potential for a patterned linguistic distribution that has not been documented and deserves attention.

However, I have also observed that more recent Disney Channel programmes illustrate fused SA American identities, which is evident in characters' use of GAE. This corresponds with the abundance of literature that analyse hyphenated SA representations in the wider media (Nadal, 2019; Rajiva, 2021; Sharma, 2011; Thakore, 2013). This prompted my final research question: have portrayals of SA identity on Disney Channel shows changed over time?

This dissertation therefore fills a lacuna in both Disney and SA Studies with an important linguistic focus that could uncover a strategic crafting of SA characters to perpetuate SA stereotypes as demonstrated in work that targets the representation of other ethnicities on children's television, such as in animated Disney films (Barnd, 2013; Lippi-Green, 1997) and Disney Channel (Blue, 2017). The following section describes relevant themes and scholarship to this phenomenon, including a background of telecinematic linguistics, the representation of SAs on mainstream western television, the portrayal of ethnicities on Disney Channel, and a study that touches on a SA depiction on Disney Channel.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Telecinematic Sociolinguistics

My project is largely based on the work of telecinematic sociolinguists, such as Androutsopoulos (2012), Bednarek (2015, 2018, 2023b), Gluszek and Hansen (2013), Lippi-Green (1997) and Queen (2015). Androutsopoulos (2012) compiled cinematic discourse that explored orchestrated speech patterns that perpetuated language attitudes in manifold cultures and indexed social traits of characters. For instance, Bleichenbacher (2008) assessed the stereotyping and othering of minority groups through linguisticism in the American film industry, whilst Planchenault (2017) discovered pressure on dialect coaches to reproduce stereotypes. Similarly, Bednarek (2023b) used existing corpora containing dialogue on various television series to analyse characters and their social personae. Her concordance analysis revealed that Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory* frequently deployed high register phrases and scientific jargon, which conveyed his identity as part of a 'nerdy' in-group and Sheldon's conformity to the nerd stereotype (Bednarek, 2023b). According to Bednarek (2023b), scholarship in sociolinguistic telecinematic discourse surrounding language ideologies, indexicality and stylisation, has bloomed (for example, Coupland, 2010; Queen, 2013). Such studies are more often being conducted with the assistance of corpus linguistics (for example, Bednarek, 2015; Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink, 2016), as does this project.

To investigate distributions of linguistic varieties in animated Disney films, Lippi-Green (1997) conducted a large-scale study on 371 characters in 24 animated Disney films. She discovered that character traits were conveyed by certain language varieties that were associated with racial and/or ethnic groups. For instance, in the *Lion King*, whilst the antagonists (the hyenas) spoke AAE and Latino-accented English, which perpetuates negative attitudes towards these varieties and its

³ Henceforth, I use the term *SAE* as it encompasses the range of SA accents and dialects found in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal (Purkayastha, 2005), unless the use of *IE* is justified such as for Ravi from *Jessie*, whose Indian heritage is explicated in episodes.

speakers, the protagonists (Zazu and Simba) spoke General American English (GAE)⁴. This was quantified by a bar graph of characters with positive, negative, and mixed motivations and their language varieties and supplemented by a qualitative analysis, an approach I also take. Despite Lippi-Green's (1997) recognition of the perpetuation of many racial and cultural stereotypes in Disney films, little attention was attributed to South Asian portrayals, likely due to a lack of South Asian-orientated Disney content. This project documents whether this omission extends to Disney Channel.

However, recent work (for example, Brous, 2020; Ingrid, 2019; Urke, 2019) have evidenced a decrease in the employment of stereotypical accents in Disney remakes, as foreign accents were often omitted by antagonists in favour of standard varieties to avoid perpetuating language attitudes and/or stereotypes (Ingrid, 2019). Urke (2019) adopted a content analysis on 16 animated original Disney films from 1950–1991 and live-action remakes from 2010–2018, inspiring the synchronic and diachronic elements to my project by investigating linguistic varieties used by characters at a given time and over a period. This project examines whether a similar linguistic change has occurred on Disney Channel with regard to SA representation.

2.2. South Asian Representation in Television Media

SA representation was scant in the early 20th century (Davé, 2013; Nadal, 2019), though nevertheless present in British and American films from as early as 1902, which often portrayed SAs as either mystical and wise or deceitful and fraudulent (Jiwaani, 1988; Davé, 2013). There is a general consensus that these films emphasised British colonialism and conveyed imperialist thought (for example, Davé, 2013; Jiwani, 1988; Menon, 2010; Ramasubramanian, 2005; Sharma, 2011). According to Davé (2013), this is where “brownface and brown-voice” emerged, the use of darker makeup by a non-SA white or light-skinned person and inauthentic SA accent for performative purposes (p. 20). This stemmed from the 18th and 19th practice of blackface, using prosthetics to caricature Black people for entertainment (Thompson, 2021). Additionally, this period exoticised and sexualised SA women as dancers and prostitutes in films, which continued into the late 1900s as seen in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) (Davé, 2013; Espiritu, 2008; Jiwani, 1988; Muraleedharan, 1996; Ono & Pham, 2009).

Existing literature discloses the multifaceted nature of SA stereotypes that have manifested into television media. This is evidenced in Ramasubramanian's (2005) findings. Whilst many depicted Indian women and children as subservient victims of patriarchy and Indians as living in poverty with low-paid jobs and orchestrators of sorcery (Jha, 2018; Jiwani, 1988), other films emphasised India's riches. Further, Greenberger (1969) and Jiwani (1988) found that SA men during this time were crafted as socially awkward, amateurish, reckless terrorists, or money-hungry, which upheld British colonial perceptions of the Indian “lascivious, greedy merchant” (p. 46). However more recent research suggests that they were portrayed as erudite and skilled model minorities, hence the intelligent Indian doctor stereotypes (Davé, 2013; Thakore, 2013)

The film, *The Party* (1968) presented one of the first SA representations in western media through a socially awkward character using brownface and brown-voice to convey stark differences between SA and American culture (Davé, 2013). This triggered other brown-voice performances such as through Apu from *The Simpsons* (1989) (Davé, 2013). The intelligent SA stereotype then became popularised, exaggerated, and manipulated and was reinforced by SAE (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010; Thakore, 2013). This is demonstrated by Raja from *Aliens in America* (2007-8), an intelligent, sensitive, wise, and incongruous misfit and the astrophysicist, Raj, from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-19), who is timid and emasculated at times, though highly educated (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010). Ultimately, scholars such as Davé (2013) and Menon (2010) suggest that SAE is a racialising trope that overtly maintains a character's identity as a foreign other.

⁴ Even though there is a preference for Standard American English (SAE) (Kretzschmar, 2008), I adopt GAE throughout this project to avoid confusion with South Asian English (SAE).

Contrastingly, Nadal (2019), Sharma (2011) and Thakore (2013) recognised a surge of fused SA American, British, and Canadian identities with lead roles in 21st century western films, such as in *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), *The Namesake* (2006), and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and series, such as *The Mindy Project* (2012-17), *Quantico* (2015-18), and *Master of None* (2015-21). In recent years, this has extended to *Never Have I Ever* (2020-23), *Ms. Marvel* (2022) and *Wedding Season* (2022) among others. Thakore (2013) argued that many SA characters in 21st century media were no longer presented as newly arrived immigrants speaking SAE and my project analyses this transition on a narrower scale. These 21st century films and series accurately and authentically capture the complex diversity of SA second and third-generation experiences in the west (Sharma, 2011; Zapata, 2010). Despite this, a minority of literature (for example, Kavuri-Bauer, 2018; Rajva, 2021) offer critical interpretations of contemporary representations, arguing that they predominantly represent educated, upper-class Indian Hindus and relays problematic American assimilationist paragons. However, it could be argued that this simply reflects the South Asian American demographics (Davé, 2013).

2.3. Ethnic Representation on Disney Channel

Blue (2017) recognised the increasingly multicultural representation on Disney Channel through her textual analysis on the Disney Channel shows *That's So Raven* (2003-7), *Hannah Montana* (2006-11), and *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-12). Blue (2017) touched on how race and ethnicity are portrayed on Disney Channel through colourblind and neoliberal concepts to critique whiteness and white-privilege depictions, despite increasingly multiethnic representation. In Season 3, Episode 10 of *That's So Raven*, Raven, an African American teen from a middle-class family, attempted to conform to values of stereotypical upper-class whiteness to please her grandmother through sophisticated (though uncomfortable) clothing and a suppression of AAE and slang in pursuit of GAE. From this, Blue (2017) argues that Raven's middle-class experience and access to such white privilege disregards authentic Black representation. The programme promotes colourblind ideologies that downplay racial and ethnic distinctions, whilst perpetuating stereotypes of Black people at times (Blue, 2017).

This corroborates Larson's (2016) findings that Disney Channel uses mixed-race representation to encourage paradoxical perceptions of multiculturalism and colour-blindness. She sees that Disney Channel alienates African Americans, whilst portraying ethnic identities by actors of other ethnicities. For example, Larson (2016) argues that even though Corbin Bleu from *High School Musical* is mixed race, his persona confines him to stereotypes of the monoracial African American identity through his obsession with basketball. Booboo Stewart, whose mother and father are East Asian and multiracial respectively, plays the role of a monoracial Middle Eastern in *Descendants*. Similarly, Vanessa Hudgens is multiracial but plays a Latina coded character in *High School Musical*. Larson (2016) refers to this as "colorblind casting" (p. 31), which conveys Disney Channel's view of multiracial actors as racially adaptable through costuming and storylines. These interpretations were based on her textual and visual analysis of *High School Musical* (2006), *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-12), *Descendants* (2015), and *K.C. Undercover* (2015-18). Although her research questions are similar to mine as they concern ethnic representation, I adopt a content analysis on characters' lines to assert my linguistic angle. Larson (2016) mentioned that a limitation to her project was her inclusion of actors whose ethnicities were not confirmed by the internet. She made educated guesses about whether they are mixed race, which raises validity concerns. I accounted for this in my own project by excluding such actors from my data collection due to a lack of evidence to support their ethnicity.

Additionally, a recent intersectional approach to ethnic representation adopted by Leon-Boys and Valdivia (2020) analysed the new face of Latina identity on four episodes of the Disney Channel show, *Stuck in the Middle* (2016-18), that incorporated elements of Latinidad. Their analysis suggested that the starring character, Harley, reflected an equivocal Latinidad through her eccentric mischief and absence of Latina culture in her character and family background. They concluded

that the show almost completely concealed Latinidad's visibility, which supports Blue (2017) and Larson's (2016) notions of colour-blindness.

2.4. South Asian Representation on Disney Channel

To my knowledge, Sharma (2016) is the only scholar that briefly discusses SA representation on Disney Channel. She embraced a semiotic approach for her qualitative analysis on the influence of Disney media on viewers' perceptions of ethnicity by amalgamating the essays and discussions of her undergraduate students. Therefore, consistent with Blue (2017), Larson (2016) and Sharma's (2016) studies on ethnic representation, I also consider visual elements of characters such as style of dress. Sharma (2016) recognised both stereotypical portrayals of ethnic minorities and a complete absence of others, which my project documents by paying close attention to SA representation. Unlike other literature on Disney Channel, Sharma (2016) acknowledged the significance of language in the construction of characters. She proposed that ethnic representations on Disney Channel are rooted in stereotypes, which is achieved by characters' use of accents to indicate a lack or presence of American identity. Sharma (2016) also discovered an association of otherness with being ethnic that was defined as being "non-white, or overtly foreign in appearance, accent, or behaviour" (p. 102). For instance, one student pointed out the performative Indian accent utilised by Karan Brar from *Jessie* (2011-15) – what Davé (2013) may call "brown-voice" (p. 20) – to play the role of Ravi, an Indian geek. I analyse such few representations of South Asian identities on Disney Channel. Sharma (2016) alludes to social identity theory (SIT) (explained below), by outlining that such representations contribute to shaping the identities of young viewers as they "learn a sense of other, or not-me" (p. 96). Sharma's (2016) student discourse suggested that an individual must relinquish association with a hyphenated ethnic identity, such as African-American or Indian-American, and cease identification and faithfulness with a cultural other in order to be accepted as authentically American. This disputes contemporary representations of South Asian Americans in the wider media described above.

2.5. Theoretical Implications

My project is broadly rooted in social identity theory (SIT). This maintains consistency with approaches in the fields of telecinematic sociolinguistics such as Sharma (2016) and Bednarek (2011, 2012, 2023a), and more specifically Disney psychology such as Bell, Haas and Sells (1995), Bernadi (2008), Brode (2005) and Jhappan and Stasiulis (2005). SIT, expounded by Tajfel and Turner (1979), is a psychological model that emphasises how identities are self-constructed to align with social groups which serve to uphold self-identity. In application to media effects, Hall (1996) asserts that representations heavily influence identity constructions. In describing Hall's (1996) schema, Barker (1999) states that "Identities are formed within and through representations [...] TV is the major communicative device for disseminating those representations which are constitutive of (and constituted by) cultural identity" (p. 31). In the context of language, Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles and Sink's (2016) findings suggest that Standard American English and Foreign-Anglo speakers are likely to maintain positive self-perceptions, whilst Nonstandard American and Foreign-Other speakers are likely to be left with negative self-perceptions from television consumption. This is because mediated representations exhibited positive and negative stereotyping and egregious underrepresentation of social groups. Considering the impressionability of children (Hensch, 2016) who are only beginning to develop a sense of self and identify with social groups (Eccles, 1999), I argue that tween-targeted television media such as Disney Channel has the power to shape children's sense of identities according to the linguistic patterns, embedded into stereotypes, that are communicated on shows. This notion has been confirmed by studies on children's television media more generally (for example, Dobrow & Gidney, 1998; Lillard et al., 2015; Van Wormer & Juby, 2015).

2.6. Predictions

Firstly, it may be predicted that SA representation on Disney Channel is scant, given trends in the wider media and across The Walt Disney Company. However, in accordance with patterns in mainstream media, the few instances of SA representation are likely to perpetuate stereotypes through SAE. By the same token, an increase in their representation and of SA hybrid western identities may also be expected over time. However, we could also expect colourblindness in areas, as disclosed by scholars who have studied the representation of other ethnicities on Disney Channel.

This literature review has introduced the field of telecinematic sociolinguistic around which this project revolves, discussed the multifaceted nature of existing mediated SA stereotypes, and outlined Disney Channel's tendencies to represent ethnicity which homes in on a specific example of Indian representation on Disney Channel. From this, it should be inferred that ethnicity on Disney Channel, as well as scholarship on Walt Disney subsidiaries more broadly, remains understudied and lacks linguistic and SA foci. This project fulfils the multiplexed gap in linguistically oriented Disney and SA Studies, by firstly addressing how much SA representation there is on Disney Channel, the nature of these representations paying close attention to language, and how these representations have changed over time. The next section describes how I collected the data to address these ideas regarding the selection criteria, coding procedures and corpus construction.

3. Methodologies

It could be inferred that research on Disney Channel rely solely on small-scale subjective qualitative interpretations. However, I employed a larger-scale mixed-method content analysis like Lippi-Green (1997) and Urke (2019), informed by a corpus of television dialogue like Bednarek (2018, 2023b) by quantifying both the amount and portrayals of SA representation to provide more concrete conclusions (Baker, 2010), which is enhanced by a qualitative interpretation. This agrees with Rasinger's (2010) guidance on linguistic research methods as he proposed that whilst quantitative data addresses the quantity of an item, which concerns research question 1, qualitative data addresses patterns and "how something is" (p. 52), which addresses research questions 2 and 3.

3.1. Selection

My data included 28 of the 95+ Best Disney Channel Shows listed on Ranker (2024), which were ranked by over 17,500 voters of the public. These shows met the following criteria: (1) the genre of the show must involve comedy, (2) have been aired on Disney Channel between 2000-2023 because the most popular Disney Channel shows are comedies that were published from 2000-2012 (IMDb, 2016;). I considered popularity because well-liked shows are likely to have the greatest influence on viewers (Blue, 2016; 2017). I extended this time range to 2023 to compare such shows with recent ones and uncover both synchronic patterns and diachronic change. It must (3), be a live action to narrow my data collection and ensure feasibility – incorporating animated shows would have considerably increased my dataset. Furthermore, the majority of the most favoured shows listed on IMDb (2016) are unanimated, which also influenced my decision to target live-action shows. It should also (4), be available on the streaming platform Disney+ as this is where the shows were watched, given that Disney Channel no longer airs on UK television (Tantum, 2020).

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Coding for Shows

To broadly examine the amount of SA representation on Disney Channel comedy shows, I coded for each shows name; publish year and duration; the number of SA actors/actresses each show has, whose character does not show an active attempt to conceal their SA background, with at

least two lines; the number of non-SA actors/actresses, who perform SA identities, with at least two lines; and whether these SAs or non-SAs had major or minor roles. I adopt Dragojevic, Mastro and Giles' (2016) definition of major roles being those who make regular appearances and minor roles as infrequent or one-time characters. I classified Tenzing Trainor from *Liv and Maddie* (2013-17) as evidence of an active attempt to conceal SA identity because Trainor portrayed a character from a White ethnic background (Article Bio, 2019a; Article Bio, 2019b; Follers, 2018a; Follers, 2018b), even though he is entirely SA (Fandom, n.d.). However, even though Amir Talai from *Hannah Montana* (2006-11) is Iranian (Lucas, 2018), he played the role of an Indian salesperson named Sanjay, which was explicated in his IE and was therefore included in my data collection. Each actor/actress of every show was researched to identify their ethnic background. I excluded partially SA actors/actresses in my dataset (unless they did not conceal their SA background or portrayed a SA character) as the focus of this project solely concerns SA representation. I also excluded those whose ethnicity could not be confirmed by the internet due to a lack of evidence. Using the same criteria to evaluate SA representation, I accounted for African American representation too to enable a comparison with another ethnicity.

3.2.2. Character Level Coding

Another table was made exclusively for shows that contain SA actors/actresses, who do not conceal their SA background, or non-SAs who perform SA identities with at least two lines. I applied three aspects of Bednarek's (2018) televisual characterisation, namely characters' individual (personality) and social (gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, occupation) traits, as well as their expressive identity (attitudes and values) to code for characters. I also noted the show/episode's setting and character's style of dress to account for elements from the multimodality domain from which televisual material is based (Bednarek, 2023a). Additionally, I coded for the SA character's variety of English in shows, by both listening and reading subtitles, and any other relevant background information. SAE accents were identified through a consistent employment of SAE phonetic features, such as the retroflexed alveolars [ʃ], [dʒ] and [tʃ]; TH-stopping of the dental fricatives, [θ] and [ð]; and monophthongisation of the diphthongs, [eɪ] and [əʊ], which are characteristic of SAE (Gargesh, 2019). GAE was broadly identified by a regular use of post-vocalic rhoticity and the vowel [ɑ] in the LOT vowel, [æ] in the BATH vowel and diphthong [aɪ] in the PRICE vowel. If a character deployed GAE features as well as SAE ones, I categorised this as SAE (Kretzschmar, 2008).

Transcriptions were conducted for the first two episodes of the first two seasons that represented a SA character to save time, maintain consistency and enable a fair comparison with those with minor roles, who appeared in a maximum of two episodes. Modelling on a similar linguistic telecinematic study conducted by Bednarek (2023a), transcriptions were orthographic and captured variants that did not require IPA transcription (as this disrupted the corpus generator, Sketch Engine's, recognition of words). This included g-dropping, elisions, fillers, discourse markers, and any other vocalisations like grunts, laughter, and screams. Group dialogue and any Hindi using my own knowledge and Google Translate were also transcribed, though no other foreign language appeared in the corpus. However, external background audio such as from the radio, multimodal features such as gestures and camera shots, overlaps and interruptions were not accounted for as they go beyond the focus of this study. Important points concerning these areas were noted in the "*background notes*" column of my table.

Flowerdrew (2022) recognises the difficulty in obtaining optimal representativeness in spoken corpora due to the time-consuming nature of transcription. Maximal representativeness and deeper insight into character personas could have been obtained if each episode of every SA representation was included in my dataset. For instance, Ravi, from *Jessie* has lines in all 26 episodes

of all 4 seasons of *Jessie* and in the first 3 seasons of *Bunk'd*⁵. Unfortunately, transcription for this quantity was not feasible in the timeframe provided. This mirrors Flowerdrew's (2022) idea that corpora may be perceived as "a snapshot of language" (p. 22) that aims to accurately reflect the linguistic varieties from which it is sampled and a "category organised around a prototype" (Gries & Newman, 2014, p. 259). A thorough understanding of characters and contexts were acquired through extensive notes on each show and episode that portrayed the SA character, combined with interpretations from fans on publicly available websites such as Disney Wiki (n.d). According to Flowerdrew (2004), such contextual familiarity is elevated by a researcher who both constructs and analyses a corpus, as I did, because it allows for a qualitative supplementation of quantitative findings, hence a mixed-method approach to analysis. An in-depth understanding of characters was also achieved by watching each relevant episode (19 in total) three times by myself and once by a fellow linguistic student. This allowed for a general understanding of episodes and preliminary notes, the transcription, more detailed notes that combined initially gathered impressions with transcriptions, and lastly a final viewing alongside the transcription by a peer.

3.2.3. *Corpus*

There is no existing corpus that is suitable for this project, so I designed a small specialised one of 4,370 words using Sketch Engine to answer my specific research questions as advised by Flowerdrew (2022) and Prior (2008). This was composed of transcriptions of SA characters' lines to contribute towards unveiling character personality traits. The wordlist function revealed high frequency words by SA characters, which conveyed the nature of their portrayals as in the study of Bednarek (2010). The figures that reflected the most used words were distorted by extensive occurrences in one show or used by one character, thus hindering the accuracy and representativeness of results. However, turning on Sketch Engines Average Reduced Frequency (ARF) function provided a modified figure that prevented skewedness caused by a high concentration of words in one document.

Despite the dangers of both building and using a corpus, such as the risk that the corpus will be created to validate the preconceived notions of the analyst (Sinclair, 2005), an objective approach was adopted with the guidance of Bednarek (2018), Flowerdrew (2022) and Prior (2008). For instance, as briefly mentioned above, a fellow linguistic student with no knowledge of the aims of my project watched the relevant episodes and produced his own notes, using the same coding procedure, which I amalgamated with my own. I next disclose my findings alongside some quantitative surface-level interpretations.

4. Results

Broadly, SA representation is scant across the 28 shows, especially in comparison to African American representation (see Figure 3). It should be noted that major/minor roles are not presented in Figure 3 because 15/16 SA characters had minor roles, the exception being Ravi from *Jessie*, who had a major but not leading role. Whilst the median for the number of SA characters across the shows is 1, it is 3 for African American characters. The total number of shows that display at least one SA character is 10/28, compared to 23/28 for shows with at least one African American character. There is no clear increase or decrease in representation over time for either type of ethnic representation, though there is a maximum number of 3 SA characters in one show as in *Hannah Montana*, *The Suite Life on Deck* and *Bizaardvark*. However, this figure is 9 for African American characters as in *That's So Raven* and *Raven's Home*.

⁵ For Ravi's transcriptions, I included one episode each from *Jessie* and *Bunk'd* instead of two because they represent the same character.

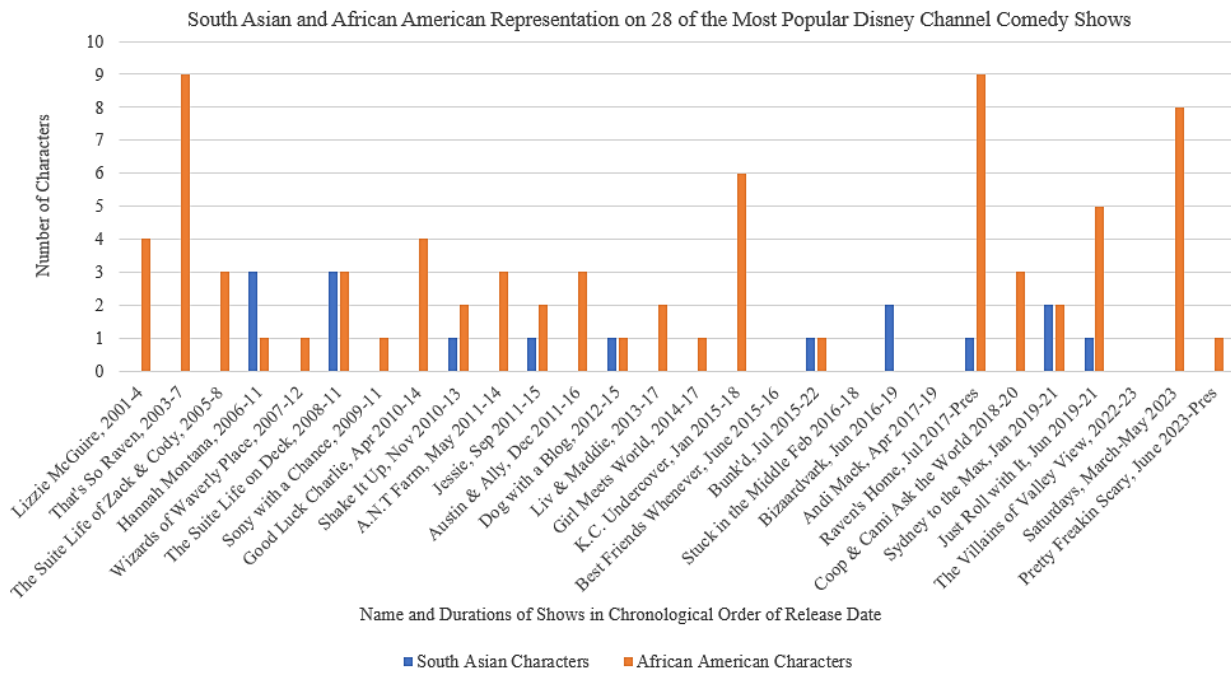


Figure 3: SA and African American Representation on 28 Disney Channel Shows.

My narrowed data collection exclusively contains shows that represent at least one SA character and identifies how they are portrayed through a linguistic lens. On the whole, there is a clear cut-off point to the representation of SAs speaking SAE and transition into GAE in 2016. This means that there is a clear change over time. SAs were generally represented as speaking SAE from 2006-15 and GAE from 2016-21 (see Figure 4). More specifically, there were 8 SAE-speaking and 2 GAE-speaking characters from 2006-15 and 6 GAE-speaking characters from 2016-21. Thus, in total while there were 8 instances of SAE-speaking characters from 2006-15, there were also 8 instances of GAE-speaking ones from 2006-21.

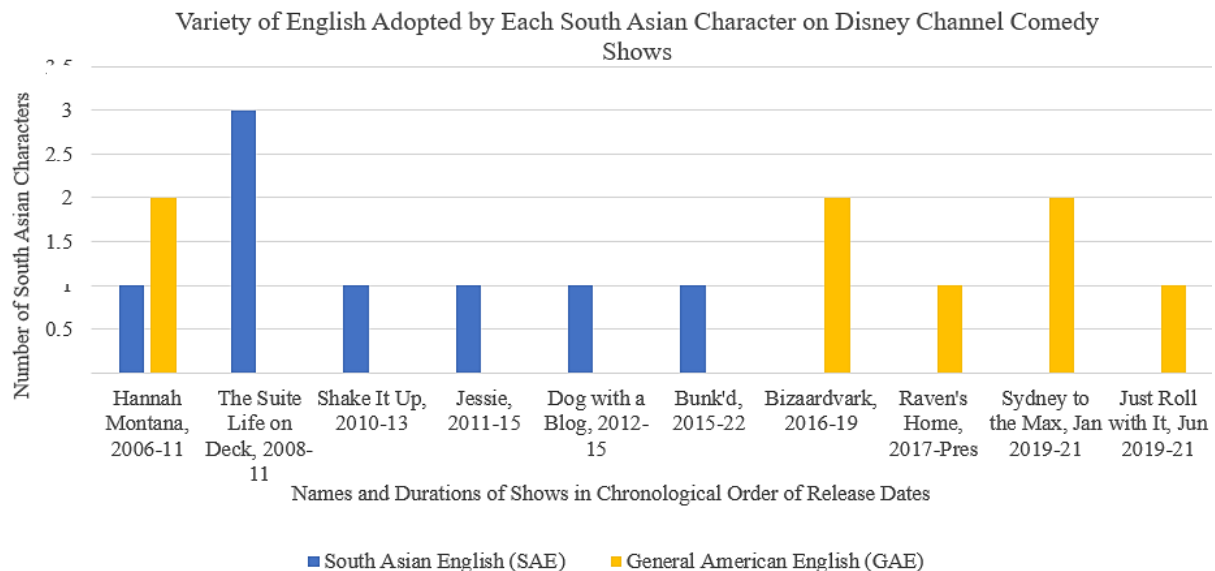


Figure 4: Variety of English Adopted by Each SA Character on Disney Channel Comedy Shows.

Finally, my corpus analysis using the wordlist frequency function on Sketch Engine disclosed the most employed nouns across the transcriptions of lines spoken by each SA character in the first two episodes of their representation. This was *time*, *school*, *job*, *student*, and *dollar* respectively

(see Figure 5). The next section delves deeper by providing a detailed analytical account for these findings, revolving around my research questions concerning the quantity of SA representation and nature of SA representation with an interweaved comparison to SA representation on newer shows.

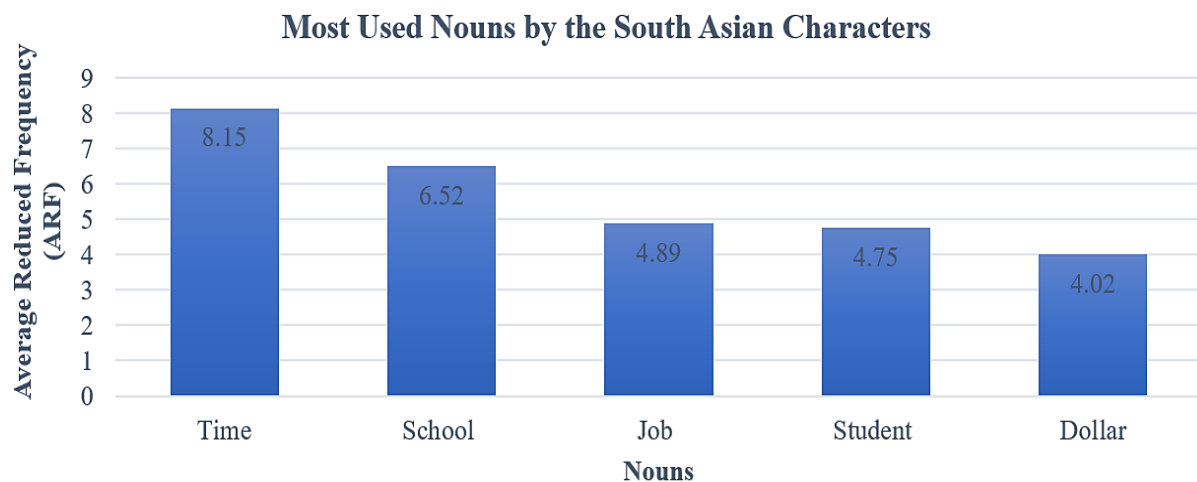


Figure 5: Most Used Nouns by the SA Characters.

5. Analysis

5.1. Quantity of SA Representation on Disney Channel

Evidently, there is little SA representation on live-action comedy shows on Disney Channel with SAs having minor roles 93.75% of the time across the corpus, which corresponds with early trends in the wider media (Davé, 2013; Nadal, 2019) and general trends on animated Disney films as described in the introduction. The only SA character that has a major (though not starring) role is Ravi from *Jessie*. This is consistent with the wider media, as during Thakore’s (2013) time of writing, *The Mindy Project* (2012-17) was the only series that contained a SA lead (which has now increased), just one year after Ravi’s appearance in *Jessie* prior to which there was no main SA character in the Disney Channel shows in my corpus. Addressing why goes beyond the scope of this study, but it may be inferred that these results reflect the SA demographics in America, which television media have shown a tendency to convey (Davé, 2013). For instance, the increased SA and GAE-speaking SA representation resembles the steady growth of SA Americans in the US, who constituted 29% of Asian Americans in 2021 (Kurien & Purkayastha, 2024). Similarly, the higher level of African American representation can reflect the larger African American population in the US from 2000-22 (USA Facts, 2022).

5.2. Nature of and Changes in SA Representation Over Time

The phase from 2006-15, during which Disney Channel almost exclusively presented SA characters as speaking SAE that their corresponding actors/actresses did not use in reality, aligns with mainstream media whereby actors such as Hank Azaria (Apu from *The Simpsons*, 1989) and Adhir Khan (Raja from *Aliens in America*, 2007-8) adopted ingenuine SAE accents and dialects. I gathered this from identifying the variety of English employed by Azaria and Khan (TheCWSources, 2018; The Late Show with, 2018) and each SAE-speaking character on Disney Channel in interviews around the time that they appeared in their respective shows (CBS, 2008; CleverTV, 2010; DesiYou, 2008; OnTheSpotInterviews, 2015). Such “brown-voice” performances highlight the role of SAE as a racialising trope in television media that explicitly maintains the otherness that is attached to SA identities (Davé 2013, p. 20). According to Menon (2010), the comedic aspects of such programmes suggests that otherness is humorous simply because it is not western.

5.2.1. *The Avaricious Stereotype*

Sanjay, a name of Indian origin (Behind the Name, 2020), from *Hannah Montana* (2006-11) reciprocates the earliest occurrence of both “brown-voice” and “brownface”, which was popularised via the film, *The Party* (1968) (Davé 2013, p. 20). This is evidenced in Sanjay’s actor, Amir Talai’s, inauthentic employment of IE and debatable use of darker-complexioned makeup to perhaps, quite literally, mask Talai’s Iranian descent (Lucas, 2018) and portray him as Indian. It may also be an instance of “colorblind casting”, the idea that Disney Channel perceives multiracial actors, or in this case an actor of an ethnic minority, as racially adaptable through costume and storyline (Larson, 2016, p. 31). Sanjay’s racial adaptability through costume can be seen in his arguable application of darker makeup, while his racial adaptability through storyline is demonstrated in Sanjay’s Indian background, which is mirrored in his deployment of IE and stereotypically SA money-grubbing characteristics (Greenberger, 1969; Jiwani, 1988). This is emphasised in “dollar” being the fifth most used noun across the corpus, which is seen in Sanjay’s line “seventy-five dollars and don’t pretend to be surprised rich Malibu child”. Here, Sanjay and his unnamed identical brother⁶ try to obtain as much money as possible from Miley at a flea market, given that that she lives in Los Angeles, one of the wealthiest cities in North America (Owusu, 2023), hence his reference to her as “rich Malibu child”.

Even though Tenzing Trainor from *Liv and Maddie* (2013-17) is SA (Fandom, n.d.) and was not included in my dataset, it is worth noting his character, Parker’s, relation to the concept of “colorblind casting” (Larson, 2016, p. 31). Even though he is entirely Indian, he plays the genetic brother and son of 5 Caucasian characters (Article Bio, 2019a; Article Bio, 2019b; Follers, 2018a; Follers, 2018b).

Hannah Montana was the first show from my corpus to display hybrid SA American identities, which is evidenced in Natasha and Ajay’s use of GAE, who are the only two SA GAE-speaking characters from 2006-15 in my corpus. However, despite Natasha’s fused identity, she conformed to an early stereotype found in western media that sexualised and eroticised SA women (Davé, 2013; Espiritu, 2008; Jiwani, 1988; Muraleedharan, 1996; Ono & Pham, 2009). This stereotype is indicated in Thakore’s (2013) survey responses, many of which mentioned media portrayals of SA women as attractive and an “exotic become erotic type” (p. 97) resulting from an orientalist western gaze (Thakore, 2013). Natasha from Season 2, Episode 9 of *Hannah Montana*, apparently did not have enough money to buy some water after surfing and seductively told the shopkeeper, Jackson, “but that’s all I have and as I said before I’m so **so** hot”. This is reflected in the lexical stress on “so” and her combination of tight clothing, repetitive hair-touching gestures, confident body positioning including upright posture and pushed back shoulders, and upward gaze (see Figure 6). Attention to such semiotic resources, where relevant, is important to provide a holistic understanding of meaning making (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010; Goffman, 1963; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Here, the sexualised SA stereotype is intertwined with the money-hungry stereotype as Natasha’s performative alluring behaviour was embraced in exchange for money from Jackson’s boss, who sent her to test whether Jackson would give away the water for free.

⁶ Sanjay’s twin was not included in my data as they were played by the same actor. This was the only instance of a SA with a double role.



Figure 6: Natasha from *Hannah Montana* Employing a Strategic Combination of Body Language and Gaze to Appear Flirtacious and Seductive (Liebleinc & Correll, 2007).

Similarly, in Season 1, Episode 1 of *The Suite Life on Deck*, the SAE-speaking student, Padma, was initially adamant about staying at a sea school. Padma cunningly told another character, London, “*there is nothing you can do to make me drop out of this school*”. However, after London offers her jewellery to leave, Padma immediately left repeatedly singing “*I’m filthy rich*”, portraying her as materialistic and avaricious, which is highlighted in Season 1, Episode 12. Padma lied throughout this episode and asked London to do, by pretending that they are still roommates and as though Padma was still in school to satisfy Padma’s mother, Gitanjali. Padma even threatened London into helping her, which is evidenced in the line “*if you don’t help me, I’m going to tell Mr Moseby how you forced me to leave and you will be expelled*”, which conveys her manipulateness, especially considering that London bribed rather than “*forced*” Padma to leave. This demonstrates how Padma went to great lengths for the ultimate purpose of being able to resume her “*worldwide shopping spree*” and luxurious stays “*on a tropical island with a two-storey hut*”. It is noteworthy that Padma also makes comments such as “*this is terrible. I cannot go back to our little village. It is so boring...*” This corresponds with the strand of SIT that states that the self-esteem of group members is strengthened by identifying with in-groups and contrasting with outgroups, hence the framing of SA culture as inferior to western culture.

In this same episode of *The Suite Life on Deck*, Swami Banukapatu, a renowned IE-speaking guru of yoga and spiritual enlightenment is introduced. This perpetuates the stereotype of Indians as mystical and wise (Jiwaani, 1988) and reveals the exoticisation of Indian Americans as cultural objects – “*new-age spirituality operates as an Indian accent in the era of neoliberalism*” (Davé, 2013, p. 86). Banukapatu initially exhibited a greedy and mercenary personality through his tourist trap that defrauds people of their money to secretly maintain his call centre. This maintains the stereotype of Indians as call centre employees, which is also seen in mainstream media shows such as *Outsourced* (2010-11) (Thakore, 2013). However, towards the end of the episode, it is revealed that funds from his businesses were partially donated to the poor. Notwithstanding, Banukapatu’s positive intent is executed connivingly. For instance, he scared Zack and Cody into staying because “*night is when the cobras come out. It is too dangerous to leave until morning*” with the aim of making more money from their stay. Banukapatu’s positive intent and virtuousness is also contradicted in shallow comments such as “*never climb a mountain without a credit card*” when Cody asks for a valuable lesson amidst his hardship. Another element of deceit can also be seen in his code-switching into native-sounding GAE in the one line “*thank you for calling tech support this is Steve please hold*” when answering the phone at his call centre. He also made a demeaning comment to women in “*you don’t want to miss lady’s yogerobics - talk about achieving bliss*”, which portrays him as perverted despite his supposed righteousness and piety – another element of deceit. An additional SA stereotype of deception is therefore interweaved into 2/3 SAE-speaking characters on *The Suite Life on Deck* through Padma and Banukapatu, which corresponds with earlier fraudulent and dishonest representations of SAs (Davé, 2013; Jiwaani, 1988). Banukapatu’s traditional attire, including his turban and kurta (see Figure 7), emphasises his Indian identity and embodies the stereotypes that he carries into the visual domain as a constant reminder to the audience of not only the setting of

the episode (India) (Soares, 2017), but more importantly his otherness, which leads viewers to conceptualising such ethnic minority characters in dichotomic ways of “us” and “them” (Davé, 2013; Sharma, 2016). This effect is strengthened by Banukapatu, Padma, Gitanjali, and Ravi’s use of Hindi and Sanskrit borrowings like “*namaste*”, “*karma*”, and “*bindi*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023a; Oxford English Dictionary, 2023b; Oxford English Dictionary, 2023c) and Hindi lexis like “*hare*”, “*achcha*” and “*bundi*”. Each SAE-speaking character also used syntactic features, like a lack of contractions. Such lexical, syntactic, and phonetic features within the accent constitute SAE (Gargesh, 2019) and intensifies the cultural distance between Americans and SAs initially discerned by Davé (2013).



Figure 7: Swami Banukapatu from *The Suite Life on Deck* (Kallis, Geoghan & Passaris, 2009).

Moreover, in Season 3, Episode 6 of *Dog With a Blog*, the SAE-speaking veterinarian, Dr Young, is presented as money-minded, acquisitive, and materialistic towards the end of the episode. This is indicated in the line, “*you kids were right. Buster does have a rotten tooth and I was about to operate on him and charge thousands of dollars only to find nothing there and buy a new watch to replace the one I lost in the last dog*”. This conveys an element of disappointment that the surgery did not go ahead due to the money he would have obtained from it. Additionally, “*I’m kidding, I operated again to retrieve it I’d never leave anything that expensive in a dog*” shows more regard for the expense of his watch, rather than the health of the animal.

Overall, the avaricious stereotype is exhibited by 5/14 different characters from 2000-21 and 5/10 from 2006-15. This is evidenced in a semantic field of money and materialism across the transcriptions, conveyed in verbs like “*filthy rich*” and nouns like “*dollars*”, “*tropical island*”, “*shopping spree*”, “*credit card*” and “*watch*”. More specifically, this stereotype is conveyed and reinforced by SAE in 4/5 characters, which strengthens the association of these personality traits with SAE and their speakers (Lippi-Green, 1997). Such characteristics coincide with earlier representations in the wider media (Greenberger, 1969; Jiwani, 1988).

5.2.2. *The Intelligence Stereotype*

Another commonality that some of the SAE-speaking characters from 2006-15 have in common with Apu, Raja, as well as Raj from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-19) is their association with the intelligent stereotype and/or nerdy ingroup. To determine this stereotype, I ensured the presence of intelligence and/or studiousness from Bednarek’s (2023b) definition of the mediated nerd persona, which listed a host of traits. The intelligent stereotype is indicated in the lines of Padma from *The Suite Life on Deck* (2008-11), such as “*once when I got an A-minus in my chemistry exam, my mum got so mad, she made me clean out the mongoose cage*”. This simultaneously discloses the SA parental emphasis on education (Ahmed & Lemkau, 2000) because SAs tend to view educational success as vital for a family to overcome socioeconomic disadvantages (Paiva, 2008). This is regularly explicated in the lines of Padma’s mother, Gitanjali: “*I sent you here to study, not fritter your time away...*” Despite the use of GAE by SA tween characters in later shows, such as Peter from *Sydney to the*

Max (2019-21), he demonstrates studiousness in his prioritisation of education: “*sorry man. I love candy but I got a math test*” when other characters pleaded for his support in protesting against the removal of a vending machine. The GAE-speaking character, Norvin, from *Just Roll with It* (2019-21) elicits a similar stereotype. In Season 2, Episode 8, Norvin executes his genius idea to ruin his town’s festival by strategically contaminating all the food and condemning the community “*to approximately forty-eight hours of severe tummy troubles*”. Here, the specific numeral and reference to abdominal symptoms almost resembles a doctor’s voice (Mishler, 1984), which further supports his conformity to the SA intellectual and more specifically the doctor stereotype, discerned by Davé (2013) and Thakore (2013).

Ravi also shows knowledgeableness in phrases such as “*medically impossible*” in Season 1, Episode 1 of *Bunk’d*, which perhaps subtly alludes to the SA doctor stereotype (Davé, 2017; Thakore, 2013), and sophisticated and academic vocabulary such as “*seething cauldron of anger*”, “*ruffians*” and “*tutelage*” in Season 1, Episode 1 of *Jessie*, which conveys Ravi’s intelligence. He is also illustrated as effeminate in *Bunk’d* when Ravi tangles himself into a climbing frame that he is incapable of escaping, which conforms to Bednarek’s (2023b) definition of the media-constructed nerd persona. This concurs with Bednarek’s (2023b) corpus analysis on the social personae of characters, which also contained dialogue on various television series, that revealed that Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory* frequently deployed high register phrases and scientific jargon, which conveyed his identity as part of a ‘nerdy’ in-group and conformity to the nerd stereotype. This semantic field of intelligence in the lines of Padma, Norvin, and Ravi corresponds with trends in the wider media in the crafting of SAE-speaking characters as nerdy and as in Ravi’s case, emasculated, like Apu from *The Simpsons* and Raja from *Aliens in America* (Davé, 2013; Menon, 2010; Thakore, 2015). This stereotype could explain why the nouns “*school*” and “*student*” were the second and fourth most common nouns across the transcriptions. However, each show includes children and/or teenagers who attend school, so a similar ARF may be yielded if the corpus also included the lines of actors/actresses of varied ethnicities.

Ajay, a banker from *Hannah Montana* (2006-11), Dr Young from *Dog with a Blog* (2012-15), Principal Karen from *Bizaardvark* (2016-19), Miss Patel from *Raven’s Home* (2017-pres), and Vice Principal Virmani from *Sydney to the Max* (2019-21) could present extensions of the intelligent stereotype as these adults have prestigious occupations that require academic qualifications (Torpey, 2021). Of the GAE-speaking adults, 1/6 has a profession in the financial sector (Ajay) and 3/6 have education-oriented jobs (Principal Karen, Miss Patel, and Vice Principal Virmani). Ergo, despite the absence of SAE that overtly attaches particular character traits to a SA identity as in the shows from 2006-15, the GAE-speaking characters from 2016-21 may still be represented stereotypically, though through occupation rather than personality. For example, Principal Karen from *Bizaardvark* is a pedagogical enthusiast who is quirkily keen to show social compatibility with the youth, hence her lenience; Miss Patel from *Raven’s Home* is a humble teacher with a low self-esteem; Vice Principal Virmani from *Sydney to the Max* is strict, insincere and unempathetic; and Norvin from *Just Roll With It* is illustrated as a weird, robotic, psychotic, yet intelligent antagonist. This exemplifies varied characterisation in the GAE-speaking SAs unlike the SAE-speaking ones, who seem confined to SA stereotypes.

Overall, 12/14 characters in some way relate to existing stereotypes, most of which are typically seen on mainstream television. The remaining 2 SA adults, John, a SAE-speaking makeup artist from *Shake it Up* (2010-13) and Lily Singh, a GAE-speaking actress from *Bizaardvark* (2016-19) are outliers and the only two characters who do not conform to existing SA stereotypes in any way. However, it is worth mentioning that Singh code-switched into SAE to impersonate her parents in “*my mom walks in and she’s all like “this party is so dirty” and then my dad walks in and he’s all like “time to party”*”, which underscores how otherness can be humorous because it is not western (Menon, 2010). The following section relates this analysis to larger theoretical frameworks, including SIT.

6. Discussion

With regard to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 2006) in the early development of a sense of self for a young SA, it could be argued that little SA representation can lead to a negative self-perception (Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink, 2016), especially considering that the main characters in Disney productions are portrayed as moral, desirable, and a pinnacle of beauty (Blue, 2017). If SA tweens cannot relate to such characters on Disney Channel, feelings of marginalisation, a low self-esteem, and a low self-image can manifest (Blue, 2017; Willetts, 2013). The scant SA representation could mirror the marginalisation of SAs in American society more broadly, drowned out by the dichotomic racial politics between Black and White Americans (Purkayastha, 2009, 2010), which is explicated in the fact that they are often erased from the Asian American category and overlooked in discourses surrounding racism and anti-Asian hate crimes (Kurien & Purkayastha, 2024).

Indexicality refers to the intricate relationship between linguistic features and social meanings (Bednarek, 2023b). Television media is widely recognised as an important agent of the enregistering and circulation of indexical meanings (Bell & Gibson, 2011; Coupland, 2010; Richardson, 2010). My findings suggest that in the live-action Disney Channel comedy shows from 2006-15, SAE is used to associate ethnicity with specific character traits. This is supported by Bell and Gibson (2011), who argue that staged performances attach certain linguistic features with social personae, which in this case is the attachment of SAE with avariciousness, deception, intelligence, and/or nerdiness. It may also be suggested that my findings integrate Queen's (2015) ideas of both type indexicality, the connection between language, social demographics (ethnicity) and specific social groups (nerds), and trait indexicality, the connection between language (SAE) and characteristics (acquisitive, deceitful, intelligent). According to Queen (2015), this can be achieved through a number of salient linguistic features that constitute an "indexical package" (p. 127), which in this case are a combination of phonetic, lexical, and syntactic features that are indicative of SAE according to Gargesh (2019). Therefore, my findings mirror the patterns discerned by Davé (2013) and Menon (2010) in mainstream television media, where SAE is used as a racialising trope for otherness and to indicate a "lack" of American identity (Sharma, 2016, p. 99).

In terms of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1996) this contributes towards viewers' conceptualisation of ethnic minorities as "them" versus "us". The self-esteem of young non-SA viewers may therefore be enhanced by socially and linguistically identifying with ethnically relatable protagonists (for example, Caucasian or African American), who are often portrayed as ultimately righteous (Blue, 2017), and distinguishing themselves from outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) such as SAs who are othered, sometimes negatively, from 2006-15. Media platforms, such as Disney Channel, can therefore socialise certain language attitudes in viewers from a young age (Gluszek & Hansen, 2013) as they are shown which linguistic groups have particular personality traits, which in turn creates stereotypical perceptions of the ethnic groups that speak certain language varieties (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2013; Menon, 2010; Morgan, 2009). Young SA viewers may identify with the few visually relatable SA characters on Disney Channel, so whilst they may be left with positive self-perceptions from the stereotypically intelligent SA representations, they may also be left with negative self-perceptions from stereotypically avaricious and deceptive SA representations "Representations of South Asians in the media are important to South Asian youth in the formation of their own identities [and] to defining South Asian identity in general for mainstream Western audiences" (Menon, 2010, p. 51).

However, Locher and Jucker (2021) point out that the language employed for characterisation is time- and culture-dependent, which reflects the shift in the language variety of SA characters from SAE to GAE to perhaps mirror the rise in second and third generation SAs that comprise contemporary American demographics (Davé, 2013). It could also represent an avoidance to perpetuate language attitudes and/or stereotypes as discovered by Ingrid (2019) in live-action Disney remake films. This shift also agrees with the wider media that now represent a vibrant

variety of hybrid SA western identities and experiences (Thakore, 2013). Interestingly, the findings do not corroborate nor dispute Sharma's (2016) student discourse that suggests that an individual must relinquish affiliation with a hyphenated ethnic identity, such as Indian-American, and cease identification and faithfulness with a cultural other in order to be accepted as authentically American. This is because even though hyphenated identities are now presented on Disney Channel through the GAE-speaking SA characters, they do not demonstrate active attempts to conceal their SA backgrounds, though nor are their SA backgrounds embraced or explicated, except in the case of Lily Singh from *Bizaardvark*. Nevertheless, the rejection of starring SA characters on Disney Channel, despite progress for other ethnic minorities, should not be dismissed and contradicts the steady increase of SA leads in the general media (Nadal, 2019; Sharma, 2011; Thakore, 2013). Thus, in accordance with SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1996) the self-images of young SA viewers of Disney Channel may be lowered by firstly, a sheer absence of ethnically relatable protagonists, and secondly, stereotypical and confining portrayals of the few minor SA characters that do exist on Disney Channel.

Gibson (2011) suggests that audiences may refer to preconceived ideas to interpret these performances. However, in the context of children's television media, it could be inferred that viewers do not have much prior knowledge to draw on, which makes tween-targeted platforms like Disney Channel particularly influential in shaping their initial worldviews (Hensch, 2016; Lippi-Green, 1997). In light of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1996), this emphasises the potential for mediated SA character representations to impact on the self-identities and self-concepts of SA tween viewers of Disney Channel (Dobrow & Gidney, 1998; Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles & Sink, 2016; Lillard et al., 2015; Van Wormer & Juby, 2015), considering the impressionability of children (Hensch, 2016) and that they are only beginning to develop a sense of self and identify with social groups (Eccles, 1999).

7. Conclusions and Future Directions

The present study corroborates my informed predictions. This is firstly because SA representation on the most-watched Disney Channel shows from 2000-21 is scant. In fact, findings reveal a clear exclusion of SAs from leading roles, despite progress for the representation of other ethnic groups on Disney Channel (Blue, 2017).

Secondly, portrayals of SAs on Disney Channel comedy shows from 2006-15 largely perpetuate, sometimes pervasive, SA stereotypes in American society through SAE and may therefore be seen as a reproduction of existing stereotypes on mainstream television (Davé, 2013; Jiwani, 1988; Menon, 2010; Thakore, 2013), which coincides with my prediction. On the few occasions that a SA character was illustrated on Disney Channel, they had minor roles that were either stereotypically associated with intelligence, studiousness, avaricious money-grubbing dispositions and/or deceit that was emphasised by SAE or had occupations that can be viewed as extensions of such stereotypes despite a non-appearance of SAE.

Lastly, there is no clear increase or decrease in SA representation, but there has certainly been a change in SA representation over time because an increase in SA hybrid western identities was displayed post 2016, as anticipated. This is conveyed in the absence of SAE in pursuit of GAE and more diverse, non-stereotypical characteristics of the SA characters. In spite of this, a starring character, let alone one with a hybrid SA identity, is yet to be seen on Disney Channel. Disney Channel therefore appears straggling behind trends of the wider media given the plentiful SA and hybrid SA protagonists in various Hollywood films and series (Nadal, 2019; Sharma, 2011; Thakore, 2013; Zapata, 2010).

In accordance with my expectations, colourblindness was also observed in two cases, which strengthens the case for Disney Channel's paradoxically assimilationist racial and/or ethnic perspectives in existing research (Blue, 2017; Larson, 2016; Leon-Boys & Valdivia, 2020).

Even though *Jessie*, *Bunk'd* and *Raven's Home* are the only shows still regularly airing on television in the US (tvinsider, 2024), tweens now have easy access to a wide range of shows, including the 28 presented in this study, through streaming platforms like Disney+. They can now be watched repeatedly, thus strongly embedding stereotypes into the long-term memories of young viewers (Mastro, 2009) and potentially negatively impacting the self-identities of SA tween viewers according to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1996). This is due to insufficient SA media representations and the idea that SA viewers may confine themselves to dominant SA mediated stereotypes, considering that these are the only SA representations on Disney Channel and that they may identify with SA ingroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hall, 1996). “Perhaps, one day, Disney will make new magic, complete with enough sparkle for everyone, and finally fulfil my wish for images that look, and feel, familiar and beautiful” (Willets, 2013, p. 20).

Televisual dialogue is inherently multimodal, but its detailedness requires close attention to small fragments of data such as gaze, gesture, stance, lighting, camera angle and so on (Bednarek, 2010; 2023a). Now that I have shed light on the patterned distribution of SAE on Disney Channel, a focused multimodal analysis may provide further insights. My findings can also be used to inform how other underrepresented races and ethnicities are represented and/or impacts of such representations on young viewers. An expansion of my dataset can also be conducted such as by incorporating animated Disney Channel shows or other subdivisions of The Walt Disney Company like Disney XD, or other companies such as Nickelodeon to identify the extent to which my findings hold.

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Appendix

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