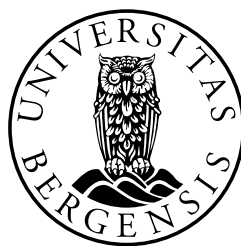


May the Accent Be with You:

An attitudinal study of language use in the *Star Wars* trilogies



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Summary in Norwegian

Føremålet med denne studien har vore å analysere bruken av engelske uttalevariantar i dei tre *Star Wars* trilogiane, for å finne potensielle systematiske korrelasjonar mellom karakterane sin aksent, og deira karaktertrekk. Slike korrelasjonar kan avdekke bakanforliggende haldningar til ulike uttalevariantar, og dermed seie noko om korleis samfunnet ser på og behandlar ulike aksentar. Den aller første *Star Wars*-filmen vart utgjeven i 1977, og den nyaste filmen kom i 2019. Dette store tidsspennet mellom dei ulike trilogiane gjer *Star Wars*-filmene unike i sitt slag. I tillegg til å undersøkje korrelasjonar mellom aksent og karaktertrekk, ser denne oppgåva også på potensielle endringar i framstillinga av ulike aksentar, og om filmene over tid har blitt meir mangfaldige og inkluderande, i tråd med samfunnsmessige endringar dei siste 50 åra.

Forskning tyder på at haldningar til språk blir forma tidleg i livet, gjennom blant anna opplevingar, media og personane ein har rundt seg (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003). *Star Wars* trilogiane har blitt sett over heile verda, av folk i alle aldrar, og har vakse til å bli eit enormt populært univers. Filmene spelar potensielt ei viktig rolle i sosialiseringprosessen til barn og unge, og er dermed ein påverknadsfaktor til haldningane dei utviklar. Måten ulike aksentar og lingvistiske grupper blir framstilt på i media og film er difor sentral for korleis dei blir oppfatta i samfunnet, og kan ha stor påverknad på korleis språkbrukarar ser på seg sjølve.

Analysen av filmene viser at somme korrelasjonar mellom uttalemåte og karaktertrekk kan identifiserast i *Star Wars*-filmene, særleg når det gjeld kor sofistikert ein karakter er, kor stor rolle den har i filmene, samt om den er god eller vond. I tillegg kan ein sjå at ei endring har funne stad mellom den første trilogien og den siste, men det var til dels ikkje den endringa som var forventa. Filmene har utvilsamt blitt meir inkluderande når det gjeld etnisitet og kjønn, men har bevega seg i motsett retning når det gjeld språkleg mangfald, då standard britisk og standard amerikansk dominerer meir enn nokon sinne i den nyaste trilogien. Standard britisk har særleg hatt ei drastisk auke, medan bruken av standard amerikansk har minka. Ein kan spekulere i at grunnen til den store auka av standardaksentar, og då særleg britisk, er fokuset på politisk korrektheit i samfunnet, samt at desse moglegvis er lettare å forstå for eit internasjonalt publikum enn regionale og sosiale uttalevariantar. Samstundes kan ein hevde at lite mangfald av ulike uttalevariantar potensielt kan vere negativt for dei språkbrukargruppene som ikkje ser seg sjølve representerte i media og film.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and scope

This thesis analyses the use of language in the fictional world of the *Star Wars* trilogies. The study aims to find out whether specific linguistic varieties are assigned to specific types of characters, thus conveying underlying attitudes to language. The present thesis is an attitudinal language study, and more specifically a societal treatment study, which aims to disclose attitudes to language in society based on the analysis of language use in public sources. The *Star Wars* films are an immensely popular franchise that has reached a global audience. The nine films have been released between 1977 and 2019, thus spanning over a significant period in which many societal changes have taken place. In addition to examining possible correlations between language and character traits, the present study also investigates any potential change from the earliest films to the more recent ones, as attitudes in society may change over time.

Similar studies have been conducted before (see section 2.3) and serve as an inspiration for the present thesis. However, a societal treatment study using science-fiction film, and the *Star Wars* films in particular, has not yet been done. Science fiction is also a highly suitable genre for an attitudinal study of language use in film, as the stories are often set in an imaginary universe. Because they are set in a fictional world, the accent distribution will reflect language attitudes and not accent use in the real world. This is further discussed in section 2.4.

The data used in the present thesis are the three *Star Wars* film trilogies, consisting of nine films. A total of 230 characters have been analysed according to their linguistic variety and the following set of character variables: *Gender*, *Alignment*, *Sophistication*, *Species* and *Character role*. In addition, observations have been made about the characters' ethnicity. The linguistic varieties detected in the sample have been placed in the following categories: Received Pronunciation (RP), General American (GA), Regional British English (Reg. BrE), English with a foreign accent, Other, and Fictional language.

Societal treatment studies such as the present are important because they enable us to access possibly hidden language attitudes in society. Research points to the fact

that some language attitudes are formed rather early in life, by our experiences and influences (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003, 5). Studies of language use in film and television are significant, as children spend several hours a day in front of a screen, and television is dominating the screen time (Canadian Paediatric Society 2017). Furthermore, a survey on American time use found that people who were 15 years or older spend more than half of their leisure time watching television on an average day (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Film and television are thus undeniably a part of children and young adults' process of socialisation. The *Star Wars* films are to a great extent seen by both children and teenagers and are thus potentially highly influential in these groups¹. Dobrow and Gidney (1998, 106) point to the fact that children not only "learn a great deal from television but they also pick up different messages depending on their gender and ethnicity". Children's perception of their own ethnic and linguistic groups, and of others, are affected by the input they get from television and film at a young age.

As noted by Dragojevic et al. (2016), the various portrayals of accents in the media can not only contribute to shaping people's language attitudes but can also be crucial for a linguistic group's identity and sense of self (77). They point out that both the presence of a group in the media, as well as the nature of their portrayals, are important. This gives great corporations like Disney, who owns Lucasfilm, the production company behind *Star Wars*, an immense power. As children's animated film and television often rely on stereotypes in their portrayal of certain linguistic varieties, a predetermined and discriminating set of impressions is given to children and young adults in the shaping years of their lives. Studies such as the present can therefore contribute to creating awareness of society's attitudes to linguistic varieties and their users, and how they are portrayed in the popular media.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses

The most central aim of the present thesis is to find out whether specific linguistic varieties are assigned to specific types of characters as a means of amplifying certain

¹ George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, has himself stated that the films' intended audience is in fact children (Alexander 2017; BBC 1999), which is also corroborated by the widespread sale of *Star Wars* toys (PYMNTS 2019).

character traits. In addition, the study aims to examine any possible changes from the first trilogies to the last, as the *Star Wars* film series spans over such a notable period of time, in which many societal changes have occurred. The research questions are therefore the following:

RQ1: Are there any systematic correlations between characters' linguistic variety and their character traits in the *Star Wars* trilogies?

RQ2: Have there been changes in accent distribution and minority representations from the earliest films to the most recent ones?

The hypotheses for the present thesis are based on previous research on attitudes to language and on language use and gender, as well as similar previous studies on language use in film and television. Additionally, changes in society over the last five decades, which will be dealt with in section 2.5, have contributed to shaping the hypotheses of the study. Several of the hypotheses are naturally linked to the character variables that the thesis operates with. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Standard accents will dominate overall among the characters.

H2: There will be more linguistic diversity in the most recent trilogy, compared to the original trilogy.

H3: There will be a higher percentage of female characters in the most recent films than in the oldest ones.

H4: Female characters will speak more standardised than male characters.

H5: Good characters will in the original trilogy mostly speak GA, while there will be more linguistic variation among the good characters in the most recent films.

H6: Evil characters will in the original trilogy mostly speak RP, while there will be more variation among the evil characters in the most recent films.

H7: Standard accents will dominate among the sophisticated characters, while the unsophisticated characters will use more non-standard varieties.

H8: RP will be the majority variety among the stiff characters, while GA will dominate among the relaxed characters.

H9: Standard accents will dominate among the human characters, while there will be more linguistic diversity among the non-human characters.

H10: Standard accents will dominate among the main characters, while there will be more linguistic diversity among supporting and peripheral characters.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters, which cover different aspects of the study. The introductory chapter gives a presentation of the aim and scope of the study as well as the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical background for the study, with a focus on attitudes to varieties of English, and previous studies on language use in film and television. The third chapter describes the methodology applied in the present study, i.e. the societal treatment study, in addition to presenting the linguistic and non-linguistic categories that the thesis operates with. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study by examining the overall variety distribution as well as each character variable. The fifth and conclusive chapter provides a summary of the main findings and attempts to answer the research questions and hypotheses. Additionally, it acknowledges the limitations of my study and offers suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter presents the field of research in which this thesis positions itself, as well as the theoretical background and framework that will provide a backdrop for understanding the study's purpose and findings. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the field of sociolinguistics, with a specific focus on language and gender, before turning its attention to the study of attitudes to language. Furthermore, I give an account of previous studies conducted on the use of accents in film and television, before additional attention is paid to the *Star Wars* film universe in order to gain a deeper understanding of this pop cultural phenomenon. Lastly, I give a brief presentation of overall changes in society over the last 50 years or so, in order to place the *Star Wars* film trilogies in a societal context.

2.1 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics can be defined as “the study of language in relation to society” (Hudson 1996, 1). Its primary aim is to investigate the correlations between language and social factors, as well as how languages vary and change over time. The field can provide a better understanding of both the essence of language and the qualities of society (1), as language is so closely related to the society from which it originates. The interest of studying language in relation to society is a long-lived one, but sociolinguistics as a research field grew rapidly from the 1960s. It is partly built on empirical data, partly on theoretical data. William Labov pioneered the field of sociolinguistic research and lay the groundwork for a lot of future research that both complemented his work and critiqued it. Coupland (2016) describes the field of sociolinguistic theory and research as a “rich, complex, and shifting context” (12), and one that has been under debate and constant evolution over the past decades. The study of attitudes to language is a branch of sociolinguistics, and the present thesis is an attitudinal study. It does not concern itself with language variation and change and can therefore not be categorised as a classical sociolinguistic study, although it remains within this rich field.

2.1.1 Language and gender

The relation between language and gender is a central variable for my study, as gender equality in society has evolved significantly from the first *Star Wars* films were released to the most recent ones. Gender is therefore a category that potentially shows change in the data. One might expect more marked gender differences in the older films than in the newer ones, in terms of representation and the types of roles assigned to male and female characters. A general tendency has shown itself through sociolinguistic research over the years, as far as language and gender is concerned. As stated by Coupland and Bishop (2007), “it is very well known that women tend to use ‘more standard’ speech than men do for a given social class and speaking context” (81). According to Milroy and Gordon (2003), who have reviewed several studies on language and gender, women tend to turn to supralocal variants, and often also lead the way in linguistic changes. Men, on the other hand, largely tend to prefer local variants, which are often also the stigmatised ones (103). However, gender is rarely the only social variable at play in a sociolinguistic study, and other variables, such as age and social class, may be just as significant. Yet, the pattern of women using more standard forms than men remains, “regardless of other social characteristics such as class, age, etc.” (Romaine 2003, 101).

As an illustration, Trudgill’s (1974, in Romaine 2003, 101) study of the pronunciation of the ending *-ing*, realised as either the alveolar nasal /n/ or the velar nasal /ŋ/, found that men were more likely to use the non-standard form /n/ than women. This non-standard form is often referred to as “dropping one’s g’s” (101). As this particular feature is “a well-known marker of social status over most of the English-speaking world” (101), gender was not the only variable at play; the lower the social class, the more frequent the feature appeared. Nevertheless, Trudgill’s findings support the claim that women tend to favour standard speech to a larger extent than men. In addition to these measured differences in use, it has been seen that women sometimes ‘over-report’ their use of standard forms, while men tend to do the same with their use of non-standard forms (104). Several explanations have been given in order to understand why women tend to speak more standardised than men. For one, women have historically had a much less powerful position in society as opposed to men. One might therefore speculate that women traditionally used standard and thus prestigious variants in order to achieve status when other means, like education and employment,

were not accessible. Furthermore, the Victorian era saw the establishment of the association between ‘proper speech’ and ‘behaving like a lady’ (104), i.e. being feminine. As society has become more egalitarian and women have gained a stronger position over the past decades, these differences have supposedly persisted because non-standard forms remain associated with masculinity, and standard speech with femininity.

2.2 Attitudes to language

2.2.1 Defining attitude

Before delving into the field of language attitudes specifically, it is useful to take a look at attitude in general. The concept of attitude is a complex one, and thus difficult to capture in a definition. Peter Garrett (2010) turns to a handful of often-used definitions in his endeavour to explain attitude. He refers to Allport (1954; in Garrett 2010, 19), who gives the following definition: “a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way”. For a straightforward and simple definition of attitude, Garrett turns to Sarnoff (1970, 279; in Garrett 2010, 20), who refers to it as “a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects”. Attitude thus refers to one’s feelings and thoughts about something, both negative and positive. People tend to have attitudes towards most things in life, be it other people’s thoughts and actions, norms of society, personal beliefs, or – the topic of this study – how people speak. Allport’s definition includes one’s behaviour in addition to thoughts and feelings, and also states that attitudes are learned, and therefore not innate. Our attitudes are formed by the experiences we encounter in life, as well as by the social environment we find ourselves in (Garrett 2010, 22). Significant factors in this process of socialisation, and consequently in the forming of attitudes, are family and other close relations, the school system and the media, to mention a few. Furthermore, Oppenheim (1982, 39; in Garrett 2010, 20) gives attitudes the status of psychological constructs. As psychological constructs, attitudes are impossible to access precisely and consequently difficult to study, as one cannot directly observe them. They are stored in the minds of the people who hold them and cannot be put under the microscope. One can only study attitude through how it manifests, either in the form of emotional reactions, statements or behaviour. A person’s attitudes and perceptions of an object or another person both

determine, and become visible through, one's emotional reactions and behaviour towards them.

As already touched upon, attitudes have often been claimed to have a 'tripartite structure', consisting of the following three components: cognition, affect and behaviour (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003). Attitudes are cognitive because they include a person's world beliefs. Furthermore, they are affective because they stir certain emotions about the object being assessed. Finally, attitudes are behavioural because they have the ability to prompt the person holding them to behave in a certain way. This tripartite structure can be exemplified in a person's attitudes towards learning a second language. The cognitive component at play would for example be the person's belief that mastering a second language is advantageous for his or her career possibilities. The affective component becomes visible when this belief creates positive emotions towards the language. When the person's favourable beliefs and emotions towards learning a second language ultimately motivate him or her to actually put in a greater effort to do it, the behavioural component of attitude is present as well. The fact that attitudes are made up of these different components, and at the same time are so present in our lives, clearly points to the complexity of them. Attitudes are almost omnipresent, yet quite the challenging concept to describe. The relation between the components that make up the attitude structure has also been debated within the field and viewed as problematic, particularly in the case of attitudes and behaviour. According to Garrett (2010, 24), "there is some difficulty determining the interconnectedness of [the three components], and the extent to which we should anyway expect them to be in agreement all the time". As attitude remains a complex and abstract construct, it is borderline impossible to determine the amount of affect, cognition and behaviour that makes up an attitude. Furthermore, one cannot suppose that each component is equally important all the time. An important indication of this fact is that not all attitudes lead to actual behaviour. One can have strong emotions and beliefs about a matter without ever acting on it. In other words, the feelings and values one reports to be in possession of may not always manifest themselves in action.

The following section will deal with language attitudes in particular in order to gain a deeper understanding of their essence, how they are formed and why one would study them.

2.2.2 *Attitudes to language*

Early sociolinguistic research from the 1960s has been able to show that “linguistic variation may be socially significant” (Kristiansen 2001, 129). In other words, the way we speak is closely related to our identity as a means of establishing ourselves as members of a social group. Kristiansen, following Labov and other sociolinguistic scholars, thus considers linguistic variants to be possible “markers of social identity” and therefore able to arouse attitudes (130). Language is simply another ‘object’ towards which one can hold a range of attitudes, feelings and beliefs, both positive and negative. As noted by Garrett (2010, 1), “language attitudes permeate our daily lives”, even though we are not always aware of them, and do not always express them explicitly. People tend to have attitudes towards every level of a language, be it grammar, spelling, pronunciation, accents, dialects or entire languages (2). Furthermore, Garrett states that “many of our attitudes to language, like language itself, are acquired early in the lifespan” (29-30). Because they are such a large part of everyone’s lives, and because they are learned at an early stage in life, understanding attitudes to language is important. Language attitudes also tend to reveal the attitudes one holds towards its users, both as a community and individuals, since these sets of attitudes are typically challenging to differentiate from each other (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003, 12).

Language attitude research can also provide useful information in the effort to explain language variation and change over time. Language attitudes tend to be influenced by the process of standardisation that goes on within a language (Garrett 2010, 7), and these attitudes may in turn provide an explanation to why a language, an accent or a dialect evolves towards a standard, or distinguishes itself from it. In other words, language attitude research does not purely aim to investigate which attitudes are present in the public, but intends to gain a deeper understanding of how these attitudes are formed (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003, 13). Standard language ideology, referring to beliefs about what type of language is correct and normative, plays a significant part in shaping people’s attitudes to language. Many languages do in fact have a standard variety (Garrett 2010, 7). Standard language ideology holds strict beliefs about which language forms are acceptable and not. Standard varieties of

languages are given legitimacy from their codification in grammar books and dictionaries, as well as their widespread use in the educational system (7). As noted by Mugglestone (2003), broadcasting, and particularly the BBC, was a central aide when it came to consolidating the ideology of Received Pronunciation (RP) as the standard British accent. The use of “institutionalized RP” as “the ‘proper’ accent for serious and intellectual concerns” (275) allowed for the creation and consolidation of attitudes and stereotypes in relation to accent and identity. When an ideal variety of a language is set, forms that deviate from the standard can become stigmatised.

All in all, the study of language attitudes is important because it can reveal underlying attitudes towards certain language varieties and its users, expose the use of stereotypes as a tool of social categorisation, as well as help providing an explanation for language variation and change.

2.2.3 Attitudes to varieties of English

The study of attitudes to the English language began in the 1970s, with Howard Giles as one of the pioneers on the field. Giles (1970) was a comprehensive and influential study that has been replicated in recent times (Coupland and Bishop 2007). Since the beginning, a number of studies have been conducted on attitudes towards varieties of English (e.g. Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles and Farrar 1979; Garrett, Williams, and Evans 2005). Accents are often assessed on three different dimensions: status, social attractiveness and linguistic quality (this is further explained in section 3.1). The general finding in many of these attitudinal studies is that standard varieties of English, particularly RP or General American (GA), tend to be perceived as more prestigious and often more pleasing to listen to than regional varieties of both American and British English. Some regional varieties score relatively high on social attractiveness, but the standard varieties are overall favoured. Research on the use of accents in film and television furthermore indicates that ‘stigmatised’ accents, e.g. non-standard varieties of English or foreign accented English, are deliberately used to enhance character traits in the building of stereotypical characters. Dialect and accent are tools used to mark for example villains or comic characters, which will be examined in more detail later. Furthermore, a particular ‘hierarchy’ of accents has been found in several studies investigating British and American varieties of English (e.g. Hiraga 2005; Coupland and

Bishop 2007). In Britain, RP has been ranked the highest in terms of prestige and pleasantness. Secondly one can find regional varieties, typically Scottish and Irish English, as well as rural Yorkshire. They do not rank as high as RP when it comes to prestige, but they sometimes outrank the standard variety on social attractiveness. At the bottom of the hierarchy one can find the urban vernaculars, such as the Birmingham, Glasgow and Liverpool accents, as well as Cockney. A similar structural hierarchy has been detected among American varieties, with GA at the top. The standard variety is followed by Southern accented American English, i.e. a regional variety, perhaps due to a perception of 'southern hospitality'. The New York City accent is generally found at the bottom of the hierarchy, as the most stigmatised accent. This hierarchical organisation thus shows the standard varieties as the dominating ones, followed by regional or rural varieties, with urban vernaculars generally rated the lowest.

Hiraga (2005) studied British attitudes towards six different varieties of British and American English, including rural, urban and standard varieties. The respondents listened to speech samples and were asked to rate the accents according a given set of adjectives. The British varieties chosen were RP as the standard, the Birmingham accent as the urban, and finally a Yorkshire accent as the rural variety. For the American accents, the standard variety, GA, was sampled from a radio announcer. Furthermore, the New York City accent was chosen as the urban American variety, and the accent of Alabama as the rural one. The varieties were assessed with reference to two dimensions: status and solidarity (292) (see section 3.1). The study found that RP gained the highest rating when it came to status but scored significantly lower on solidarity. Network American ranked high both in terms of status and solidarity. The non-standard varieties, both rural and urban, generally scored lower than the standard varieties, with the urban varieties at the very bottom. It is interesting that standard American is valued more among Brits than their own rural and urban varieties, and the explanation given is that American English is favoured because it comes from outside of the British society. Another central finding is that these British respondents mirror American attitudes towards American varieties. Studies have shown that American respondents tend to rate their own varieties according to a similar tripartite accent hierarchy as the Brits (Preston 1998), and it is noteworthy that Hiraga's British respondents both distinguish between and evaluate American accents in the same manner as Americans do. One might

speculate that these attitudes, reflecting the American society, have reached other parts of the world through the media, and that these respondents have been subject to an influence primarily from film. Previous findings have shown that rural accents are more favoured than accents from industrial urban areas, and as noted, this turned out to be the case in Hiraga's study as well, confirming the previously mentioned accent hierarchy. The reason for this is that urban varieties of British English are associated with a largely negative image of the working-class, while the rural varieties are connected to "a romanticised nostalgic view of the countryside" (Hiraga 2005, 301) on the part of people who live in the cities. The study thus concludes that British people very much care about social connotations of accents, favouring standard British English, and that the level of prestige afforded to a specific accent is important to Brits (306). In addition, similar attitudes become apparent in their evaluation of American accents.

Another study of attitudes to accents of English, that also illustrates the aforementioned accent hierarchy, was published by Coupland and Bishop in 2007. The study included an online survey in which the 5010 participants reacted to 34 different accents of English. The accents were represented by labels. The majority of the accents were British, but the study also included other native accents, as well as some non-native accents of English. In line with Hiraga, the study was based on U.K. informants (Coupland and Bishop 2007, 74). Coupland and Bishop underline that although there is not "a consolidated, single ideological set in the evaluation of English accents" (85), the findings of their large-scale study still offers comparative data from which one can draw some conclusions. The study found that standard accents, in this case referred to as 'A standard accent of English' and 'Queen's English', were rated the highest regarding both how much prestige the participants thought was connected to the accent, as well as how pleasant they felt the accent sounded. The variety referred to as 'A standard accent of English' was favoured more liberally than 'Queen's English', the phrasing of the latter perhaps carrying some distancing connotations. Urban vernacular varieties, particularly the speech of Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow, were "systematically downgraded" (80), while regional varieties, such as Irish, Scottish and the West country accent were rated more favourably than the urban ones. In short, the hierarchical relation between standard, regional and urban varieties is found here as well.

Coupland and Bishop's (2007) study also found that what they label Northern American, was in fact rated lower on both social attractiveness and prestige than RP and a handful of British regional varieties, but still higher than urban vernaculars and most of the non-native English accents. Australian English was rated rather similarly to regional British varieties, with a slightly above-middle score on social attractiveness, but a bit lower on prestige. As far as the non-native varieties are concerned, the majority were rated rather low on both scales. Afro-Caribbean accented English was rated quite low on social attractiveness, and almost at the bottom on prestige. An Asian accent of English was virtually on the bottom of both scales, showing very negative attitudes towards this accent. A French accent of English, on the other hand, was rated fairly high, and clearly evokes more positive connotations among the respondents than the other non-native accents included did. The study also revealed some differences between age groups among the respondents: the older respondent groups were more negative towards 'stigmatised' varieties than the younger respondents were, even though the younger groups were still overall negative (85). Younger respondents were also a bit less positive towards the standard accents, i.e. RP. Coupland and Bishop hopefully interpret this finding as "a glimmer of liberal sentiment" (85), perhaps indicating a shift in language attitudes over time. They argue that if young people's detained positivity towards 'Queen's English' means that they are becoming less favourable towards conservative RP, their study consequently supports Lynda Mugglestone's (2003) claim that "talking proper" is gradually starting to be seen as "talking posh" (280).

In a separate article, Bishop, Coupland and Garrett (2005) compare and contrast a subset of the data from the abovementioned study with those of Giles' notable study from 1970, in order to detect any systematic change in attitudes to language in British society. The contemporary study was conducted to be as similar to the study by Giles as possible. The results were, as put by the authors, "from a progressive libertarian stance 'disappointing'" (152), as the findings of the two studies were strikingly similar. Overall, the most recent study found that accent prejudice had not changed all that much over the course of the roughly 35 years that had passed since Giles' study. The standard accent of RP remains "the most prestigious accent of English" (139). The researchers did not, however, use the term RP, but rather two labels in order to capture what

linguists consider to be RP. The labels used were ‘a standard English accent’ and ‘Queen’s English’. The results show that ‘Queen’s English’ is rated lower on social attractiveness than ‘a standard English accent’, especially among younger respondents (140). Nevertheless, the accents equivalent to RP maintain their favourable evaluations on social attractiveness as well as prestige (139-140). Other notable results from the comparison of the two studies are that the Scottish and North American accents continue to achieve a relatively high score on prestige, although not surpassing RP, whereas the Birmingham and Liverpool accents remain stigmatised varieties (139). The traditional pattern of favouring standard accents thus remains.

With regards to attitudes to English varieties outside the UK, Bayard et al. (2001) investigated accent evaluations with participants from universities in New Zealand, Australia and the US. The study aimed to disclose whether or not ‘RP-type accents’ maintain their prestigious position, particularly in New Zealand and Australia, and to find out if standard American might be taking over as the most prestigious accent (23). The study found that American English was generally rated most favourably across the three nationalities of the respondents (22). It also showed that the New Zealand participants tended to “downgrade their own accent in power and to some extent solidarity” (40). However, this was not the case for the Australians, who “clearly exhibit less deference” towards British and American English (40) than their neighbours do. All in all, the study revealed that the dominance of RP at the expense of NZE has largely been replaced by the dominance of American English, especially in the media (41). Its findings suggest that RP might seem to be replaced by General American as the most prestigious variety of English in New Zealand, Australia and some non-English speaking countries (43-44), due to the USA’s dominating position in the global media. Nevertheless, RP did maintain its high score on certain traits, such as power and competence. In addition, it has been confirmed that Bayard et al.’s findings cannot be as widely applied as it anticipates. A study by Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) on the attitudes of Danish learners towards British and American English showed that even though the dominance of American culture is recognised, and even though the participants generally reported positive attitudes towards America, its culture and its people, they had no desire to adopt an American accent. RP maintained its position as the most prestigious accent of English in this study, and was also considered to be “the

most fluent, the most efficient, beautiful and correct”, as well as “the most appropriate model for pronunciation” (100). In other words, the participants would rather strive for an RP accent than GA, thus contradicting Bayard et al.’s claim that “a *Pax Americana* [...] will continue for the foreseeable future” (2001, 44).

A number of attitudinal language studies have been conducted in the US as well. Although there is less regional variation in the US compared to Britain, a similar hierarchical pattern as mentioned above has been identified in an American setting as well. Preston (1998) found that an accent highly similar to the standard GA was considered to be ‘neutral’ or ‘normal’ by the respondents, and also the most ‘correct English’ (142). The accents of the South and New York City were rated the lowest on correctness, and the New York City accent was also described as ‘bad English’ (144). Furthermore, the study found that this view was largely shared by respondents from different areas, including the South itself. At the same time, Southern respondents reported that they found their own variety to be the ‘most pleasant’ (147). All in all, one can identify a comparable accent hierarchy in the US as in Britain, in which the standard variety is favoured above regional and urban varieties. Similar to British regional varieties, the southern American accent is afforded a slightly higher rating than the urban variety of New York City, due to a perceived ‘southern hospitality’ and pleasantness.

Lindemann (2005) conducted a study on US undergraduate students’ perceptions of non-native English accents. The respondents were asked to rate a list of countries according how familiar their English accents were to them, as well as how correct, pleasant and friendly they perceived the accents to be. The results showed that practically all non-native accents of English were classified as ‘broken’ or ‘bad’, with the exception of some Western European countries (207). Both French, Italian and Spanish accents of English were evaluated as quite ‘correct’, ‘pleasant’ and ‘friendly’ (208). Lindemann even states that “varieties of English spoken by Western Europeans tended to be viewed more positively than stigmatized native US dialects” (210). Eastern European in general, and Russian accented English in particular, was afforded the lowest ratings on all three traits. East Asian accents of English was also among the most stigmatised non-native accents, with characterisations like ‘choppy’, ‘poorly enunciated’ and ‘hard to understand’ (208). Latin American was also evaluated

negatively. Lindemann points out that “the most salient groups are those which include the largest numbers of recent immigrants to the US: Latin Americans and East Asians” (208). However, she underlines that other factors might be relevant, e.g. the students’ negative experiences with East Asian teaching assistants (209) or socio-political relations to the countries in question and their portrayals in popular media (210). Finally, Lindemann argues that the description of ‘broken’ English may not necessarily be as negative as one first thinks, but that more research is needed to investigate to which degree these generally negative perceptions of non-native English accents are applicable.

There is some controversy related to the fact that some varieties, and often standard varieties like RP, are always rated high when it comes to both status and aesthetic qualities (Hiraga 2005, 299). One explanation given is the ‘inherent value hypothesis’, which claims that some accents are simply more aesthetically pleasing to listen to by way of an internal quality. Another, and opposing, explanation is the Imposed Norm Hypothesis, which refers to the assumption that social pressure leads speakers to favour these standard varieties, that are ultimately perceived as “desirable and superior on many counts” (299). It explains that standard varieties are given high-status because the majority of their speakers are also of high status. A study by Giles, Bourhis, and Davies (1979) aimed to find out which of the two hypotheses is the most plausible mechanism behind the standard varieties’ afforded prestige. They asked a set of Welsh respondents to evaluate three varieties of French according to pleasantness and status. All of the subjects reported to have very little knowledge of French, which was an essential prerequisite for the study. The findings did not reveal any patterns, thus supporting the Imposed Norm Hypothesis. If certain varieties did in fact possess an inherent aesthetic value, listeners who do not know the variety in question would evaluate its perceived level of prestige and pleasantness in a similar manner as native speakers. The results of Giles, Bourhis and Davies’ study thus indicate that the Imposed Norm Hypothesis is the most suited one to explain why some varieties are rated more favourably than others. The findings of the study also support the claim that attitudes are learned and constructed, and therefore not innate.

Attitudinal studies of the English language have overall shown a preference of standard varieties when it comes to perceived pleasantness and prestige. A lot of

research has been conducted since Giles' 1970 study, but relatively little change in attitudes has been detected (Bishop, Coupland, and Garrett 2005), as standard varieties ultimately maintain their strong position.

2.2.4 Stereotyping

Central to the study of language attitudes is the use of stereotypes, both linguistic and social, in order to categorise speakers of various accents. Stereotyping can be defined as “a functional cognitive device by means of which we systemize our social environment, creating distinct and apparently homogeneous categories” (Kristiansen 2001, 137). It refers to the labelling and categorisation of others into specific groups, and often the exaggeration of certain traits that one reckons apply to the entire group. In her article, Kristiansen aims to explore how and why accents can indeed say something about a person's identity and membership of a community, i.e. be “socially diagnostic” (129). Kristiansen writes about accents from a cognitive point of view, using social identity theory, and explains how individuals tend to seek the membership of certain social groups in order to enhance their self-esteem. Seeing oneself as a member of a prestigious group, or distinguishing oneself from stigmatised groups, can be a way of doing this. In other words, we tend to categorise ourselves and others in an effort to build our identity. Language can be a crucial way of differentiating oneself from others. Accent use can establish identification and membership with a social group, create unity within the group, as well as distinctness from other groups. Social categorisation can lead to the use of stereotypes, both to describe the ingroup and the outgroups. Garrett, Coupland and Williams (2003, 3) point at two main functions of stereotypes within a social group: firstly, a social-explanatory function, which refers to “the creation and maintenance of group ideologies” in order to define one's own group. Secondly, a social-differentiation function that serves to preserve the differences between one's own group and outgroups (3). These explanations go hand in hand with Kristiansen's theories of social categorisation and stereotyping. One tends to see the outgroups as more homogenous than they really are in an effort to distinguish oneself from them, essentially claiming that ‘they are all the same, but I am different’. A significant consequence is thus the failure to see the diversity that is present within an outgroup, as well as defining the group in its entirety based on the conception of a subgroup of the

group, or only one member. By emphasising similarity within our own group as well as our group's difference to others, in combination with basing the characterisation of the outgroup on a small portion of it, or even on a single member, it becomes easier to quickly associate linguistic features with social identities, often in a very simplistic way. Linguistic and social stereotyping, in turn, makes the process of categorisation much easier. Stereotyping is, in other words, a useful tool in social categorisation, but also something that undoubtedly can create both positive and negative attitudes to different language varieties.

As mentioned in section 2.2.2, our attitudes to language begin to take form quite early in life. Film and television are significant factors in the process of socialisation in which this formation takes place. The way films and television series portray and treat various accents and character types therefore plays a significant role in shaping attitudes to language, and possibly stereotypical perceptions of different accents. Several studies show that many filmmakers tend to rely on stereotypes when creating their characters, which will be dealt with further in the following section. The use of stereotypes allows for the audience to make quick decisions as to which type of character they are dealing with, using mechanisms of social categorisation. Research has shown that children's television tends to portray people of colour, as well characters of both genders, in "highly stereotypical ways" (Dobrow and Gidney 1998, 106). Lippi-Green's study of accent use in Disney animated film also found that stereotypes were widely used to create certain connotations among the audience, as well as a pattern of presenting characters with stigmatised accents in "animal or inanimate form" (Lippi-Green 2012, 113). More attention will be paid to these studies in section 2.3. Nevertheless, as children and teenagers watch a large amount of film and television (cf. section 1.1), they are highly exposed to linguistic and social stereotypes and stand the risk of reproducing them as they are not able to meet them in the same critical manner an adult would.

2.2.5 The societal treatment study

The societal treatment study is one of three central approaches to the study of attitudes to language, and the one that is employed in the present study. The approach investigates the 'treatment' of different linguistic varieties and their users in society by examining the use of language in public sources like advertisements, letters to editors or

film and television (Garrett 2010, 142). In a societal treatment study, language attitudes are not explicitly expressed by a set of informants but inferred by the researcher from the sources used. A detailed presentation of the method can be found in section 3.1. As for the use of language in film specifically, the underlying premise for a study that investigates this, is the assumption that the choices made concerning accent distribution are not arbitrary. One considers that the various characters are deliberately assigned a specific variety, whether it is the accent of the actor or a different one. As actors sometimes are asked to change their accent for a job, one must take for granted that there is always a conscious choice behind the variety a character is assigned. That is why a study of language use in film can offer an insight into attitudes to language in society.

2.3 Previous studies

The following section describes a handful of studies that have been done within the field of language attitudes in film and television, many of which are MA theses. Two of the studies are particularly relevant for this thesis; Bratteli (2011) investigated computer games within the same genre as my sample, that is to say science fiction, while Urke (2019) compared older original Disney films to their more recent remake counterparts. Along the same lines, I will attempt to disclose any changes from the first *Star Wars* trilogy to the last.

2.3.1 Dobrow and Gidney (1998)

Dobrow and Gidney (1998) conducted a study on the use of dialect and foreign accents in children's animated television in the US. The authors underline the importance of "critically [examining] the images of gender and ethnicity that exist in contemporary children's programming" (106). Dobrow and Gidney wanted to examine how dialect and accent potentially is used to create stereotypes, as well as how linguistic variation is treated in children's animated television. They note that research from the 1970s has shown a significant underrepresentation of female and non-white characters in animated programs for children, and that this picture remains intact during the 1980s (107). This is noteworthy, as the first *Star Wars* trilogy was released during this time period, thus

creating an expectation that female and coloured characters will be inadequately represented in these films as well. Furthermore, they refer to Graves (1993, in Dobrow and Gidney 1998, 106-107) when pointing out that for members of minority groups in society, particularly African Americans in this case, the absence or negative portrayal of their own ethnic groups can have a negative impact on self-esteem and self-concept. Research from the 1990s point to a slight change in a positive direction when it comes to the portrayal of various ethnicities and women, but there is still some way to go.

Many of Dobrow and Gidney's (1998) findings were in line with previous research, but some did indicate "somewhat greater diversity in the world of children's animated programming" (112). Nevertheless, as many as 69% of the characters analysed were male, and only 27% were female. The study also found a stereotypical presentation of gender, in which male characters were "portrayed as stronger and smarter than females" (113). There was also more diversity among the male characters. Furthermore, even though their results pointed to slightly more ethnic diversity than previous research, the majority of the characters were of "Anglo-Saxon" ethnicity (113). In terms of the linguistic results, the findings revealed that accent and dialect was indeed used to emphasise certain character traits, thus suggesting that "children's television relies heavily on language to mark characters' personalities" (114). Accent was particularly used to mark villains and comic characters, assigning villains either with recognisable foreign accents, often Slavic or German, or non-standard American. In general, villains spoke with accents that were "all associated with low socioeconomic status" (115). Additionally, RP was frequently used for villains, but also to signal sophistication and delicacy. The use of RP to represent either "the embodiment of effete evil" or "the epitome of refinement and elegance" (117) points to very ambivalent American attitudes towards this particular variety of English. Dobrow and Gidney concludes by saying that television is an important source for children when it comes to learning about others, but also about themselves (118). It is therefore problematic that linguistic and social stereotypes are allowed to live on without contradiction. The fact that children from minority backgrounds are unable to find characters with whom they can identify on an ethnic basis is also criticisable, as the depiction of non-white ethnicities remains heavily stereotypical. As a final note, however, they do state that a small handful of the television shows analysed are able to portray "male and female

characters from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in ways free of visual, behavioral, or linguistic stereotypes” (118). The concluding remark may indicate some hope for more inclusive and diverse children’s television in the future.

2.3.2 *Lippi-Green (2012)*

One of the earliest studies of attitudes to language conveyed through film, and a well-known one as such, was conducted by Rosina Lippi-Green in 1997. The study investigated the use of accents in Disney full-length animated films, and analysed 23 films released between 1937 and 1994, including 371 characters. For the second edition of her book *English with an Accent*, in which she presents her findings, an additional 15 films were included. The study focuses on three main aspects: the use of foreign accents, African American Vernacular English, and gender roles. Lippi-Green (2012) found what she calls “a range of social and linguistic stereotypes” (112) conveyed to children by Disney, and claims that the stereotypes used are made quite clear. The Disney corporation has great power over the formation of children’s images of other cultures and traditions, as these topics often form the backdrop of the story in many of their films. Lippi-Green claims that the image of a culture that Disney portrays through its films is sometimes even the only image children will be exposed to, leaving Disney with a monumental power when it comes to shaping people’s perception of certain cultures or historical periods.

Lippi-Green found that around 70% of the characters analysed were male, and the remaining female. This significant gender imbalance corresponds to the findings of Dobrow and Gidney (1998), as seen in section 2.3.1. Furthermore, Disney animated films heavily reproduce traditional gender roles through the part the characters play in the film, both when it comes to profession and aspirations in life. If the female characters have a job outside the home, which is rare, they tend to hold traditional female professions, such as waitresses, nurses and nannies. The female characters are generally content with fulfilling the role as a dutiful daughter, mother or wife, and have few other aspirations. As far as the linguistic aspect is concerned, Lippi-Green found that the majority of the characters, namely 43%, spoke with what she refers to as a Standard American accent, while 22% spoke Standard British English (Lippi-Green 2012, 115). The standard varieties of English thus dominate Disney animated film, and

there is little linguistic diversity to be detected. Lippi-Green also found a correlation between Standard American English and character traits such as being powerful and educated (123). The occurrence of AAVE is generally low, and all the characters speaking this accent “appear in animal rather than humanoid form” (123). Similarly, only around 9% of all the characters speak with a foreign accent, even though many of the films take place in a foreign setting. The percentage of evil characters among non-native speakers of English is much higher than among US English speakers, even though the majority of the characters speak with a Standard American accent (117). Lippi-Green concludes by stating that Disney deliberately uses language to create correlations between ethnicity and alignment, and thus detects systematic correlations between accent and character traits.

2.3.3 *Dragojevic et al. (2016)*

In the “first quantitative content analysis to comprehensively examine accent portrayals on American primetime television” (59), Dragojevic et al. (2016) conducted a societal treatment study of 89 different television shows, including 1,252 characters. The characters were categorised according to four accent clusters, as well as their role and a handful of attributes related to status, solidarity and appearance. The accent clusters were Standard American (SA), corresponding to GA, Nonstandard American (NSA), which refers to all American regional and ethnic accents, Foreign-Anglo (FA), i.e. all non-American Anglo accents such as British, Australian, etc., and finally Foreign-Other (FO), which refers to non-Anglo foreign accents (65). The accent clusters are in other words very broad.

Dragojevic et al. (2016) found that SA speakers appeared much more frequently than any of the other accent groups (72). They also found accent to correlate with both character role, status and physical appearance. SA and FA speakers were more likely to have main roles than characters speaking with an FO accent (72). On attributes related to status, characters who spoke SA and FA were portrayed as more intelligent than NSA and FO speakers, as well as more motivated than FO characters (73). The researchers also found that accent was related to physical attractiveness, as SA speakers were portrayed as more attractive than NSA speakers, who in turn were portrayed with heavier body mass than the remaining groups (74).

Overall, Dragojevic et al. (2016) found that characters speaking with SA or FA accents are highly overrepresented in American primetime television, while non-standard speakers are virtually silenced. When non-standard speakers are in fact represented, their portrayals are often of a more negative nature than those of SA speakers. In light of their findings, the researchers thus argue that “accent portrayals in this media landscape are biased, reflecting pervasive accent-based stereotypes in American society” (79). They note how these biased portrayals can have negative consequences for naïve viewers’ perceptions of the practically silenced linguistic groups and for those groups’ sense of self (77). The presence or absence of certain linguistic groups in the media can be a reflection of their power in society, and the nature of their portrayals can contribute to defining them. Several of the findings of Dragojevic et al. (2016) are also in line with previous research on language attitudes. It will therefore be interesting to investigate whether the same patterns of accent distributions and nature of portrayals can be detected in the *Star Wars* trilogies.

2.3.4 Sønnesyn (2009)

In her MA thesis, Sønnesyn (2009) conducted a study of the use of accents in Disney animated films released between 1995 and 2009, as a continuation of Lippi-Green’s initial study. Sønnesyn thus wanted to examine possible correlations between accent and character traits, in addition to comparing her own findings with those of Lippi-Green. As society has developed in the time period from Lippi-Green’s 1997 study, Sønnesyn was curious to see if the films reflected this development in the language attitudes they convey. Sønnesyn analysed a total of eighteen films and 372 characters, and categorised the characters according to accent, character role, gender, ethnicity and level of sophistication. The specific accent categories used were GA, RP, Regional American English, Regional British English, African American Vernacular English and “English with other accent” (28).

The study found that the clear majority, i.e. 61%, of the characters analysed spoke with a General American accent. RP was the second largest accent category, with 14,2% of the characters (51). This finding largely correlates with the findings of both Dobrow and Gidney (1998) and Lippi-Green (2012). The pattern of standard varieties of English dominating film and television is striking. The imbalance of gender that was

detected in the two previously mentioned studies is also found in this study, with notable similarities; 66% of the characters are male, 23% are female and the remaining 11% are categorised as undetermined (Sønnesyn 2009, 57). The analysis of gender and language shows that GA is the dominating accent among both genders but has a slightly higher representation among the female characters. Sønnesyn also found slightly more linguistic diversity among the male characters. As previous studies have shown, and sociolinguistic theory explains, women tend to speak more standardised than men (see section 2.1.1). More linguistic diversity among male characters is therefore expected, as men to a larger extent tend to use localised variants.

Furthermore, Sønnesyn found a great majority of “non-ethnic”, i.e. white characters, compared to characters of other ethnicities (Sønnesyn 2009, 61). GA is the dominating accent for both categories. This finding is rather interesting seeing as several of the films take place in a foreign country, without it being reflected in the manner in which the characters speak. RP, however, was barely detectable among ethnic characters. As for the characters’ level of sophistication, GA dominated both the sophisticated and the unsophisticated group. When taking a closer look, it became evident that regionally marked accents, and the New York City accent in particular, was predominantly used for unsophisticated characters. Within the variable of character role, GA was again the accent of the majority. However, the distribution of GA was significantly lower in the categories “Aide to hero/heroine” and “Unsympathetic character” (78). The latter category in particular unexpectedly showed a much more diverse distribution of accents, with both regionally marked American and English with a foreign accent showing a rather high representation compared to the other character roles. A possible explanation given is the level of sophistication for these characters, as they were predominantly unsophisticated. All in all, in light of recent social changes, Sønnesyn expected a more diverse and authentic use of language than was found in Lippi-Green’s study and was surprised to find that the Disney corporation clearly favours standard varieties of English, and GA in particular. She speculates that the frequent use of standard accents might be an effort to remain politically correct, and not stand the risk of portraying various accents as notably negative or positive (91).

2.3.5 *Bratteli (2011)*

Bratteli's (2011) MA thesis investigated the use of accents, in addition to stereotyping, in computer games. A total of 10 computer games, released between 1997 and 2009, were analysed, including as many as 1230 characters. Bratteli's study distinguishes itself from the other mentioned in this thesis as his data consists of computer games, as opposed to films and television series. Due to this, he has little opportunity to directly compare his findings with similar studies. Still, his study aimed to investigate possible correlations between accent and character traits, similar to the studies mentioned above. The characters analysed were categorised according to the following variables: Orientation, Gender, Social Status, Species, Prominence and Alignment (9). Furthermore, they were placed in the accent categories of GA, RP, British Coloured American (BA), i.e. "a variety using a mix of GA and RP features", foreign accented, socially and regionally marked American, and socially and regionally marked British English (9).

Bratteli expected to find more accent variation in older games compared to newer, due to the political correctness that has evolved in society in this given time period, a topic also touched upon by Sønnesyn (2009). Furthermore, although he expected to find a widespread use of American English, Bratteli anticipated more use of British English in fantasy games than in science fiction games. The argument behind this expectation is that fantasy games are often set in a medieval or renaissance European setting, a time period in which North America was yet to be colonised (Bratteli 2011, 11). Additionally, he expected to find more standard varieties among female characters, as well as more use of RP and BA among intellectual characters and characters of high social status.

The study found that GA was the dominating accent category, with well over 50% of the characters speaking this accent. The second largest accent category was RP (Bratteli 2011, 73-74). The percentages differ somewhat when taking into account that some games include significantly more characters than others, showing greater linguistic diversity in games with fewer characters, but the dominant position of GA remains unchanged. Characters defined as intellectual were more likely to speak with British accents, either in the form of RP or Bratteli's category of British Coloured American. BA and RP were often the accents of characters with high social status, while

socially and regionally marked varieties of English were more common among those categorised as non-high (106). Bratteli also found the gender imbalance that has made itself clear through the studies previously mentioned: roughly 74% of all the characters analysed are male, while only 26% are female. Even though the male characters “were far more likely to speak BA than females” (105), the study found that the female characters to a slightly larger extent than male characters spoke with standard variety, either RP, GA or BA. There was also a higher distribution of non-standard accents, thus more linguistic variation, among the male characters. This finding is in line with previous research on language and gender (cf. section 2.1.1), as well as with Sønnesyn’s (2009) findings. In his concluding remarks, Bratteli states that the distribution of GA was unpredictable, as it was used for many different purposes, but he assumes its function to be a mark of neutrality (107). The results thus differ a bit from Lippi-Green (2012), Dobrow and Gidney (1998) and Sønnesyn (2009), as it seems GA is the obvious accent choice in games when no “better alternative” is present (Bratteli 2011, 107).

2.3.6 *Lundervold (2013)*

In her MA thesis, Lundervold (2013) conducted a study of language attitudes in the *Harry Potter* films, as well as the first season of *Game of Thrones*. As previous research has established correlations between accent and character traits, Lundervold expected to find a similar pattern in her data material, yet some differences between the two types of data as they have different target audiences. The accent categories applied in Lundervold’s study were RP, London English, i.e. Cockney, Estuary English, West Country English, Northern English, Scottish English, Irish English, Welsh English and English with foreign accents (44-48). The non-linguistic categories were Character role, Maturity, Gender, Level of sophistication, and finally a category named Other character traits, which included sympathetic/non-sympathetic or good/evil characters (48-51). The study analysed and categorised a total of 124 characters, 76 of which were from *Harry Potter*, and the remaining 48 from *Game of Thrones* (54). The general finding with regards to accent distribution was a clear domination of RP (54-55). Lundervold thus distinguishes itself from the beforementioned studies in that it found only British varieties of English, in addition to English with a foreign accent, but no American accents. A possible reason behind this is that at least the *Harry Potter* film series takes

place in a British setting. However, as *Game of Thrones* is set in a fictional time and place, any variety of English could be applied.

Furthermore, the pattern of gender imbalance that has appeared in the review of the abovementioned studies is relevant for Lundervold as well. 88 of the 124 characters are male and 36 are female, giving the same relative percentage as the other studies: 70% male characters, 30% female (55). When looking at *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones* individually, the gender imbalance is nearly identical (57-58). In addition, there is more overall linguistic variation among the male characters than the female in this study as well. The clear majority of the female characters, 63,9%, speak with an RP accent, while the corresponding percentage for the male characters is 47,7% (56-57). This finding is in agreement with previous sociolinguistic research indicating that women have a higher tendency to speak with a standard accent than men.

When it comes to level of sophistication, Lundervold found that the majority of the sophisticated characters spoke with an RP accent, while all the speakers of the Cockney, West Country, Northern English and Irish English accents were classified as unsophisticated (62). The study also showed that speakers of Scottish English were generally sophisticated characters, which indicates that Scottish has a higher status than other non-standard British accents, in line with the ‘accent hierarchy’ seen in section 2.2.3. The pattern of favouring RP for sophisticated characters is quite similar between the two franchises, with the exception that the number of unsophisticated RP speakers in *Harry Potter* is higher than in *Game of Thrones* (64). As far as alignment is concerned, the overall finding was that the ‘evil’ and ‘mixed’ categories had a higher percentage of RP speakers than the ‘good’ category, and there was also more linguistic variation within the ‘good’ category. However, the actual number of RP speakers in the ‘good’ category was higher, giving a less clear linguistic distinction between good and evil.

The study concludes that there are indeed detectable correlations between accent and character traits in *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*, thus conveying underlying attitudes to language, and that the two sample groups overall are quite similar on this point.

2.3.7 *Moltu (2014)*

Moltu's (2014) MA thesis examined the use of English accents in American fantasy film. The study included a total of 12 fantasy films, directed at both adults and children. These two types of expected audiences were deliberately selected in order to find out whether there was any difference in accent use between them (28). A total of 189 characters were analysed and categorised according to accent and character traits. Moltu's accent categories were RP, GA, regionally marked British English, African American Vernacular English and English with a foreign accent. The characters were categorised in line with the following variables: Gender, Character role, Alignment, Species and Level of sophistication (33-34).

The study found that an overwhelming majority of the characters analysed spoke with British accents: as many as 62% spoke with an RP accent, and 19% with a regionally marked British accent, which included Cockney, Irish English, Northern English, Scottish English and West Country, i.e. the accents of the southwest of England. Moltu comments that even though this finding is quite interesting, given that the films are all produced by American film companies, the genre of fantasy still tends to favour British accents. She suggests that they in this case "are used to signal that the action takes place in a different world outside the US", in addition to establishing a connotation between "accents with deep historical roots" and the mythical, often medieval-inspired setting of the fantasy films (40). Furthermore, Moltu refers to a study by Garrett, Williams, and Evans (2005) which found that American English speakers associated British speech with history and royalty (227), which might indicate that the audience expects to hear British accents rather than American ones in a fantasy setting (Moltu 2014, 41). Moltu's study distinguishes itself from previous studies like Lippi-Green (2012), Sønnesyn (2009) and Bratteli (2011) in the distribution of General American, which was the mostly used accent in these three studies. The relative limited use of General American that was found in Moltu's study is therefore notable.

In terms of the gender variable, the study showed a gender imbalance in how many characters were female and how many were male. In line with the other studies introduced, a significant majority of the characters were men, with almost three-quarters of the characters being male in the analysed films (Moltu 2014, 44-45). Furthermore, the vast majority of the female characters spoke with a standard accent, either RP or

GA, which leaves the group of male characters with significantly more linguistic variation than the female. Moltu also found that characters with “major roles” largely tended to speak with standard accents, while non-standard accents, and regional British accents in particular, were found to a higher degree among “minor roles” (48). A possible explanation is that the audience is expected to sympathise more with the major roles than the minor ones, and possible stigmatised accents are therefore avoided. Furthermore, accents serve as a tool in character building, and minor characters have less screen-time with which one can get to know them and are possibly in higher need of a marked accent in order to be established as characters. The accent distribution among various species, categorised by Moltu as either “human”, “human-like” or “non-human” (50), also shows a pattern of largely assigning human characters with standard accents, while regionally marked British gains a higher representation among human-like and non-human characters. She suspects that a marked accent contributes to underlining the ‘otherness’ of these characters, thus creating a clear distinction between those who are human and those who are not.

As far as alignment is concerned, the study found quite similar patterns of accent distribution among good and bad characters, even though the number of good characters outweigh the bad ones. However, in contrast with previous studies, Moltu found that RP had a higher distribution among good characters than among bad (Moltu 2014, 56). This is interesting, as RP previously quite notably has been used for villains. However, an increased use of regionally marked accents was found among bad characters, with Cockney particularly favoured within the character category. Another, and perhaps the most notable finding in Moltu’s study, is the accent distribution between sophisticated and unsophisticated characters. Categorically all of the sophisticated characters speak with a standard accent; the vast majority being RP. Among the unsophisticated characters, the majority is assigned a regionally marked British accent, most often Cockney. Finally, the study found that family films had a higher distribution of GA, and less regionally marked accents, than films directed at adults. However, the expected audience-variable did not yield the most distinct results.

2.3.8 *Urke (2019)*

In her MA thesis, Urke (2019) studied the use of accents in original Disney films and their remakes. The study aimed to investigate correlations between accent and character traits, as well as to explore any possible changes between the oldest and the more recent films, and whether such changes coincided with developments in society and the film industry (1). Urke's study is similar to that of Lippi-Green (2012) and Sønnesyn (2009), but distinguishes itself from the two in that it includes live action films in addition to animated films. The original Disney films included in the study were released between 1950 and 1991, and the remakes were released between 2010 and 2018 (28). This significant time gap allows for interesting observations with regards to change. The analysis included 16 Disney films and a total of 234 characters that were categorized according to Gender, Level of sophistication, Alignment, Species and Character role (1). Additionally, the characters were categorized according to the following accent categories: GA, RP, Regional American, Regional British, Cockney and Foreign accent.

The study found that standard varieties of English by far dominate the original films. GA is the largest accent category, with 46%, while 35% of the characters speak RP (Urke 2019, 42-43). With its 10%, Cockney is the third largest category. The analysis of the remakes shows a notable decrease in the use of GA to only 16% (43-44). The majority of the characters in the remakes speak with an RP accent. The remaining accents, all non-standard, roughly shows the same distribution in both originals and remakes. Overall, the standard varieties GA and RP are the dominating accents in both sample groups, and there is generally little linguistic variation in the analysed films. Urke's expectation to find more accent diversity in the remakes was therefore not fulfilled (46). The gender imbalance one has seen in other previous studies is present in Urke's thesis as well: females make up only 30% of the total number of characters in the originals, and 38% in the remakes (46), thus following the noteworthy pattern of roughly distributing males and females 70% and 30%, respectively. When it comes to language and gender, the study found that both male and female characters followed the pattern of increased RP and decreased GA from originals to remakes (47-49). Even though the clear majority of male and female characters alike speak with GA or RP, the female characters have a slightly higher tendency to speak with a standard accent than the male. Furthermore, all of the non-standard accent categories are represented among

the male characters in both of the sample groups (47), but this is only the case for the female characters in the originals, and not in the remakes (48-49).

When it comes to level of sophistication, the study found that in the originals, roughly half of the characters classified as sophisticated spoke with an RP accent, and 38% spoke with a GA accent. For the remakes, an even higher percentage of the sophisticated characters were RP speakers, as many as 64%, while the percentage for GA had decreased to 15% (Urke 2019, 52). Among the unsophisticated characters, the analysis of the originals proved GA to be the most used accent, while RP is the most frequent accent for this category in the remakes (53-54). It is quite unusual for RP to be the accent of the unsophisticated. A possible explanation Urke gives is that although many RP speakers in the sample were indeed members of the upper class, they were eccentric and strange enough to be classified as unsophisticated (56). All in all, the study found more accent diversity among the unsophisticated characters than among the sophisticated ones in the original films, while there was an overall higher accent diversity among the sophisticated characters in the remakes (56).

In terms of alignment, the accent distribution among both good and bad characters follows the pattern of GA dominating the original films, while RP has a marked increase, and consequently GA has a decrease, in the remakes. Within the species category, the study found slightly more accent diversity among non-human characters than among humans, although the percentages were quite similar (Urke 2019, 77). The overall finding when comparing the originals and the remakes, which contradicted Urke's hypothesis, is the non-existent increase of accent diversity in the remakes as opposed to the originals, as the standard accents still dominate (77). The most central finding of the study however was the notable increase of RP, which could be applied in an effort to create distance and underline the fairy tale-like setting of the films (78).

2.3.9 Summary of previous findings

All of the abovementioned studies are societal treatment studies analysing film, television or computer games within the genres of science fiction, fantasy or fairy tales. Another common attribute is that they are all set in a non-real world. The majority of the studies reviewed in section 2.3 reveals GA as the dominant accent of film, television

and computer games. In studies where British varieties are more common than American ones, i.e. Lundervold (2013) and Moltu (2014), the standard variety is still the most frequent. Urke (2019) stands out as quite the particular case, as the analysis and comparison of Disney originals and remakes found the decline of GA and the rise of RP as the dominating accent. Nevertheless, from the studies reviewed one can easily detect a dominance of the standard. These findings therefore heavily indicate that the same pattern will be found in the *Star Wars* trilogies, which are expected to show a majority of GA, as it is an American-produced film series. A significant gender imbalance in terms of representation is found in previous research on attitudes to language in film and television. What is striking is that the imbalance is nearly identical in all of the above-mentioned studies, with roughly 70% of the characters being male, and only around 30% female. Even though the distribution of female and male characters fails to reflect that of society, the same almost identical distribution seems to be reflected again and again in these three genres of film, television and computer games. This is rather puzzling, and it will be interesting to see whether or not *Star Wars* will follow this peculiar pattern. Even though the gender distribution is inconsistent with society, there is one sociolinguistic pattern across the majority of the studies that is in fact rooted in reality, namely the fact that women use more standard varieties than men. The studies also generally found more linguistic diversity among the male characters. Nevertheless, it seems as even though society has moved towards a more open and accepting norm, this development fails to be reflected in much of television, film and computer games directed at children and adolescents. It seems like even though there might be a higher tolerance of accent diversity in today's society, which will be dealt with in section 2.5, Disney and other significant film and television producers remain on safe territory, in other words stick to the use of standard varieties, possibly in order to not offend anyone.

2.4 The *Star Wars* universe

From the release of the first film in 1977, the *Star Wars* universe has grown to a large media franchise encompassing not only films, but also TV series, video games, toys, comic books, board games, theme parks, and even a philosophy that regards itself as an actual religion. *Star Wars* has been rated the second highest-grossing film franchise of

all time, with its total worldwide box office revenue estimated at around 10 billion US dollars (Statista 2020a). In short, it has become a pop-cultural phenomenon, and a highly lucrative one as such. The first, and now termed the original, trilogy consisted of *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* and was released in the late 1970s and early 1980s to great success. The first film was retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* when the prequel trilogy was added to the universe between 1999 and 2005. The prequel trilogy consisted of *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. The story of the Skywalker saga, as *Star Wars* is also referred to, was written by George Lucas, who also directed several of the films. In 2012, the Walt Disney Company purchased Lucasfilm, the company behind the *Star Wars* trilogies (Whitten 2018), and from 2015 to 2019, the final trilogy was released with the films *The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker*. *Star Wars* is thus rather unique in the fact that the film series spans over 40 years in time and has enjoyed great popularity across generations. The fact that the franchise now is a part of the Walt Disney Company presumably only strengthens its position in popular culture, as the corporation has established itself as one of the largest media- and entertainment corporations in the entire world. As *Star Wars* has been a part of children and adolescents' lives for decades and given that film and television, i.e. the media, are contributing factors to a person's process of socialisation (Garrett 2010, 22; Lippi-Green 2012, 101), there is no doubt that this fictional universe holds great potential power in the shaping of attitudes to language.

The *Star Wars* trilogies can broadly be placed within the genre of science fiction. More specifically, it can be defined as a space fantasy or a space opera. Some critics go as far as claiming that even though it has been created within a framework of the science fiction genre, *Star Wars* cannot be described as science fiction at all because they consider the genre of space opera to be too unrealistic and fairy tale-like (Tiffin 1999, 68; Rubey 2012, 53). Nevertheless, the most suitable classification might be space opera, acknowledged as a subgenre of science fiction. Even though it is a popular subgenre, as the success of the *Star Wars* franchise has shown, it has previously been subject to rather harsh critiques. Westfahl (2003, 197) claims space opera to be “the most common, and least respected, form of science fiction”. Central factors to a space opera are the depiction of space journeys in a spaceship, an intriguing adventure story

including both humans and aliens, often following a typical dramatic plot (197-198). In short, space operas distinguish themselves from classic science-fiction in that they perhaps seek to entertain more than they seek to explore possible future scientific advancements. Even though the legitimacy of the space opera has been an issue of debate, Westfahl suggests that science fiction may finally begin to appreciate “the importance and dignity of the ‘pure entertainment’ that space opera in all its forms provides” (207). No matter if the genre is acknowledged among literary scholars, the success of George Lucas’ *Star Wars* is undeniable as it has contributed to popularising science fiction and is still watched and appreciated by millions today. According to Statista (2020b), each *Star Wars* film has reportedly been seen by between 34% and 49% of adults in the United States, giving an image of how immense the franchise’s audience is.

Although the *Star Wars* films are loved by many, they have been the subject of criticism from time to time. American science fiction film in general has been criticised for the non-existent portrayal of black people, up until the last decade or so (Nama 2008, 10). The original *Star Wars* trilogy largely follows this pattern, apart from three characters, of which Lando Calrissian, played by Billy Dee Williams, is the only one with a notable role. Following the release of *The Phantom Menace* in 1999, the first film in the prequel trilogy, the filmmakers were also accused of presenting racial stereotypes. The most debated character was that of Jar Jar Binks, an unintelligent and sloppy alien who spoke in a Caribbean-sounding pidgin English. Other claimed racial stereotypes were the villain Nute Gunray with an apparent Japanese accent, as well as the sleazy slave owner and junk dealer that seems to fulfil the stereotype of a pushy Mediterranean salesman. Lucasfilm denied any racial motivations and attempted to disassociate the fictional universe of *Star Wars* from the real world (Harrison 1999). However, both social, racial and linguistic stereotypes that are conveyed through a fictional universe like that of *Star Wars* might in fact signal existing attitudes, prejudices and stereotypical views that are present in society.

The genre of science fiction is especially well-suited for attitudinal language studies, as its films are set in a fictitious world and therefore not bound to follow a realistic pattern for accents. In a realistic drama, for example set in working-class London, it would be natural that the characters spoke Cockney, as it reflects reality.

Furthermore, a character from Italy would have an Italian accent. A realistic drama would therefore be completely uninteresting from the perspective of an attitudinal researcher. As the *Star Wars* trilogies take place ‘in a galaxy far, far away’, there is no anticipation that the distribution of linguistic varieties will resemble that of our real world. In other words, there is no logical reason to choose one accent over another, and the choices made concerning accent distribution are thus highly conscious and indicative of the attitudes behind them. In addition, science fiction films like *Star Wars*, and perhaps space operas in particular, often present quite simple stories and characters that are unambiguously good or evil, which makes it easier to detect correlations between character traits and accent. It is therefore interesting to conduct such a study of language use in these culturally significant blockbusters, in order to attempt to reveal underlying attitudes to certain varieties and their users.

2.5 Changes in society

As the *Star Wars* trilogies span more than 40 years in time, it is essential to take a look at changes in society over the last 50 years or so. It is tempting to believe that changing attitudes towards equality, diversity and political correctness will have had an impact on language attitudes in society as well, and be reflected in films. This section will therefore provide a brief overview of significant societal changes over the past decades in the US and the Western world, as this is the setting in which the *Star Wars* universe has been created.

A central movement that saw its beginnings in the early 20th century and has continued to develop until today, is the women’s liberation movement. Feminism and the struggle for equal rights consolidated and accelerated as a widespread movement in the 1970s (McKay et al. 2017, 997). Historically speaking, men have had more power in society than women, and this unequal position has without doubt been reflected in film and television. As seen, previous studies such as Lippi-Green’s (2012) has found that female characters in Disney films are to a large extent confined to traditional gender roles, thus following the pattern of discrimination and oppression that women have endured for a long time. Even though the feminist movement is still relevant today, a more equal society might have led to less stereotypical depictions of women in film.

Furthermore, the strengthened position of women in today's society compared to that of the period in which the first *Star Wars* trilogy was released presumably has led to more female characters in significant roles, and possibly more female characters in film generally. It is therefore expected that the most recent *Star Wars* trilogy, i.e. the films *The Force Awakens* from 2015, *The Last Jedi* from 2017, and the 2019 film *Rise of Skywalker*, will present a less traditional gender pattern than the first trilogy, that does not portray many female characters. The expectation is that the newest films will show women in leading heroic roles, in addition to a higher number of female characters. Alongside with equal rights between genders is the struggle for equality among different ethnicities. The Civil Rights movement in the US, in combination with increased immigration to many Western countries, have created more ethnically diverse societies and possibly a higher toleration for people who are different from oneself. At the same time, racism remains a significant issue in society, and many would claim that the struggle has only just begun. It will therefore also be interesting to see whether or not the most recent *Star Wars* trilogy reflects a more ethnically diverse society.

Another relevant change that has taken place in society is the increased focus on political correctness. Although its presence in English society stretches back centuries (Hughes 2010, 7), political correctness as “a part of the modern mind-set” became relevant from the late 1980s (3). Being politically correct refers to avoiding a type of behaviour, language or set of attitudes that is potentially offending and discriminative. As noted by Hughes, “politically correct language avoids judgmental terms” (14), particularly related to gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity and minority groups in society. It is not a simple concept to define, as it is not an imposed ideology from one particular ‘force of power’. The general societal expectation to act politically correct has also fuelled claims of censorship and the deprivation of freedom, as it largely anticipates conformity of some sort. Nevertheless, political correctness can contribute to “changing ingrained attitudes and language based on offensive stereotypes” (40). It is therefore a highly relevant topic in the analysis of a film series that has been released during a time in which political correctness has become increasingly important. One might expect to see fewer linguistic and social stereotypes, and less stereotypical and stigmatising underlying language attitudes in the more recent film trilogies than in the first. The aim to remain politically correct can create more

accent diversity in an effort to be inclusive, as well as a diverse character base in terms of ethnicity, and a higher representation of women. At the same time, the fear of offending someone might lead to a dominating use of standard accents, in order to avoid any stereotypical depictions of non-standard accents.

A third societal change that is highly relevant when attempting to contextualise the *Star Wars* trilogies, is the technological advancement one has seen over the past decades, and American popular media's influence in the world. The original trilogy, released in the late 1970s and early 1980s, did indeed reach an international audience, but was less accessible for the world outside of the US than the prequel and sequel trilogy has been, following what one might refer to as “[t]he global domination of the American film industry” (Crane 2014, 365). American films are without a doubt dominating the global market today, as Hollywood is characterised by an “enormous concentration of talent and economic resources dedicated to the production of film” (366). One might therefore claim that the first and original trilogy possibly was more directed at a US audience than the two more recent, seeing that American films have gained an increasingly international audience during this time period. Technological advancements such as the Internet, as well as more and more advanced devices, in combination with the establishment of online streaming services like Netflix, HBO and the quite recent Disney+, have also made film franchises such as the *Star Wars* trilogies available for a much bigger audience today. In general, film and television are extremely available in today's Western society as opposed to what they were in the 1970s and 1980s, and consequently plays a part in many more people's lives.

Lastly, one might argue that today's society sees a higher tolerance for accent diversity than it did a few decades ago. In the UK, RP was for a long time the only accent to be heard on BBC broadcasts. The association between this standard British variety and broadcast speech was so close that one would often refer to the accent as “BBC English” (Hannisdal 2006, 22). Today, regional accents are both allowed and encouraged on BBC broadcasts in an attempt to both represent its broad and varied audience, as well as appeal to new listeners or viewers (Hogenboom 2018). Furthermore, the director-general of the BBC has publicly called for more regional accents on their television and radio programs (Martin 2008). An analysis of Queen Elizabeth's annual Christmas messages from the 1950s to the 1980s has shown that

even the Queen herself no longer speaks what has been referred to as ‘the Queen’s English’, as her accent has slightly shifted towards that of the middle class and younger generations (Harrington, Palethorpe, and Watson 2000, 927). All of the abovementioned developments point to changing attitudes to language in British society and to the ‘rise of the regional’ at the expense of standard varieties, as seen in section 2.2.3.

All in all, the societal changes over the past decades create an expectation that the third and most recent *Star Wars* trilogy is more politically correct, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, that it includes a higher number of female and non-white characters and allows them to fill more non-traditional and significant roles in the films. However, the fear of stepping on people’s toes might also result in standard accents dominating the sample. Nevertheless, the expectation of more ethnic diversity and a higher representation of female characters remains strong, and may in turn lead to more linguistic diversity as well.

3. DATA AND METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology applied in the present study, as well as the data it analyses. Furthermore, the chapter gives a presentation of the different linguistic varieties that have been detected in the *Star Wars* film trilogies, and finally the traits according to which the characters have been analysed.

3.1 Methodology

As seen in the previous chapter, attitudes can only be observed and analysed through their various manifestations, which can make them challenging to study. As mentioned, there are three main approaches to the study of language attitudes: the direct approach, the indirect approach and the societal treatment study (Garrett 2010, 37). The latter is the one employed here. Both the direct approach and the indirect approach involve the use of respondents, while societal treatment studies turn to other sources in order to examine attitudes to language. Coupland and Bishop (2007) note that while direct approaches operate with unconcealed questions concerning the respondents' opinions and beliefs about linguistic varieties, indirect approaches to attitudinal studies "try to uncover tacit and (arguably) more deeply held beliefs and predispositions" (75). It is thus suggested that indirect approaches might reveal underlying attitudes that the respondents would not express deliberately. Along the same lines, societal treatment studies might disclose unspoken attitudes to language in society, as they do not even consult respondents directly, but analyse public sources. The three different approaches to studies of language attitudes will be reviewed more detailed in this section.

In attitudinal studies, accents are often assessed on three evaluative dimensions: status, social attractiveness and linguistic quality. Giles (1970) refers to these dimensions as 'status', 'communicative' and 'aesthetic' (212). Although various terms have been applied by different researchers, the dimensions largely refer to the same qualities. The status dimension recognises how much prestige is afforded to a given variety, while social attractiveness refers to how comfortable one finds it interacting with a speaker of a given accent (Giles 1970, 215). A speaker's social attractiveness is related to personal qualities such as friendliness, congeniality and humour, which ultimately make him or her more comfortable to be around. Finally, linguistic quality

refers to how aesthetically pleasing an accent is perceived to be. In order to measure the different dimensions, respondents are for example asked to rate the perceived pleasantness and prestige associated with a range of accents on a numerical scale, or asked to label the given accents with a handful of word pairs, such as ‘friendly/unfriendly’, ‘educated/uneducated’ etc. (Zahn and Hopper 1985, 118). However, the scores of an accent on the different dimensions do not necessarily correspond to one another; an accent’s high score on for example prestige may not be reflected in its score on the remaining dimensions. Studies have found that standard varieties often gain high scores on status and linguistic quality, but slightly lower scores on social attractiveness, as respondents often prefer their own accent on this dimension (e.g. Giles 1970; Coupland and Bishop 2007). All in all, the three dimensions of status, social attractiveness and linguistic quality are considered to yield the most fruitful results in studies of language attitudes.

The following subsections give a presentation of the three main research approaches within the field of language attitudes.

3.1.1 The direct approach

The direct approach is largely the most dominant approach to the study of language attitudes (Garrett 2010, 159). It is also an approach that includes a wide range of methods and techniques. As briefly touched upon, studies applying the direct approach ask the respondents directly to report on their attitudes towards and beliefs about language, by the use of interviews and/or questionnaires. As noted by Garrett (2010), this approach “relies upon overt elicitation of attitudes” (39). The participants are generally well aware that they are taking part in an attitude measuring study. On the one hand, this approach might seem to be the most apparent way to learn about people’s attitudes, as one simply asks them straightforwardly. On the other hand, the direct approach possibly brings about several problems. There are certain ‘biases’ that might occur in the participants’ answers (44). The most significant one is the ‘social desirability bias’, which refers to a respondent’s wish to remain ‘socially appropriate’, thus revealing only the attitudes they think they should have, as opposed to the ones they do. One cannot be certain that the respondents reply truthfully, as there might be a tendency for them to think that certain replies are socially unacceptable. Another

important weakness of the direct approach is the use of variety labels, which are often very broad. The participants are asked to share their attitudes towards e.g. “American English”, “Asian English” or “Scottish English”, which can be understood in several different ways. Ultimately, one cannot know for certain if the respondents perceive the labels as they are intended to be. Although a direct approach may initially seem like the more obvious choice for an attitudinal study, there are several challenges that can occur along the way. One might also argue that the direct approach is generally only able to extract conscious attitudes from its participants, thus failing to uncover the more hidden ones (43). The indirect approach however, which will be dealt with in the following subsection, holds the potential to go deeper into the attitudes of the respondents.

3.1.2 The indirect approach

As put by Garrett (2010), studying language attitudes by way of the indirect approach “means using more subtle, even deceptive, techniques than simply asking straight questions about what people’s attitudes are to something” (41). The most common method within the indirect approach when it comes to studying language attitudes is the ‘matched guise technique’. This method typically involves respondents listening to one speaker reading the same passage several times, only in different accents. The accent is the only factor that is supposed to change, while other features, such as speech rate and intonation, should remain constant, and the participants should have the impression that they are listening to several different speakers. The participants are then asked to evaluate the speakers on various traits. The participants of such a study are preferably unaware that they are rating the accents specifically. The ‘matched guise technique’ was developed in order to avoid biases of the direct method.

There are both strengths and weaknesses to the ‘matched guise technique’. The main advantage is that it is a good way to access the respondents’ private attitudes. Furthermore, the technique has laid a lot of the groundwork for the research domain, and resulted in studies that show similar results, allowing one to draw some conclusions about attitudes to language (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003, 57). The main drawbacks are related to authenticity issues, with only one speaker mimicking several accents, and intonation remaining constant. In addition, one has seen that the choice of text can be crucial for the results, as one has to find a passage that does not distract the

listener from the accent, and one that is fitting for the age of one's respondents. Another form of the 'matched guise technique' is the 'verbal guise technique', which uses different speakers for the different varieties. This technique has been used because of the difficulty of finding one speaker who masters each variety fluently enough, or to avoid accusations concerning the authenticity of the varieties. All in all, one might conclude that indirect approaches such as the 'matched guise technique' offer valuable insights into the more concealed language attitudes, as long as one is aware of possible methodological challenges.

3.1.3 The societal treatment study

While the traditional direct and indirect methods examined above use informants to directly or stealthily uncover their attitudes to language, the societal treatment study follows a different research design. Societal treatment studies look at how linguistic varieties and their users are treated by or in society by looking at language use in public sources, e.g. advertisements, road signs, letters to editors, language policy documents, etiquette books, as well as film and television (Garrett 2010, 142). Without informants, one is able to avoid many of the weaknesses concerning the direct and the indirect methods. A societal treatment study does not examine explicitly expressed language attitudes but concludes that society has certain attitudes towards certain varieties based on the data that is analysed. It is thus the "least obtrusive" (52) method of the three approaches, as it differs from the others in that there are no respondents involved. By for example looking at the use of accents in film, the use of dialect in novels or what type of language is applied in advertisements, one can gain valuable insight into the stereotypes associated with different varieties.

Within the societal treatment approach there is a range of diverse studies. A study might investigate the use of language in consumer advertisements or analyse the linguistic landscape of a given city or region (e.g. Lieberman 1981; Haarmann 1984; Backhaus 2007). The linguistic landscape of an area can be defined as "[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25). In bilingual or multilingual settings, it can be particularly interesting to explore the linguistic landscape, as it may signal underlying attitudes towards the different varieties,

as well as whether or not the languages have an equal status. As the attitudes detected in societal treatment studies are inferred by the researcher and not explicitly expressed, one can claim that these types of studies are highly subjective and reliant on the researcher analysing the data, which is an aspect of the approach that has been criticised. As all methods of research – and particularly attitudinal studies, as attitudes are difficult to study – the societal treatment study has its weaknesses. An advantage of this particular approach is however the possibility to avoid the challenges of the direct and indirect approaches, as it does not rely on informants. At the same time, Garrett (2010) notes that societal treatment studies “tend to be relatively overlooked [...] in most contemporary reviews of language attitudes research” (51). They are sometimes considered to be slightly informal and more of a preparation for “more rigorously designed surveys” (51). Nevertheless, the societal treatment study is a useful way to gain an understanding of the non-articulated language attitudes that are present in society. Additionally, societal treatment studies can provide continuous, historical data in a way that direct and indirect approaches cannot (50), and are therefore valuable and important in their own sense.

As seen in section 2.2.5, societal treatment studies using film or television as their data operate with the underlying assumption that all choices concerning language are deliberate, and thus reflect latent attitudes to language in society.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The present study conducts an analysis of nine science-fiction films within the *Star Wars* universe. An overview of the films included in the study can be found in table 3.1. As one can see from the table, the first three films, released in the late 1970s and early 1980s, are referred to as the original trilogy. The three films from the turn of the millennium are referred to as the prequel trilogy, as they take place chronologically before the plot of the original trilogy. Finally, the three most recent films are called the sequel trilogy.

Table 3.1: The films used in the present study

The original trilogy	The prequel trilogy	The sequel trilogy
<i>Episode IV – A New Hope</i> (1977)	<i>Episode I – The Phantom Menace</i> (1999)	<i>Episode VII – The Force Awakens</i> (2015)
<i>Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back</i> (1980)	<i>Episode II – Attack of the Clones</i> (2002)	<i>Episode VIII – The Last Jedi</i> (2017)
<i>Episode VI – Return of the Jedi</i> (1983)	<i>Episode III – Revenge of the Sith</i> (2005)	<i>Episode IX – The Rise of Skywalker</i> (2019)

The primary aim of the present thesis was to find out which linguistic varieties are used in the films and investigate correlations between varieties and character traits. A total of 230 characters have been analysed and categorised according to their accent and a number of character traits. Every character with enough speech time to determine the accent was included in the study. A handful of characters were thus excluded due to limited speech time, or if the character for some reason was not visible in the film, but could only be heard, and would therefore be impossible to categorise according to the list of character traits. However, the vast majority of the characters in the *Star Wars* trilogies have been included, and those who were excluded are generally highly peripheral characters and thus not essential to the analysis.

Several characters in *Star Wars* are not established with their own personalities but rather as a large group. They have therefore not been included in the general quantification, with the exceptions of individuals that stand out and have more notable roles, such as Chewbacca and a handful of Ewoks. A total of six groups of characters have been included, examples of which are Storm Troopers and Wookies. They have been included as homogenous groups in the data, and will be treated as such in the analysis, separate from the individually quantified characters.

Given that *Star Wars* is a film series set in one particular fictional universe, many of the same characters appear in several different films. With a single exception (see section 3.5.2), these characters were only counted once. Some challenges related to the counting of characters arose when watching the films. In some cases, a character changed role from main character in one film, to a supporting or peripheral character in another, to give an example. In other cases, characters changed from evil to good

towards the end of a film. These aspects are discussed in detail in the presentation of character traits.

Each character's accent was determined through careful auditory analysis. Before watching the films, I had a rough idea of what the linguistic categories would be, based on previous similar studies. These categories naturally had to be adjusted along the way, as the distribution of varieties became clear. They are presented more detailed in section 3.4. In cases of uncertainty my supervisor was consulted in order to assure the correct conclusion. There was overall a very high degree of concurrence between my supervisor and me as to which variety a character used, thus reassuring me in my own analysis.

A few challenges arose when collecting the data for the present study. Firstly, there are many peripheral characters in the *Star Wars* trilogies who only have one or two lines, who are not referred to by name, and who consequently might be difficult to recognise in other films. In order to avoid counting these highly peripheral characters more than once, I spent a lot of time cross-checking the IMDb page for the given film alongside with thorough Google searches. Secondly, as will be dealt with in more detail in section 3.4, a handful of characters were rather inconsistent in their speech, and therefore had to be categorised according to which accent they predominantly spoke.

3.3 Film selection

As mentioned above, the present thesis analyses nine *Star Wars* films, in other words the three different trilogies. As seen in section 2.4., science-fiction is a very well-suited genre for an attitudinal study like the present one. A space opera, which *Star Wars* more specifically might be referred to, is possibly even more appropriate for such a study. As its purpose is first and foremost to provide entertainment, one might anticipate a rather straightforward dramatic plot starring unambiguously good or evil characters. This is largely the case for *Star Wars*, which makes it easy to establish contrasting traits and classify characters, and to look for systematic correlations between linguistic varieties and character traits. Although several similar studies have been conducted using fantasy films and films directed at children, a societal treatment study is yet to be done with science-fiction films, at least to my knowledge.

Another factor that makes the *Star Wars* trilogies interesting for a study of language attitudes, is the time span between the releases of the films. From the first release in 1977, to the last one in 2019, significant societal changes have taken place (see section 2.5), and it is interesting to see whether or not these are reflected in the more recent films. Garrett (2010) underlines the advantage of “having access to historically continuous data”, as this type of source “allows insights into changes in ideological stances, and changing attitudes to languages and their users over time” (151). Having a single film series set in the same universe, even involving some of the same actors and creators, that spans over such a long time, is rather unique. The *Star Wars* film series is indeed a source that spans over a significant historical time period in the development of society, and a societal treatment study might therefore uncover changing, or perhaps stable, attitudes to language.

3.4 The linguistic varieties

In order to successfully determine the accent of a given character, it is essential to have knowledge about what features characterises the various accents. This section thus presents the most common features of the linguistic varieties detected in the sample. It does not, however, give a thorough phonetic analysis of the accents, as this is beside the point of the study. The main aim of the present thesis is, as mentioned, to detect any possible correlations between linguistic varieties and character traits. Furthermore, the linguistic categories in the thesis will be referred to as variety categories, as opposed to accent categories, as they include fictional language, which can hardly be recognised as an English accent. The thesis operates with six linguistic categories based on the varieties detected in the films: General American (GA), Received Pronunciation (RP), regional British English (Reg. BrE), English with a foreign accent, Other and fictional language². The ‘Other’ category was constructed to hold those varieties that did not fit into the other categories, namely Australian English and Caribbean English. As one can tell, the variety categories the present thesis operates with are rather broad, as a means

² Some characters were bilingual and often spoke a fictional language in addition to English. In these cases, the character was categorised according to its English variety.

of simplifying the categorisation process. Naturally, there will be variations within each linguistic category. Such broad categories also facilitate comparison with previous studies.

Furthermore, the present thesis operates with a rather liberal classification of standard and non-standard varieties, in which RP and GA are the only varieties that are considered to be standard. Although GA is arguably not a standard accent in the same manner as RP, it is referred to as such here in order to more easily distinguish it from the linguistic varieties I consider as non-standard, i.e. the remaining ones. This broad division thus entails that fictional language is categorised as a non-standard variety.

A handful of the characters in *Star Wars* are quite inconsistent in their manner of speech, which made them rather challenging to categorise. Some examples of this are Darth Vader, the Jedi master Qui-Gon Jinn and Senator Bail Organa. In these cases, I had to place them in the category to which they predominantly belong. This is also partly why I chose to conduct the study with such broad categories.

A couple of other special cases also stood out in the data. Yoda, the legendary Jedi master who appears in as many as six of the films, speaks GA, but with an inverted grammatical structure that is unique for him alone. A few examples of his inverted speech are: “Away put your weapon”, “Why wish you become Jedi?” and “Take you to him, I will”. One might speculate about the function of his irregular speech pattern. The most apparent function might be to underline the fact that he is a very old man, possibly so old that his language has become fossilised. Additionally, it contributes to marking him as different, and perhaps a bit enigmatic. Another character with an irregular pattern of speech is the ‘Gungan’ Jar Jar Binks. His variety is overall categorised as English with a Caribbean accent, due to pronunciation features such as TH-stopping and monophthongisation of the GOAT vowel. An example of his speech is: “Wesa got a grand army. Dat’s why you no liken us, mesa thinks”. He also demonstrates grammatical irregularities such as saying ‘mesa’ and ‘wesa’ instead of ‘me’ and ‘we’. All in all, his pronunciation points to a Caribbean inspired English, strewn with grammatical irregularities and made-up words. Although Yoda and Jar Jar both demonstrate deviant grammatical structures, one might argue that the intended functions of their abnormal speech are quite different from one another. While Yoda is made to appear calm, old and knowledgeable, Jar Jar’s speech is meant to mark him as

unsophisticated and simple. Finally, two peripheral characters demonstrated non-standard grammatical patterns of their GA accent. In these cases, the function of their speech is to contribute to marking them as lower class. One of the two characters was also classified as unsophisticated. Although some characters showed grammatical irregularities in their speech, they were categorised according to their manner of pronunciation, i.e. their accent. The examples mentioned above shine a light on the diversity that inevitably will be found in such broad variety categories.

The following subsections present the most central features of the different variety categories in the thesis, based on descriptions by Cruttenden (2014), Kretschmar (2008), Tollfree (1999), Stuart-Smith (2008), Hickey (2008), Horvath (2008) and Allsopp (1996). The presentation of vowel features uses Wells' (1982) standard lexical sets. The features characterising each variety have formed the basis for the auditory analysis and the linguistic classification of the characters. Among the characters who speak a lot, one might detect all of the mentioned features for a given variety, while only some of the features are present among minor characters. Nevertheless, in order to be included in the study, a character had to demonstrate a sufficient number of central features to be categorised. In cases of inconsistent use of accent features, characters have been classified based on which accent dominates their speech.

3.4.1 Received Pronunciation (RP)

Received Pronunciation (RP) is the most prestigious accent in England (Wells 1982). RP has no regional attachment, but rather a social one, as it traditionally is the accent of the upper and middle classes. Furthermore, attitudinal studies have shown that the accent is associated with high education, status and sophistication, but is not considered to be as socially attractive as it is prestigious (Stewart, Ryan, and Giles 1985). The main features of RP, that also separates it from GA, are the following:

- Non-rhotic, i.e. /r/ is only pronounced prevocally
- /l/ is clear before vowels and 'dark' (velarised) in all other positions
- /t/ is normally realised as a fortis plosive
- The LOT vowel is open back rounded /ɒ/

- The BATH vowel is long open back /ɑː/
- The GOAT vowel is a diphthong with a central starting point /əʊ/
- NEAR, SQUARE, CURE have centring diphthongs /ɪə, eə, ʊə/

3.4.2 *General American (GA)*

General American, or GA, is the accent of the majority of the American population (Boberg 2015, 229). Similar to RP, GA is not a regionally marked accent, and can therefore be found across the entire US. It does not enjoy the same level of prestige in America as RP does in Britain, but attitudinal studies have shown that GA ranks higher than non-standard varieties of both British and American in terms of status and social attractiveness (Hiraga 2005). With the exception of the accents of the east and the south, there is very little regional variation in the US. Non-standard varieties are often characterised by grammar, not pronunciation. Some main features of GA, distinguishing it from RP, are:

- Rhoticity, i.e. /r/ is pronounced in all positions
- Velarised /l/ in all positions
- /t/ is often realised as a tap [ɾ] intervocally in words like *city*
- The LOT vowel is long open back /ɑː/
- The BATH vowel is open-mid front /æ/
- The GOAT vowel is a diphthong with back close-mid starting point /oʊ/
- NEAR, SQUARE, CURE have a short vowel + /r/, /ɪr, ɛr, ʊr/

3.4.3 *Regional British English (Reg. BrE)*

A handful of characters spoke with a regional variety of British English, i.e. an accent that is not RP, but recognisable as an accent from the British Isles. Irish English is thus included in this broad category. As there were quite few of each, they have been placed together in this category. One character spoke Irish English, one spoke London English, or Cockney, two spoke Scottish English and one character was classified as regional BrE although it was not possible to determine specifically which one. Irish and Scottish English tend to be evaluated similarly in attitudinal studies. They are not considered to

be as prestigious as standard varieties, but often score high on social attractiveness. London English, on the other hand, tends to be rated negatively in terms of both prestige and social attractiveness. Scottish and Irish English are similar in that they are both rhotic and have monophthongs in FACE and GOAT words. However, the /r/ can be realised as both an approximant, a tap and a trill in Scottish, but only approximant in Irish. Other typical features of a Scottish variety are:

- Velarised /l/ in all positions
- The vowel of FOOT and GOOSE is realised as the close central rounded vowel /ʊ/
- The NURSE vowel is realised as the open central /ʌ/ in words spelt with *i*, *u*, *o*, and the open-mid front /ɛ/ in words spelt with *e*
- The KIT vowel is realised as the open-mid front [ɛ]
- Vowel length is not phonemic, but dependent on the phonetic context

Typical features of Irish English are:

- /l/ is typically clear in all positions
- T-opening, i.e. incomplete closure of /t/ both finally and intervocalically
- TH-stopping, the dental fricatives /θ/, /ð/ become dental plosives [t̪], [d̪]
- The vowel of LOT and THOUGHT is realised as open back unrounded /ɑ(ɜː)/
- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START is realised as the open front /aː/

As mentioned, one character spoke London English, also known as Cockney. Typical features of London English are:

- T-glottalling, in which intervocalic /t/ becomes a glottal stop [ʔ]
- TH fronting, in which the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ become the labiodental fricatives /f, v/
- L-vocalisation, in which non-prevocalic /l/, the alveolar lateral, becomes the close-mid back vowel /ʊ/

- H-dropping: /h/ is dropped in lexical words
- Diphthong shift, resulting in the following diphthongs:
FLEECE /əi/, GOOSE /əu/, FACE /æɪ/, PRICE /aɪ/, CHOICE /oɪ/, GOAT
/ʌʊ/, MOUTH /æʊ/.

3.4.4 *English with a foreign accent*

The category ‘English with a foreign accent’, or simply ‘Foreign accent’, is an umbrella category for all non-native accents of English detected in the films. The foreign accents encountered in the *Star Wars* trilogies are Japanese, Scandinavian, Italian, Indian and Russian accented English. This section will not offer a systematic presentation of all the aforementioned varieties, but some general features are:

- /r/ is realised as a trill
- Vowel quality and quantity do not always correspond to the native realisations
- Intonation may differ from a native variety of English, and it is often comparable to the pattern of intonation of one’s native language

3.4.5 *Other*

The ‘Other’ category is used to include those English varieties that did not fit into any of the remaining categories. The majority of the characters in this category speak with an Australian accent of English. Attitudinal studies have shown that Australian English is evaluated quite similar to Irish and Scottish English; it does not receive a particularly high score on prestige, but typically scores relatively high on social attractiveness (Coupland and Bishop 2007). A few of the characters in this category spoke with an accent inspired by Caribbean English. Coupland and Bishop (2007) also found that an Afro-Caribbean accent was rated low on social attractiveness, and virtually at the bottom on prestige.

Australian English is characterized by the following features:

- Non-rhotic
- Velarised /l/ in all contexts

- Intervocalic /t/ is realised as a voiced tap
- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START is open front /a:/
- Raising of DRESS and TRAP to close-mid [e], open-mid [ɛ]
- Diphthong shift (cf. London English, section 3.4.3)

Typical features of Caribbean accented English are:

- /l/ is clear in all contexts
- TH-stopping, in which the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ become plosives /t, d/
- H-dropping
- Consonant cluster reduction
- The vowel of BATH, PALM, START realised as the open front /a:/
- Monophthongisation of vowel in FACE and GOAT /e:/, /o:/'
- Syllable-timed rhythm, meaning that all the syllables have equal weight.

3.4.6 *Fictional language*

As the *Star Wars* films are set in ‘a galaxy far, far away’, in an entirely fictitious universe, starring both humans and non-humans, several of the characters speak with fictional languages. The fictional languages are generally given names, such as ‘Huttese’, ‘Ewokese’ or ‘Sith’, but they are not constructed fictional languages, such as for instance Tolkien has created for his fictional universe. It was natural to create a separate category for these fictional varieties, although it is rather difficult to determine the function they may have. As the varieties do not exist in the real world, there are no previous findings to compare with, and there are no stereotypical attitudes connected to them, as is the case with accents of English.

3.4.7 *Accent identification*

Some challenges emerged when it came to identifying the different linguistic varieties. There was often a limited amount of speech to base one’s conclusion on, which meant that there occasionally were only a couple of characteristic features present. Repeated listening was thus frequently necessary in order to determine a character’s variety. As

noted in section 3.2, a few of the characters spoke with mixed or inconsistent accents, which made the process of categorisation even more complex. The solution to this challenge was to categorise the characters according to which variety they predominantly spoke, i.e. according to their most frequent and dominant features of speech. Some examples of inconsistent characters are Darth Vader, the Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn and the peripheral character Lor San Tekka (see further section 4.1).

3.5 Character variables

In addition to investigating which linguistic varieties occur in the *Star Wars* films, this thesis aims to uncover any systematic correlations between linguistic variety and character traits. In order to do so, one needs to establish a set of character variables according to which one can categorise the characters. The categories for character traits that this thesis operates with have proven themselves to be useful and relevant for the analysis. They have been established based on the type of stories and characters one finds in the *Star Wars* films and on what can be operationalised in the analysis. The categories have largely been inspired by previous studies (e.g. Sønnesyn 2009; Moltu 2014; Urke 2019) so that comparisons can be made. This section presents the categories for character traits that this study operates with, the reason behind the choice of categories, as well as the criteria for inclusion for each of them.

3.5.1 Gender

Sociolinguistic research has proven gender to be a central variable in relation to language use. The general finding is that women tend to prefer more standard forms than men. *Gender* as a category was thus included in the present study in order to see if this is reflected in the *Star Wars* films. Furthermore, great developments have taken place in society when it comes to gender equality during the time span of the trilogies, which makes it interesting to see whether or not this has had an impact on *Star Wars*. Previous studies about language and film have found a significant gender imbalance among the characters, with roughly 70% of the characters being male, and the remaining 30% female (e.g. Dobrow and Gidney 1998; Lippi-Green 2012; Lundervold 2013). The present thesis investigates the overall gender distribution in the nine films, in

addition to examining any possible changes between each of the trilogies. One would expect a higher representation of female characters in the most recent trilogy than in the original, in line with societal changes. Furthermore, Lippi-Green (2012) found that the majority of the female characters were confined to traditional females roles. It will therefore be of value to see if the sequel trilogy of *Star Wars* depicts female characters in more untraditional roles. In addition to looking at gender distribution, the present thesis investigates accent distribution according to the gender variable, to disclose any possible patterns of assigning particular accents to male or female characters.

Determining the gender of the characters was in most cases a straightforward task, especially when the character was human, solely based on the appearance of the character. Non-human characters could be classified as either male or female on the basis of their voice quality or the manner in which they were addressed. In both cases, the name could also often give a good indication of gender. A small number of characters were however categorised as ‘Indistinguishable’, as none of the abovementioned criteria could be fulfilled. These characters were excluded from the analysis of this particular variable.

3.5.2 *Alignment*

As previous studies have demonstrated the use of accent as a tool that contributes to marking a character as good or evil, *Alignment* is another relevant category for the present thesis. As seen in section 2.3.1, Dobrow and Gidney (1998) found that distinct foreign accents or non-standard American often was used for villains, in addition to RP. It is therefore relevant to examine whether specific varieties are used to mark a character’s affiliation. This thesis operates with three subcategories on the character trait *Alignment*: ‘Good’, ‘Evil’ and ‘Neutral’. The majority of the characters are defined as either good or bad, while the neutral category is rather small. The characters of the *Star Wars* universe generally either work for the good side, the resistance force, or the bad side, i.e. ‘the Empire’ or ‘the First Order’. All those who work for the bad side have thus been classified as evil, and all those who are rebels have been classified as good. Characters who do not really work for either side are classified according to how they act. An example of this is Jabba the Hutt, a crime lord and gangster, who has no association to ‘the Empire’, but is still classified as evil due to his actions. Nevertheless,

a handful of characters have been categorised as ‘Neutral’ as they did not stand out as either good or evil.

However, some characters were more ambiguous on this trait, as they underwent a change from bad to good. In these cases, the characters often turned good only towards the end of a film, or even towards the end of a trilogy. This was the case for Darth Vader in the original trilogy, as well as Kylo Ren in the sequel trilogy. Although Kylo Ren struggles with his emotions and affiliation throughout, he has been classified as evil, as his actions throughout the sequel trilogy are predominantly evil. He turns good towards the end of the very last film and is offered redemption when he sacrifices himself for Rey. As his other character traits remain constant, it seemed fruitful to classify him as predominantly evil. Darth Vader, on the other hand, is a highly particular case. As he is quite equally good and bad, i.e. good and evil in the same number of films, he could not be classified as predominantly one or the other. This single character was therefore counted twice, in order to make his remarkable, and practically simultaneous, shift of accent and alignment visible in the data. He was divided into ‘Young Anakin Skywalker’ and ‘Darth Vader’, which is the adult version of the character, as he changes his accent from GA to (predominantly) RP when he turns from good to evil. This is such a noteworthy development that it should indeed be visible in the analysis of the data.

3.5.3 *Sophistication*

A central character trait for a thesis such as the present is *Sophistication*. At the same time, it was one of the most challenging categories to create a distinct set of criteria for. Some characters had to be reassessed as the criteria became clearer during the process of analysis. Sophistication in this particular context is related to intelligence and skill, but also partly to refinement. A sophisticated character in this sense is thus clever, civilised, observant, perhaps witty, and behaves to a certain extent in a graceful manner. An unsophisticated character is less intelligent, perhaps a bit clumsy and awkward physically, and the character can be sloppy, unrefined and a bit ignorant. In order to sharpen the analysis of the marked characters, I decided to create three subcategories on this particular trait: two marked categories of ‘Sophisticated’ and ‘Unsophisticated’, and one ‘Neutral’. A character had to stand out as either sophisticated or unsophisticated in

order to be categorised accordingly. The result was that a rather large share of the characters was classified as neutral, which allowed a more precise image of which accents are assigned to sophisticated and unsophisticated characters.

In addition, the sophisticated characters were further categorised as either ‘Stiff’ or ‘Relaxed’, in order to capture yet another nuance of this complex trait. A character is categorised as ‘Stiff’ if he or she seems tense, formal or perhaps a bit cold. A ‘Relaxed’ character, on the other hand, is one that appears informal, laid-back and often has a sense of humour. As the ‘Sophisticated’ category holds a wide range of different characters, the subcategories of this trait were deemed necessary to capture this diversity, as well as relevant differences within the group. The ‘Sophisticated’ category holds both good and evil characters, and there is a tendency for the evil characters to be rather stiff, while the good ones are more relaxed.

There was also a lot of variation within the ‘Unsophisticated’ category. This category has not been further divided into subcategories, but it still holds a wide range of characters, as sophistication is relative. A couple of special cases appeared under the *Sophistication* category: the droid R2D2 and the ‘Wookiee’ Chewbacca. They were both classified as unsophisticated, even though they are not unintelligent. They were classified as such due to the fact that they appear a bit childish and clumsy, and because they partly function as comic relief. As R2D2 is a robot, thus by definition a ‘sophisticated’ object, it might seem strange that he has been classified as unsophisticated. Still, he appears to be quite child-like and is treated as such by other characters. He does not have any real language, only beeping sounds, but the way in which the other characters respond to his questions and utterances makes him seem very simple and naïve. He has therefore been classified as unsophisticated. A lot of the same characterisations can be applied to Chewbacca as well, who is of a tall, hairy species. He also seems very simple and child-like and has been deemed unsophisticated despite the fact that he can pilot a spaceship. In addition, he appears unrefined, primitive and animal-like with his sharp teeth and fur coat. As mentioned, he is also a bit of a comic relief with his physical whimsiness and cheeky comments.

All in all, *Sophistication* was the most demanding category to establish and to apply in the process of data collection. The two examples presented above shine a light

on the relativity that characterises the trait. However, the most important aim in the application of this trait was consistency.

3.5.4 *Species*

As the *Star Wars* films take place ‘in a galaxy far, far away’, one naturally encounters a wide range of different fictional species among the characters. The galaxy’s aliens, droids and animal-like, yet humanoid, creatures, make the character category of *Species* a necessity in the present thesis. This category was divided into ‘Human’ and ‘Non-human’. The criterion for this trait is therefore quite straightforward: all humans are classified as ‘Human’, everyone else is classified together as ‘Non-human’. This trait did not create much uncertainty, as any character one could not see, but only hear, was excluded. The characters were classified on this trait according to their appearance, and the differentiation between ‘Human’ and ‘Non-human’ has been quite strict. A character was only classified as ‘Human’ if it looked completely like a human being. Any character who resembled a human, but had any sort of alien physical feature, was therefore classified as ‘Non-human’. From the perspective of an attitudinal study, it is interesting to examine any possible correlations between the classification of ‘Human’ or ‘Non-human’ to linguistic variety.

3.5.5 *Character role*

Based on the assumption that accent is indeed used in character building, the role of a character can be a factor concerning which variety it is assigned. One might therefore assume that especially the central characters’ accents have been meticulously chosen. In like manner, peripheral characters can also have been assigned specific linguistic varieties that might substantiate certain character traits, as their limited screen time does not allow an elaborate presentation and character building.

Within the trait *Character role*, the present thesis operates with three subcategories: ‘Main character’, ‘Supporting character’ and ‘Peripheral character’. A character’s amount of screen time as well as importance to the plot affect its classification of role. Main characters are characters around whom the plot largely evolves, who are essential to the story and who very often play an important part in several of the films. Some examples of main characters are Luke, Leia and Han Solo

from the original trilogy, and Rey and Finn from the sequel trilogy. Supporting characters are also of a certain importance to the story, and often appear in several films, but they do not stand out enough to be included in the ‘Main’ category. Examples of supporting characters in the *Star Wars* films are the protocol droid C3PO in virtually all of the films, Obi-Wan Kenobi in the first trilogy and Senator Palpatine in all three trilogies. Finally, peripheral characters have a very limited amount of screen time and are not significant for the story. As mentioned in section 3.2, there is a very large number of peripheral characters in *Star Wars*, which sometimes made the identification of each character rather time-consuming.

As *Star Wars* is a film series spanning over several generations, both in real life and in the films, a handful of characters are bound to reappear in several films. In some cases, these characters also changed character role between films. An example of this is Han Solo, who is one of the main characters in all the three films of the original trilogy. Late in the sequel trilogy, he appears as a ghost in one scene only, and is thus reclassified as a supporting character in that particular film. However, this is only the case for a few of the characters, primarily the three main characters from the original trilogy, who play such a large part in the trilogies overall that they are classified accordingly. As they are only counted once, they are given the status of main characters.

3.5.6 *Other observations*

A study like the present, with such broad categories, will naturally not be able to include every nuance. In order to detect patterns and allow comparisons with previous studies, the categories needed to be broad and the analysis to a certain extent simplified. One could have divided the categories into even more subcategories, but this is beside the purpose of the study. Some perspectives will therefore inevitably be lost, as for instance the ethnicity of the human characters. The present thesis does not include ethnicity as a separate character variable but has investigated the ethnic diversity among the characters in order to see whether or not the *Star Wars* trilogies have become more inclusive over the years. The number of non-white characters has been counted so that a comparison between the oldest films and the most recent ones can be made. The study does not, however, correlate ethnicity with accent use.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the present study and discusses the implications of the results in light of similar previous studies. Additionally, it aims to shine a light on possible changes from the earliest *Star Wars* films to the last. The chapter opens with a presentation of the general distribution of linguistic varieties, before taking a closer look at each character variable.

4.1 Overall distribution of varieties

Hypothesis 1 of the present thesis states that standard accents will dominate overall among the characters of the *Star Wars* trilogies. Table 4.1 shows the overall variety distribution in the nine films. The numbers are presented graphically in figure 4.1.

Table 4.1: Overall distribution of linguistic varieties

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	102	44
RP	78	34
Fictional	28	12
Foreign	9	4
Other	8	4
Reg. BrE	5	2
Total	230	100

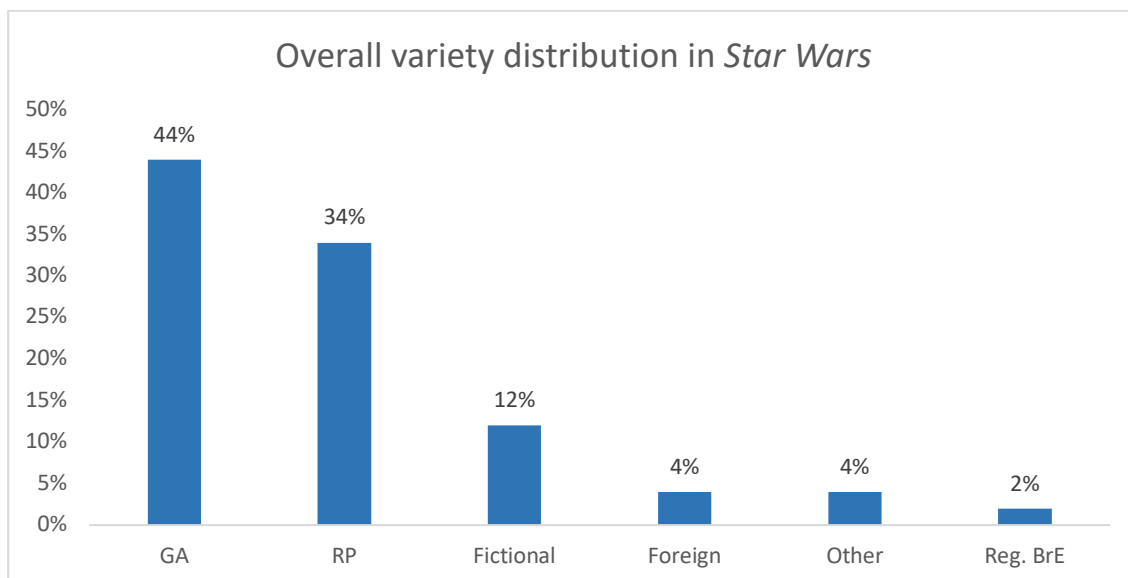


Figure 4.1: Overall distribution of linguistic varieties

n = 230

The results clearly confirm the first hypothesis, as GA and RP speakers combined constitute as many as 78% of all the characters. Standard accents thus undoubtedly dominate in the *Star Wars* trilogies. GA is the largest variety category, with 44% of the characters speaking this accent, closely followed by RP's 34%. Overall, there is not much linguistic diversity in the analysed films. The dominance of GA was expected, as the *Star Wars* trilogies are American produced films, and due to the findings of previous research. With varying percentages, previous studies such as Lippi-Green (2012), Dragojevic et al. (2016), Sønnesyn (2009) and Bratteli (2011) also found GA to be the majority accent. However, these studies generally found lower percentages for RP than the present thesis did. Urke (2019), on the other hand, presents very similar distributions of standard accents to my own, with 46% of the characters speaking GA, and 35% speaking RP in the original Disney films. In the Disney remakes, the percentages have shifted to 62% RP speakers and 16% GA speakers. Although the distribution has changed, standard accents constitute 78% in the remakes, a percentage identical to the overall distribution in *Star Wars*.

As touched upon in section 3.4.7, a handful of the characters in *Star Wars* demonstrated inconsistencies in their linguistic varieties. These 11 characters were categorised according to the variety they predominantly spoke, i.e. the variety from which they demonstrated the most frequent and dominant features. As mentioned in

3.4.7, some of the characters with linguistic inconsistencies are Darth Vader, Qui-Gon Jinn from *The Phantom Menace*, as well as Lor San Tekka from *The Force Awakens*. Darth Vader’s accent is classified as predominantly RP, since his most prominent and frequent features are typical for this variety, but he sometimes demonstrates common GA features. The same is the case for Lor San Tekka. Qui-Gon Jinn was also categorised as a predominantly RP speaker, although a few of his features resemble Irish English. Additionally, as seen in section 3.4, Yoda was classified as speaking predominantly GA, and Jar Jar Binks as Caribbean accented, despite their grammatical irregularities.

In contrast with most of the previous studies, the present thesis found a relatively high distribution of RP in an American film franchise. The numbers become more nuanced when looking at the variety distribution within each trilogy. Hypothesis 2 states that there will be more linguistic diversity in the most recent trilogy, compared to the original trilogy. I expected to see a decline in standard accents and an increase of non-standard varieties. The results, presented in figures 4.2–4.4, were quite noteworthy.

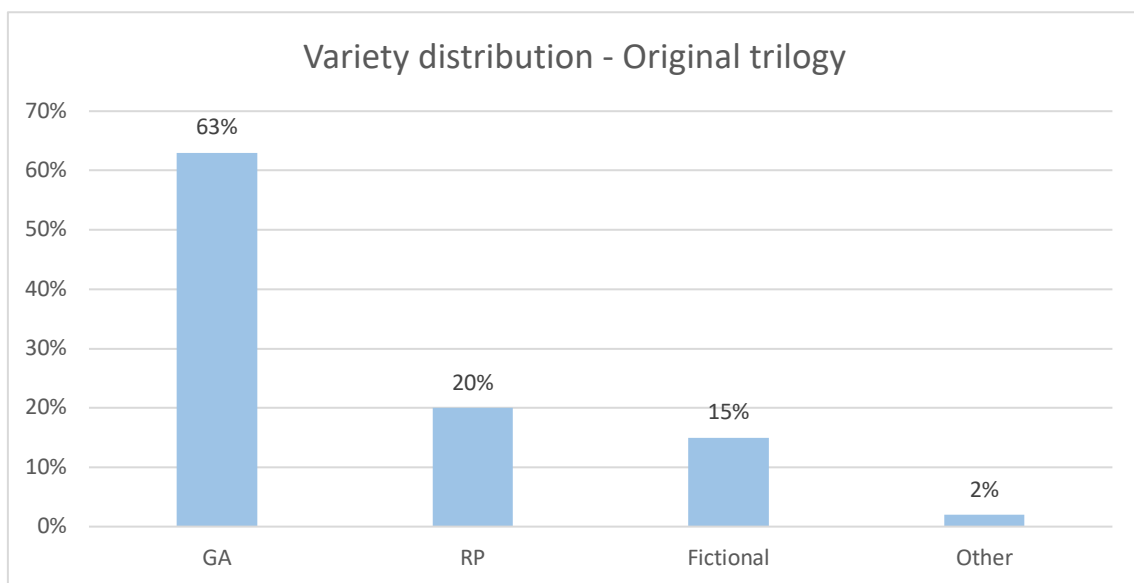


Figure 4.2: *Variety distribution in the original trilogy*

n = 88

As expected, there is very little linguistic diversity in the original trilogy, as 83% of the characters in the earliest films are speakers of a standard accent. GA is by far the

dominating variety, followed by RP. The 2% with a variety labelled ‘Other’ were in this trilogy Australian speakers.

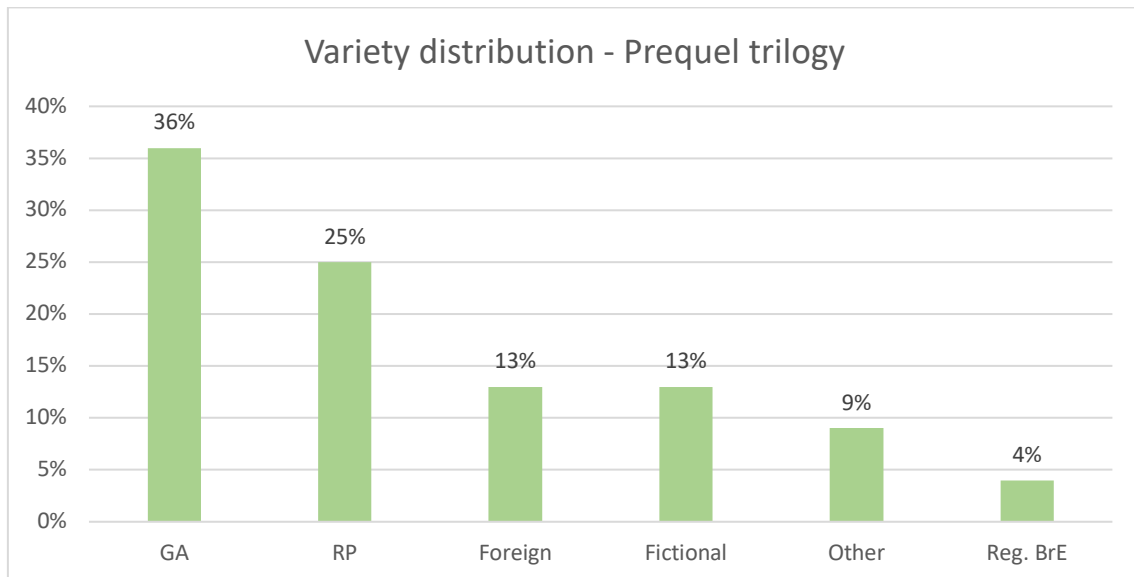


Figure 4.3: *Variety distribution in the prequel trilogy* n=69

The results from the prequel trilogy show that the standard accents continue to dominate, as 61% of the characters speak either GA or RP. However, the percentage for GA has dropped greatly from the previous trilogy, while the use of RP has increased slightly. Overall, there is also more linguistic diversity here, with more varieties represented than in the original trilogy, and a relatively great use of English with a foreign accent. Among the ‘Other’ varieties in the prequel trilogy, one can find Australian English, as well as a Caribbean inspired English. The regional British accents detected are Irish, Cockney and one case that was a mix of several non-standard British varieties. After examining the original and the prequel trilogies, it appears as if the *Star Wars* trilogies are becoming more linguistically diverse. However, the tides turn once again in the sequel trilogy.

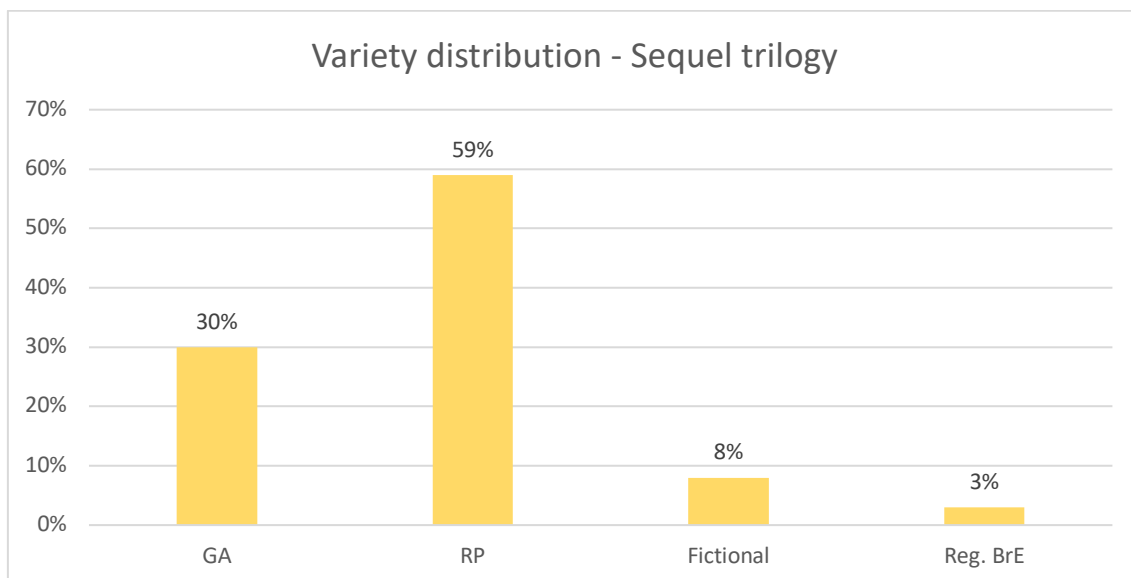


Figure 4.4: *Variety distribution in the sequel trilogy*

n = 73

In the sequel trilogy, the standard accents have had a surge, with as many as 89% of the character speaking either GA or RP. In line with the original trilogy, there is once again very little linguistic diversity, and even more so than in the first films. The percentage for GA has once again decreased, while the amount of RP speakers has more than doubled compared to the other trilogies. Only two characters speak a regional British variety in the sequel, and they both speak Scottish English.

One can clearly detect a development in the variety distribution from the original trilogy up until the sequel trilogy. However, it is not the development that was expected. The results show a pendulum swing, from very little linguistic diversity in the original trilogy, to slightly more in the prequel trilogy, and once again back to very little diversity in the sequel trilogy. Hypothesis 2 can thus not be confirmed. It is difficult to point to any particular reason why *Star Wars* moved towards becoming a more linguistically diverse universe in its second trilogy, only to return to the supremacy of the standard accents in the most recent one. As seen in section 2.5, societal changes over the past decades have given an impression of a higher tolerance for accent diversity. Combined with Coupland and Bishop's (2007) finding that the younger respondents were less positive towards standard accents, the perception of a potential ongoing change in attitudes to language was strengthened. However, the development in the overall distribution of varieties in *Star Wars* reaffirms standard accents' powerful

position in society. The only characters who spoke a non-standard English variety in the most recent trilogy were the two Scottish speakers. In like manner as with Dragojevic et al.'s (2016) findings, non-standard speakers are virtually absent in the *Star Wars* trilogies, particularly in the most recent films.

One might speculate that the lack of non-standard varieties in the most recent films is a way for the filmmakers to 'play it safe'. As touched upon in section 2.4, the first prequel film, *The Phantom Menace*, received an extensive backlash upon its release and was accused of presenting racial stereotypes. The characters Jar Jar Binks, Nute Gunray and Watto, all speakers of a non-standard English variety, were particularly criticised, with the former being the subject of hatred from many fans (Gumbel 2011; Baker 2017; BBC 2018). The harsh criticism of especially Jar Jar's Caribbean accent in combination with his negative characteristics, might have made the filmmakers afraid of using non-standard varieties. As one can tell from the development in the overall variety distribution, the short-lived accent diversity of *Star Wars* is mainly visible in the prequels. In addition, the film industry has become significantly more globalised since the 1970s and the 1980s, and the most recent *Star Wars* films have probably been aimed at an even wider global market. A globalised industry entails a significantly higher degree of contact and cooperation between nations, and particularly between English speaking countries (Mingant and Tirtaine 2012). A practical aspect of this internationalisation of the industry could be a fear among the filmmakers that a global audience would struggle to understand non-standard accents. One might therefore assume that using standard accents is the more accessible choice for an international audience. Yet another reason could be the fact that political correctness is more important today, which is discussed further below.

The substantial increase of RP throughout the trilogies is very interesting. This result is in line with the findings of Urke (2019), who noted almost a doubling in the use of RP in Disney remakes compared to their original counterparts. Both Lundervold (2013) and Moltu (2014) also found RP to be the dominating accent in their samples. However, the settings and genres of the films they analysed differ from those of *Star Wars* and could help explain their findings. One can only speculate why this development has taken place in my sample. A possible explanation is that the original trilogy, in which GA undoubtedly is the accent of the majority, might have been

directed more at an American audience, although it became an international success at the time. The *Star Wars* franchise has grown massively popular in the time span from the first release to the last, and as discussed above, the film industry has become more globalised, thus substantiating the assumption that the most recent films are distributed more widely and globally. Although this might help explain the decrease of GA, it is still challenging to interpret the surge of RP at the expense of other and perhaps non-standard varieties. The increased focus on political correctness in society, cf. section 2.5, has arguably led to the assumption that more linguistic groups would be represented in popular television and film, but it could also be the reason why the filmmakers behind *Star Wars* refrain from including a range of different varieties. It might be an effort to avoid offending anyone with potentially negative portrayals of accents, as the *Star Wars* filmmakers have been accused of in the past. However, as Dragojevic et al. (2016) point out, the sheer absence of particular linguistic groups in the media can be just as damaging to their sense of self as negative portrayals can be.

It has thus been established that the standard accents are the varieties of the majority in *Star Wars*. Examining the variety distribution for each character variable can reveal correlations between linguistic variety and character traits and offer a deeper insight into language distribution in the films.

4.2 Gender

A central variable to the present thesis is gender. The vast majority of the characters of *Star Wars* were easily classifiable in terms of gender. However, 4% were not possible to categorise, and they have thus been excluded from the analysis of this particular variable. A review of previous studies has revealed a strikingly similar pattern of gender imbalance in which male characters constitute around 70% of the characters in a sample, and female characters only about 30% (e.g. Lippi-Green 2012; Lundervold 2013; Urke 2019). It was therefore interesting to see if the same imbalance would be found in the *Star Wars* trilogies. In order to detect any possible change, the present thesis has examined the gender distribution overall in the films, as well as within each trilogy. In addition, it analyses the variety distribution among the genders. Hypothesis 3 states that there will be a higher percentage of female characters in the most recent films

than in the oldest ones, as women's position in society has been strengthened during the past decades (cf. section 2.5). On the basis of previous sociolinguistic research, hypothesis 4 states that female characters will speak more standardised than male characters. The gender distribution in *Star Wars* will be dealt with first, followed by a correlation of gender to linguistic variety.

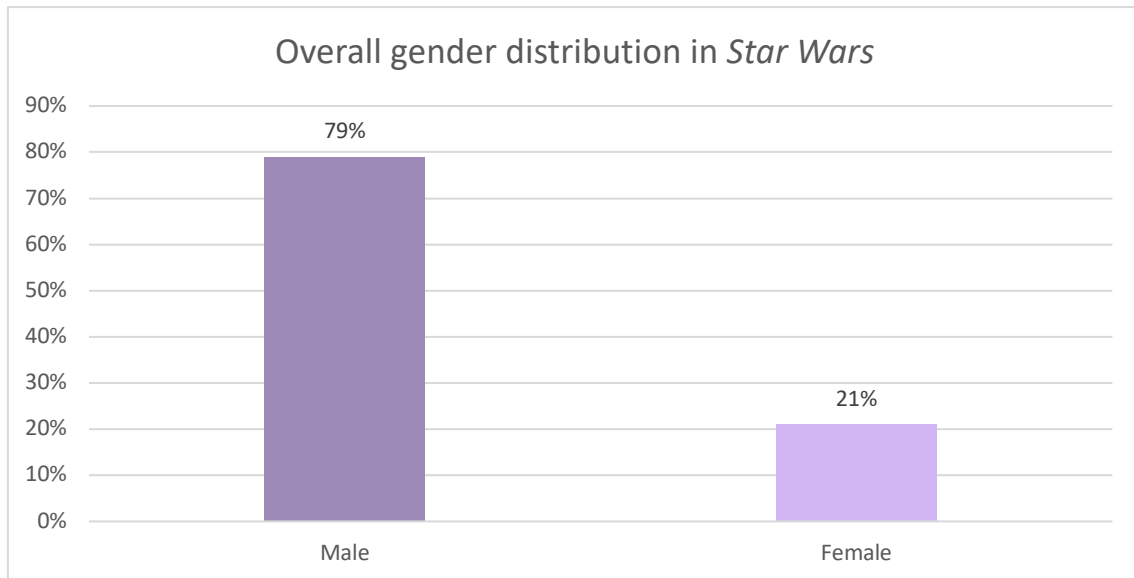


Figure 4.5: Overall gender distribution

n = 222

The overall gender distribution in *Star Wars* is practically identical with the findings of previous studies. It is quite noteworthy that these particular numbers reproduce themselves across genres and generations. A likely explanation is the fact that the film industry has traditionally been dominated by men. Although the gender distribution in society is roughly equal, this is failed to be mirrored in several different types of films. However, a closer look at the *Star Wars* trilogies individually, presented in figure 4.6 below, allows for nuances that might indicate an ongoing change.

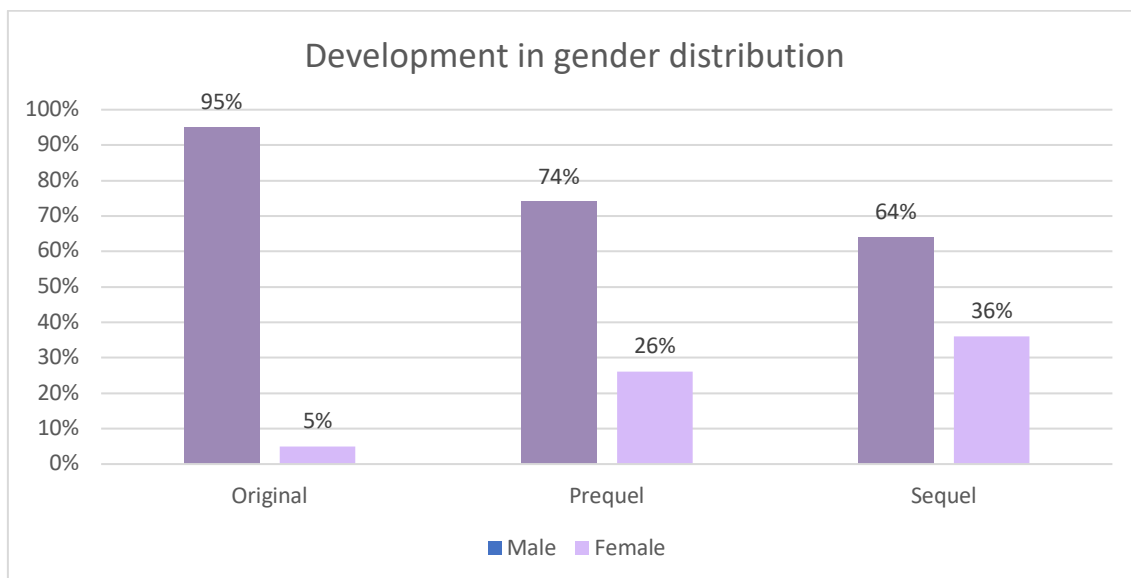


Figure 4.6: *Development in gender distribution through the trilogies*

The original trilogy demonstrates a sizeable imbalance in the representation of gender, as only four characters in the entire trilogy are female. The numbers equalise markedly in the prequel trilogy, and a bit more in the sequel trilogy. Although the gender distribution remains uneven, hypothesis 3 has indeed been confirmed, as the most recent *Star Wars* films include an increased number of women, and the female characters are depicted in more untraditional roles such as pilots, soldiers and commanders. This is very much in line with recent societal changes, as the women's liberation movement has accelerated in the years since the release of the first *Star Wars* film. These findings differ from those of Lippi-Green (2012), who found female characters to largely be bound to traditional gender roles. Although one cannot make generalisations about the entire film industry based on the analysis of one franchise, the findings of the present study might indicate that at least the genre of sci-fi is moving towards a more equal representation of gender. Perhaps the gender distribution in sci-fi film eventually will resemble that of the real world. The findings demonstrated in figure 4.6 at least point in the right direction.

After investigating the distribution of male and female characters, it is interesting to see whether there are any differences in the use of language between the genders, as women traditionally use more standard forms than men. The results are

presented in tables 4.2 and 4.3, while figure 4.7 gives a graphical presentation of the percentages.

Table 4.2: *Overall variety distribution among the male characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	85	48
RP	57	33
Fictional	17	10
Foreign	6	3
Other	7	4
Reg. BrE	3	2
Total	175	100

Table 4.3: *Overall variety distribution among the female characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	17	36
RP	21	45
Fictional	4	9
Foreign	2	4
Other	1	2
Reg. BrE	2	4
Total	47	100

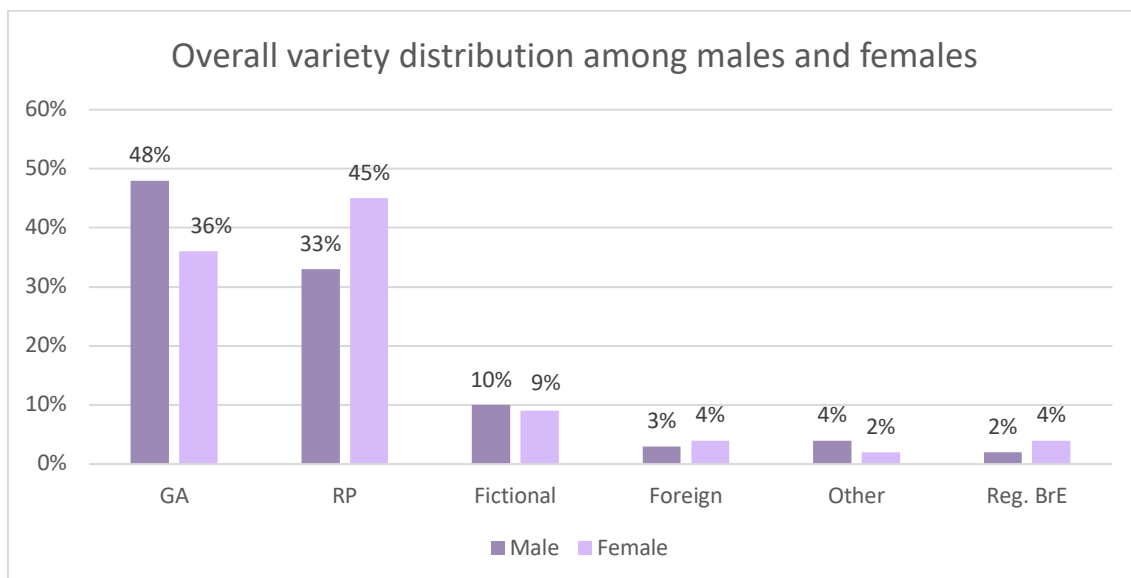


Figure 4.7: Overall variety distribution among male and female characters

Overall, the standard varieties GA and RP are the largest variety categories for both genders. Considering the general variety distribution in *Star Wars* (cf. figure 4.1), this is not very surprising. However, standard speakers constitute 81% of both the male and female characters, and the identical percentage is quite unexpected. Hypothesis 4, the expectation that female characters would speak more standardised than male characters, is therefore not met here. The male and female characters follow the same distribution of linguistic varieties in terms of standard vs. non-standard varieties. However, it is rather interesting to see that GA is the most frequent accent among male characters, while RP is the most used accent among the females. A possible explanation is that, in attitudinal research, RP scores higher on the status dimension than GA (Coupland and Bishop 2007, 79), and women's use of standard language has traditionally been a means of achieving status (cf. section 2.1.1). In addition, RP has stronger connotations with education, formality, and upper class than GA, also outside the context of the UK and the US (Rindal 2010; Margic and Sirola 2014; Carrie 2017). One might therefore speculate that although the standard accents dominate among both genders, the female characters have been assigned RP to a greater extent due to its prestigious connotations, as a way of mirroring traditional female language use. Nevertheless, as RP and GA are both defined as standard varieties here, the level of linguistic diversity is identical

among the genders, as 19% among each of the genders speak with a non-standard variety, when fictional language is considered to be non-standard.

Figures 4.8 and 4.9 demonstrate the development in the variety distribution among the female and male characters, respectively.

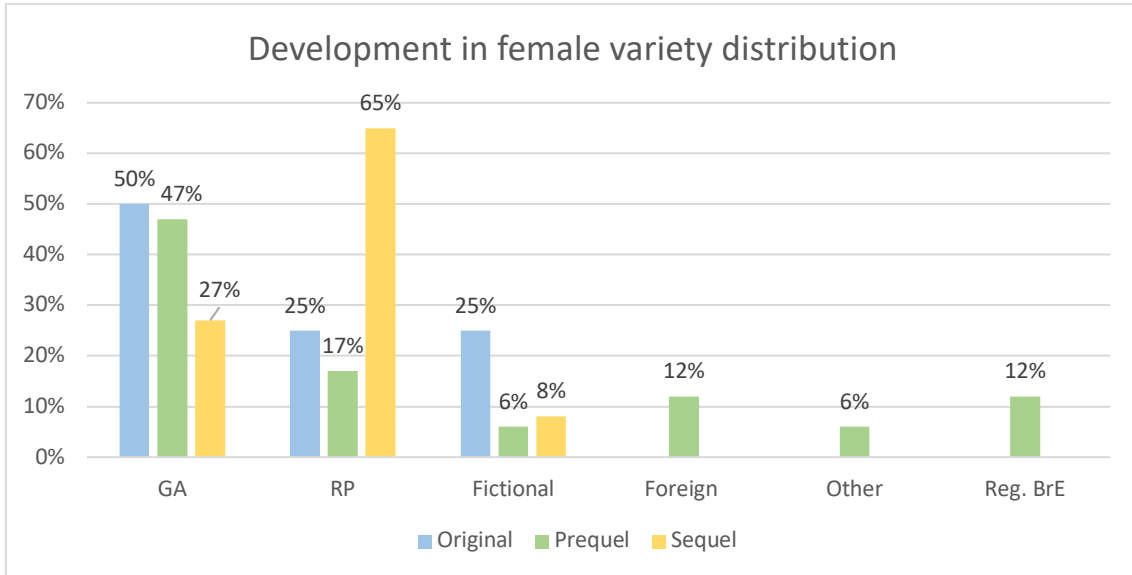


Figure 4.8: Variety distribution among the female characters through the trilogies

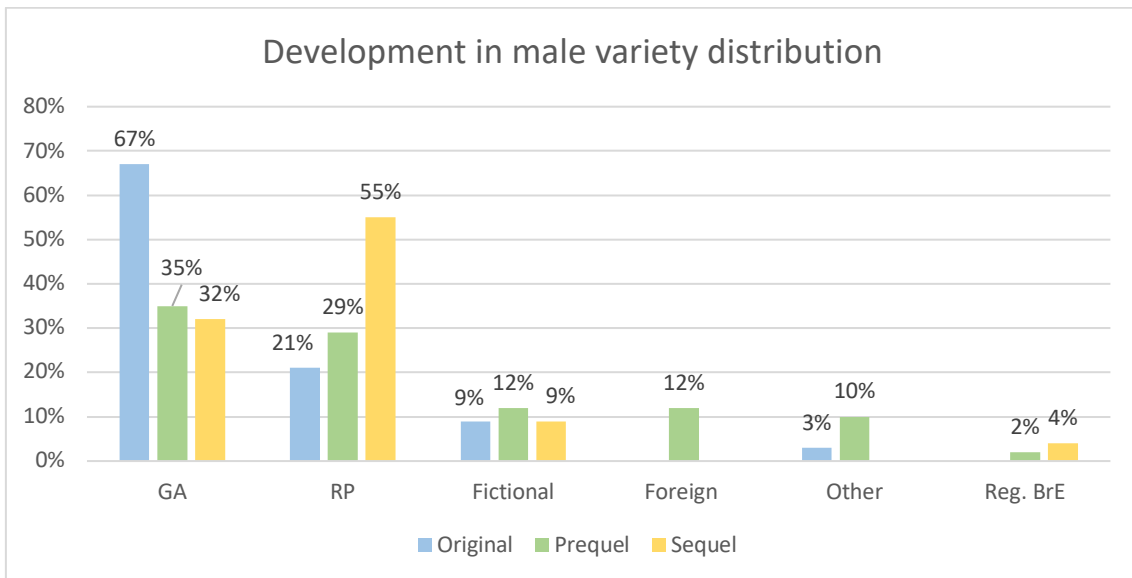


Figure 4.9: Variety distribution among the male characters through the trilogies

When looking at the distribution of varieties for female characters in each of the three trilogies, one can see that it largely follows the general pattern of distribution: there is

little diversity in the original and sequel trilogies, and a bit more in the prequel trilogy. The use of GA drops from the first trilogy to the last, while the use of RP increases greatly. Consequently, a higher percentage of female characters speak RP in the sequel trilogy compared to the male characters. In addition, there is slightly more linguistic diversity among the male characters than the females in the latest trilogy. The male characters also demonstrate a decrease in the use of GA from the first trilogy to the last, and an increase in RP, although not as notable as among the female characters. While the majority of the non-standard varieties are only represented in the prequel trilogy for the female characters, they are slightly more spread out over the trilogies among the male characters, perhaps giving an impression of more linguistic diversity among the males. However, the overall percentages (cf. figure 4.7) show that the same percentage of male and female characters speak with a standard variety.

Although gender was considered to be a central variable for the present thesis, it did not yield the most remarkable results. Previous studies such as Lundervold (2013) and Moltu (2014) found greater differences between the genders in terms of language use, as there was notably more linguistic variation among the male characters than the female. Bratteli (2011) and Urke (2019) on the other hand, found only a slight tendency for the women to speak more standardised than the men. All in all, both the male and female characters of *Star Wars* generally follow the overall pattern of language distribution, although with slightly more variation among the males.

4.3 Alignment

Studies such as Dobrow and Gidney (1998), Lippi-Green (2012) and Sønnesyn (2009) have found systematic correlations between accent and a character's alignment. It is expected that this will be the case in the present thesis as well. Hypothesis 5 thus states that good characters in the original trilogy will mostly speak GA, while there will be more linguistic variation among the good characters in the more recent films, based on the expectation of more accent tolerance in today's society. At the same time, hypothesis 6 states that evil characters in the original trilogy will mostly speak RP, while there will be more variation among the evil characters in the more recent films. 49% of the characters in *Star Wars* have been classified as 'Good', 36% as 'Evil' and

the remaining 15% are ‘Neutral’. The latter category is excluded from this particular analysis.

Table 4.4 presents the overall variety distribution among the good characters, while figure 4.10 gives a graphical presentation of the results.

Table 4.4: Overall variety distribution among the good characters

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	67	60
RP	26	23
Fictional	11	10
Foreign	2	2
Other	3	3
Reg. BrE	3	2
Total	112	100

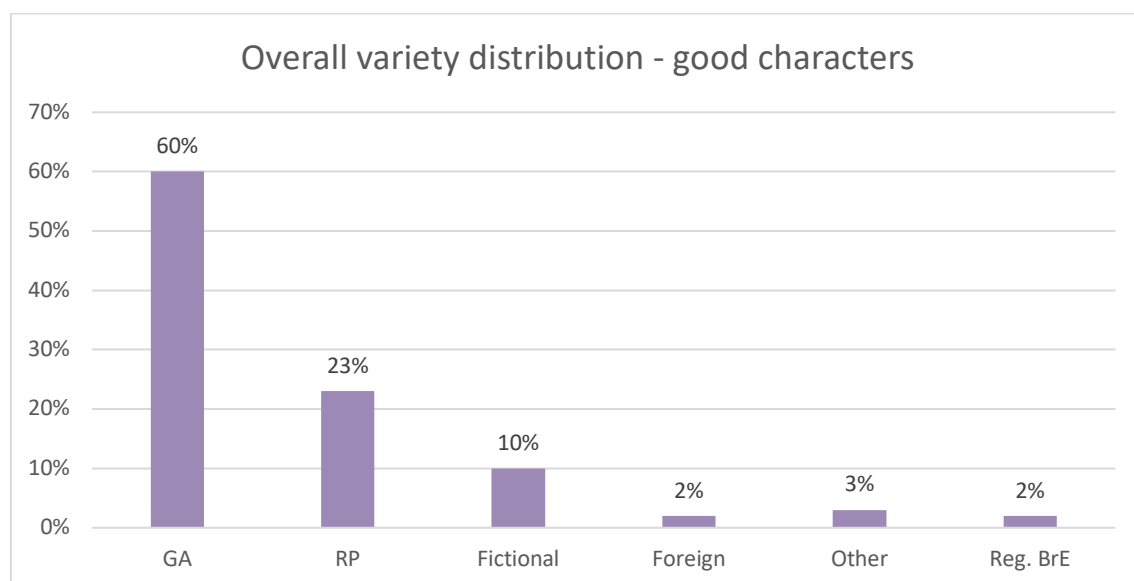


Figure 4.10: Overall variety distribution among the good characters n = 112

The majority of the good characters of *Star Wars* speak GA. Only 17% of the good characters speak with a non-standard variety, including fictional language. Sønnesyn (2009) and Bratteli (2011) also found GA to be the largest accent category among good

characters. As *Star Wars* is an American film series, it is perhaps natural to assign the good guys with an accent similar to that of the intended audience, as a means of identification. Yet, one must keep in mind that particularly the prequel and the sequel trilogies reach far beyond the American public. It is therefore very interesting to examine any possible change as the film industry has become more globalised. Figure 4.11 illustrates the development in the variety distribution among good characters from the first trilogy to the last.

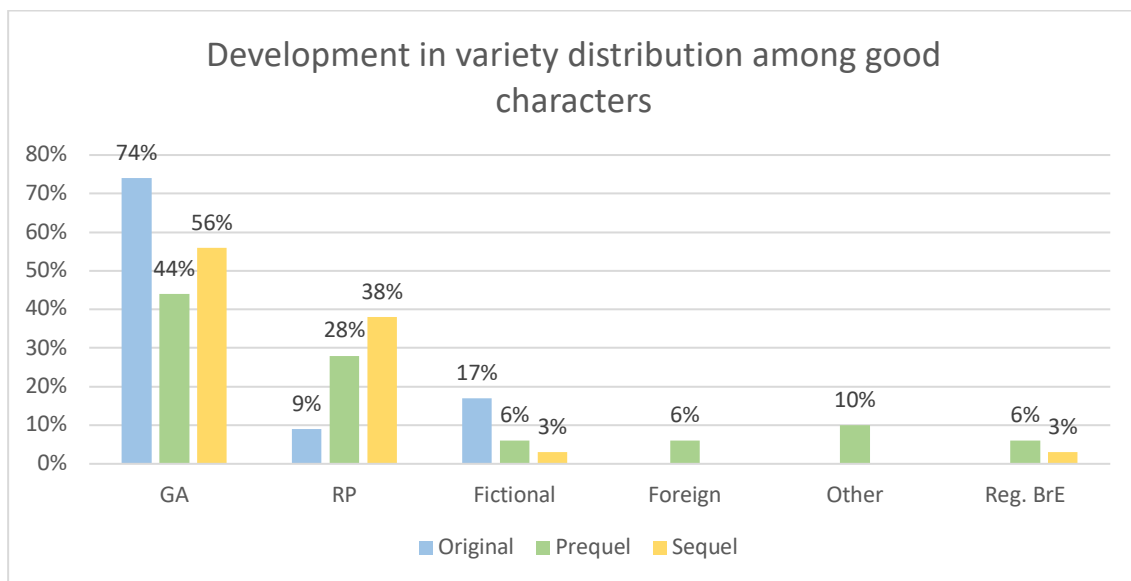


Figure 4.11: *Development in the variety distribution among good characters*

As figure 4.11 shows, GA is the indisputable dominating variety among good characters in the original trilogy. Standard speakers make up 83% of the good characters in the original films. The prequel trilogy once again demonstrates more linguistic variation, yet with standard accents comprising 72% of the sample, but the development towards more diversity is abandoned in the sequel trilogy. Hypothesis 5 is thus partly confirmed; GA was indeed the most used variety for good characters in the original trilogy, but the development did not go precisely as expected. Standard speakers still constitute the majority of the good characters in the most recent films, with as many as 94%, and consequently outweigh the percentage of standard speakers in the original trilogy. Although one more linguistic variety is represented among good characters in the sequel as opposed to the original, namely Reg. BrE, the total percentage of non-standard

speakers has decreased between the first and the last releases. This finding is rather interesting, and contrary to the initial expectation. As good characters generally have positive connotations connected to them, one might claim that a diverse representation of varieties among these characters would contribute to creating beneficial portrayals of previously stigmatised linguistic groups in a society that has moved towards a higher accent tolerance.

Alongside with the relative decrease in GA among good characters, RP has gradually increased in this group. As seen in section 4.1, the use of RP in general drastically escalates in the sequel trilogy. It is therefore natural that this development also takes place among good characters, though the increase is not extreme. The findings concerning the good characters in *Star Wars* are more or less comparable to Urke (2019), who also found a notable decrease in GA among good characters, as well as an increase in RP. GA was thus the dominating accent among the good characters of the Disney originals, but was replaced as such by RP in the remakes.

The variety distribution among the evil characters of *Star Wars* is presented in table 4.5, and a graphical presentation of the results is given in figure 4.12.

Table 4.5: Overall variety distribution among the evil characters

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	24	29
RP	43	51
Fictional	6	7
Foreign	6	7
Other	4	5
Reg. BrE	1	1
Total	84	100

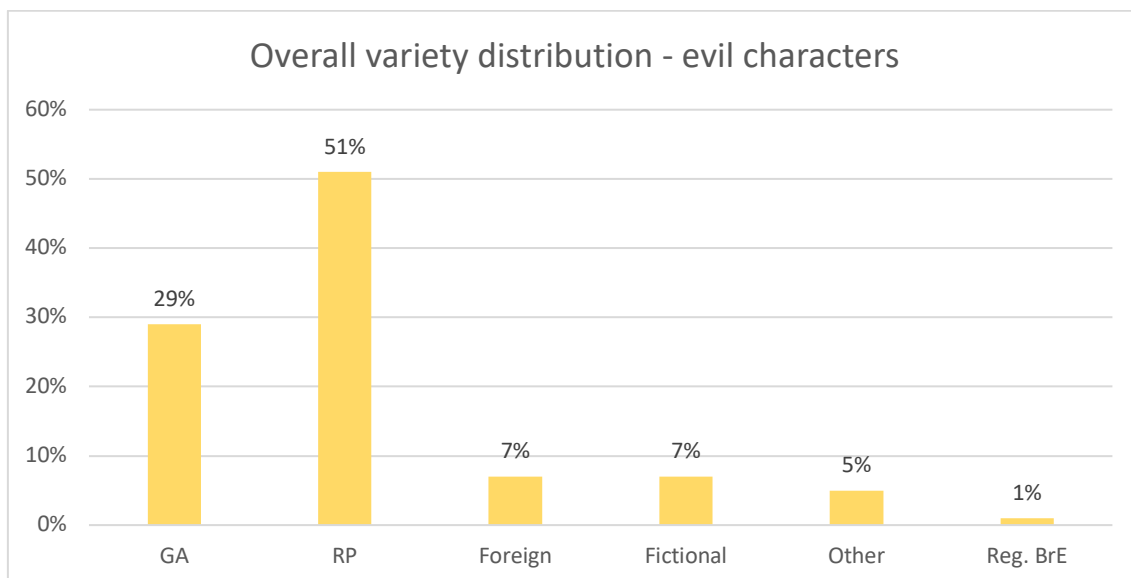


Figure 4.12: Overall variety distribution among the evil characters n = 84

RP is by far the largest variety category for evil characters, which to a certain extent was expected, as e.g. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) found that RP was frequently used for villains, alongside English with foreign accents. It is also noteworthy that the percentage for foreign English accents is three times higher among the evil characters of *Star Wars* than the good. Sønnesyn (2009) and Bratteli (2011) found GA to be the accent of the majority among evil characters, as it was the dominating variety overall, but the percentages for RP was higher among evil characters compared to good ones. The present study differs from the two in that RP is essentially the accent of the villains in *Star Wars*. In the present study, RP is followed by GA, which is also the largest variety category overall, and it is therefore not surprising that one finds a high distribution of it among evil characters as well.

A noteworthy observation concerning the evil characters is that prominent evil characters, such as commanders and leaders, tend to speak with RP, while the lower ranking villains, like soldiers, officers and the Storm Troopers, speak GA. This finding indicates an accent hierarchy in *Star Wars*, in which RP functions as the accent of the ruling core, while the less important and more peripheral villains speak the slightly less prestigious GA. As seen in section 2.2.3, RP tends to rank higher than GA in terms of prestige and may possibly serve that function in *Star Wars*. This can also help explain the inconsistency in the character Darth Vader's speech, which was dealt with in section

4.1. He was also the only character to be counted twice in the data, due to his simultaneous change of accent and alignment. Young Anakin Skywalker is good and speaks GA, while Darth Vader is evil and speaks RP, although in an inconsistent manner. His discrepancy can in fact be symptomatic of an effort to speak the variety of the elite in *Star Wars* once he steps into the ranks himself. The idea that RP is the variety of the ruling core is further supported when considering that princess Leia and Queen Amidala, who are both GA speakers, tend to show inconsistencies aiming towards RP as they make their first appearances in formal settings. When they eventually find themselves in more relaxed environments, away from the ruling elite, they return to their GA accents.

As pointed out in section 3.5.2, Darth Vader and Kylo Ren demonstrated a mixed alignment, because they turned good towards the very end of a trilogy. In line with the characters who are inconsistent in their way of speech, they were categorised according to the affiliation they predominantly acted in line with. As seen above, Darth Vader's shift of alignment corresponded with a shift of accent, leading him to be counted twice. Kylo Ren, on the other hand, was counted only once and was therefore categorised as predominantly evil.

Overall, RP is the majority accent among villains. Examining the variety distribution for evil characters in each of the trilogies, however, reveals some intriguing refinements.

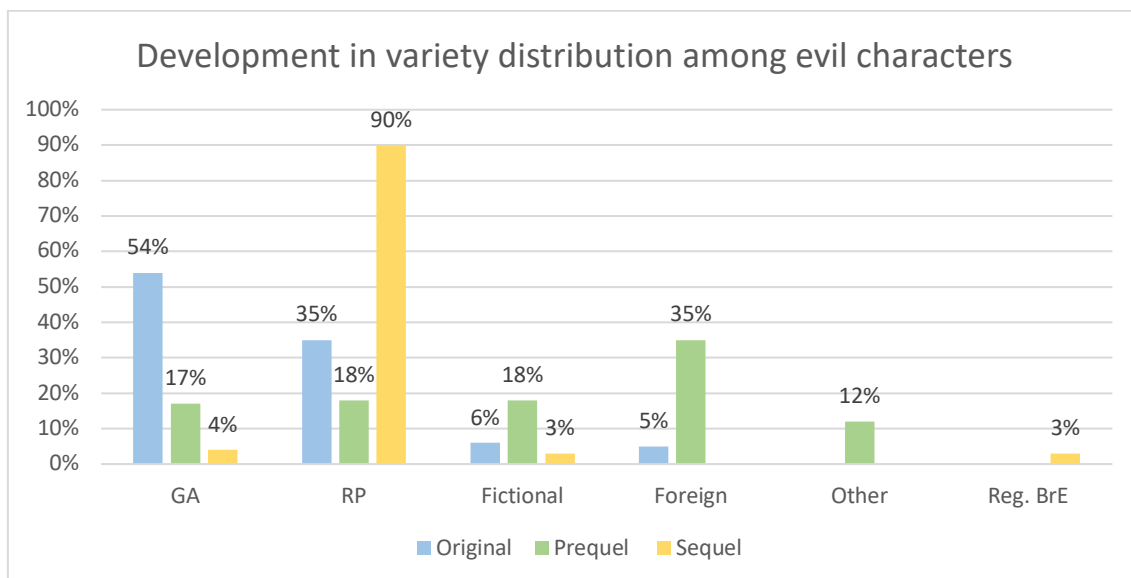


Figure 4.13: *Development in the variety distribution among evil characters*

The development in the speech of the evil characters is quite remarkable. Hypothesis 6 expressed an assumption that the majority of the evil characters in the original trilogy would speak RP, in line with previous research showing that RP has been used to mark villains. Although RP speakers constitute 35% in the original, and despite the fact that there is a higher percentage of RP speakers among evil characters than among good characters, this part of the hypothesis is not confirmed. GA is clearly the most used variety for evil characters in the original trilogy. The prequel trilogy sees a great decrease in GA among villains and a notable decrease of RP. A central finding, however, is that the evil characters in the prequel trilogy have become considerably more linguistically diverse. The largest variety category is suddenly English with a foreign accent. The foreign accents detected among evil characters in the prequel are Japanese, Russian and Italian. Japanese and Russian in particular have negative associations connected to them, as Lindemann (2005) found that these accents were rated poorly in terms of how correct, pleasant and friendly they sounded (192). Coupland and Bishop (2007) also found very negative attitudes towards an Asian accent of English (79), although this variety label is very broad. The findings from the prequel trilogy thus indicate that these foreign accents are utilised to make evil characters appear harsh and unfriendly. Italian, on the other hand, was in Lindemann's (2005) study rated the most pleasant and friendly-sounding non-native English accent. The

character who speaks with an Italian accent in *Star Wars*, however, does not appear very sympathetic.

Hypothesis 6 also stated an expectation that there would be more linguistic variation among the evil characters in the most recent films. Figure 4.13 clearly demonstrates that this hypothesis has been contradicted. As many as 90% of the evil characters in the sequel trilogy speak RP, which was an unforeseen development. This finding is rather astonishing considering it is the most modern of the trilogies, from which I expected a more diverse accent distribution. This use of language very much relies on stereotypes of RP as “the embodiment of effete evil” (Dobrow and Gidney 1998, 117). One can only speculate why this development has taken place. A possible explanation is the fear of presenting negative portrayals of non-standard accents, which could lead to a backlash similar to what *The Phantom Menace* received after its release in 1999 (cf. Gumbel 2011; Baker 2017; BBC 2018). RP could arguably be considered a safe choice for an ‘evil’ accent, as it is associated with privilege and whiteness. Non-standard accents are typically minority accents that are linked to specific groups, some of which are already outnumbered and less powerful in society. Using their accents for evil characters could thus be a sensitive matter, and RP remains the ‘harmless’ choice for villains as it is a variety connected to prestige, education and power.

4.4 Sophistication

The *Sophistication* variable intended to capture the characters’ intelligence, refinement, and abilities. As mentioned in section 3.5.3, it was a challenging variable to analyse, and consistency was essential in the process. *Sophistication* was further divided into three subcategories: ‘Sophisticated’, ‘Neutral’ and ‘Unsophisticated’. 16% of the characters were categorised as ‘Sophisticated’, 77% as ‘Neutral’ and 7% were categorised as ‘Unsophisticated’. In order to focus on the marked characters in the *Sophistication* variable, the ‘Neutral’ category has been excluded from the analysis below. Examples of neutral characters are Luke Skywalker’s uncle and aunt from the original, Owen and Beru. They are not unintelligent, but they are not particularly marked on this trait and they have minor roles. Such ‘unmarked’ characters are not particularly interesting in this context, and are therefore not included in the analysis of

sophistication. Hypothesis 7 states that standard accents will dominate among the sophisticated characters, while the unsophisticated characters will use more non-standard, and perhaps stigmatised, varieties. The sophisticated characters were further classified as either ‘Stiff’ or ‘Relaxed’, and hypothesis 8 expresses an anticipation that RP will be the majority variety among the stiff characters, while GA will dominate among the relaxed characters. The sophisticated characters will first be dealt with, followed by the unsophisticated characters. Table 4.6 demonstrates the variety distribution among the sophisticated characters. The percentages are presented graphically in figure 4.14.

Table 4.6: *The variety distribution among the sophisticated characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	16	44
RP	17	47
Foreign	1	3
Other	2	6
Total	36	100

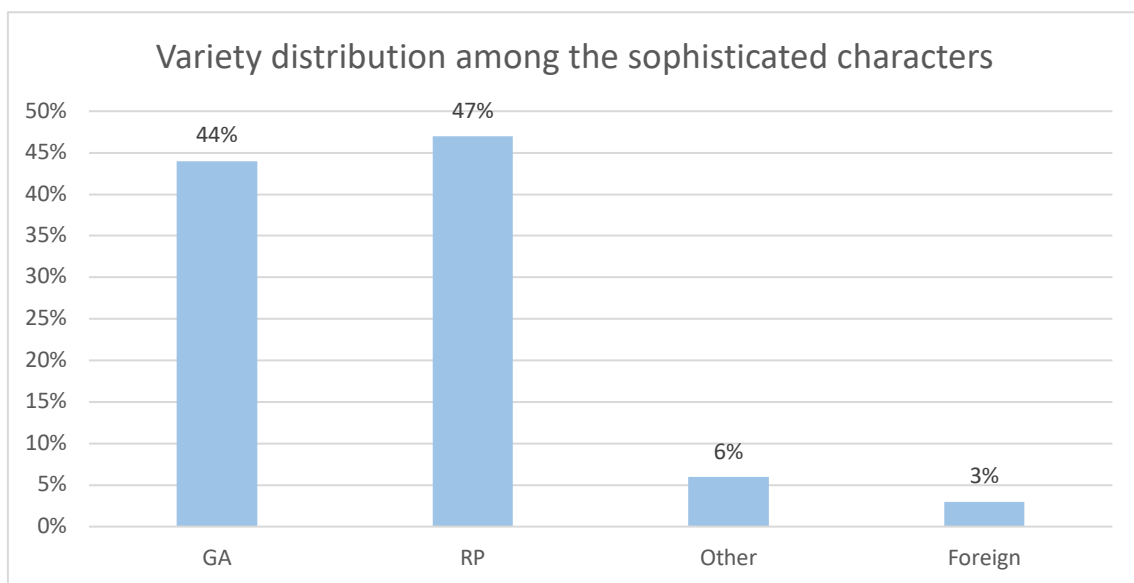


Figure 4.14: *Variety distribution among the sophisticated characters* n = 36

As 91% of the sophisticated characters speak with a standard accent, the first part of hypothesis 7 is undeniably confirmed. The one foreign English accent that was detected among sophisticated characters was a Scandinavian accent. The two characters classified as ‘Other’ were Australian speakers. As seen in section 2.2.3, Australian English is not ranked as high on status and social attractiveness as standard varieties, but gains similar scores as e.g. Scottish or Irish English. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) found that RP was often used to signal sophistication, which correlates to the findings presented above. Similar findings have been presented in other previous studies: Lundervold (2013) found that the majority of the sophisticated characters spoke RP, and Moltu’s (2014) findings are quite comparable to mine, as she found that all of the sophisticated characters were standard speakers, of which the majority spoke RP. Additionally, Urke (2019) found that 91,6% of the sophisticated characters spoke a standard variety in Disney originals, with a slight decrease to 79% in the remakes. Furthermore, Dragojevic et al. (2016) found more positive portrayals of Standard American and Foreign-Anglo speakers than Nonstandard American and Foreign-Other speakers (cf. section 2.3.3) on status related traits such as intelligence. As intelligence is a part of my *Sophistication* variable, one might compare Dragojevic et al.’s findings to the present thesis, as they correspond to one another. Some examples of sophisticated characters in *Star Wars* are Lord Palpatine, who is an RP speaker and appears in all the trilogies; Han Solo from the original and the sequel, who speaks GA, and Rey from the sequel trilogy, who speaks RP.

The *Star Wars* trilogies thus contribute to maintaining a tendency to primarily depicting standard speakers as sophisticated. Figure 4.15 presents how the variety distribution among sophisticated characters has progressed through the trilogies.

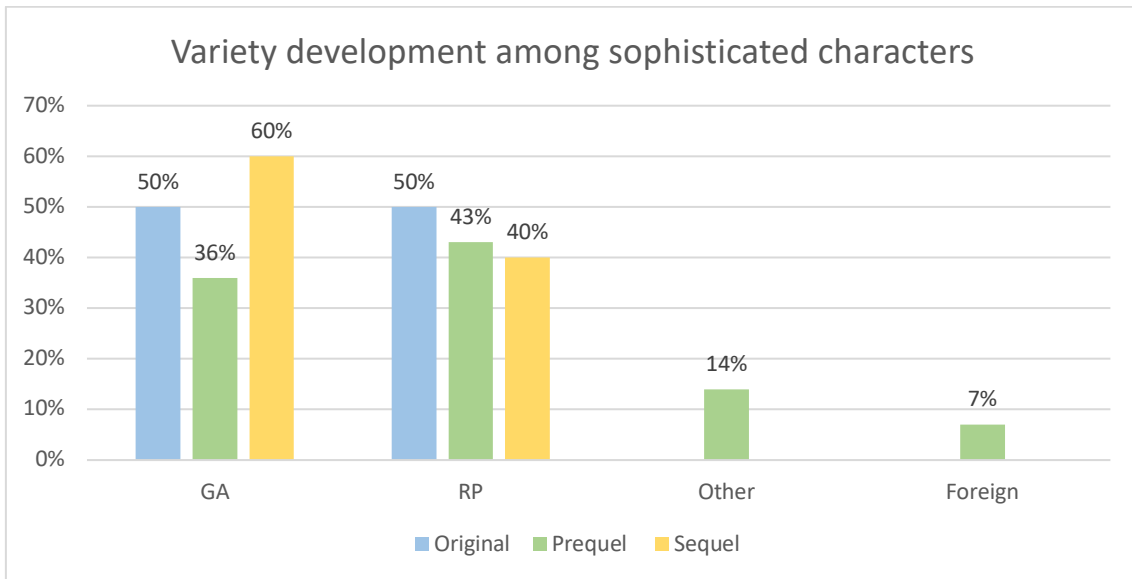


Figure 4.15: *Development in variety distribution among the sophisticated characters*

The development in variety distribution among sophisticated characters of *Star Wars* largely follows the overall pattern of distribution that demonstrates more linguistic diversity in the prequel trilogy than in the other two. As is made clear in the figure, 100% of the sophisticated characters in the first and last trilogies speak a standard variety. There is a drop in the use of GA for sophisticated characters in the prequel, in which a Scandinavian accent and Australian English are represented, but the standard variety re-establishes itself as the dominating variety in the sequel trilogy. RP, on the other hand, shows a small decrease from the first films to the last. Nevertheless, the standard varieties remain the most common ones among sophisticated characters. With the exception of 21% non-standard speakers in the prequel trilogy, the tendency to assign sophisticated characters with standard accents remains steady. Additional nuances are detected when looking at the stiff vs. the relaxed sophisticated characters in figure 4.16.

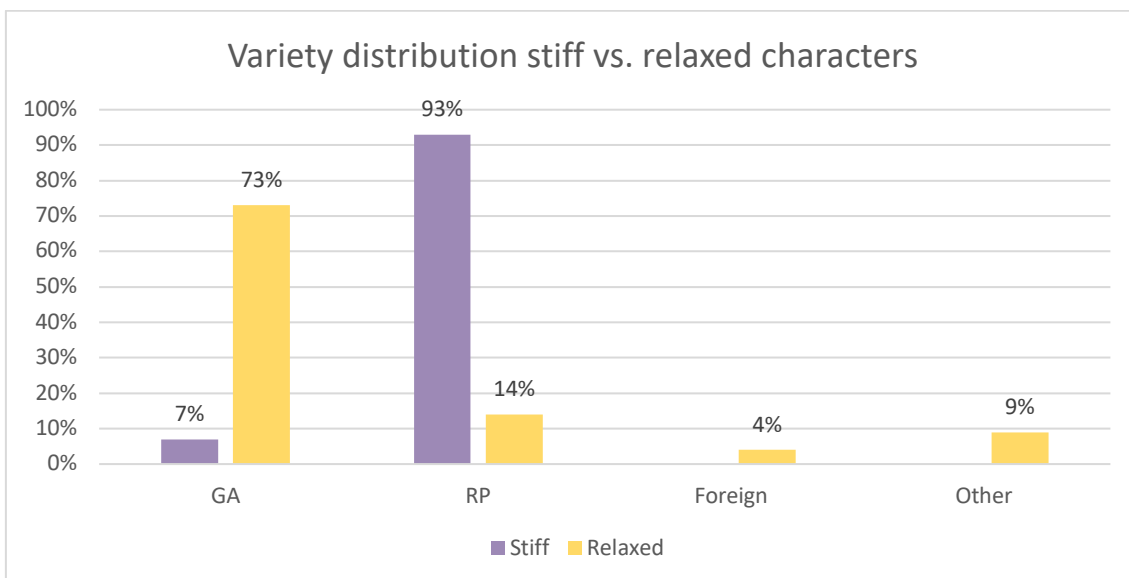


Figure 4.16: *Variety distribution among the stiff vs. the relaxed characters*

When taking a more detailed look at the sophisticated characters, one can see that RP is the accent of the majority among the stiff sophisticated characters, while GA dominates among the relaxed ones. In addition, there is more linguistic diversity among the relaxed characters. These findings can largely be explained by previous research on attitudes to language, which has shown that RP tends to score slightly higher on the status dimension than GA, while some studies find that GA is considered to be more socially attractive than RP. The formality demonstrated by the stiff sophisticated characters in the present study can possibly be related to the characteristics that constitute the status dimension. Correspondingly, the qualities connected to social attractiveness may be more present among the relaxed characters. As previous attitudinal research has shown, RP is indeed associated with formality, while GA is perceived as more informal and casual (cf. Rindal 2010; Margic and Sirola 2014; Carrie 2017). One might therefore infer that the respective accents contribute to marking the characters as either stiff or relaxed. Such a variety distribution can contribute to upholding stereotypes of RP speakers as uptight and cold, while GA speakers are portrayed as more easy-going and potentially friendlier. Moreover, 57% of the stiff characters were also evil, while 91% of the relaxed characters were classified as good.

The subcategorisation of stiff and relaxed characters can be illustrated with some examples. An example of a sophisticated and stiff character is the protocol droid C3PO.

He is a good character, and a speaker of RP. C3PO is very knowledgeable and polite, although quite arrogant, and his stiffness as a robot contributes to exaggerating his formality and rigidity. Another example of a stiff character is the evil General Hux in the sequel trilogy. He is very formal and serious, to such an extent that it becomes comical when the much more relaxed character Poe Dameron teases him. Hux speaks a conservative RP with some examples of tapped /r/, and the stiffness and formality of his manner of speech amplify these character traits in him. An example of a sophisticated, yet relaxed character, is Han Solo, one of the main characters of the original films. He is sophisticated in the sense that he is intelligent and clever, but he is very informal, charming, and relaxed, and he speaks GA. These examples shine a light on the diversity of the *Sophistication* variable and illustrate why a further classification into stiff and relaxed was deemed fruitful.

Table 4.7 shows the variety distribution among the unsophisticated characters of *Star Wars*. The numbers are presented graphically in figure 4.17.

Table 4.7: *The variety distribution among the unsophisticated characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	1	6
Fictional	9	56
Foreign	3	19
Other	3	19
Total	16	100

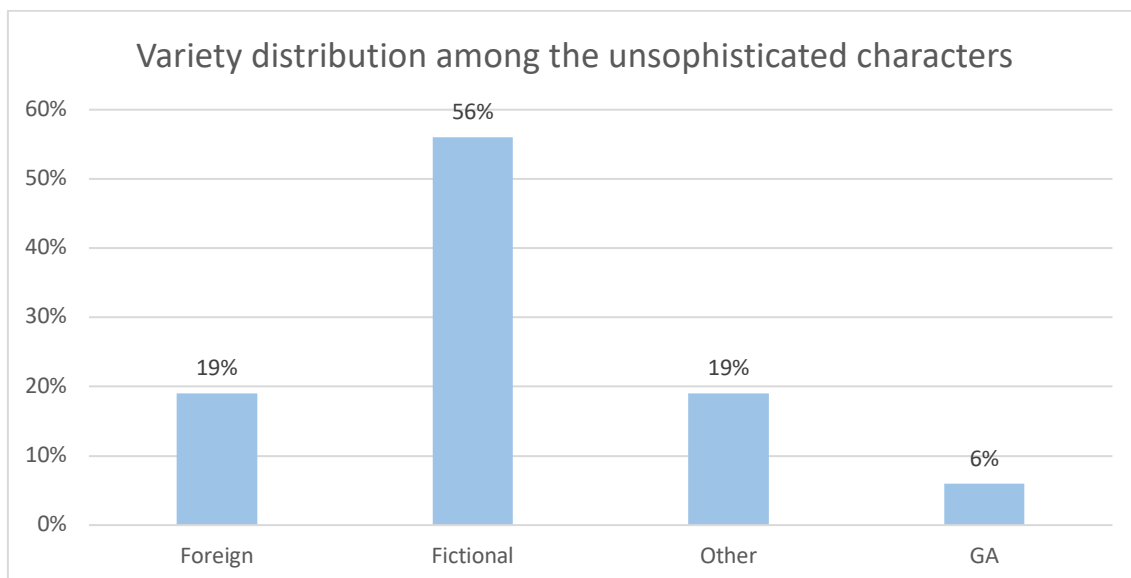


Figure 4.17: *Variety distribution among the unsophisticated characters* n = 16

As one can tell from table 4.7, the total number of unsophisticated characters was rather small. Nevertheless, the majority of these characters spoke with a fictional language, sometimes only beeping sounds or simply growling. English with a foreign accent and Other, in this case Caribbean inspired English and Australian, were equally distributed on this trait. The final part of hypothesis 7 states that unsophisticated characters to a larger extent would use more non-standard, and perhaps stigmatised, varieties. Hypothesis 7 is thus confirmed in its entirety, as fictional language in this context is considered to be non-standard. Notably, RP is absent from the unsophisticated group, contrary to GA which can be detected among both. As pointed out in section 3.5.3, a lot of variation was detected among the unsophisticated characters, just as among the sophisticated ones. Although they are not plainly unintelligent, both R2D2 and Chewbacca were classified as ‘Unsophisticated’, because they often appear simple and child-like.

The foreign accents detected among the unsophisticated characters were Russian, Japanese and Italian. As mentioned in section 4.3, Lindemann (2005) found that the first two accents created quite negative associations among the respondents. Russian, in particular, was described as ‘guttural’ and ‘harsh’ (204). In addition to demonstrating a very distinct and recognisable foreign accent, the Russian accented character in *Star Wars*, the evil droid General Grievous, has a raspy cough which

contributes to making him even more harsh sounding. All in all, he is portrayed as unrefined and almost repulsive. The character who spoke a Japanese accent of English, the villain alien creature Nute Gunray, is also portrayed rather negatively, which will be dealt with further in section 4.6. Studies such as Sønnesyn (2009), Lundervold (2013) and Moltu (2014) found that regional varieties to a large extent were used for unsophisticated characters. Their findings are to an extent similar to mine, as the representation of the categories ‘Foreign’ and ‘Other’ is notably higher among the unsophisticated characters than in the overall variety distribution of *Star Wars* (cf. figure 4.1 above).

In addition to examining the overall variety distribution among the unsophisticated characters, it is also interesting to look for changes between the trilogies. The results are presented in figure 4.18.

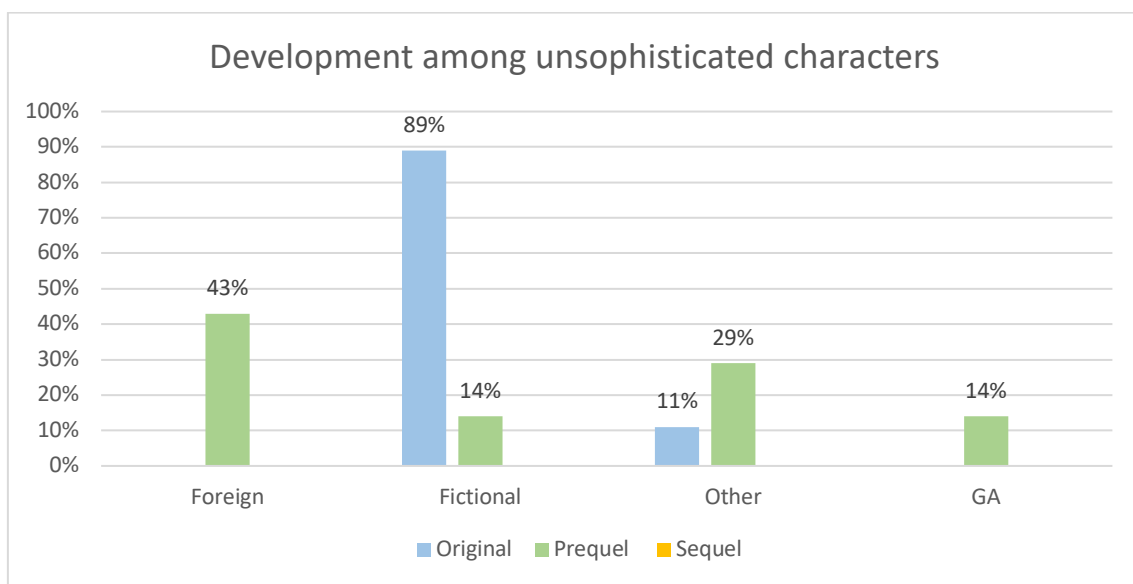


Figure 4.18: Development in variety distribution among the unsophisticated characters

Figure 4.18 shows that in the original trilogy, the unsophisticated characters were largely assigned with a fictional language. In the prequel, the unsophisticated characters are a more diverse group, while there are no unsophisticated characters in the sequel. It is rather interesting that there are no unsophisticated characters in the most recent trilogy. This decision could possibly be related to political correctness, since portraying certain characters as particularly unintelligent or unrefined might be seen as

controversial. As the linguistic category ‘Fictional’ cannot be connected to any previous attitudinal research, it has been difficult to single out a particular function for the fictional languages in *Star Wars*. However, the results for the unsophisticated characters might offer an explanation, as one can see that fictional language to some extent is used to mark a lack of intelligence or refinement, which are qualities that define an unsophisticated character. When turning the numbers around, one can see that 32% of the characters who speak a fictional language are unsophisticated, and none of them are sophisticated. Although the percentages are moderate, the results create a perception that fictional language might be used to mark unsophistication.

All in all, one can see that the minor accents dominate among the unsophisticated characters in *Star Wars*, and not the standards GA and RP as among the sophisticated characters. The current sample therefore continues a tradition of portraying standard speakers as more sophisticated than non-standard speakers, thus confirming hypothesis 7.

4.5 Species

Previous studies have found correlations between a character’s species and its linguistic variety. On the basis of previous findings, hypothesis 9 states that standard accents will dominate among the human characters, while there will be more linguistic diversity among the non-human characters. 71% of the characters in *Star Wars* are human, while the remaining 29% are non-human. The variety distribution among the human characters is presented in table 4.8, as well as graphically in figure 4.19.

Table 4.8: *The variety distribution among the human characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	86	52
RP	65	40
Fictional	3	2
Foreign	2	1
Other	3	2
Reg. BrE	5	3
Total	164	100

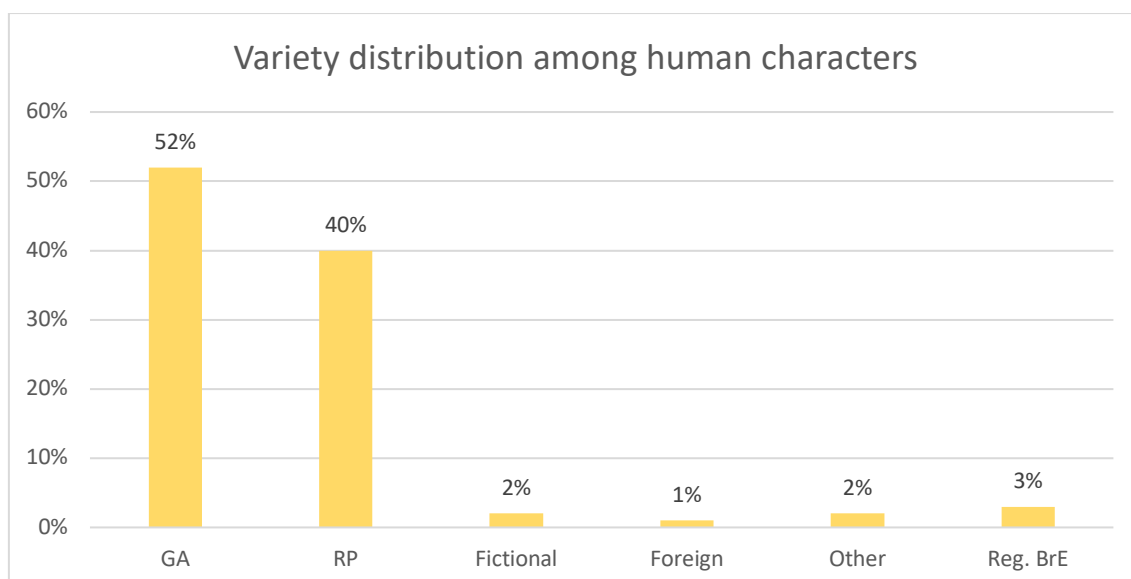


Figure 4.19: *Variety distribution among the human characters* n = 164

The majority of the human characters in *Star Wars* speak with a standard accent: as many as 92% speak either GA or RP. There is thus very little linguistic diversity among the human characters. Similar results have been presented by Moltu (2014), who also found that human characters largely spoke standard accents, while regionally marked accents were more represented among non-humans. Bratteli (2011) found the same relative distribution of human and non-human characters as the present thesis, with the former being the majority. However, our linguistic results differ, as GA and British coloured American were the most common varieties among non-humans in his sample, while there was actually a higher representation of non-standard varieties among the

human characters. He speculates that this is to avoid stereotypes among non-human characters. After examining the overall variety distribution among the human characters, it is interesting to look at the development that has taken place. The results are presented in figure 4.20.

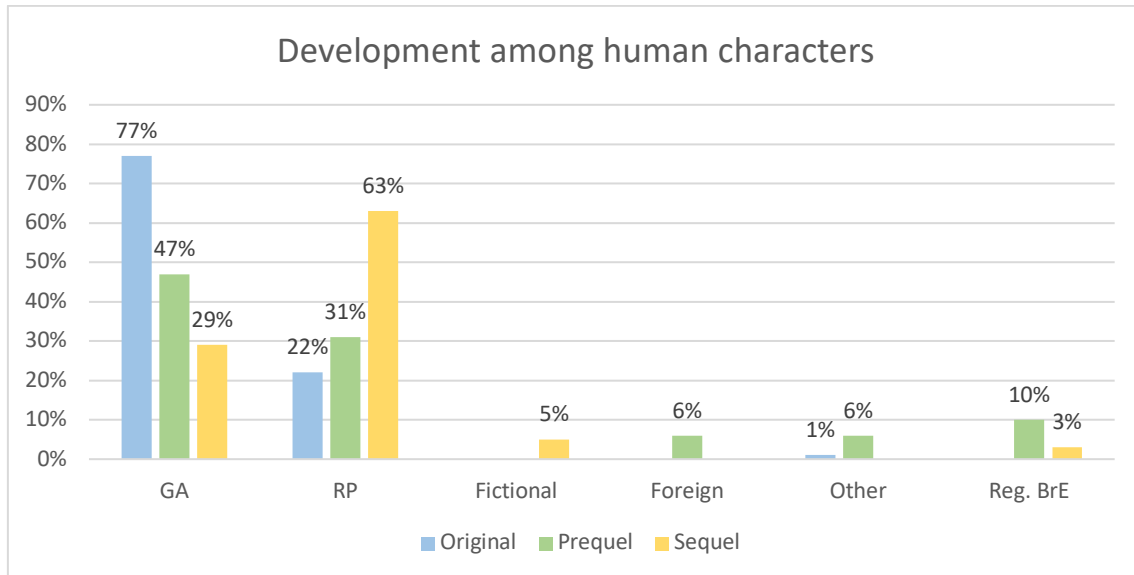


Figure 4.20: Development in variety distribution among the human characters

Figure 4.20 shows that GA decreases greatly among the human characters over the course of time. At the same time, RP follows a similar pattern of increase. The result is that although the variety distribution between the species changes over time, the standard accents overall dominate among this character group. 99% of the human characters speak a standard variety in the original, while the percentages for the prequel and the sequel are 78% and 92% respectively. This variable also follows the overall pattern of distribution, namely the pendulum swing that suggests a development towards more variation when analysing the second trilogy but returns to the dominance of the standards in the final trilogy. It is interesting to see if a similar pattern is reproduced among the non-human characters as well. Table 4.9 and figure 4.21 display the overall variety distribution among the non-humans of *Star Wars*, while figure 4.22 shows the development across the trilogies.

Table 4.9: *The variety distribution among the non-human characters*

Linguistic variety	Characters	
	n	%
GA	16	24
RP	13	20
Fictional	25	38
Foreign	7	11
Other	5	7
Total	66	100

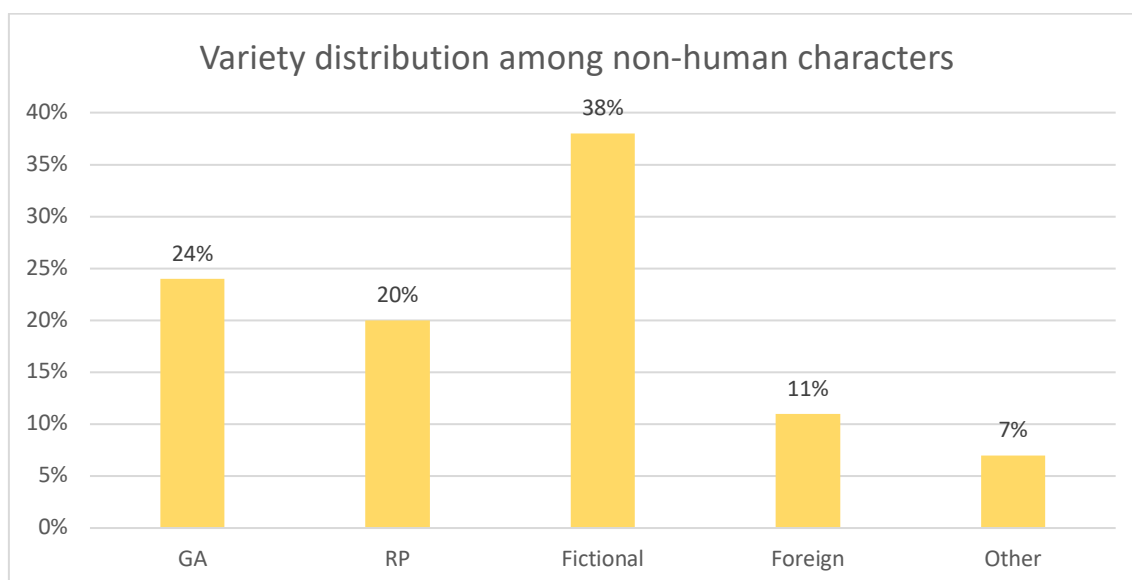


Figure 4.21: *Variety distribution among the non-human characters* n = 66

As expected in hypothesis 9, there is more linguistic diversity among the non-human characters. Compared to the human characters' 92%, only 44% of the non-human characters speak a standard variety. Moltu (2014) also found a pattern of more linguistic diversity among the non-human characters. In her study, regional varieties of British had a higher representation in these groups. As figure 4.21 shows, there is a high percentage of fictional language among the non-humans of *Star Wars*. The setting of the films, i.e. 'a galaxy far, far away', facilitates the inclusion of a range of various aliens and creatures. A fictional language can in these cases function as a marker of 'otherness', distinguishing these characters further from the human characters. Within

the ‘Other’ category on this trait, one can find both Australian and Caribbean accented English. The foreign accents are Japanese, Italian and Russian. While a human character’s ethnicity can correlate with a foreign accent of English, it is rather peculiar to assign aliens with these types of varieties, as there is nothing about the character’s origins that points to either of these countries. Such choices related to variety distribution are thus what makes a societal treatment study like the present particularly interesting. In order to detect any changes from the first films to the last, figure 4.22 presents the development in the variety distribution among the non-human characters.

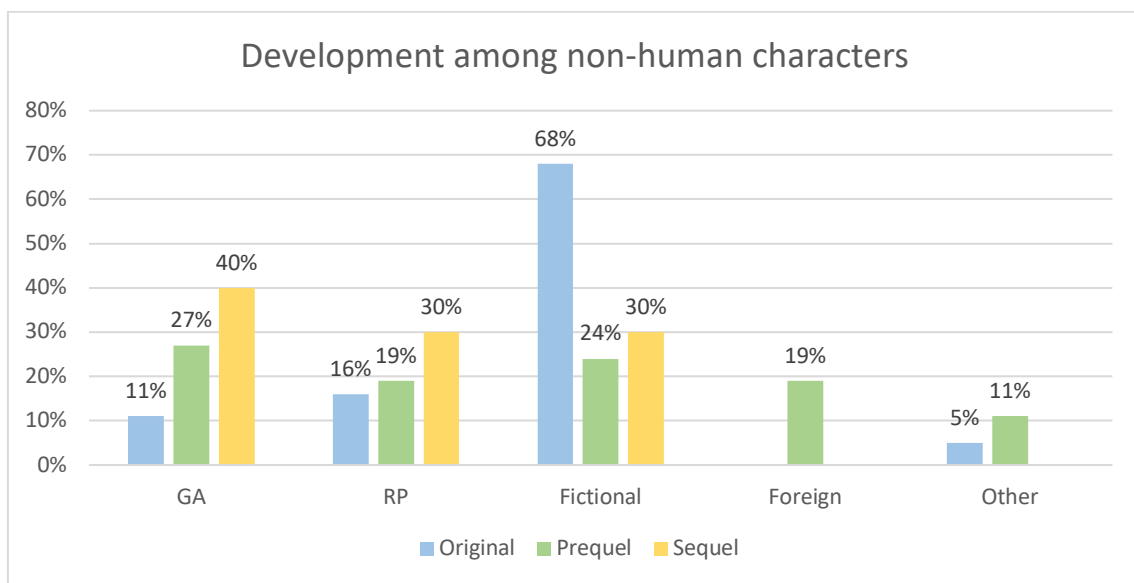


Figure 4.22: *Development in variety distribution among the non-human characters*

Fictional language is undoubtedly the largest variety category for non-human characters in the original trilogy, but it decreases markedly in the following trilogies. In both the prequel and the sequel, GA is the most common variety for non-humans, although the prequel trilogy demonstrates quite an equal distribution of the represented varieties. The variety distribution among non-human characters in the prequel trilogy is thus the most balanced of all the variables investigated. A relevant note is that in the original and sequel trilogies, the numbers of human characters are much higher than non-humans. In the prequel trilogy, there are actually more non-human characters than humans.

In the original trilogy, only 27% of the non-human characters speak a standard variety. In the prequel, this percentage has increased to 46%, and to 70% in the sequel

trilogy. In other words, the alien and animal-like creatures of *Star Wars* have in fact become less linguistically diverse over the years. Although there is more variation overall among the non-humans than their counterpart, they are gradually becoming a more homogenous group, similar to the human characters. This can probably be partly related to the increased political correctness in society. Non-human characters can perhaps be considered minorities, and a fear of backlash by associating non-humans with non-standard speech could have governed this development. Lippi-Green (2012) criticises Disney for the fact that all their AAVE speakers are animals, further substantiating the claim that assigning non-human characters with non-standard varieties might be problematic.

4.6 Character role

The following section investigates potential correlations between character role and linguistic variety. Hypothesis 10 conveys an expectation that standard accents will dominate among the main characters of *Star Wars*, and that there will be more linguistic variation among supporting and peripheral characters. As noted in section 2.3, linguistic variety is often used in character building, and since minor characters have a limited amount of screen time, their language could be a way of instantly marking them in different ways. As mentioned in section 3.2, there are numerous peripheral characters in *Star Wars*, making this the largest group within the character role variable. Table 4.10 presents the distribution of varieties among the different character roles, while figure 4.23 gives a graphical presentation of the results.

Table 4.10: Variety distribution among the different character roles

Linguistic variety	Main		Supporting		Peripheral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
GA	8	73	8	24	86	46
RP	3	27	13	40	62	33
Fictional	–	–	4	12	24	13
Foreign	–	–	5	15	4	2
Other	–	–	3	9	5	3
Reg. BrE	–	–	–	–	5	3
Total	11	100	33	100	186	100

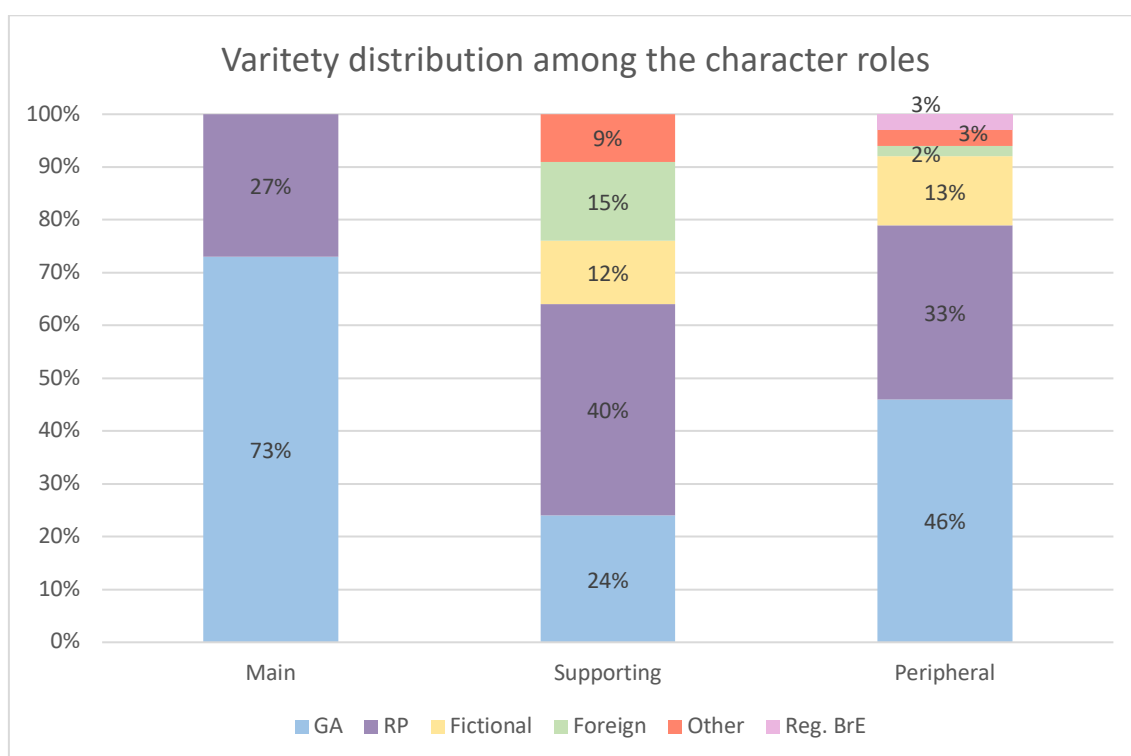


Figure 4.23: Variety distribution among the different character roles

As is made clear from the figure, the main characters are exclusively standard speakers. GA is the largest variety category among the main characters, with roughly two thirds speaking this accent. Non-standard speakers are thus not portrayed as key figures in any of the nine films. There is generally more linguistic diversity among the supporting and peripheral characters. Hypothesis 10 is therefore confirmed in the overall language

distribution. Nevertheless, there are some noteworthy differences between the variety distribution for the supporting and peripheral characters. For one, standard speakers make up 64% of the supporting characters but as many as 79% of the peripheral characters. Secondly, and rather interestingly, the linguistic categories ‘Foreign’ and ‘Other’ have notably higher percentages among the supporting characters as opposed to the peripheral ones. The supporting characters are thus the group in which one can detect the greatest use of non-standard English varieties. At the same time, the peripheral characters represent all the linguistic categories that the present thesis operates with.

Previous studies such as Moltu (2014) and Dragojevic et al. (2016) have found similar results, revealing that central characters were more likely to speak a standard variety. Moltu (2014) also found that non-standard accents, particularly regional British varieties, was more present among minor roles. One might speculate why there is more variation among the supporting characters than the peripheral in *Star Wars*. It is tempting to believe that it would in fact be the opposite, as supporting characters have more screen time than the peripherals and can therefore be established as characters based on a range of different traits other than their way of talking. At the same time, the peripheral characters are less important to the story and are therefore possibly assigned more ‘neutral’ varieties as they make their fleeting appearances.

Examples of supporting characters whose language indeed contributes to forming their characteristics are the protocol droid C3PO, the ‘Gungan’ Jar Jar Binks and the alien villain Nute Gunray. C3PO speaks RP, and is formal, stiff, and quite arrogant. He is sophisticated, and his standard accent, which is related to status and prestige, underlines these traits. C3PO is one of very few characters who appear in all the films. Jar Jar Binks, on the other hand, is an eccentric and unrefined character, who has been placed in the linguistic category ‘Other’ due to his Caribbean inspired English accent. His simple, and at times unconventional way of speaking, with grammatical irregularities and invented words, strengthens the image of him as simple and unrefined. Finally, Nute Gunray, a speaker of Japanese accented English, is portrayed negatively as somewhat unintelligent and cowardly, as well as a bit ridiculous with choppy movements. An Asian and a Japanese English accent has in fact been described as “choppy” and “cut up” (Lindemann 2005, 200), and Nute’s manner of speech thus

underlines these traits. Overall, these examples shine a light on how linguistic varieties can be used for supporting characters to amplify certain traits.

Figure 4.24 presents the development in the variety distribution among the main characters.

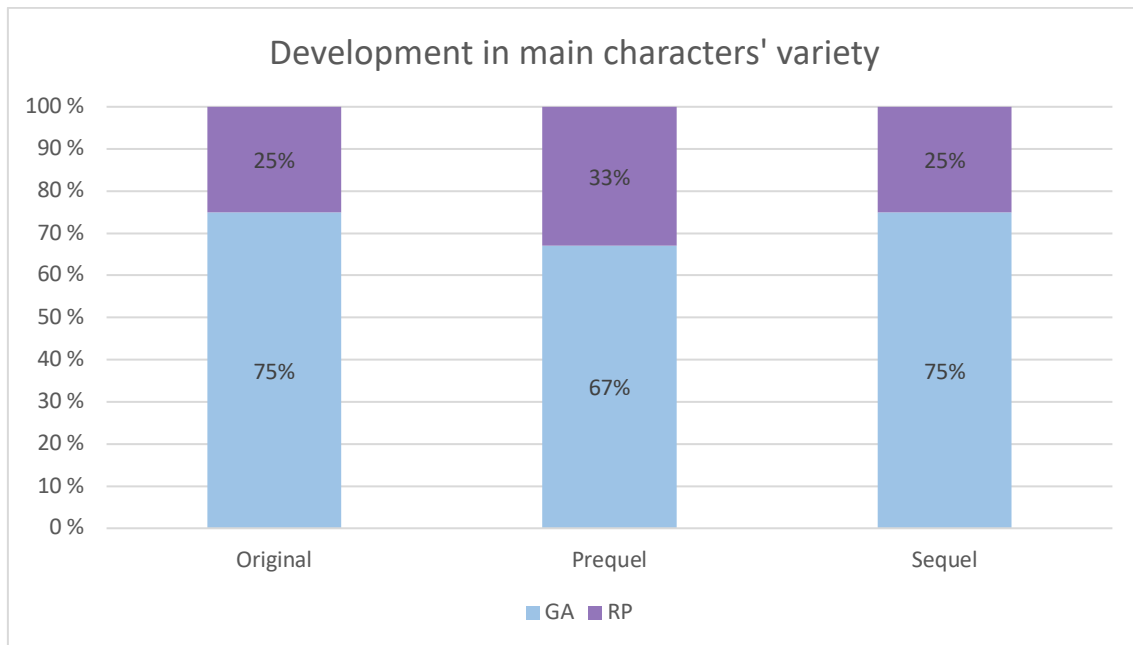


Figure 4.24: *Development in the variety distribution among main characters*

An examination of the development in the variety distribution among the main characters of *Star Wars* reveals that the standard accents dominate throughout the trilogies. The proportionality between GA and RP remains relatively constant as well, with a slight divergence in the prequel trilogy. Throughout the trilogies, the RP speakers are thus outnumbered among the most central characters either three-to-one or two-to-one.

The development in the variety distribution among the supporting characters is presented in figure 4.25.

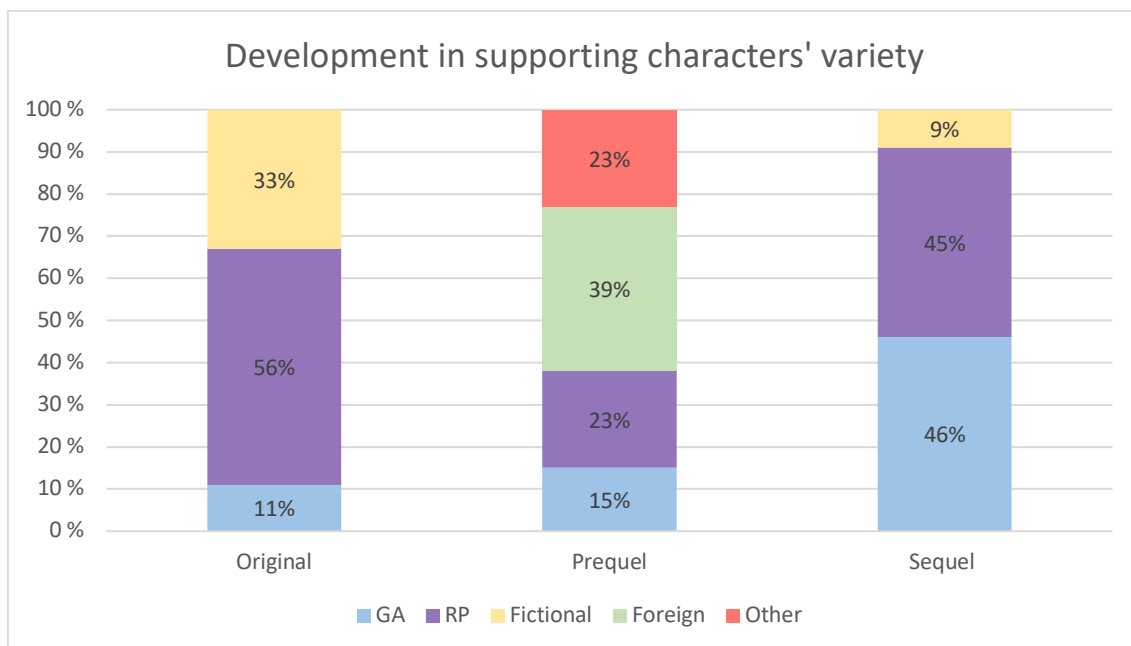


Figure 4.25: *Development in the variety distribution among supporting characters*

Figure 4.25 shows that a development has indeed taken place in the variety distribution among the supporting characters. In line with the overall pattern of distribution, the prequel trilogy includes the most linguistically diverse supporting characters. 67% of the supporting characters are standard speakers in the original. The corresponding percentages for the prequel and the sequel are 38% and 91% respectively. The prequel thus demonstrates a notable drop in the number of supporting characters with a standard accent. In the sequel trilogy, the supporting characters are almost as homogenous as the main characters, which is a rather surprising finding, as hypothesis 10 expected more linguistic variation among supporting characters. This can perhaps be related to the backlash faced by the prequel, in which both foreign accents and ‘Other’ were highly represented among supporting characters.

Finally, figure 4.26 presents the development in variety distribution among the peripheral characters of *Star Wars*.

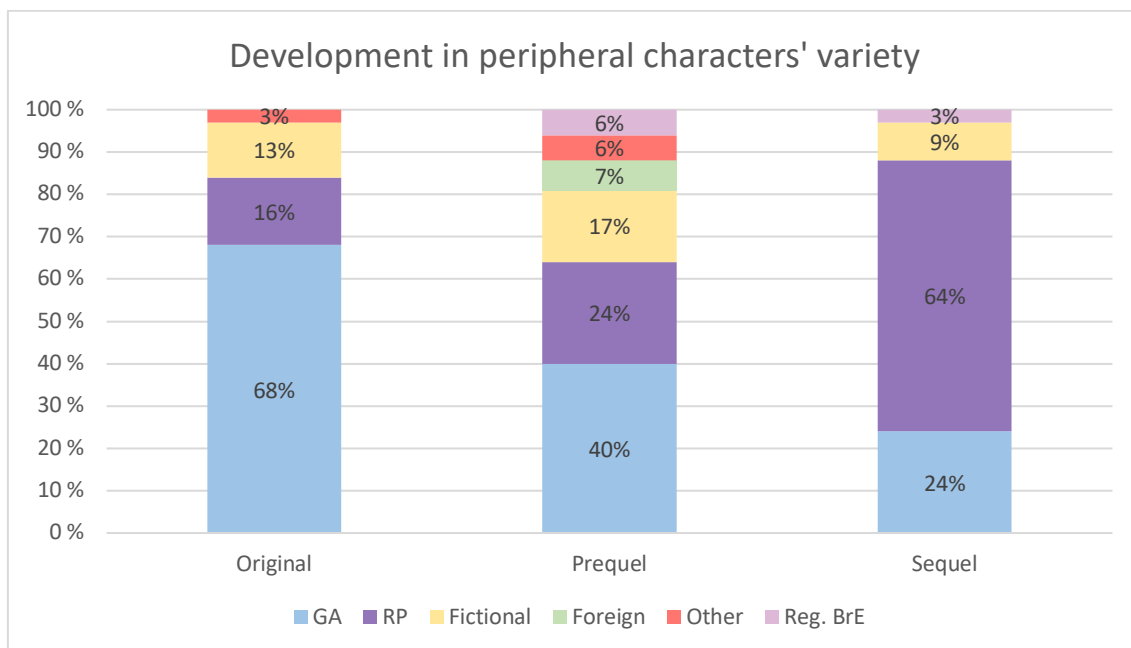


Figure 4.26: *Development in the variety distribution among peripheral characters*

Similar to the supporting characters, the peripheral characters follow the overall trend of the pendulum swing, in which the prequels display a more diverse group than the remaining trilogies. In fact, a slightly higher percentage of the peripheral characters speak a standard variety in the sequel compared to the original.

Although hypothesis 10 could be confirmed from investigating the overall variety distribution among the various character roles, some interesting nuances are made evident when looking at the development between the trilogies. Urke (2019) found more accent diversity among supporting and peripheral than main characters in the Disney originals. This pattern is largely repeated in the remakes, contrary to her expectations, although GA has decreased markedly, and RP has increased. Her findings are to a certain extent comparable to mine, as the *Star Wars* sequel largely repeats the pattern of the original, at least among the main and peripheral characters. In addition, there is undoubtedly more variation among the supporting and peripheral characters than the main characters of *Star Wars*.

4.7 Other observations

As mentioned in section 3.5.6, the ethnicity of the characters has not been included as a separate variable that has been correlated with linguistic variety. However, the ethnic diversity among the characters has been examined. Naturally, only the human characters are included in this analysis. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) point to research showing that female and non-white characters were underrepresented on television in the 1970s and 1980s. These findings indicate that the same will be true for the original trilogy, which was released between 1977 and 1983. Although not formally stated in a hypothesis, I expected the most recent films to be more inclusive and diverse than the oldest films, particularly in terms of ethnicity, due to recent societal changes that have been dealt with in section 2.5. Figure 4.27 gives a graphical presentation of the ethnic distribution throughout the *Star Wars* films³.

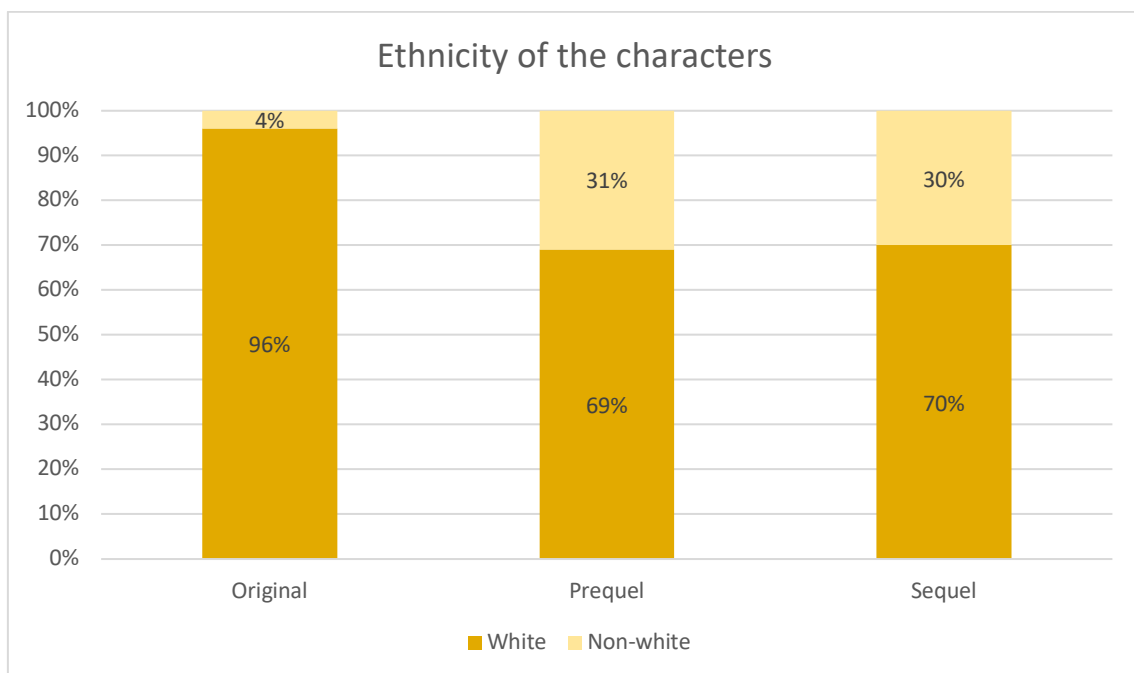


Figure 4.27: Percentages of white and non-white characters

³ The terms 'white' and 'non-white' have been used for simplicity, because I am mainly interested in this contrast. As there are relatively few non-white characters, a further subclassification was deemed unnecessary.

As expected, there is very little ethnic diversity in the first films. The number of non-white characters in the original trilogy is three, and only one of them, Lando Calrissian, has more than a minor role. The two others are the bounty hunter Boba Fett, whose face we only see in the prequel trilogy, and a peripheral resistance pilot. The percentages change greatly in the prequel trilogy. One would expect this development to continue further in the sequel, but it culminates at a 70-30 distribution. Nevertheless, in the last two trilogies, one can see characters of a range of ethnicities portrayed in several different types of roles. In the most recent films, one of the main characters is also coloured. All in all, a wider and more inclusive range of ethnicities is represented in the latest films.

As presented in section 4.2, the distribution of male and female characters over the trilogies also points to a process of equalisation, although a notable imbalance remains. The results for gender and ethnic equality in each trilogy of *Star Wars* are quite similar, as the distribution between male and female, as well as white and non-white, develops at the same rate, from a clear dominance of male and white characters, to a more even representation. Although the distribution remains unbalanced, the findings of the present study thus show a tendency over time of representing both genders, as well as people of various ethnicities, more evenly. Female characters are also assigned more untraditional roles, such as pilots, commanders and Storm Troopers in the most recent films. One can also see females among the evil characters, which is rarely the case in the original and prequel. In addition, the ninth and final *Star Wars* film depicts two females kissing, opening up for a broader portrayal of sexual orientation. All in all, one can conclude that the *Star Wars* film series has indeed become more diverse and inclusive in terms of ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and is therefore a more accurate reflection of society than the earliest films were, although it is less diverse when it comes to language.

4.8 Characters treated as groups

As noted in section 3.2, a handful of the characters have been treated as homogenous groups and are also analysed as such. The six groups all have in common that they comprise peripheral characters who are not established with individual personalities, but

rather referred to and represented as groups in the films. The majority of the groups either consist of both genders, or are indistinguishable in terms of this variable.

The Sand People, also known as the Tusken raiders, are a group of non-human scavengers appearing in the original and prequel trilogies, who speak a fictional language made up of shrieking, grunting and growling noises. It is impossible to distinguish the genders of this group. They have been classified as evil on the basis of their actions, although they do not work for any side in the imperial conflict. Their primitive and ruthless manner has resulted in their classification as unsophisticated. Their way of speaking also contributes to marking them as unrefined and unsophisticated.

The Storm Troopers are a well-known symbol of *Star Wars*, as they appear in the majority of the films. They are the human foot soldiers of the Empire and the First Order, and are thus evil, and are dressed in the characteristic white uniforms and masks. Up until the sequel trilogy, their voice quality reveals that they are all males. In the most recent trilogy however, both genders are represented among the Storm Troopers. Their linguistic variety is GA, with one single exception that speaks RP. As seen in section 4.3, RP is overall the dominating variety among the evil characters. The fact that the Storm Troopers speak GA is interesting: it supports the idea of RP being the variety of the elite in *Star Wars*, as the Storm Troopers are on the bottom of the command chain among the villains. While the evil officers and commanders largely speak RP, the foot soldiers speak GA. The Storm Troopers have also been classified as unsophisticated, as they seem unintelligent, simple and weak-minded, since they are easily manipulated by Jedi mind tricks. They also function as a comic relief at times, as they tend to be clumsy and not very clever.

The Ewoks are a group of small bear-looking creatures, who live in tree huts in the woods and speak a fictional variety called Ewokese, which includes barking and howling noises. As they are a tribe, one would expect them to comprise both genders, although this is not made clear in the films. They aide the resistance in fighting and have therefore been classified as good. Furthermore, they have been categorised as unsophisticated. The Ewoks are made to appear as simple, shy and primitive animal-like creatures who are unfamiliar with ‘modern’ technology. In addition, they start

worshipping C3PO in the belief that he is a god, which contributes to the perception of them as a bit unintelligent.

The Clone troopers are a group of soldiers working for the evil side, who have been cloned from a human being. They are therefore classified as human. Unlike the previously reviewed groups, they are all male, as they were cloned from a man. The Clone troopers speak Australian English and have thus been placed in the linguistic category 'Other'. Two individuals from this group have been included in the quantification because they are established as separate characters. The Clone troopers have been classified as neutral on *Sophistication*.

A group of droids who appear in the prequel trilogy has also been included. They are all male, based on their voice quality, and work for the evil side. Due to their clumsiness and simplicity, they have been categorised as unsophisticated. They speak with a GA accent, but with certain grammatical irregularities that make them sound almost like children, such as "What that?" and "That nothing". The droids also function as comic relief.

Finally, the non-human Wookies have been included as a character group. A couple of individuals have been quantified from this group as well, most famously the supporting character Chewbacca. The Wookies speak a fictional variety consisting mostly of growling and moaning. They have been classified as good, and neutral on *Sophistication*. It has not been possible to distinguish different genders among them as a group.

To summarise about the character groups, one can see that the unsophisticated groups speak either GA or a fictional language. As demonstrated in figure 4.17 above, GA is a rather uncommon variety for unsophisticated characters in *Star Wars*. Fictional language, on the other hand, is widely used among the unsophisticated. The groups that have been classified as good exclusively speak a fictional variety, while the evil groups are quite linguistically diverse, as they represent GA, 'Other' and fictional language. This roughly corresponds to the overall finding on *Alignment*, as there is slightly more diversity among the evil characters than among the good. Yet, the good groups differ greatly from the individually counted good characters, as they only speak fictional language, while the standard varieties dominated in the quantification. Additionally, 75% of the non-human groups speak a fictional language, which was also the largest

variety category of the non-humans in general. All in all, the analysis of the characters treated as groups detects some previously noted correlations between linguistic variety and character traits, although some aspects differ. Furthermore, the idea that RP is the variety of the ruling core in *Star Wars* is supported through the analysis of the Storm Troopers.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter opens with a summary of the findings of the present study and attempts to answer the research questions and hypotheses presented in section 1.3. Furthermore, it discusses the limitations of the present study, as well as possibilities for future research.

5.1 Summary of findings

An analysis of the overall variety distribution in *Star Wars* showed that GA is the dominating variety. RP is the second largest linguistic category and demonstrates a relatively high percentage, considering the fact that *Star Wars* is an American film franchise. Hypothesis 1, expressing an assumption that standard varieties would dominate overall in *Star Wars*, has therefore been corroborated. An investigation of the development in variety distribution throughout the trilogies showed that *Star Wars* did in fact move towards becoming more linguistically diverse, before returning to an even firmer domination of standard varieties in the latest trilogy. Overall, the use of GA decreased, while the use of RP had a substantial surge, a development that was rather unexpected, but which was also observed in Urke's (2019) study of Disney originals and remakes. Hypothesis 2, stating that the most recent films would be more linguistically diverse than the oldest films, is thus not supported by the findings of the present study.

There is overall a very imbalanced distribution of gender in *Star Wars*, as male characters make up 79% of the total number of characters, and females only 21%. When looking at the trilogies individually, however, one can detect an ongoing process of equalisation, although the sequel trilogy does not arrive at a proportionate distribution of male and female characters. Hypothesis 3, which stated that there would be a higher percentage of female characters in the most recent films compared to the originals, has nevertheless been confirmed. When correlating gender to linguistic variety, one can see that overall, an equal percentage of male and female characters speak a standard variety. However, male characters tend to favour GA, while females to a larger extent speak RP. One might speculate that this is a sort of reflection of traditional language use in which

females use more prestigious language than men, as RP has a slightly higher status than GA. Nevertheless, the level of linguistic diversity is quite similar between the genders, which was unexpected. Hypothesis 4, stating an expectation of more standardised language use among the female characters, is therefore not supported. Both genders largely follow the overall pattern of a decreased use of GA and an increase of RP.

A correlation of variety to alignment showed that GA is favoured among the characters classified as good, while RP is the majority accent among the evil characters. This is similar to previous findings and was expected. However, hypothesis 5 stated that the good characters would become more linguistically diverse in later trilogies, but this did not end up being the case. Hypothesis 6 stated an expectation that the evil characters would mostly speak RP in the original and become more diverse in the newer films. This hypothesis was denied in its entirety, as the majority of the villains in the original speak GA, and the sequel depicts as many as 90% of the villains as RP speakers.

The sophisticated characters of *Star Wars* almost exclusively speak a standard variety. GA and RP are overall quite evenly distributed among the sophisticated. This did not change much over the course of the trilogies. A more detailed analysis also revealed that GA is mainly used for the characters defined as relaxed, who were also generally good, while RP is the dominating variety among the stiff sophisticated characters, the majority of whom were also evil. In essence, the results roughly indicate that sophisticated GA speakers are portrayed as more relaxed and sympathetic than their RP speaking, stiff and villainous counterparts. The unsophisticated characters, on the other hand, are a more linguistically diverse group for which fictional language is the largest variety category. A more detailed analysis showed that English with a foreign accent to a relatively great extent is used for unsophisticated characters in the prequel trilogy. Overall, hypothesis 7, i.e. the expectation that there would be more variation among the unsophisticated characters than the sophisticated ones, was indeed confirmed. In like manner, hypothesis 8, which predicted that the stiff characters would largely be RP speakers, and the relaxed ones GA speakers, has been supported.

An analysis of the characters' species correlated to linguistic variety showed that standard accents are the most common varieties for human characters. This remains the case throughout the trilogies, although the use of GA for human characters decreases greatly, while RP increases. Standard varieties have less of an important role among the

non-human characters, as fictional language is the majority variety in that group. As the non-human characters largely are aliens, it does not come as a surprise that they speak fictional varieties invented for the purpose, perhaps in order to underline that they come from different worlds than the human characters. Overall, hypothesis 9 has been corroborated, as it stated that standard accents would dominate among human characters, while there would be more diversity among the non-humans. At the same time, one can also see that the use of fictional language for non-humans greatly decreases from the first trilogy to the last, while the use of standard varieties for this group moderately increases, making them a bit more linguistically similar to their human counterparts.

An investigation of character role and linguistic variety revealed that the main characters of *Star Wars* exclusively speak standard varieties, and that the distribution between GA and RP within this group remains quite constant throughout the trilogies. The supporting and peripheral characters, on the other hand, were more linguistically diverse, in line with the expectations that were expressed in hypothesis 10. However, the variation within these groups mostly takes place in the prequel trilogy, as the standard varieties dominate in the original and sequel.

Although ethnicity has not been included as a separate variable in the present thesis, the percentage of non-white characters versus white characters has been presented. The results show that while there is very little ethnic diversity in the original trilogy, an improvement has taken place in the prequel, but the development does not go any further in the sequel. However, the most recent trilogy depicts a range of different ethnicities in various roles, including a coloured main character. Female characters are also assigned with more untraditional roles in the sequel, indicating that the *Star Wars* films have indeed become more inclusive over the decades that have passed since the first release.

Finally, characters treated as groups were analysed separately from the quantification. The findings presented in section 4.8 overall support the idea that there are fairly systematic correlations between linguistic variety and character traits in the *Star Wars* trilogies, and that this is also detectable among character groups.

5.2 Conclusions

The most central aim of the present study, and the first research question, was to examine whether specific linguistic varieties were assigned to specific types of characters as a means of reinforcing specific character traits. The findings of the present study allow us to answer RQ1 with the conclusion that certain systematic correlations between characters' linguistic variety and their character traits have indeed been detected in the *Star Wars* trilogies. Some central correlations that have been detected in the present sample are between linguistic variety and alignment, sophistication, and species, to name a few. Generally, GA is the accent of the good characters, while RP is the accent of the villains. The *Sophistication* variable yielded particularly interesting results, as the sophisticated characters are almost exclusively standard speakers. Furthermore, the differentiation between stiff and relaxed characters showed clear correlations, as RP speakers were to a large extent depicted as stiff and evil, while GA speakers were portrayed as relaxed and good.

Overall, standard varieties dominate among the 230 characters that have been analysed. There is surprisingly little linguistic diversity, and it is largely restricted to unsophisticated characters, non-humans and supporting characters, and mainly visible in the prequel trilogy. RQ2 sought to reveal any changes from the first trilogy to the last. A change has indeed been detected, but it was not the one that was expected in a society that seems to demonstrate an increasing tolerance for accents. The pendulum swing that made itself visible between the trilogies is very interesting, and one can only speculate why *Star Wars* abandoned the linguistic diversity it was moving towards at one point. A combination of the backlash received by the prequels, as well as an assumption that standard accents are easier to understand for an international audience might be the explanation. However, non-native speakers of English outnumber the native speakers in the world, while there are very few RP speakers, which means that there is quite a linguistically diverse body of English speakers globally. One might argue that this diversity should in fact be visible in film and television as well. The marked increase of RP in the most recent *Star Wars* films is therefore interesting. On the other hand, studies have shown that non-native speakers often view RP as the 'most correct' and 'elegant' variety, confirming its high status (e.g. Ladegaard and Sachdev 2006; Rindal 2010).

The majority of the hypotheses presented in section 1.2 have been confirmed by the findings of the present study. Overall, non-standard speakers are portrayed as less sophisticated than standard speakers and are excluded from main roles. They are to a greater extent than standard speakers depicted as non-human, and foreign accents have been correlated with evil characters. As Dragojevic et al. (2016) point out, the absence of portrayals of various linguistic groups can be just as damaging to their sense of self as negative portrayals. It appears as there is not only a lack of representation of non-standard speakers in *Star Wars*, but the portrayals that do exist are generally more negative than those of the standard speakers.

The present study is a contribution to attitudinal studies of the English language, as well as to societal treatment studies. As societal treatment studies are able to access more deeply hidden attitudes to language, the present study has hopefully contributed to creating more awareness of existing language attitudes in society, as well as of the nature, and relative absence, of the portrayals of non-standard speakers in the *Star Wars* trilogies. Previous studies on this field have investigated accent use in children's film and television, animated film, and fantasy. To my knowledge, a societal treatment study of science-fiction film was yet to be conducted. The analysis of a franchise that spans over more than 40 years is also unique for the present study. In addition, no previous studies have included the category 'Fictional language'. Overall, the present thesis hopefully inspires to an investigative perspective on the use of language in film and television in a world where the film industry has become heavily globalised, and where we consume more digital media and film than ever before.

5.3 Limitations of the study

In the process of research for the present thesis, several choices have been made that have imposed certain limitations. Firstly, a societal treatment study is undoubtedly subjective to a certain extent, as the language attitudes are inferred by the researcher, and not explicitly articulated in the sample. However, this is an inherent and inevitable aspect of this type of study. Secondly, as the present thesis analyses one franchise within the genre of science-fiction, including only 230 characters, one cannot make generalisations concerning film in general, or on other genres than the one investigated.

However, the numbers of characters and films were deemed sufficient for the scope of an MA thesis, and a more comprehensive study was not possible within the given time frame. In addition, larger studies of language use in film, such as Dobrow and Gidney (1998), as well as Lippi-Green's (2012) initial study, have not included that many more characters.

The present thesis operates with rather broad linguistic categories, as it does not distinguish between e.g. different regional varieties of British English. Additionally, regional or social varieties of American English were not included in the present study, as there were no examples of these varieties in the nine films. Nevertheless, the broad categories were considered the most efficient way of classification, and they facilitated comparison. In addition, it is common to use broad categories in these types of studies. The character variables were inspired by previous research in order to make comparisons with similar studies. It could have been interesting to include other characters traits, such as age, but there is a limited age range in the analysed films and thus little basis for comparisons. One could also have performed a further subclassification of some of the categories to include more nuances, but this would have complicated the analysis unnecessarily.

In addition, there is a small number of non-standard speakers in the *Star Wars* films, which in turn does not allow one to make nuanced analyses concerning the portrayal of these speakers, although one can detect certain patterns. However, their relative absence is an important finding in itself, which gives valuable insight into the societal treatment of non-standard varieties and their speakers.

5.4 Future research

Previous studies have analysed children's animated film and television, fantasy films and computer games, and the present thesis a science-fiction franchise. Further studies on a different franchise, or within a different genre, would be very interesting. As the majority of the previous research included in the present thesis are MA theses, i.e. studies with limited scopes, it would be beneficial to the field of societal treatment studies to carry out more large-scale studies on language use in popular film and television, like that of Dragojevic et al. (2016). The present thesis can hopefully inspire

others to conduct similar studies in the future, in order to determine whether correlations between character traits and accent use are indeed as frequent as the previous research on the field suggests. Additionally, as the present study has found that *Star Wars* has become more inclusive over the years in terms of gender and ethnic equality, but not linguistically, it will be interesting to examine whether this tendency can be found in other franchises, as well as in newer films and television series.

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