Tutorial 11
Language variation and change
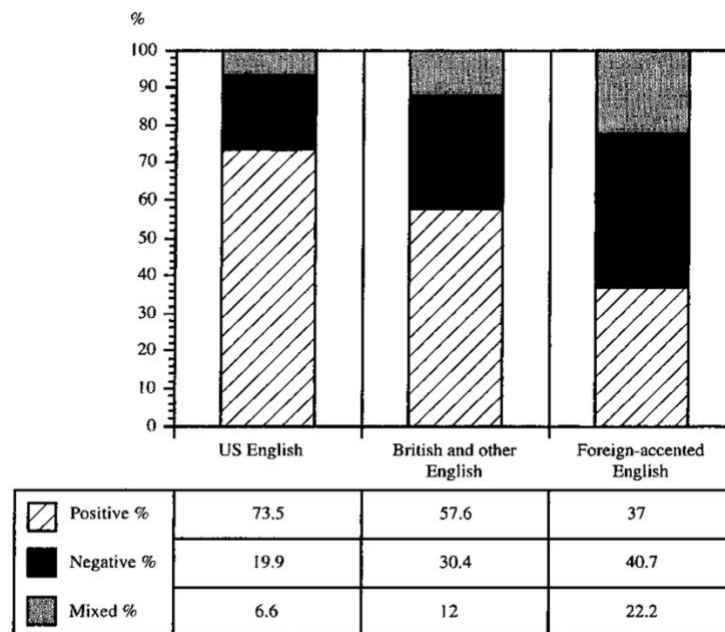November 28, 2024

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this tutorial, you should be able to:

- Critically reflect on how evaluations about accents get reproduced and circulated in society
- Analyze quantitative data on sociolinguistic variables

Accents

Lippi-Green (1997) examined accents used by different characters in several Disney animated films. As can be seen from the figure below, the overall representation of persons with foreign accented English is far more negative than that of US or British English. About 20% of US English speakers are "bad characters" (villains or portrayed as having bad morals) while about 40% of non-native speakers of English are evil (twice as much!).

	US English	British and other English	Foreign-accented English
Positive %	73.5	57.6	37
Negative %	19.9	30.4	40.7
Mixed %	6.6	12	22.2

Disney animated characters of positive, negative, or mixed motivations and actions, by major language group (adapted from Lippi-Green 1997: 92).

1. What effects do the patterns above have on our understanding of the relationship between language and prestige?
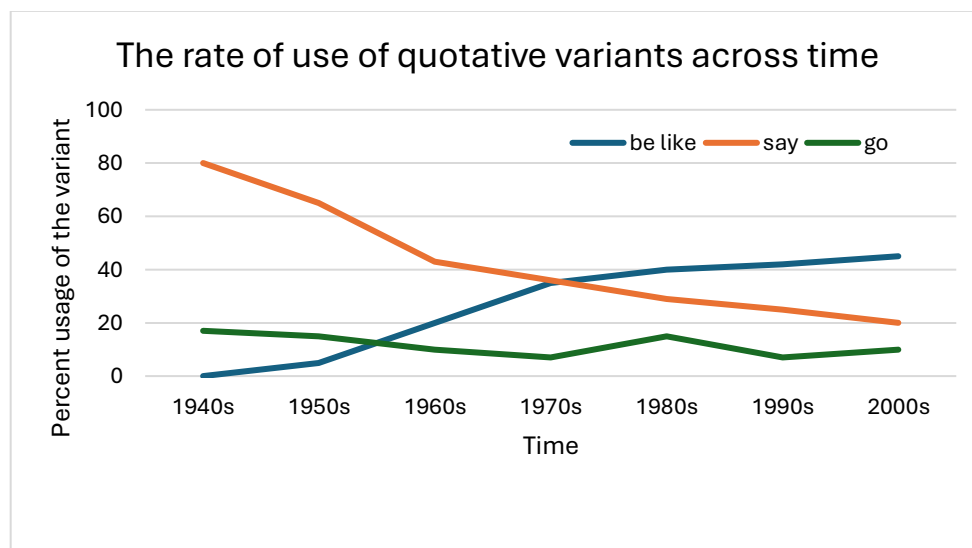
2. How do you think the portrayal of characters with different accents in Disney films influences children's perceptions of those accents in real life? Can you think of any personal experiences where media influenced your views on language or accents?

3. Can you provide other examples from other media that show the same kinds of pattern?

4. Beyond media, where else can we see negative consequences of having accents that are different from the mainstream?

The English quotative system

In many English varieties, the quotative system is a (socio)linguistic variable. There are several ways (i.e., variants) in which speakers can report quoted speech, as in the examples below:

- Ahmed **said**, "I haven't seen you in class recently."
- Umida$_i$ and I were having dinner and they$_i$ **go**, "Gosh we gotta have dessert!"
- Marty and Jonah were studying when Marty **was like**, "Oh shoot! I forgot to call mom."

Consider the data below, showing the variation in the use of the three variants of this sociolinguistic variable over time.

The rate of use of quotative variants across time

Percent usage of the variant (y-axis, 0 to 100)

Legend: be like, say, go

x-axis (Time): 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s

1. <u>Describe</u> the general trends that you see in the use of *say*, *be like*, and *go* over time.

2. Focus on the use of *say* and *be like*: <u>determine</u> which variant is *conservative* (older form) and *innovative* (newer form).

3. Is this (socio)linguistic variable undergoing change? What piece(s) of evidence from the graph above support(s) your answer?

4. Reflect on your own use of quotatives (or how you hear it used in everyday life). What other (social) factors may influence its variable use?