

Playing with stereotypes:

Language variation and stereotypes in Flemish audio plays for children

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In this contribution we investigate whether the Flemish audio plays *Heerlijke Hoorspelen* expose children to stereotypes. In particular, we scrutinize the links between accent variation and social characteristics of the audio play characters, and examine whether the target audience (children) really perceives the stereotypes attached to the characters through accent variation.

This study builds on the societal treatment study of Lippi-Green (1997), who argued that Disney movies teach children to discriminate as they expose them to stereotypical associations of accents. We contribute to Lippi-Green's study in two ways:

- (1) We have conducted a similar societal treatment study with recent Flemish audio plays to examine whether the plays expose children to stereotypes. To this end, we have drafted an inventory of the accents used in the *Heerlijke Hoorspelen* and of the personality traits they index, resulting in an accent-by-traits matrix for 208 characters.
- (2) We have set up an experiment which examines whether the target audience links the accents with their geographical region and stereotypical associations. More in particular, 54 nine- to ten-year-olds were asked to listen to 5 second audio clips extracted from the plays, after which they had to locate the accent (Kristiansen 2010), perform a free response experiment (Grondelaers & Van Hout 2010), and fill in a list of more traditional Likert scales.

Our societal treatment analysis confirms that the audio plays expose children to stereotypes, while our experimental analysis shows that the children of our study are not able to label the accents with a high degree of accuracy, and seem to be unaware of the stereotypical associations of accents (although that could be due to methodological issues). The interpretation of our results focuses on the furthering of our knowledge of the effect of language variation and stereotypes in media that target children.

Bibliography

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Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. Teaching children to discriminate. What we learn from the Big Bad Wolf. *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. London & New York: Routledge.