

## DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN MULAN DISNEY PRINCESS MOVIE

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### ABSTRACT

*Movies are one of the most favorable types of media which play a great role in shaping our daily lives. Also, they hold a huge impact on both children and adult in the whole world. Due to this importance, the present study sheds the light on Mulan (1998) Disney princess animated movie which is highly seen by the audience. It seeks to analyze the verses of one of the movie's songs which is entitled " you'll bring honor to us all ". The article tends to analyze the types and the frequency of the different categories of lexical cohesion. For this purpose, Tanskanen's (2006) model of lexical cohesion is adopted for the analysis. The analysis revealed 42 lexical cohesive devices. The article reaches the conclusions that simple repetition is highly used among the other types and especially the repetition of the pronoun "you" in order to indicate that the honor of Mulan's family is based on her, since their cultural norms force the girl to be like " a perfect porcelain doll " in order to impress men and this in return will bring honor to the family. But Mulan did not submit to these norms; instead, she honored the family and saved the country by breaking and challenging the traditions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Discourse Analysis, Ethical challenges, Disney Princess Movie, Mulan, Lexical Cohesion*

### INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that media is of great importance for the societies and it plays a central role in shaping and reshaping our daily lives (Ali & Batool, 2015: 692). Despite the different types of media (television shows, movies, the radio, newspapers, advertisements, and the internet); movies can be regarded as one of the most favorable and dominant types among the various types of media. Therefore, the present study sheds the lights on Disney princess animated movies which are seen by millions of children and adults in the whole world. These movies present characters of different shapes, customs, personalities and of course different roles. But despite these differences, some of the princesses have distinct similarities.

Regardless of the differences and the similarities among Disney princesses movies, it is important to know that these movies are of a great impact on children and adults in the whole world, and this impact can be positive, negative or it can be both. Therefore, great attention was paid on them, especially on the roles played by the princesses and the princes since these roles focus on how a female is portrayed in Disney princesses movies in relation to ethnicity.

However, ethnicity can be seen from the early beginning of Disney princesses movies when Walt Disney was running the studio and witnessed the release of the first era movies " Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs " (1937), " Cinderella " (1950) and " Sleeping Beauty " (1959) ( Hall & Bishop, 2009 : 31 ). Then after Walt's death, and a wave of criticism towards Disney's ethnicity, a new era began to include new movies such as " The Little Mermaid " (1989), " Beauty and the Beast" (1991), " Aladdin " (1992), " Pocahontas" (1995), " Mulan " (1998), " The Princess and the Frog " (2009), Tangled " (2010), " Brave " (2012), and " Frozen " (2013) ( Hall & Bishop, 2009 : 31 ), where the princesses were much more diverse in their appearances than those in the first era (Hill:2010). This in return, changed the audience's first impression of Disney princesses movies to a new better one.

In addition to the ethnical problem, Disney has a gender problem that addresses only feminists issues ( Vogel : 2015 ), and this problem can be found in a number of movies which all share the common structure of a prince or a young hero who saves the princess( Duggan:2013 ), the weak, submissive women, who regularly called helpless, brainless, passive and superficial ( Fine : 2016). Later, Disney created films where the princesses has been transformed into a powerful heroines with different set of values : independence, self reliance and embracing dreams even when it meant disregarding authority ( Blonar & Glazer : 2017 ), and this can be seen when the princesses become strong enough to face the ethical challenges to make their own decision about marriage, learning, working or doing tasks supposed to be for males only. Mulan (1998) is one of these movies where the princess goes to the war disguised as a man instead of her father to save the emperor and her country ( Hall & Bishop, 2009 : 31 ). This is going to be explained with further details in the following sections.

### **The World of Disney: Historical Background**

The name of the Disney Empire goes back to Walter Elias Disney (December 5, 1901 – December 15, 1966) who also known as Walt Disney. The name of Walt Disney or Walt, as he always preferred to be called is known all over the world as the pioneer in the making of animated cartoons. He was the father of Mickey Mouse, the designer of Disneyland, and the man who made millions of people believe that, indeed, dreams can come true ( Krasniewicz : 2010 ). In addition to this, he was an American entrepreneur, cartoonist, voice actor, and film producer. Therefore, Walt Disney was regarded as a cultural icon, known for his contribution to the entertainment industry during the twentieth century (Suren:2015), and he introduced several developments in the production of cartoons including 22 Academy Awards from 59 nominations, two Golden Globe Special Achievements Awards, and one Emmy Awards. Besides the individual Oscars that he won more than anyone else (Rajput:2016).

However, Walt's interest in animation started from his early childhood. He was only 4 years when he discovered his love for drawings. Therefore, he decided to sell his art to the family and his friends who encouraged him (Hansen; 2015). Then after a period of time, Walt developed his talents of drawings and attended art classes. Also, he developed an interest in gags used by burlesque comedians and this can be seen in a number of pranks that he played with his mother or his friends. (Bryman,1995:4).

In 1919, Walt moved to Kansas City and he worked as a cartoonist at a commercial art studio (ibid). Then after he was laid off, Walt moved to the Kansas City Film Ad Company where he learned about animation (Hansen;2015). Then, after a period of time and bad financial conditions, Walt began his work on " Alice's Wonderland " and made a plan to reach out to Margret Winkler in an attempt to accept his animations, and indeed she agreed to pay for his project " Alice

Comedies " ( *ibid* ). This project provided Walt with further financial backing (Bryman;1995). Thus, in 1923 Walt and Roy opened the first Disney studio " Disney Brothers Studios " in Hollywood, California and he began to produce Alice series, besides other new animated characters such as " Oswald the Lucky Rabbit " ( Krasniewicz : 2010 ). Later in 1926, the brothers moved into the " Walt Disney Studio to release a new cartoon every week through an assembly line system that Iwerks and Walt developed ( Warner, 2014: 19).

However, By 1930s, the Disney Studio grew very big and new characters appeared, such as Pluto, Donald Duck and Goofy ( Bryman, 1995:5-6). During this time, Walt worked as the manager, editor, director, salesman and promoter of the films (Warner, 2014:20). Due to this, Walt was ready to produce his first film and in 1937 he released " Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" ( Hansen : 2015). As a result of Snow White's success, Walt used the money to move into a new studio in Burbank in 1940 and there the animators started to work on feature films such as " Make Mine Music", " Song of the South " and the first completely live-action feature " Treasure Island " which opened in theaters in 1950 ( Bryman,1995:8). In addition to this, other films were produced such as Pinocchio, Bambi, Fantasia, Dumbo, Cinderella, Peter Pan and. which all reached 18 ones by 1964 ( Hansen:2015). Starting from the humble beginning of Walt Disney and the difficulties the company has faced until these days, Disney succeeds in doing an amazing work that satisfies all the people of different ages and different cultures whether on TV or in the real life.

### **Mulan : The Plot**

Walt Disney's animated movie " Mulan " is based on an ancient Chinese poem "The Ballad of Mulan " ( Blum, 2007 : 2 ). In 1998, Disney adapted the Ballad of Mulan to the Hollywood screen (Cheu,2007:1 ). This poem tells the story of China's most famous female warrior Hua Mulan ( Pasch & Norsworthy, 2001: 36 ). However, Mulan is an impulsive girl. Her family was expecting her to be a disciplined daughter and a future caring wife, but unfortunately she disappointed them after a catastrophic visit to the local marriage broker who reproached her for being a disgrace to her family and predicted that Mulan will never find a husband. This in return made Mulan in search of self-definition. Therefore, she decided to join the Imperial army disguised as a man in order to fight against the Huns who invaded China ( Blum,2007 : 2 ). Mulan's decision to join the army is based not on a religious vision but on her deep sense of filial piety since her father is unable to serve and her brothers are still too young ( Wang :2003). Thus, she stole her father's armament, dressed as a man and ran away to join the military in his place despite the fact that her father obeyed the command announced by the Emperor's messengers (Blum,2007 : 2-3).

During the war, Mulan succeeds in transforming an imminent defeat into a victory neither by skill nor military strategy; She enabled the Chinese army to win the battle by firing one cannon at a nearby snow-covered mountain, creating an avalanche that engulfs almost the entire Hun army. But immediately after the avalanche, Mulan's comrades discovered that she is a girl. Hence, the army leaves her on the snowy mountain due to the cruel patriarchal law. This in return enabled Mulan to discover that a small fierce group of Huns has survived and they plan to take the emperor's city. According to this, Mulan goes to the city in order to warn the people, but nobody believes her because she is a female (Cheu, 2007:1-2).

At the end, she manages to save China and rescue the emperor by dressing her comrades as imperial concubines to infiltrate the palace where the Emperor has been captured. With femininity and cross-dressing scene Disney evoked the sense of poetic justice. (*ibid*). Finally, Once the war is over, Mulan asks to return home in order to see her family to which she now has brought great honor (Blum,2007 : 3 ).

## Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a rapidly growing and evolving field. Its term was first introduced by Zellig Harris in 1952 as a way of analyzing connected speech and writing ( Paltridge, 2006 :2 ). The terms " discourse " and " discourse analysis " of course have different meanings to scholars in different fields. Therefore, there are so abundant definitions of discourse and many linguistics books open on this subject with a survey of definitions. For example many linguists define "discourse " as anything " beyond the sentence " while others such as Fasold (1990: 65) believes that the study of discourse is the study of language use. On the other hand, critical theorists and those influenced by them add other things where the term of discourse not only becomes a count noun, but further refers to a broad conglomeration of linguistic and nonlinguistic social practices and ideological assumptions that together construct power or racism as in " discourse of power " and " discourse of racism ". (Tannen, Hamilton & Schiffrin, 2001 : 1). But for discourse analysts the term " discourse " usually means " actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language " and for other discourse analysts, the term becomes more broadly as " meaningful symbolic behavior in any mode ( Johnstone,2008 :2 ).

Despite the differences in defining the term "discourse", discourse analysis is practiced in one way or another by at least some people in most of the academic disciplines in which human life is the focus: anthropologists, communications scholars, rhetoricians, literary and cultural critics, sociologists, psychologists, geographers, and medical, legal, and educational researchers, among others. Then learning how to analyze discourse is important not just for linguists, but also for many other people who depend on the language in their everyday lives (ibid :3).

According to the importance of discourse analysis, now it is important to know why it is called by this term rather than " discouseology ", on the analogy of " phonology " " or " discourseography " on the analogy of " ethnography " or any different term. The answer to this has todo with the fact that discourse analysis typically focuses on the analytical process in a relatively explicit way. It is useful to think of discourse analysis as analogous to chemical analysis. Like chemical analysis, discourse analysis is a methodology that can be used in answering many kinds of questions. But what is worth mention here is that the most familiar use of the word "analysis" is for processes, mental or mechanical, for taking things apart. Discourse analysts often find it useful to divide longer stretches of discourse into parts according to various criteria and then look at the particular characteristics of each part. Therefore, discourse analysis could include: 1) a breaking-down into parts 2) a breaking-down into functions 3) a breaking-down according to participants, settings or processes (ibid:4-5).

## Lexical Cohesion

It is well known that any speaker of English who hears or reads a passage of the language which is more than one sentence in length, can normally decide without difficulty whether it forms a unified whole or is just a collection of unrelated sentences. However, the word " text " is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does from a unified whole. In this sense, a text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or sentence; and it is not defined by its size. Instead, a text is regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus, a text doesn't consist of sentences; it is realized by or encoded in sentences. ( Halliday & Hasan : 1976 ).

Yule (2010) states that texts must have a certain structure that depends on factors quite different from those required in the structure of a single sentence. Some of those factors are described in terms of cohesion, or the ties and connections that exist within texts. Therefore, cohesion is one of the text properties that contribute to the organization of discourse. The term " cohesion " refers to the connectedness of the surface elements in the text (Martin:1992), and the

concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by resources to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text. ( Halliday & Hasan : 1976 ).

However, cohesion is like all the components of the semantic system. It is realized through grammar and vocabulary (Tanskanen: 2006). Therefore, cohesion can be divided into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion which is the center of debate here. Grammatical cohesion is based on structural content and includes devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction, while lexical cohesion is based on lexical content, background knowledge, and divided into reiteration and collocation. The reiteration category has to do with the repetition of the same item or via the use of synonyms, superordinate, and general words ( Halliday & Hasan : 1976 ). However, both the reiteration category and collocation are divided into other subcategories. Therefore, the following table which is based on Tanskanen (2006), designed for this purpose.

1. Reiteration Sub-Categories	
<b>Simple Repetition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Occurs when an item is repeated either in an identical form or with no other than a simple grammatical change, e.g. singular – plural, present tense – past tense".</li> </ul>
<b>Complex Repetition</b>	"involves a more substantial change: the items may be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identical but serve different grammatical functions, or</li> <li>• They may not be identical but share a lexical morpheme "</li> </ul>
<b>Substitution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• this includes a pronoun substituting for a noun, and</li> <li>• other substitution, such as <i>one, do, so</i>, which can</li> <li>• reiterate previous items.</li> </ul>
<b>Equivalence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the term equivalence is used to refer to the relation more commonly referred to as synonymy.</li> </ul>
<b>Generalization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refers to " the relation between an item and a more general item, which has been referred to as a</li> <li>• <i>superordinate</i> or <i>hyponymic</i> relation in most of the earlier studies, or <i>inclusion: specific-general</i> by McCarthy.</li> </ul>
<b>Specification</b>	" it is the opposite of generalization: it refers to the relation between an item and a more specific item. This relation has previously been called <i>meronymy</i> , and McCarthy referred to it as <i>inclusion: general-specific</i> ".
<b>Co-specification</b>	" includes the relation between two items which have a common general item. The earlier studies that have included this relation have referred to it as <i>co-hyponymy</i> or <i>co-meronymy</i> ".

2. Collocation Sub-Categories	
<b>Ordered set</b>	"this category includes members of ordered sets of lexical items : colors, numbers, months, days of the week and the like ".
<b>Activity-related collocation</b>	this type occurs when the relation between the items is based on activity. It is similar to Martin's (1992) nuclear relations, " which reflect the ways in which actions, people, places, things, and qualities configure as activities "
<b>Elaborative collocation</b>	this category refers to "all those pairs whose relation is impossible to define more specifically than stating that the items can somehow elaborate or expand on the same topic".

## METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

### Research Approach

The lyrics of the song are analyzed through the mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative). The qualitative analysis will investigate the different types of lexical cohesion used in the song; while the quantitative analysis will involve statistical analysis to calculate the frequency and the percentages of these types as is shown in the table (3). Tanskanen's (2006) lexical cohesion framework is adopted for the analysis of the song.

### Data Collection

The data of the present study is based on Mulan (1998) Disney princess animated movie which is one of Disney's amazing collection of movies. The lyrics of the song ( *You'll bring honor to us all* ) will be analyzed thoroughly in this article.

### Data Analysis

It is clearly obvious that the lyrics contain many different words repeated as it is or with simple grammatical changes to present what is known as simple repetition. However, these words are : " *you, I, we, It, honor, please, girls, men, good, our, me, us, my, luck, family, all, bring, see, go, bearing, work, guards, great* ". The repetition of the words is to emphasize the main idea the whole movie is about and that is females are not simply looking forward to marriage but rather can be part of the society and be side by side with the man. Further, the lyrics involve substitutions and all represented by the pronoun " *It* " which substitutes the words " *beauty, luck and future* ". These three nouns show that Mulan or any girl in China needs both beauty and luck to get a good future. Another lexical cohesive device is equivalence which is represented differently in the lyrics of the song as in: " *purse = fortune*", " *polish = glow*", " *boys = men = sons = fellow*", " *look = see* ", " *fast = instant*".

There are two cases of generalization. The word " *family*" is a generalization of the words : " *sons, girls, boys and father* ". Also, " *family tree* " is a generalization of the word " *ancestors* ". The purpose intended from generalization is to show that societies share things in common and these are inherited generation after generation. In other words, such ethical norms are not easy to be changed.

Since specification is the opposite of generalization, then the words " *sons, girls, boys and father* " are a specification of the word " *family* ". Also, the word " *ancestors* " is a specification of " *family tree* ". Again the use of specification is intended in the song to refer to who should follow the norms (boys and girls) and still the relatedness to the family plays a major role in framing the ethical beliefs that should be followed within each community.

The co-specification is similar to specification, but here it is not necessary for the general item to appear in the text. co-specification is represented in the lyrics by the "sow's ear" and "emperor". The general items for these two cases are not mentioned in the song, but they could be "sow" and "empire". Finally, the song involves five contrasts including: "freezing  $\times$  warm", "washed  $\times$  dried", "boys  $\times$  girls", "me  $\times$  you", "I  $\times$  we". This lexical device plays a major role in showing how cultural norms are broken. These contrasts create a kind of balance in the song as far as feminist issues are concerned since they show that no much difference can be found between males and females since females can take the same responsibilities as much as a man can do.

Having analyzed the lyrics qualitatively, the following table implies a statistical analysis for the lyrics of the song:

**Table 2: The Statistical Analysis of the Lyrics**

Lexical Cohesion	Frequency	Percentage
Simple repetition	23	54.76 %
Substitution	3	7.14 %
Equivalence	5	11.90 %
Generalization	2	4.76 %
Specification	2	4.76 %
Co-specification	2	4.76 %
Contrast	5	11.90 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100 %</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

This article shaded the light on Mulan (1998) Disney princess animated movie which is one of the great movies that holds a positive impact on both children and adults in the whole world. It studied the lexical cohesion of one of the movie's songs by investigating and analyzing the different categories of reiteration and collocation. After analyzing the data, the results stated that there are 42 lexical cohesive devices in the song. Those consist of 23 simple repetitions, 3 substitutions, 5 equivalences, 2 generalizations, specification, co-specification, and finally 5 contrasts. It is obvious that the simple repetition is highly used among the other types. In the song, the pronoun "you" repeated more than any other word. It is mentioned 13 times. Generally speaking, the reason of repeating the same word could be used to indicate certain idea and the same case can be applied for this study. As it was mentioned earlier, the song is titled "you'll bring honor to us all". Therefore, the repetition of the pronoun "you" is to indicate that the honor of Mulan's family is depending on her. They want Mulan to honor the family by accepting the cultural ethical norms which are unfair. However, at the end Mulan honors her family and saves the emperor and the country by challenging these norms. In addition to this, it is important to know that the use of other types of lexical cohesion plays a great role in changing the wording to make the text richer and more interesting. Besides delivering the exact message enables the reader to get a full understanding of the meaning intended from the words used.

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## APPENDIX

This is what you give me to work with?

Well, honey, I've seen worse

We're going to turn this sow's ear

into a silk purse

We'll have you washed and dried

Primped and polished

till you glow with pride

Trust me recipe for instant bride

You'll bring honor to us all

Wait and see

When we're through

Boys will gladly go to war for you

With good fortune

And a great hairdo

You'll bring honor to us all

A girl can bring her family

great honor in one way

By striking a good match

And this could be the day

Men want girls with good taste

Calm

Obediant

Who work fast-paced  
With good breeding  
And a tiny waist  
You'll bring honor to us all  
We all must serve our Emperor  
Who guards us from the Huns  
A man by bearing arms  
A girl by bearing sons  
When we're through  
You can't fail  
Like a lotus blossom  
Soft and pale  
How could any fellow  
Say "No Sale"  
You'll bring honor to us all  
There - you're ready  
Not yet  
An apple for serenity  
A pendant for balance  
Beads of jade for beauty  
You must proudly show it  
Now add a cricket just for luck  
And even you can't blow it  
Ancestors  
Hear my plea  
Help me not to make a  
fool of me  
And to not uproot  
my family tree

Keep my father standing tall

Scarier than the undertaker

We are meeting our matchmaker

Destiny

Guard our girls

And our future

as it fast unfurls

Please look kindly on

these cultured pearls

Each a perfect porcelain doll

Please bring honor to us

Please bring honor to us all

source: <https://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/m/mulanlyrics/honortousallyrics.html>



Previous quantitative research examining Disney movies has highlighted that whilst prince characters display largely balanced gender profiles, princesses exhibit biased gender role portrayals—performing mostly feminine characteristics, rarely participating in rescue behavior, and concluding movies in romantic relationships with the prince. Furthermore, the storylines of “good daughter”™ characters (such as Belle, Mulan and) Even fewer studies have examined the behavior of men in Disney movies, however some appraisals do exist. The work by Towbin et al. Analysis of the Disney Princesses. Snow White in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). Cinderella in Cinderella (1950). Pocahontas in Pocahontas (1995). Mulan in Mulan (1998). Conclusion. Works cited. I would also like to thank the Walt Disney Company, for releasing the movies that became my current material for analysis; my parents, for once taking me to the theater to see them; and Prof. dr. Àngels Carabà Ribera, who teaches at the University of Barcelona, for introducing me to “a whole new world” of gender studies to analyze them. Both in Mulan and Princess and the Frog, Disney eschews a traditional fairytale ending involving palatial opulence by substituting an alternative narrative for women of color. Mulan disguises herself as a male soldier in order to serve in her father’s place. After sharing victory with male companions, she willingly returns home to domesticity and the confines imposed by her gender. Tiana spends two thirds of the movie as a frog, substantially limiting her on-screen time as an African American female. Like Mulan, she is driven to please her father. She fulfills his dream of owning a high-end restaurant, ironically named Tiana’s Palace, the closest she comes to a royal lifestyle.