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Chapter 15

POP CULTURAL MEDIA AS A RESOURCE FOR FOSTERING RESPONSIBLE WORLD CITIZENS

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POP CULTURAL MEDIA AS A RESOURCE FOR FOSTERING RESPONSIBLE WORLD CITIZENS

Valentin Werner and Theresa Summer

Introduction

'How much TV is educational?' – 'All of it! It just depends on what it's teaching'[1]

As we live in a media-saturated world, language learners are constantly exposed to[2] and strongly influenced by pop cultural media such as songs, video games, memes, podcasts, films, and TV/streaming series, among others. While relevant artifacts have been usefully employed in language education for various purposes (see, e.g., Werner and Tegge 2021), this form of media influence has alternatively been associated with 'cultural pedagogy', defined as 'process[es] of teaching and learning through social sites, often outside of sanctioned educational institutions' (Tavin and Anderson 2003: 23). In this context, it has been found that pop cultural media as sites of (normative) social evaluation are not merely 'benign forms of entertainment' (Duff and Zappa-Hollman 2012: 3). Rather, they act as power instruments (Currie and Kelly 2022). This means that their visual elements and content, such as the under- and misrepresentation of ethnic minority groups (see, e.g., Klein and Shiffman 2006; Greenberg and Mastro 2011),[3] but particularly the language varieties used, can transport certain identities, power structures, stereotypes, and ideologies that perpetuate discriminatory practices (Joyce et al. 2020). Thus, pertinent artifacts and their cultural pedagogy can be viewed as a form of mind engineering by scriptwriters and media producers.

Accordingly, pop media artifacts and the characters represented therein are one of the main ways language learners encounter 'a version of the world regarding ─ among other things ─ how different groups of people speak' (Stamou et al. 2015: 216). Language education thus plays a crucial role in multiple respects. While promoting communicative competence as an overarching goal, it can also initiate critical reflection on media artifacts encountered inside and outside the classroom by examining 'how characters and contexts are discursively constructed, marginalized, commodified, or mocked, based on their social or linguistic characteristics' (Duff and Zappa-Hollman 2012: 2). This encompasses, especially on the part of educators, an understanding of language teaching as a political activity that can tackle social injustices, based on theoretical concepts such as critical language education (Crookes 2021) and intercultural citizenship education (Byram 2008). Against this background, the present chapter aims to illustrate the potential of analyzing linguistic

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usage and concurrent social attributions in pop cultural media for advocating critical consumers and eventually responsible world citizens who value freedom of speech and independent thinking while countering any form of discrimination. By focusing specifically on cultural and linguistic stereotyping (i.e., bias in the form of an association of a particular, often non-standard language use with unfavorable social traits of a character) in narrative telecinematic children's media,[4] it discusses their relevance for language learning.

Theoretical Foundations

The following passages summarize insights from several disciplines considered relevant for broader contextualization at the intersection of media studies, psychology, sociolinguistics, and language education.

Social Psychology, Media Effects, and Socialization

The issue of media effects on the socialization of children and adolescents has been a long-standing concern in social psychology. Research from this domain converges in viewing broadcast media, and especially animated films and series, as an important socializing agent, given that even children at an early age 'form their expectations for a variety of behaviors and social roles by watching animated films' (Bloomquist 2015: 751; see also Klein and Shiffman 2006: 167; Barrett et al. 2022: 259). This has been related to social essentialism as 'the propensity to see social differences as being real, immutable, and highly predictive of people's attributes and behaviors' (Kinzler 2021: 252) and resulting social categorization (i.e., the tendency to categorize all kinds of input one receives) as general psychological processes. While such mechanisms may foster cognitive efficiency, it has also been observed that there is a risk of emerging social biases when 'stereotypes about groups of people [are] erroneously applied to specific individuals' (Kinzler 2021: 242). Such cultural or cognitive stereotypes, formally defined as 'set of beliefs, mental models, or schemas relating to a specific social group or category' (Joyce et al. 2020: 59), can be reinforced through the media and are especially salient when linguistic traits of people (particularly accent features) are essentialized and related to their social identity, leading to negative evaluation of the social group affected (known as prejudice) and eventually to stigmatization and discriminating behavior (Kinzler 2021; Ward and Bridgewater 2023).

In this context, it has been found that media artifacts in general are prone to represent stereotypes relating to gender (e.g., González Vera 2012) and race/ethnicity (e.g., Mastro 2009: 377), as selectively illustrated in Table 15.1 for racial stereotypes in the US-American context, pertaining to random characteristics and roles from various domains. It emerges that while not all stereotypes are necessarily negative, non-white groups are generally represented less favorably (Klein and Shiffman 2006: 167). Notably, however, linguistic features are rarely discussed in relevant publications (see sections 'Indexicality and Language Ideologies' and 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics').

The central importance of media in establishing and reinforcing stereotypes is underlined by the fact that, while they may be an important channel for encountering a wider range of people than would be possible through personal contact alone, they are often the *only* channel through which people receive formative information about other social groups (Sanborn and Harris 2022: 113; Ward and Bridgewater 2023: 87),[5] and thus also about linguistic variation (Stamou et al. 2015: 217). Such observations (with an explicit reference to telecinematic content) are grounded in

Table 15.1 Common racial stereotypes

	African American	*Asian American*	*Latinx*	*Native American*	*American with Middle Eastern/North African background*
Traits/roles	Athletic	Compliant	Drug dealer	Alcoholic	Muslim
	Criminal	Humble	Illegal immigrant	Brave	Terrorist
	Poor	Model minority	Low-status jobs	Lazy	
	Rhythmical and musical	Smart	Uneducated	Spiritual	
	Unintelligent	Wealthy	Very religious	Wild	
	Aggressive	Sidekick (martial artist, nerd)	Hypersexual		

Source: Synthesized from Kirsh 2010: 105; Ward and Bridgewater 2023: 83

approaches such as cultivation theory, whose central claim is that 'exposure to the themes in television content shifts viewers' social perceptions toward the television version of reality, regardless of the accuracy or precision of that content' (Gerbner et al. 2002; cited in Greenberg and Mastro 2011: 76). Empirical research in this area (including the analysis of animated shows) has further shown that consumers with repeated and long-standing media exposure are indeed susceptible to adapting to conceptions of telecinematic reality, including mediatized stereotypes (Mastro 2009: 379; Dragojevic et al. 2016: 63). Proponents of Bandurian social cognitive theory (which recognizes interaction between environment, behavior, and individual factors, such as affect, cognition, and biological factors) claim that even *irregular* consumers are susceptible to media effects, potentially building on the enactment of already learned models (Pila et al. 2018: 40). In any case, there is strong evidence that media, as outlined above, act as socializing agent, influencing values and attitudes of the audience in the 'realm of pleasure' (Tavin and Anderson 2003: 23), that is, in an environment in which affect may be raised through mediatized emotions.[6]

On a positive note, studies have shown a longitudinal trend of increased diversity. This applies to the sets of characters in animated TV and movies and the disappearance of overt racism since the late 1990s (Klein and Shiffman 2006: 173; Pila et al. 2018: 35). Furthermore, exposure to counterstereotypical content with pro-social and pro-diversity messages can have positive effects, especially on non-minority adolescents (Mastro 2009: 380; Ward and Bridgewater 2023: 85). In this regard, it has been argued that media are not merely a mirror of society but may also serve as a catalyst for change with substantial positive effects on social attitudes and ultimately behavior (Kearney and Levine 2020: 83; Sanborn and Harris 2022: 402).[7] In other words, media should be viewed not only as a risk factor but also as potentially beneficial (Kirsh 2010: 239), since stereotyping is learned and can therefore be changed. Relating to the use of language specifically, it has been argued that the presence of media characters with non-native and non-standard accents portrayed as competent and devoid of stereotypical traits (see Table 15.1) tentatively leads to a reduction in negative affect toward speakers of such varieties and more openness to linguistic variation (Griva et al. 2018: 34; Roessel et al. 2020: 99). To consider the role language plays in purporting stereotypes and ideologies, the sociolinguistic concepts of language ideology and indexicality will be introduced in the section 'Language Variation in Current Animated Series for Children'. This is done with a focus on their relevance in media contexts before assessing the representation of varieties of English in an animated children's series to gauge current media practice.

Indexicality and Language Ideologies

As already mentioned in the section 'Social Psychology, Media Effects, and Socialization', language usage as an overtly audible feature is an important carrier of social information, enabling people to categorize others through it. A general tendency observed in this regard in both psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic language attitude studies is that non-native or non-standard language varieties are commonly stigmatized (Kinzler 2021: 243). This bias has been termed 'standard language ideology' (SLI), loosely defined as any kind of hegemonic effort to highlight the supremacy of a language variety and to systematically devalue linguistic diversity (Stamou et al. 2015: 216; see also Woolard 1998).

SLIs have been found to be prevalent in narrative media, and particularly in telecinematic media directed at children, through the portrayal of linguistic stereotypes (Barrett et al. 2022: 259). Concretely, there are persistently strong correlations between likable main protagonists and speaking a standard variety (most probably standard American English), while minor or evil characters, as well as those portrayed with low education, from lower classes, or belonging to an ethnic minority, are much more likely to use non-standard varieties (Stamou 2014; see further section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics'). Sometimes, such non-standard varieties are ignored altogether (Degener 2017: 2). Importantly, linguistic stereotyping (i) varies according to concrete sociohistorical and political circumstances (e.g., with Russian accents prevailing for evil characters during the Cold War, while Middle Eastern accents have featured more prominently for them since the 1990s; Barrett et al. 2022: 266), and (ii) has also been traced for non-human (yet anthropomorphic) characters in telecinematic representations (see, e.g., Tavin and Anderson 2003: 24; Bloomquist 2015).

Given the abovementioned function of language as a key carrier of social meaning, the sociolinguistic notion of 'second order indexicality' (see, e.g., Silverstein 2003), relating to the connection between linguistic variables and social and character traits of the speaker (rather than the mere association of a speaker with a stereotyped group alone, which would be related to first-order indexicality), appears relevant. Scriptwriters may therefore deliberately exploit language varieties as a shortcut to characterization (i.e., individual distinctiveness of a character; see Queen 2015: 155) through styling language use of characters after (stereotypical) social traits associated with them (Hodson 2014: 66–67). This has been criticized as a 'particularly easy trick […] to play into the stereotypes and prejudices that exist in the society within which the story is to be told' (Barrett et al. 2022: 258; see also Dragojevic et al. 2016: 67).

Therefore, it is argued here that usage of varieties in media should not be viewed as given reality or even a reflection of actual use but rather as strategic (or, at best, unconscious) choices made by producers that potentially foster SLIs and both form and maintain linguistic stereotypes (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 64). This is particularly important from a language education perspective, as learners should be made aware that their knowledge of languages and varieties is largely 'socially constructed and culturally mediated' (Abe and Shapiro 2021: 359; see also the section 'Critical Language Education and Awareness'). Further, a critical assessment of language usage in media artifacts among learners may help overturn SLIs (Coupland 2014: 78).

Critical Language Education and Awareness

Given the potential of pop cultural media to spread biases through SLIs, the field of critical language education with its aim to develop learners' critical literacies is highly relevant. Rooted in Paolo Freire's work, critical language education seeks to eliminate oppression and promote

transformation through a problem-posing approach that focuses on critical thinking, learner-driven content, and active participation (Crawford 1978: 112–113). This perspective has also entered linguistic research within the field of critical language awareness (CLA), in which Fairclough (1992) posits that language awareness does not only include descriptive linguistic knowledge but also a critical awareness of how language practices relate to social and political power dimensions. He notes that CLA is 'coming to be a prerequisite for effective democratic citizenship and should therefore be seen as an entitlement for citizens, especially children developing toward citizenship in the educational system' (Fairclough 1992: 3). CLA approaches should therefore be incorporated into teacher education courses for future teachers to gain insights into the relationship between language and culture (Abe and Shapiro 2021: 356). A crucial argument is that 'awareness of implicit bias (linguistic or otherwise) is the starting point for resistance and change' (Abe and Shapiro 2021: 363). As concerns the visibility of stereotyped varieties in telecinematic artifacts, '[r]epresenting real varieties that do not emerge solely as part of stereotyped character-building shortcuts can offer visibility and increase linguistic knowledge' (Darder 2022: 3). In more general terms, CLA pedagogy encourages learners to think about the following question: 'Who gains and how from the production of particular texts, genres and their accompanying discourses?' (Wallace 2017: 132).

The pedagogy of multiliteracies (Kalantzis et al. 2016), which accounts for the increasing multimodality of texts, also emphasizes critical literacy, a term defined as '[a]pproaches to literacy that focus on texts that communicate student interests and experiences and address challenging social issues, such as discrimination and disadvantage' (Kalantzis et al. 2016: 176). Crucially, therefore, discrimination affects social justice because those affected may internalize stigmata, leading to poor health and low self-esteem.

A central aim of critical language education is to foster social justice (Crookes 2021: 249). Problematic, however, is the fact that the concept of social justice is highly complex and lacks an objective definition. While classrooms are described as 'sites of social justice work' (Randolph and Johnson 2017: 102), social justice is considered to be a journey and the equitable sharing of social power and benefits in a society (Osborn 2006). Randolph and Johnson (2017: 102) have suggested a framework consisting of three components that impact social justice learning outcomes in world language education: (1) standards (cultures and communities); (2) student-oriented processes (transformative learning, intercultural communicative competence); and (3) teacher-oriented processes (critical pedagogy, community-based instructional design). Student-oriented processes highlight the importance of learning becoming transformative. This happens when learners decenter their own experience and take the perspective of the interlocutor (Randolph and Johnson 2017: 106). Regarding the consumption of pop cultural media, this means uncovering stereotypical depictions of certain characters and language varieties and finding ways to promote their diverse and inclusive representation.

This understanding of learning complies with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence and the goal of developing critical cultural awareness (Randolph and Johnson 2017: 104). More specifically, it is the field of intercultural citizenship education that provides another important theoretical base for considering a critical literacies pedagogy that aims to counteract mind engineering and promote critical engagement with language.

Intercultural Citizenship Education

Education is increasingly regarded as a means of combating racism, extremism, and discrimination. This is reflected in the *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights*

Education (Council of Europe 2010), advocating the promotion of core values including human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Represented in the *Charter for All* (Council of Europe 2012), the points raised provide an important reference point for language education, which plays a key role in valuing diversity and promoting human rights.

This understanding of education is the foundation of intercultural citizenship education, which is a major goal of foreign language education today (Byram 2008; Porto et al. 2018). Defined as 'the ability of individuals and groups to live and dialogue with individuals and groups of other identifications' (Porto and Byram 2015: 23), citizenship education promotes the integration of pluralism including ethnic and linguistic complexity without promoting division in society (Portera 2021). Intercultural citizenship education therefore offers an important basis for a critical engagement with pop cultural media that, through their culture-specific representation of certain characters and language varieties, may implicitly promote a division of society by displaying certain characters (and thus social groups) in a negative light (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics').

In a similar vein, global citizenship 'acknowledges global interconnectedness and the responsibility every individual has in preserving planet Earth and in contributing to a fair, just and peaceful world' (Lütge et al. 2022: 3). In connecting global citizenship with social justice education, Banks (2003: 18) emphasizes that the biggest problem worldwide is not that people cannot read and write but rather their inability to get along and work together to solve problems such as global warming, racism, and war. Consequently, he considers it imperative to foster 'thoughtful and active citizens' to make the world 'more just and humane' (Banks 2003: 19). This highlights the necessity to engage with 'reflective processes [that] can help us to understand the nature of privilege and inequality and to engage with the world more equitably' (Abe and Shapiro 2021: 355). Extremist/stereotypical views, fostered by, for example, inadequate representation of language varieties in pop cultural media must be uncovered so that learners can become intercultural and global citizens committed to a more humane world.

Through mediation, defined as 'a class of intervention strategies that attempt to disrupt the effects of consuming media' (Kirsh 2010: 241), telecinematic representations can build a bridge to critical literacy. More specifically, this requires active mediation that involves, for example, discussions about media content with learners to help them understand the intent and realism of media products to change their affective responses to them and reduce potentially negative media effects (Kirsh 2010: 244). Such effects related to SLIs and linguistic stereotyping are outlined in the subsequent passages.

Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics

While the study of pop cultural media had long been sidelined in sociolinguistics due to the alleged 'inauthenticity' of the data (see Werner 2022: section 3), there has been an increasing acceptance of the importance of mediatization as a 'historical process through which more and more aspects of social lives and socio-cultural understandings are achieved through technologically-mediated systems' (Coupland 2014: 78). Consequently, there has been considerable engagement with scripted narrative forms, and specifically language use in telecinematic artifacts, and this work has usefully employed the notions of indexicality and language ideology (see the section 'Indexicality and Language Ideologies'), as a selective review of relevant studies that focus on animated children's series and movies shows.[8] The choice of animated (and specifically fantasy) telecinematic artifacts is deliberate, as they provide an 'ontological rupture that allows some distance between voice and image [and] allows non-mainstream varieties to be decontextualized and recontextualized in

mediated relocations of speech communities' (Darder 2022: 3). Further, previous work has found that animated productions may lag in the more diverse representation of ethnic groups increasingly found in traditional, non-animated movies and series (Bloomquist 2015: 751; cf. Clouse 2022).

A landmark effort in this respect is Dobrow and Gidney (1998), who manually coded 323 characters from 12 animated US TV series to determine whether ethnicity and gender are used to convey stereotypes and how linguistic variation is employed in the series studied. While they fail to find evidence of a specific 'genderlect',[9] their overall results imply that standard American English (AmE) is the default variety for heroes and that linguistic variation is used to stereotype characters, especially in the role of villains, who are found to use German- and Slavic-accented, but interestingly also standard British English (BrE), which alternatively features as a variety associated with refined characters. The representation of these varieties indeed relies on several indexical phonological features, such as final devoicing for German-accented English. The study identifies additional noteworthy tendencies, among them the use of a stylized New York/'Italian' accent for criminals, regional AmE accents for comic characters, and only rare use of African American English (AAE), working-class speech, or foreign-accented English for hero characters. The results of several related studies are summarized in Table 15.2.

In sum, the aforementioned findings indicate a general potential of telecinematic artifacts directed at younger audiences to use varieties to deliberately conceptualize 'good and evil in ways that strongly correlate to race and ethnicity' (Barrett et al. 2022: 273) and therefore to establish a rigid 'status hierarchy' (Dragojevic et al. 2016: 75) of varieties. Thus, they may foster SLIs (and residual racism) by way of stereotyping speakers of different varieties as either desirable or inferior through processes of second-order indexicalities.

Such insights are highly relevant from a language-educational perspective, as, due to the production circumstances of animated telecinematic artifacts, it can be assumed that scriptwriters and producers deliberately select varieties and their use for various purposes of characterization. Observers have called such practices an implicit *political* choice and have criticized producers of animated formats in particular for associating language varieties that may in fact be part of a person's identity with stereotypical character representations (especially in anthropomorphic characters such as animals, robots, cars, etc.), ascertaining an institutionalized status hierarchy in the mediasphere (see, e.g., Degener 2017: 13 on AAE and African American identity).

This is particularly relevant as studies have found that an awareness of varieties is already observable among children (Maroniti et al. 2013: 60–61; Griva et al. 2018: 42), who may internalize the attitudes purported in such media representations, which may be the first and only encounter with a particular variety (see the section 'Social Psychology, Media Effects, and Socialization'). To unearth language ideologies and to put such representations into perspective, there have been repeated calls for active engagement with telecinematic artifacts and their language representation in connection with stilted roles (Degener 2017: 13; Abe and Shapiro 2021: 363). That is why we address the potential of pop cultural media for mind engineering in a critical literacies' pedagogy (see the section 'Building a Bridge to Language Education'). At the same time, we highlight that such media can also be characterized by inclusive practices fostering tolerance.

While most of the studies presented considered commercially successful movies, children and adolescents have even greater exposure to the media through streaming and video-on-demand services (see the section 'Introduction'). The ensuing case study (the section 'Language Variation in Current Animated Series for Children') therefore complements extant work in two ways: First, it provides an updated picture of animated series vs. movies, and, second, it gauges whether media practice as to the use and representation of language varieties has been subject to change in recent productions, reflecting an increased awareness of the role that language may play as a carrier of

Table 15.2 Sociolinguistic studies on animated telecinematic artifacts for children

Study	*Film/series*	*Non-standard variety/varieties*	*Main results*
Meek (2006)	*Peter Pan*	'Hollywood Injun English' (stylized non-standard variety of English to depict the speech of Native Americans)	Indexical markers (e.g., lack of tense and aspect and usage of specific lexical items) that work in collaboration with the representation of negative character traits to signify the 'otherness' of Native Americans
Bloomquist (2015)	Various	AAE	• Both older and contemporary animated children's movies following 'Black stock characters' stereotypes emerging from minstrel shows (e.g., Baloo the Bear in the *Jungle Book* as an 'Uncle Tom' or Marty in the *Madagascar* franchise as 'Coon') • Indexicality: AAE associated with minor and comical roles and unfavorable traits (laziness, superstition, childlikeness, cowardice, stupidity, being thuggish) • Distorted depiction of African American realities • Lack of positive Black characters
Degener (2017)	*The Secret Life of Pets*	AAE	• AAE as 'deviant' variety • Indexicality: AAE associated with (male) streetwiseness and low socio-economic status
Valleriani (2020)	*Zootopia*	AAE, Southern AmE	Indexicality: selected phonological, grammatical, and lexical features index characters as rural, low-class, unintelligent, or criminal
Darder (2022)	Various	AAE, Southern AmE, Jamaican English/Creole	Indexicality: selected grammatical and lexical features index characters as low-class, uneducated, or thuggish
Barrett et al. (2022)	Various	AAE, Spanish-accented English, non-native accents	• Negative portrayal of non-native accents • Indexicality: AAE and Spanish-accented English for dangerous or mentally insane characters

social information. This increased awareness may, in turn, result in positive media effects on the audience (see the section 'Social Psychology, Media Effects, and Socialization').

Language Variation in Current Animated Series for Children

While the view of stereotyped language use in telecinematic media for children as an 'inescapable trait' (Darder 2022: 3) seems justified given the review of previous work (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics'), and there is persistent skepticism about whether growing social diversity is also represented medially (Kirsh 2010: 123; Degener 2017: 3); there has also been some recognition of positive messages that can be conveyed through children's media in general (e.g., Sanborn and Harris 2022: 372) and animated films in particular (e.g., Bloomquist 2015: 751). Regarding the latter, it has been suggested that animated fantasy is, in principle, a site of creativity and almost endless possibilities to conjure up an 'equitable universe' (Pila et al. 2018: 35). The looming question that remains is whether and to which extent current scriptwriters and producers make use of these opportunities (in the sense of practices that foster tolerance and inclusivity), especially in series with an educational and/or pro-social concern.[10] To address this issue, patterns in a commercially highly successful,[11] award-winning, and critically acclaimed[12] educational series distributed via the BBC[13] in the UK, and, globally via Netflix, the *Octonauts* (www.theoctonauts.com; 2010–2021; UK/Ireland – US version available) is qualitatively explored with a view to the representation of language varieties.

The cast of *Octonauts* is a team of eight anthropomorphic animals that embark on undersea adventures using various vehicles ('gups') during which they encounter real marine ecosystems and animals. The role of the speech used by the characters has been highlighted before in the context of the formation of national identity in children by means of 'accents imagined to belong to people's [sic] of differing nations' and an inherent potential for the audience in 'developing knowledge of and attitudes toward nations' (Barraclough-Brady 2023: 3–4). The connection to the function of animated media as agents of socialization (see the section 'Social Psychology, Media Effects, and Socialization') is evident. Table 15.3 presents an overview of the main protagonists, featuring six male and two female characters.

As shown in Table 15.3, the *Octonauts'* main cast represents a mixture of characters using both standard and non-standard varieties. This in itself is a noteworthy finding because traditionally non-standard varieties were sometimes ignored in animated telecinematic representations for (positive) main characters (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics'). Remarkably, the protagonists using non-standard accents (including non-AmE/BrE) are represented as equally competent in the story world and fulfill important specialist and/or leader functions that require high professional qualifications. Noteworthy in this context is the fact that some main characters use varieties that are widely stigmatized, such as Cockney, Southern AmE, and AmE with a Spanish accent. These generic observations are striking in light of the results of other sociolinguistic analyses (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics') and show an alternative practice of how the diversity of varieties/accents can be represented medially.

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that, despite the wide range of varieties in *Octonauts*, the focus on the main protagonists is a limitation of the present analysis because, as other work has shown, the use of varieties by minor characters may still at times be associated with stereotyped behavior and traits (Barraclough-Brady 2023: 11). Further, given the large amount of research on the role of AAE (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights

Table 15.3 Octonauts main characters overview

Character name (and species, gender)	*Variety*	*Roles/traits*
Barnacles (polar bear, male)	Standard BrE	Group leader/captain, operating vehicles, physically strong, brave, claustrophobic
Kwazii (cat, male)	Cockney/Estuary English	Second in command (lieutenant), (crypto)zoologist, operating vehicles, daring, arachnophobic
Peso (penguin, male)	Standard BrE/AmE with Spanish accent (US version)	Medical officer, sometimes easily scared, brave in the face of danger
Shellington (otter, male)	Standard BrE with Scottish accent	Biologist, researcher
Inkling (octopus, male)	Standard BrE with hyper-RP accent	Oceanographer, professor, founder of the *Octonauts*
Dashi (dog, female)	Australian/AmE (US version)	IT specialist, technician, photographer, surfer
Tweak (rabbit, female)	Southern AmE	Engineer, inventor
Tunip ('vegimal' = hybrid between plant and animal)	N/A	Chef, gardener, leader of the vegimals

from Sociolinguistics'), it could be argued that *Octonauts* misses the chance to present this widely stigmatized variety in a positive light. Furthermore, we have focused solely on linguistic diversity in general and have omitted gender or class, for instance.

Overall, however, the – necessarily brief – analysis of the series' protagonists shows that, unlike the practices traced in most telecinematic artifacts (see the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics'), it is by no means 'inescapable' to employ non-standard and less widely used varieties to index positive character traits. Rather, *Octonauts* could be viewed as an example challenging stereotypical associations between social attributions and linguistic usage, illustrating paradigmatic 'new ways of embedding and disembedding voices into/from social contexts, and new normativities for self-presentation and for social relations' (Coupland 2014: 78) fostered by mediatized representation. Thus, animated telecinematic artifacts might, in fact, epitomize desirable practice in the sense of showing the value of linguistic diversity or at least presenting linguistic diversity as a given and natural state of societies.

Building a Bridge to Language Education

Over the past six decades, critical language education (see the section 'Critical Language Education and Awareness') has recognized the fact that language is neither a neutral object of study nor a neutral medium of communication. Rather, it is an instrument for maintaining power hierarchies and promoting certain values (see the section 'Introduction') so that 'language teaching and learning are not ideologically neutral practices; they are located within complex webs of political and historical contexts and sociolinguistic practices' (Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger 2015: 1). Importantly, the use of pop cultural media in language education as a mere cultural resource that

promotes media literacy is insufficient and rather requires '[an analysis of] its production within historically specific social relations' (Currie and Kelly 2022: 415).

Fostering responsible world citizens capable of critiquing pop cultural media and promoting social justice requires practice-oriented suggestions, which are discussed in the following sections. Since critical foreign language pedagogies, including intercultural citizenship education (see the section 'Intercultural Citizenship Education'), are generally compatible with curricula based on a democratic understanding of education, no new method is required but rather the creation of spaces for discourses that advance social justice (Osborn 2006). This complies with Randolph and Johnson's (2017: 109) argument that social justice themes can enhance the communication goals of curricular guidelines. Hence, we will discuss practical implications in two parts: A sketch of some basic requirements for engaging with critical literacy practices is presented, followed by an outline of some more specific ways to integrate pop cultural media into the classroom with the aim of developing responsible world citizens.

Basic Requirements

Critical literacy practices aim to uncover language (and other) ideologies. The assumed context in this section is a foreign language classroom, although the requirements equally apply to language learning in general. We argue that three basic requirements (see Figure 15.1) provide the foundation for potentially fruitful critical literacy practices and pave the way for more specific suggestions related to the variety of texts in the subsequent section.

The first requirement is the creation of a safe learning environment. This safe space includes the establishment of a trustworthy atmosphere in the classroom that allows learners to raise their voices, ask questions, and possibly share their stories – yet without encouraging or even forcing

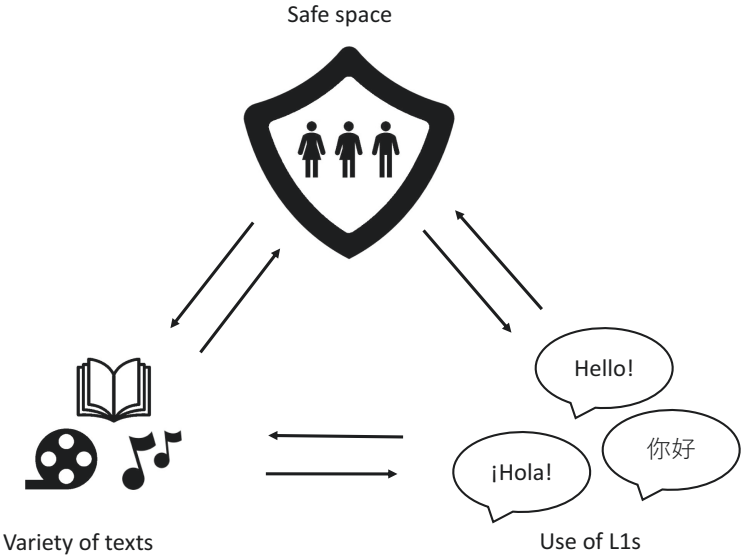

Figure 15.1 Basic requirements for critical literacies pedagogies focusing on language ideologies

them to share any potentially traumatizing experiences (Ludwig and Summer 2023: 14). Freedom of speech, democracy, pluralism, and fairness set the basis for this safe space in which basic human rights provide the foundation for educational practices. Importantly, a critical investigation of pop cultural media by learners in a safe environment can empower them and enhance their agency (Yol and Yoon 2020: 12).

A second requirement for critical literacy practices is openness toward learners' language resources and their individual cultural experiences. This means that the use of learners' first and other languages (L1s) is not tabooed but included in foreign language teaching – albeit not as a medium of instruction but rather as a 'teaching aid' (Akbari 2008: 280). Engaging learners' linguistic diversity aims to make them aware that educators appreciate diversity in all its forms, for instance by raising language awareness through a comparison of linguistic features across different languages or by increasing awareness of their own unique linguistic variety.

A third aspect central to critical literacy practices is the use of a variety of thought-provoking and valuable texts (i.e., in a broad sense, including songs, films, etc.) that showcase voices beyond the classroom and invite multicultural perspectives. According to Yol and Yoon, 'instruction should challenge the ideologies praising norms and encouraging cultural assimilation' (2020: 12). As such, language educators play a key role in raising learners' awareness of stereotypical, potentially problematic, and racist representations of linguistic varieties through telecinematic media by initiating classroom discourse that counters stigmatization and promotes critical literacy. The movies and series explored in sociolinguistic work (the section 'Language Ideologies in Narrative Pop Media: Insights from Sociolinguistics') and the series analyzed above (see the section 'Language Variation in Current Animated Series for Children') offer examples illustrating how linguistic varieties in series can be critically investigated while showcasing some positive developments and fostering learners' CLA.

Specific Ways

Specific ways through which critical literacies with a focus on pop cultural media can be implemented at different levels of language proficiency emerge from our theoretical groundwork see (the section 'Theoretical Foundation'). At a general level, a distinction between a simple and a more complex way of putting critical language pedagogies into practice can be drawn: A simple approach would be to include supplementary content that is more diverse; a more complex way would be to negotiate the syllabus with learners (Crookes 2021: 252). This could include a comparison of animated films and series with different degrees of linguistic diversity or a critical inspection of text suggestions in syllabuses or textbooks by investigating how (non-dominant) linguistic varieties are perceived and valued.

According to Chang (2018: 4–5), three broad themes are effective in promoting social justice in English language education: (1) recognition, (2) collaboration, and (3) solidarity. These themes are described by highlighting the importance of (1) recognizing different types of linguistic and cultural practices while also recognizing learners' own identities. Collaboration (2) refers to all forms of collaborative learning among learners, parents, administrators, and stakeholders, for instance through action research projects. Solidarity (3) involves striving toward collective goals to develop a sense of community among learners. As such, integrating social justice perspectives into foreign language education by recognizing learners' own (linguistic, among other) identities, encouraging them to work together with others, and envisioning collective goals provides important impulses for the journey toward social justice (Osborn 2006).

Critically reflecting on the representation of linguistic diversity in telecinematic representations can provide an ideal starting point for social justice work in the classroom, as our case study has shown. In addition, a great variety of text formats offers relevant materials for a critical engagement with language. Another interesting way of approaching the representation of language ideology is, for instance, to examine Disney films. As analyses like Barrett et al. (2022) and Currie and Kelly (2022) reveal and criticize, certain portrayals of characters (and their language) perpetuate specific racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes, thus contributing to the formation of social injustice. These include characters like princesses (often white and symbolizing goodness and beauty) and voices of primates in Tarzan (with Black voices encouraging associations with apes). Indeed, these sexist and racist representations call for a thorough critical engagement with such texts, especially when we consider their worldwide popularity. In addition, lyrical texts such as poems (e.g., 'All American Girl' by Julia Alvarez) offer opportunities to examine resistance toward dominant language ideologies, as suggested by Abe and Shapiro (2021: 363). They also recommend the TED talk '3 Ways to Speak English' by Jamila Lyiscott as it includes code-switching and thus offers opportunities for analyzing linguistic codes and creative writing. The idea behind using such texts is that '[t]hrough media engagement, students can exercise their power to resist, challenge and transform media culture promoting exclusion and marginalization of social groups, while also recognizing extra-textual processes that sustain this culture' (Currie and Kelly 2022: 406). Importantly, however, in line with Crawford's recommendations (1978), language educators are well advised to include texts from learners' lives, which might be popular series offered by streaming services or videos by influencers on social media platforms. In that way, learners may learn to critically reflect on processes of mind engineering in texts with which they personally engage.

As criticality has shown to play a key role in all of the theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter, it should take center stage in pedagogical endeavors. Based on Barnett's (1997) work, critical language education can be approached by focusing on three domains of criticality: (1) knowledge, (2) self, and (3) world (Porto and Byram 2015: 18; in reference to Barnett 1997: 103). Referring to a project for lower proficiency learners (Porto and Byram 2015: 20–21), we suggest the following steps when working with pop cultural media and focusing on the representation of language ideologies:

1 Knowledge: Students learn about different linguistic varieties of English in pop cultural media and stereotypes associated with these as well as the SLI and how this relates to social justice.
2 Self: Students reflect on their own beliefs and biases with regard to linguistic varieties, gaining conscious awareness of and relating them to their perception of pop cultural media.
3 World: Beyond critical thinking and reflexivity, learners take critical action by evaluating the representation of linguistic varieties in pop cultural media (e.g., through digital posters displayed in the school or podcasts shared with a (local) community).

Overall, a variety of pop cultural media, possibly suggested by learners, can provide a basis for these three domains of criticality. In line with Currie and Kelly (2022: 412), we reject treating seemingly authentic cultural resources such as pop cultural media 'as "natural resources" for meaning making […] rather than the product of human activities orchestrated by social relations and vested interests' (see the section 'Introduction'). We advocate a differentiated discussion of the concept of text authenticity and a consideration of critical literacy in language education that accounts for the potential effects of mind engineering through pop cultural media. This is crucial

in today's world as mediatized 'global flows of language and culture' (Pennycook 2010: 65) of internationally distributed pop culture have an impact on learners, which needs to be considered by language education.

Conclusion

Learning languages in the 21st century requires the development of critical literacies. This can pave the way for a tolerant society and eliminate impacts of mind engineering (aka 'brainwashing') through pop cultural media, which are an important factor in the socialization of youth. That is why Fairclough's statement that 'a language education focused upon training in language skills, without a critical component, would seem to be failing in its responsibility to learners' (1992: 6) holds true today more than ever. As children and adolescents face potentially biased representations through linguistic stereotypes in animated telecinematic content, for instance, language education plays a key role in uncovering such representations and fostering responsible world citizens. This can be achieved by integrating critical literacy practices into today's language classrooms, and, more specifically, by taking the dangers involved in the creation of stigmata through the mediatized representation of certain language varieties seriously.

The present chapter related critical language pedagogies/awareness and intercultural citizenship education to the concept of mind engineering and discussed findings from sociolinguistics. This discipline has found evidence for mind engineering in the sense of a long-standing tradition of stereotypical depictions of characters (and thus social groups, often minorities) in pop cultural media with the help of linguistic processes related to second-order indexicality. To gauge whether such representations are inevitable in media practice, this chapter developed a case study on the current (educational and pro-social) animated children's series *Octonauts*, focusing on the usage of varieties. It was found that *Octonauts* represents, to some degree, a positive example of a diverse representation of standard and non-standard varieties and avoids falling into the trap of using linguistic stereotyping as a means for characterization conveying SLIs. While the series in the case study exemplified desirable practice in the sense of avoiding linguistic stereotyping, it concentrated on linguistic variation as one domain of diversity, so that additional broader domains such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, ableism, and age, among others, were not considered explicitly and are issues open to further exploration.

On a general note, pedagogical endeavors that take the dangers of mind engineering seriously, as postulated in this chapter, should aim to make injustices and inclusive practices across different domains evident to learners. This is important because typically subconscious thinking processes need to be made visible to learners (Currie and Kelly 2022: 408). Basic requirements, such as creating a safe space, using L1s as teaching aids, and integrating a variety of texts, provide a foundation for reflexive educational practices.

Crucially, a critical engagement with the effects of mind engineering through pop cultural media (but also with how they employ practices that emphasize tolerance and inclusivity) can be beneficial for both formal (in the classroom) and informal language learning (outside the classroom). As Degener highlights, '[c]hildren's media can serve to help educators guide students to view media critically, understand stereotyped representations to be a (conscious or subconscious) political decision, and work to dismantle linguistic supremacy inside and outside of the classroom' (2017: 14). Such endeavors require a fundamental 'stance of tolerance and generosity toward difference and nuance [as regards] the messy, complex realities of language use' (Abe and Shapiro 2021: 365). We therefore suggest that relevant media should be exploited in language education to promote the development of responsible world citizens in which human rights and democratic values set the basis for independent thinking and anti-discriminatory practices.

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Notes

1 Attributed to Nicholas Johnson, member of the US Federal Communications Commission; quoted in Sanborn and Harris 2022: 370.
2 While over time the amount of media contact has grown and direct interaction with peers and family has diminished (Kearney and Levine 2020: 83), current surveys estimate that youth use media between 3.5 and 6.5 hours daily, with telecinematic content covering two to three hours (Ward and Bridgewater 2023: 86; see also European Commission 2023).
3 See also https://sites.tufts.edu/ctvresearch/.
4 While the focus in the present chapter is on telecinematic media, it is evident that (linguistic) stereotyping may occur in other media, such as books for children and adolescents, comics and cartoons, computer software and video games, and TV commercials (see Kirsh 2010: 105–120 and Adukia et al. 2023 for an in-depth study of race and gender stereotyping in children's books).
5 In terms of additional social factors, children from low-income families are more likely to spend time with media input and thus to receive their role models from it (Kearney and Levine 2020: 83).
6 These attitudes may not only emerge towards other groups, but media may also have an effect on the self-perception of one's own (often minority) group in terms of what is called social identity threat if this group is stereotypically displayed (for a case study, see Schmader et al. 2015).
7 The cultural context plays a large part, as Moland's (2020) study on the ineffectiveness of *Sesame Street*, a series widely acclaimed for its diversity and pro-social messages, as an educational program in Nigeria shows.
8 See also https://shrekthelinguistics.wordpress.com/2017/12/01/the-protagonists-language/ for an analysis of language varieties used in *Shrek* or https://latinasandmedia.wordpress.com/term-projects/latinoa-characters-in-childrens-television/ for exemplification of the portrayal of Latina characters in animated TV series.
9 For lack of space, linguistic gender stereotyping is ignored in the present chapter. For relevant work, see González Vera (2012), Pila et al. (2018), or Fought and Eisenhauer (2022).
10 An issue outside of the scope of the present chapter is whether such programs are educationally successful in terms of content delivery and realism, for instance as regards factual accuracy (see Chlebuch et al. 2023).
11 See https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/US/the-octonauts-cbeebies and https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/UK/the-octonauts-cbeebies.
12 See www.commonsensemedia.org/tv-reviews/octonauts and www.commonsensemedia.org/tv-reviews/ask-the-storybots.
13 www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b00xhyjf/octonauts.

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