Deviation of Enhancing Stereotypes through Lexicalization and Songs in *Mulan*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the deviation of enhancing stereotypes that takes place in Disney film Mulan. It attempts to reveal the stereotypes that arise from the film in terms of lexicalization and the songs. Also, this study examines the implication of watching this type of movie as it is classified as family genre. The analysis is based on S. Jager and F. Mayer (2009) film analysis on Foucauldian approach of discourse analysis. It connects linguistic discursive practice, non-linguistic discursive practice, and materialization (object). Because of the limitation of the space in presenting the data, this paper focuses only on the linguistic discursive practice in terms of lexicalization and four songs represented in the film. The result shows that in terms of lexicalization, the use of word 'girl' compared 'man' has an implied deal with the case of stereotypes. Likewise, the symbol of 'girl' as a doll and 'man' as a sword symbolized in the film also bring the effect on the stereotypes which are characterized by the female and male characters. Then, in terms of songs, the four songs that are sung in the film also convey the stereotypes which can be denoted by the film.

Keywords: *deviation, stereotypes, film*

Introduction

Mulan was one of Disney movies that acquired good reception at the time of its release. This film raises the tale from the other countries, that is, a legendary female figure form China. The story tells about the battle of Mulan, a Chinese woman who has lots of limitedness in gaining her freedom. Here, Mulan is described as a rebellious daughter who always confronts problems in the family. As an impact, she is not able and permitted to do things that she thinks right and proper.

As its category is a family movie, most people will tend to say that this film is suitable to be watched by all ages (general audiences). Likewise, the type of the film which is made as an animation will make parents to become less aware of the contents of the movie. They will presume that animated film is intended for children or teenagers like the animated films in general. Moreover, Disney, which is known as creator and producer for many children's cartoons and animations, has a very big impact on the globalization on its films world-wide. The films such as *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White*, and *Aladdin,* are inevitably popular among people of leveled generation and ages around the world.

The problem will be tightening when we really pay attention deeply into the story. That is, the implication that is offered by Disney through its story and its feasibility to be watched by young generation during this time. The story, which derived from the other culture from the other country, is in fact can lead to different meaning and perceptions. Furthermore, the impact of the story perhaps will be misguided of misunderstood by its viewers, especially for the young ages. Thus, it is considered important to seek deeper to the implied consequences resulted from the point of view of language, non-discursive, and objectification that is advocated from this

movie: what is implicated from the movies in terms of enhancing stereotypes and how far can we tolerate this kind of films to be viewed by the young ages.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes can be defined as an authorized issue in enabling the maintenance of discrimination over time and across different segments of experience and social-life (Cook and Cusack, 2011: 37). This occurrence also can be dissimilar according to the culture, the perception, and the reception of people individually or collectively.

Most stereotypes are argued to take place firstly by stating to the visual or physical appearance. Ethnical, racial, group, individual, men, women, the elderly, and the young are all the factors that may emerge the stereotypes (Zebrowitz, 1996 :79). Then, it may be followed by the difference in sounds (language, including accent, vocabulary, etc), behaviors, habits, as well as relating with religion and political interest.

In this paper, there are at least two stereotypes that are observed. They are cultural and gender stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes deal with specific physical or facial features, judge in (personal) beliefs, norms, customs, and low/ high prejudice to certain culture (Moskowitz, 2005: 506). Meanwhile, gender stereotypes are in line with the social and cultural construction of men and women. That is, to make a judgment in the extent of their distinctive physical, biological, sexual and social functions (Cook and Cussack, 2011: 20). They basically affect and endorse to each other in social-life construction.

The worrisome thing about these stereotypes is that when they already enter to children's psyche or the so-called 'children's trajectory', with certain internalization that affects them as they were getting older (Schneider, 2005: 353). Since children watch the movie, any exposure may have a tendency to bring them in misguided role of understanding. Therefore, they should be monitored continuously dealing with the input and contact that they live in daily experience. Here, the power of media (in this case is movie) is argued as the biggest 'ills' for promoting stereotypes among people, not to mention, children as well.

Lexicalization in the Film

In this film, there is one marked lexicalization that is done by the characters. That is, the use of lexeme a "girl" in the whole of story. It can be observed that all conversations which take place in the movie use this word consistently throughout the film. It can indicate the estimation of a girl as a powerless human being that has negative connotation. Significantly, the word *girl* is always used to call or name Mulan. There is only one big time when she was called as "woman". That is, this name is given to her when her disguise is revealed by the Royal Guard. In fact, this calling is also not containing a good sense at all since it is used as a connotative idea followed by the metaphors *treacherous snake.*

This lexeme can be compared directly to the use of word to represent male characters in the film. The word "man" is used to represent the entire male figures in the story. If we compared these two words, "a girl" and "a man", they definitely bring different sense to the viewer. The word **"**girl" has the features of young, immature, perhaps also powerless, reckless and innocent. Whereas, the word **"**man" has the features of adult, mature, powerful, and full grown-up. If they are compared mutually from the film, these two lexicalizations offer an obvious idea of gender stereotype.

Moreover, if we look through the film, there are two objects used frequently in the film and can be stated as the representative symbols of the female and male characters in the film. In this extent, the objects signify the imagery of the story as it uses a symbol to underline some idea of the story. The first is related to the two objects that are presented and compared in the story. They are "the doll" versus **"**the sword". In this story, the doll signifies Mulan where the sword represents men.



A doll is usually an image of fragile, young, innocent, and playful thing that essentially deals with a girl or a young woman. Likewise, in the song, it is also stated that a woman is like a *porcelain doll* that represents beauty and fragility. Meanwhile, a sword is a symbol of power, dignity, greatness and skill. In this film, the presence of the doll is compared to the sword which characteristically reflects two disparate things as the significance of women and men in the story.

Songs as the Implied Message of the Stereotypes

The other interesting knowledge can be gained from the songs which are represented in *Mulan* film. The lyrics of the song are the depiction of the character's mind and also can be stated as the significant part of the story. That is, it covers up the idea of the story in a whole. There are *four songs* which are sung by various characters in the film. The first song is when Mulan is prepared to meet the matchmaker, entitled *Honor to Us All* (min 00.06). In this song, it can be inferred that women should be pretty, beautiful, innocent, calm, obedient, and the like. The extract of the song can be seen below.

…….
-With good fortune
-And a great hairdo
You'll bring honor to us all [Maid]
…….
Men want girls with good taste
-Calm -Obedient
Who work fast-paced
-With good breeding
-And a tiny waist
……..
We all must serve our Emperor
Who guards us from the Huns
The men by bearing arms
A girl by bearing sons [Maids together]

When we're through you can't fail
…….
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 [Mulan]

Scarier than the undertaker
We are meeting our matchmaker [Girls]
……..
Please look kindly on these cultured pearls
Each a perfect porcelain doll [Parents]

This extract of song describes perfectly how to be a woman in Chinese culture. This song represents the "dos" and "don'ts" to be a Chinese woman as well as the demands of the society to be the perfect girl in civilization. There are some criteria to be a perfect girl, such as doing a great hairdo, having a good taste, calm, obedient, work fast-paced, giving a good breeding, and having a tiny waist. It is also mentioned that women should serve the Emperor by "bearing sons", compared to men who do it by "bearing arms". This is somewhat a kind of different culture that happens to men and women in the state of being. From the last lyric, it is also shown how Mulan is hopeless and frightened to be failed. She is not confident to prove herself as her family wanted.

The second song is when Mulan fails to impress the matchmaker and shames her family in the song *Reflection* (min 12.15). In this song, Mulan describes her thoughts in a stressful way. She seems reckless and feels so bad for herself and her family. She states firstly, that if she reveals her true self to the others, it will only break her family's heart and dignity. She does not want to let her family down but the indeed she did it. She

bares her feelings through this song. Here are some lines of the song.

[Mulan sings]
Now I see
That if l were truly to be myself
l would break my family's heart

Who is that girl l see
Staring straight
Back at me?

Why is my reflection
Someone I don't know?
Somehow I cannot hide
Who I am

Though l've tried
When will my reflection show
Who I am inside?

When will my reflection show
Who I am
Inside?

The third song is presented when Mulan and the soldiers are trained for the army (*I'll Make a Man Out of You* min 38.04). This song reveals the exact way of how hard Mulan tries to be able to finish the training and try her best to act as a man. It is noted from the lyric that to 'be a man' is the thing related to strength, power, endurance, and toughness. In this song, it is also shown how the soldier must follow every single order that is dictated by the captain. Here, the expectancy of men's obedience in the hierarchical system is also shown through this extract line of the song.

[Shang]
…….
Did they send me daughters
When I asked for sons?
…….
Mister, l'll make a man
Out of you
…….
You're a spineless, pale, pathetic lot
And you haven't got a clue
Somehow I'II make a man
Out of you
……..
[Shang]
-With all the strength of a raging fire
……..
Time is racing toward us
Till the Huns arrive
Heed my every order
And you might survive

You're unsuited for the rage of war
So pack up, go home, you're through
How could I make a man
Out of you?

*-Be a ma*n [the soldiers]
-We must be swift as a coursing river [Shang]

-Be a man [the soldiers]
-With all the force of a great typhoon [Shang]

-Be a man [the soldiers]
-With all the strength of a raging fire [Shang]

Related to women's stereotype, the song *A Girl Worth Fighting For* (min. 47.37) describes overtly how men perceive women and how they want women to be look like or behave. When the soldiers debate of the girls, Mulan seems to offer different opinion of a woman that she thinks worth to fight for. However, none of the men agrees with her. The criteria of a worth girl seems to discard all the things that are related to cleverness, power, voice, and the like. The significant lines of the song are presented as below.

[Ling]
That's what I said. A girl worth fighting for
l want her paler than the moon with eyes that shine like stars

My girl will marvel at my strength, Adore my battle scars [Yao]

[Chien Po]
I couldn't care less what she'll wear or what she looks like
lt all depends on what she cooks like "Beef, pork, chicken. Hmm"
……..
My girl will think l have no faults [Yao]
That l'm a major find [Chien Po]

[Mulan]
How 'bout a girl who's got a brain
Who always speaks her mind?
My manly ways and turn of phrase are sure to thrill her [Ling]
……

The Impact of the Film Related to Stereotypes

It is proposed that Mulan's ideological messages are *freedom, right of passage, intolerance, choice, greed, and the brutalities of men chauvinism.* It is also argued that Mulan, as the lead character of the film, challenges these stereotypes, especially on women (Giroux, 1999: 111&117). However, the fact is that, from the findings that have been presented, the issue of stereotypes is not heavily much disproved from the film.

From the time duration of 87 minutes, around 70 minutes of the film tells the all kinds of act and language behavior that somewhat enhancing the stereotypes to women and Chinese culture. It is only the last 17 minutes of the film where there is a phase of realization of the role of Mulan as a heroine. But, again, it is only a little portion of the film compared to the whole narrative which is presented. Similarly, if we dig up deeper to the essence of the story, there are some female figures who are presented in the story, such as Mulan's mother, grandmother, and the maids. However, until the end of the story, the viewpoint and the treating of them are still the same from the beginning. It can be seen extensively at the end of the story when Mulan's grandmother met Captain Shang at the yard. She said *"Sign me up for the next war."* It implies how much women are still amazed to men's stuff and felt it affordable to be chased.

Likewise, it is clearly shown from the story that Mulan is actually neglected and even is underestimated by Shang after her disguise uncovered. She is treated so badly and her attempt to explain the reason why she did it is not heard at all. Even when she was dumped by the royal guard, Shang did nothing. Her effort to tell Shang that the Huns are still alive is also in vain until she makes her own effort to save the emperor. However, at the end of the story, Mulan still expects him as her lover. She seems thoughtless and does not consider of what he has done to her before. It shows implicitly how women are still weak in the story and Mulan, eventually, is still innocent to realize the happening. She cannot prove herself or get recognition as well.

If we observe further, this happening is really a big deal for the viewers, particularly the young people who usually watch Disney films. Their films, which are popular or even being the favorite of the children, are in reality does not convey a proper heading of them. They can make generalization of what is good or bad based on the film which can be misleading. Nonetheless, parents typically do not really notice about it since they assert that Disney films are safe and indeed intended for children. This presumption makes Disney film, in this case is *Mulan* becomes the potential recklessness of its delicate viewers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Mulan* contains some stereotypes related to gender and culture. These indication can be confirmed from the film analysis based on Jager and Maier (2009). On the findings, there are at least some important points to be stressed from Disney film *Mulan*.

The lexicalization of saying a girl rather than a woman is also significant in implying how females are seen and treated in the film. Subsequently, the four songs that are sung by the characters in the film also show the general perception related to women and also men. This is considerably important in showing the tendency to stereotype of the film.

In entailing these all things with the impact of the film, it can be stated that Mulan somehow conveys the deviation of its viewer to subconsciously permit the stereotypes related to women and culture. This occurrence becomes more disturbing when Disney film is mostly being the favorite of the young ages as its viewers. Parents also

typically neglect this issue as they did not realize how much the impact of this tendency in constructing the troublesome compensation that the children will experience in dealing with real life.

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