



The Gender Evolution In The Sequels Of Cinderella: A Study In Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The film *Cinderella* is one of the most beloved fairy tales, captivating children across all age groups and cultures. This study examines the evolution of the female protagonist, Cinderella, in the context of gender identity and roles. It is mainly focusing on sequels produced by Walt Disney. Although, the extensive research has been done on the stereotypical portrayal of Cinderella and its various adaptations but, there is a notable gap in comparative analyses that track the character's development of Cinderella over the time period 1950-2007.

The method of research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This research utilizes politeness theory and conversation analysis to investigate three key sequels: "Cinderella," "Cinderella: Dreams Come True", and "Cinderella: A Twist in Time". The research findings reveal an important transformation in Cinderella's character, showing a progression from traditional, submissive roles to a self-determined, empowered, and independent individual. Cinderella challenges stereotypes and inspires viewers to reconsider their own beliefs about gender. This shift not only enriches the narrative but, also reflects and contributes to broader societal changes in attitudes towards gender equality and empowerment.

Keywords: Cinderella, Sequels, CDA, Politeness, Gender, Evolution

Introduction

Fairy tales play a significant role as sources of information and entertainment for children of various age groups. Between the ages of 2 and 12, during this critical phase of cognitive growth, children are more receptive to external influences and adept at absorbing information than adults (Lenneberg, 1967). This period, commonly referred to as the Critical Period Hypothesis. It allows children to encounter a diverse range of informational sources—such as television, smart phones, YouTube, and interactions with friends and family (Hart & Risley, 1995).

The extensive exposure to various media increases the likelihood that children will accept information without critically assessing its accuracy or underlying meanings. It is essential for parents, educators, and caregivers to carefully consider the quality and appropriateness of the content presented to children. The messages communicated through these channels can significantly shape children's perceptions of the world, influencing their understanding of social roles, cultural norms, and values (Zipes, 2006). Therefore, guiding

children's media consumption is vital to ensuring they engage with content that promotes healthy development and fosters critical thinking skills.

In this context, Disney animated films stand out as some of the most popular choices among children promoting interest in their impact on young audiences. These animated films often reflect societal values and occasionally present themes that starkly differ from reality. Traditional films like *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty* center on marrying a prince, symbolizing the end of struggles and the pathway to happiness. Furthermore, these early films typically emphasize physical beauty and traditional feminine qualities, such as obedience, kindness, and gentleness.

Over the years, however, there has been a notable evolution in the portrayal of female characters within the Disney film industry. The Modern films such as *Brave*, *Moana*, *Encanto*, and *Frozen* present powerful female protagonists. They are filled with confidence, assertiveness, and self-reliance. This transition in storytelling not only reflects changing societal values but also offers children more diverse and positive role models. Building on the discussion of character evolution in Disney films, the current research aims to analyze *Cinderella's* sequels to illustrate how the beloved character has developed over time.

This sequel revisits the classic tale and explores themes of personal growth, empowerment, and resilience in a modern context. By examining *Cinderella's* journey, this research will demonstrate how her character evolves from a passive figure to one who actively shapes her destiny. This transformation reflects a broader trend in children's media, where female protagonists are portrayed as multi-dimensional characters with agency. As children engage with such narratives, they are likely to be positively influenced by the portrayal of a heroine who exemplifies determination, independence, and strength.

In examining the evolution of *Cinderella's* character through the sequels, this research aims to underscore the significance of narrative changes over time while contributing meaningfully to discussions about the role of media in shaping perceptions of gender—particularly through the lens of beloved characters like *Cinderella*. The outcomes of this analysis will provide insights into how Disney films can both reflect and influence societal attitudes, ultimately fostering a nuanced understanding of gender roles in contemporary narratives.

Literature Review

Fairy Tales have been long served for conveying societal norms and gender roles. The classic films have reinforced gender norms. In many traditional fairy tales, female protagonists are portrayed as objects of desire or rewards for the male hero's actions. These portrayals often encourage young audiences to internalize the belief that a woman's primary goal is to marry and secure a man's approval (Lieberman, 1972). Feminist critiques of fairy tales have highlighted the restrictive nature of these gender roles. Marcia Lieberman (1972) notes that the passivity and submissiveness of female characters in classic tales send a clear message that women are expected to prioritize love, beauty, and domesticity above all else. In contrast, male characters are depicted as adventurous and decisive, reinforcing a gender dynamic that privileges men's agency while limiting women's roles to that of passive bystanders.

The extensive research has been conducted on the Narratives of traditional *Cinderella*. For instance, Kay Stone's *Things Walt Disney Never Told Us* (1975) critiques Disney's portrayal of women in fairy tales like *Cinderella*. She is portrayed as submissive, indirect passive and focused on beauty, romance, and domesticity. She argues that these films reinforce gender stereotypes, limiting female agency and empowerment by reducing women's roles to waiting for rescue and defining their worth through marriage.

Another research *Cinderella's Transformation: The Rewriting of Gender in Fairy Tales* (2001) has been conducted on the transformation of *Cinderella* by Janice Schroeder and Jack Zipes, the authors explore how *Cinderella* and other fairy tales have been rewritten over time to reflect shifting societal views on gender roles. Though, this is a literary analysis on the versions of *Cinderella* as in *Charles Perrault's Cinderella*

(1697), It represents traditional gender roles, portraying *Cinderella* as submissive and reliant on external help (e.g., the fairy godmother and the prince) to change her circumstances. In contrast to this version, Grimm's brothers *Aschenputtel* (1812) .the Grimm Brothers' tale includes darker themes, and *Cinderella* is shown as more resourceful and hardworking. However, the underlying gender dynamics remain the same, focusing on her virtue, domesticity, and eventual rescue through marriage.

In Disney's *Cinderella* (1950)- Zipes and Schroeder critique this version for perpetuating patriarchal ideals. Disney's *Cinderella* is portrayed as beautiful, submissive, and patient, awaiting rescue by the prince. Her role is largely passive, reinforcing traditional gender norms prevalent during the mid-20th century. Contemporary Retellings explore modern adaptations of *Cinderella* that rewrite the character to be more empowered and self-sufficient. These versions challenge traditional gender roles by portraying *Cinderella* as assertive, independent, and actively shaping her own destiny, reflecting more feminist and progressive values.

This research has been conducted over the versions of Cinderella produced by different authors However; no such research has been conducted on the same character in the same production over a period of time. The current research is likely to focus on the Cinderella's sequels produced by the same Walt Disney over a period of time. The old version of Cinderella was criticized by most of the researchers as it is having focused on submissive women and influenced negatively on the audience all over the world especially small girls and boys and . So, Walt Disney tried to improve the character of Cinderella in the sequels and transformed the indirect, passive Cinderella into empowered, curious, confident and self reliant version of Cinderella. The main aim of the research is to analyze the language change over the period of time of that main character Cinderella. How politeness used in conversation combined with power balances? How the gender roles can condition dominance and subordination? How language can show power imbalances and empowerment? The researcher tries to answer the questions in the language analysis.

Methodology

This research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the language and discourse surrounding Cinderella's character in three films: *Cinderella* (1950), *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True* (2002), and *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time* (2007). CDA is a method used to analyze the relationship between language, power, and ideology, with a specific focus on how discourse reflects and reinforces societal norms (Fairclough, 1992).

The study utilizes two primary tools of CDA: politeness theory and conversation analysis. Politeness theory examines how individuals use language to manage social relationships and maintain face, while conversation analysis focuses on the structure and flow of dialogue. Together, these tools facilitate an in-depth examination of how Cinderella's character evolves over time, particularly concerning her ability to assert herself and challenge traditional gender roles. Extracts have been selected from the film sequels based on conversations that show the more interaction of female protagonists in the dialogues. Furthermore the analysis and discussion is given below.

Analysis of Cinderella Sequels Using Critical Discourse Analysis

This analysis utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tools, specifically politeness theory and conversational analysis, to examine the dialogues in the Cinderella films, including the original *Cinderella*(1950), "*Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*" (2002), and "*Cinderella III: A Twist in Time*" (2007). By comparing the language used across these films, this analysis highlights how gender roles, dominance, and power dynamics are conveyed through dialogue.

In the original *Cinderella* the use of politeness strategies distinctly illustrates traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Cinderella's language reflects her submissive position within her household, exemplified by her interactions with her stepmother and stepsisters. Dialogues such as, "I'll do whatever you say," emphasize her role as a compliant servant in her own home. She has fewer dialogues in a conversation with stepmother and step sisters. She uses the politeness strategies of formal greetings “ Good morning Crezella,

Anastasia” to be friendly and polite. But, in return she was ordered and mistreated by not getting any reply back and her sisters as well as stepmother. Lady Teramine, stepmother employs negative politeness strategies, using formal address and imperatives such as, "Clean this up," to assert her control over Cinderella. This dynamic starkly reflects societal norms where women are positioned in subordinate roles, reinforcing the belief that their primary purpose lies in serving others. In one instance, lady Teramine was scolding her for not doing chores. In return she was defending her blame by saying "She is doing works". The defending attitude displays subordination and give domination to the later one.. Step sisters and step mothers were successful in showing authority over Cinderella using the bald on strategy.

In contrast, In *Cinderella II, Dreams come True*, the dialogues reveal Cinderella's ongoing struggle to navigate her new role as a princess. The politeness strategies employed throughout this film further illustrate the challenges she faces. Dialogues like, "I just want to prove myself," highlight her desire to gain approval while conforming to royal expectations.

Prudence's use of formal language and commands reinforces her authority in the royal court, evident in lines such as, "That's not how we do things." This creates a hierarchical dynamic where Cinderella is reminded of her status and duties, perpetuating traditional views on femininity and subservience. In some instances like-

Could I just wear my own dresses?

Why can't we open the curtains?

Wouldn't it be nice if people could sit wherever they want?

These dialogues utilize modal verbs shows that Cinderella is using positive politeness strategy to maintain harmony within relation and her individuality too. She expresses her desire within the constraint of her family. Cinderella's statement, "He loves me because I am me," employs positive politeness, showcasing her desire for acceptance based on her true self. This assertion reflects her growing self-identity and challenges societal norms about worth and appearance.

Additionally, her remark, "I have been trying to obey someone else's rules about who I should be and how I should be dressed," utilizes negative politeness. This acknowledges the pressure of external expectations while expressing her discomfort with conformity.

Overall, these dialogues highlight Cinderella's transformation from subservience to empowerment, emphasizing her personal journey towards self-acceptance and autonomy. Through these strategies, she articulates a rejection of imposed identities, reinforcing her individuality and agency.

In *Cinderella III, Twist in Time* Lady Teramine's dialogues showcases a more manipulative use of politeness, demonstrating dominance over Cinderella and Anastasia. For instance, when she states, "You must remember your place," it illustrates her attempt to control their actions while appearing to offer guidance. This reflects the societal power held by older women, using traditional female roles to manipulate and restrict the younger generation.

Anastasia's transformation from submissive to assertive language is noteworthy. Lines such as, "I want to be more than what my mother expects of me," signify her growing awareness and desire for self-empowerment, challenging the expectations imposed upon her by her mother.

Conversational analysis of key dialogues in the original "Cinderella" reveals pronounced power dynamics. Lady Tremaine's interruptions when Cinderella speaks underline her control. For example, when Cinderella suggests, "Can I try on the slipper?" her stepmother interjects, "You will do as I say," reinforcing her authority. The power struggle is clear, where Cinderella's inability to assert herself contrasts starkly with Lady Tremaine's commanding presence. While Cinderella remains loyal and dutiful, her dialogues depict a clear victimization theme, encapsulating the struggle young women face in the pursuit of independence and happiness.

Cinderella's dialogues in "Cinderella II" predominantly feature positive politeness strategies aimed at maintaining harmony. For instance, when she says to Prince Charming, "I want to make you proud," it signifies her prioritization of his feelings over her aspirations, highlighting her internal conflict between individual desire and societal expectations.

Prudence represents a dominant force, frequently cutting Cinderella off or undermining her suggestions, such as in the scene where she dismissively states, "Leave the planning to me." This conversational dynamic showcases a clear assertion of power and authority, reinforcing traditional gender roles where women compete for dominance within a constrained environment.

In "Cinderella III," the dialogues undergo a significant evolution. Lady Teramine utilizes conversational strategies focused on manipulation, often framing her commands as concern, as seen when she says to Anastasia, "You must do this for our family's honor." This rhetoric serves to bind Anastasia to her mother's ambitions, employing societal pressure as a tool of control.

The contrast with Anastasia's language evolution is stark; her shift to assertive speech illustrates a breaking away from oppression. Lines such as, "I choose my own path now," demonstrate her defiance against her mother, highlighting a theme of self-empowerment and the rejection of traditional gender roles. Comparing dialogues across the three films reveals critical differences in how language conveys gender roles, dominance, and power. In *Cinderella*(1950), the language reinforces traditional roles, with Cinderella portrayed as passive and her stepmother as dominant. In *Cinderella II*, Cinderella's interactions reflect her struggle to adapt to royal life while facing pressures of compliance.

On the contrary, *Cinderella III* presents a more dynamic portrayal of female empowerment. The assertive dialogues of Anastasia signify a shift towards challenging traditional structures. This sequel captures a nuanced exploration of gender roles, revealing how language can be leveraged for empowerment, setting the stage for a more progressive representation of female characters.

Conclusion:

This study has explored the evolution of Cinderella's character across the sequels "Cinderella II: Dreams Come True" and "Cinderella III: A Twist in Time" through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). By applying politeness theory and conversation analysis, it highlights how language reflects shifting gender roles and power dynamics from the original 1950 film to its modern adaptations.

Cinderella's transition from a passive, submissive figure to an empowered, self-determined individual illustrates a significant progression in narrative portrayal. This transformation reflects evolving societal attitudes towards gender equality, providing young audiences with more diverse and positive female role models. Moreover, the dialogues analyzed demonstrate Cinderella's increasing assertiveness and her rejection of imposed identities, challenging traditional norms and inspiring viewers to embrace their individuality.

The findings of this research contribute meaningfully to discussions about the role of media in shaping perceptions of gender and identity, underlining the importance of evolving narratives in children's media. As Cinderella's character evolves, she not only becomes a symbol of empowerment for young girls but also for broader societal change, encouraging future generations to prioritize self-acceptance and resilience over conformity to restrictive gender roles. Thus, the sequels of Cinderella exemplify a crucial shift in storytelling, reflecting and influencing contemporary views on gender, empowerment, and personal agency.

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