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Who saves the day? Challenging children's linguistic biases through exposure to foreign-accented cartoon heroes

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Abstract

Villains are disproportionately voiced with foreign accents in children's media (Lippi-Green, 1997), and previous work has shown that children do indeed associate foreign accents with villains (St. Pierre & Johnson, 2022). Here, we investigate whether short-term exposure to foreign-accented heroes can mitigate this association. First, 7- to 9-year-old children (current n=112) watched a series of cartoon clips featuring either foreign-accented heroes or foreign-accented villains. Then, participants watched new clips in which foreign- and native-accented voice actors each performed both a hero and villain, and selected which character they thought each voice was best suited for. Preliminary results show that children were less likely to associate foreign accents with villains after exposure to foreign-accented heroes (compared to foreign-accented villains). These findings demonstrate how strongly language biases in children's media can impact children's attitudes, and suggest that more mindful programming might help reduce the development of negative social views towards foreign accents.