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# The phonetic construction of good and evil from a whole larynx perspective

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*Nordic Speech Research Forum  
Spring Season 2026 Webinars*

*17th April 2026*

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# What's ahead?

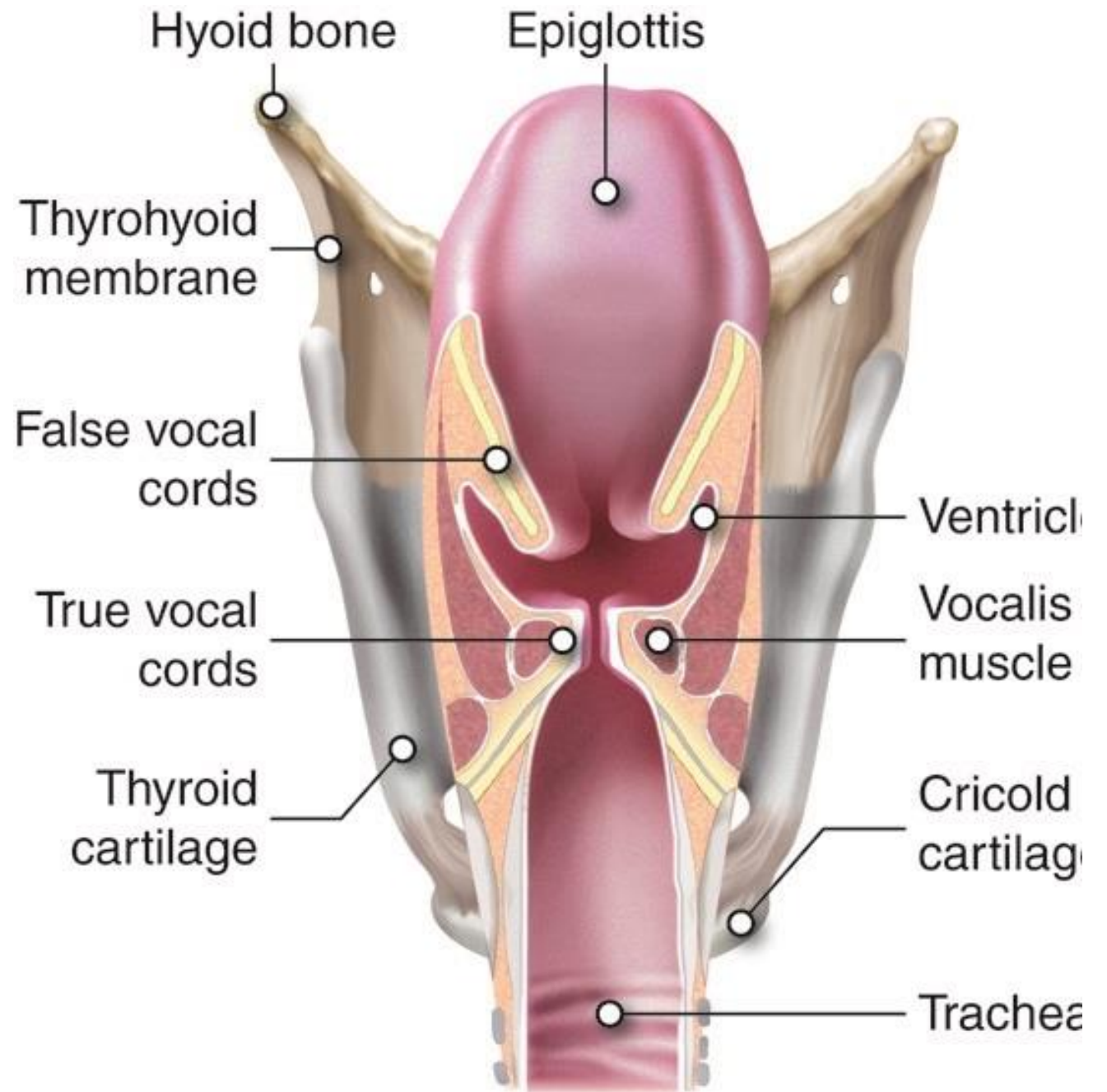
1. Laryngeal Articulator Model
2. Linguistic construction of morality
  1. Disney, video games, and more **accentism**
  2. *The Exorcist, Dungeons and Dragons*, and beyond **phonatory profiling**
3. Looking ahead

# 1. Laryngeal Articulator Model

(Esling et al. 2019)

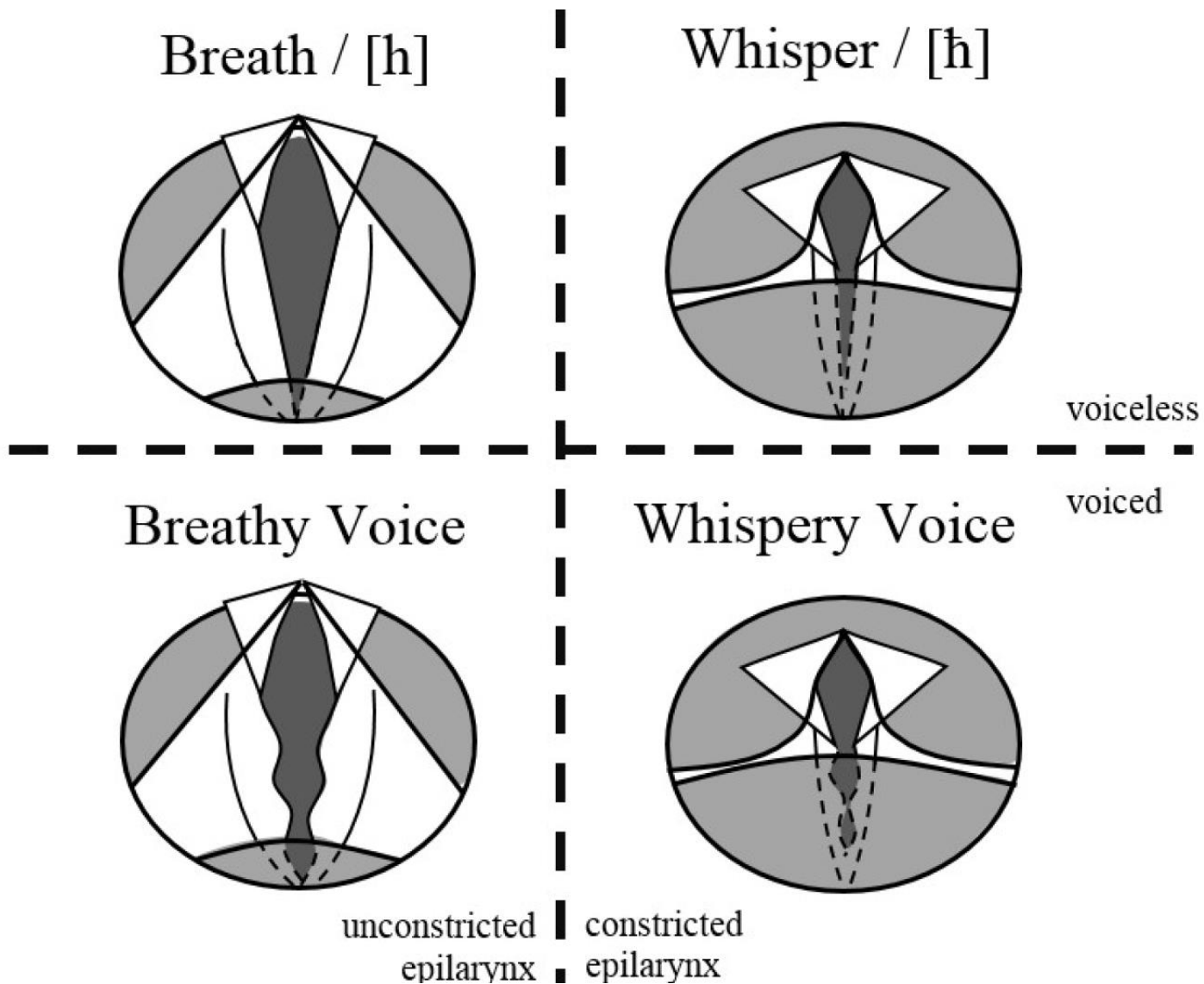
- Lower vocal tract as the laryngeal constrictor
- Epilarynx as a tube within a tube
- Main movements
  - constricting and laxing
  - larynx height

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# 1. Laryngeal Articulator Model

(Esling et al. 2019)



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## 2. Linguistic construction of morality

Take a few seconds:

Do villains and heroes speak in any particular ways?

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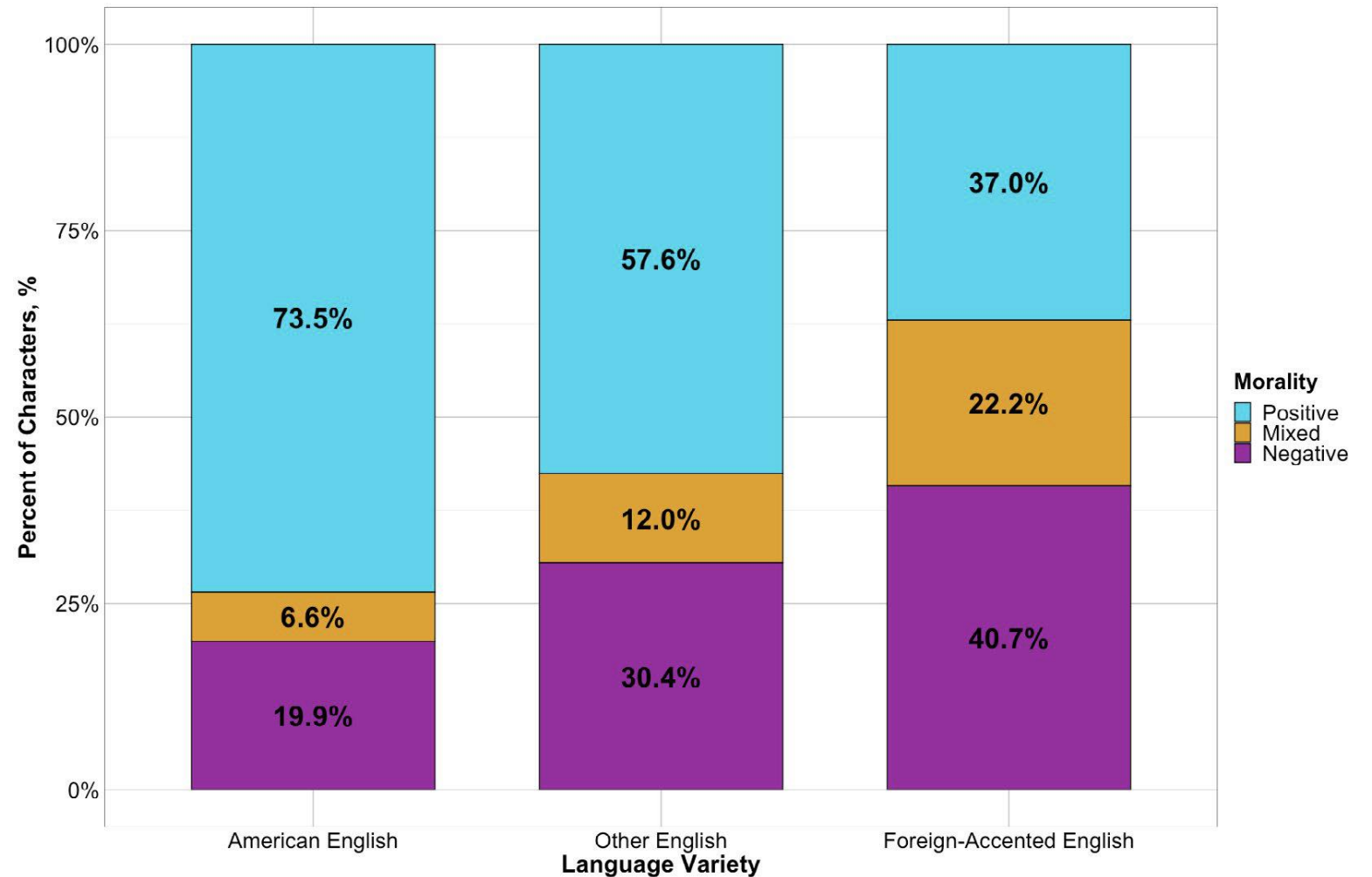
# The voicesketeers



## 2.1. Accentism Disney, video games, and more

Lippi-Green's seminal work  
(1997, 2012)

our adaptation of her  
results →



## 2.1. Accentism

# Disney, video games, and more

- Has this accentism in Disney changed since 2012?

- Lippi-Green's Disney study
  - Standard American English
  - Peripheral American English = non-Standard American varieties; natively spoken
  - Standard British English = RP
  - Other English = natively spoken but not American (and not RP)
  - Foreign-Accented English = non-natively spoken Englishes

# 2.1. Accentism

## Disney, video games, and more

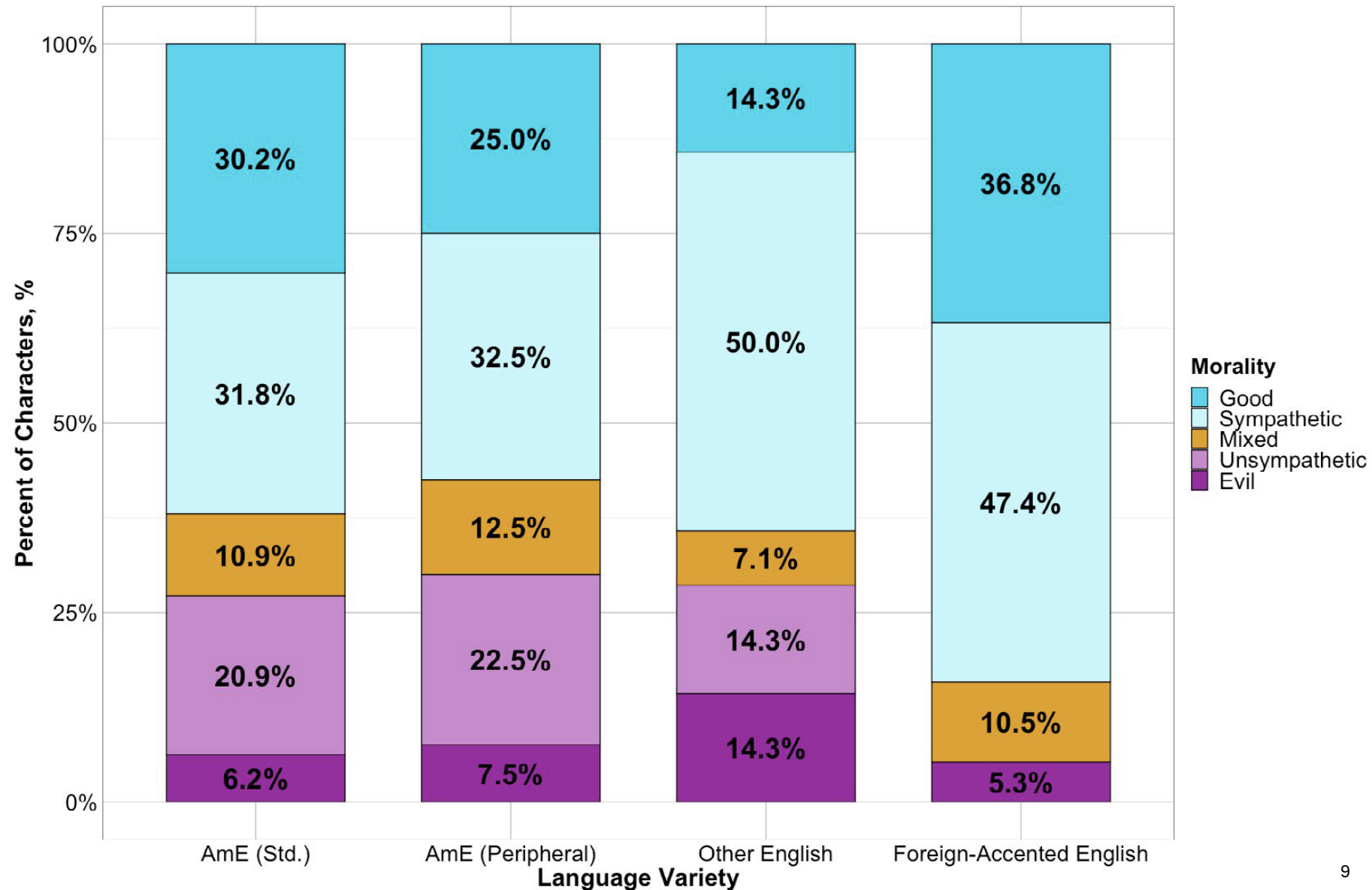
Kjeldgaard-Christiansen et al. (2024)

- Our Disney films:
  - *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)
  - *Zootopia* (2016)
  - *Tangled* (2010)
  - *Moana* (2016)
  - *Winnie the Pooh* (2011)
  - *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018)
  - *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012)
  - *Frozen II* (2019)
  - *Frozen* (2013)
  - *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021)
  - *Big Hero 6* (2014)
  - *Encanto* (2021)

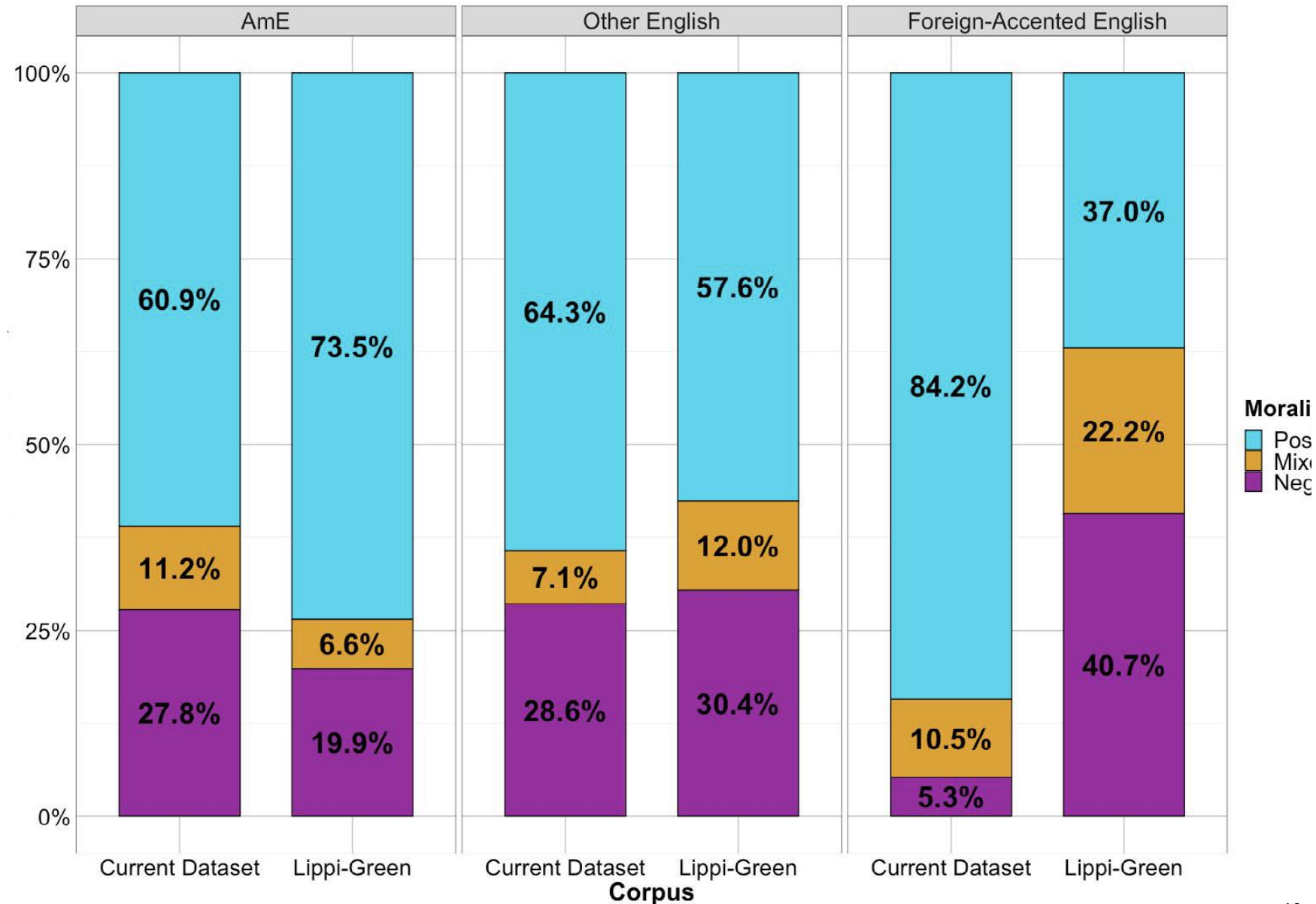
### Characters

- 273
- Similar proportions of morality groupings
  - Positive
  - Mixed
  - Negative
- We also added
  - Sympathetic
  - unsympathetic

## 2.1. Accentism in recent Disney animated films?



## 2.1. Accentism in Disney animated films



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# Stretch!



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## 2.2. Phonatory profiling

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## 2.2. Phonatory profiling

### *The Exorcist, Dungeons and Dragons, and beyond*

- Which phonatory profiles, if any, are used to construct morality?

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## 2.2. Phonatory profiling

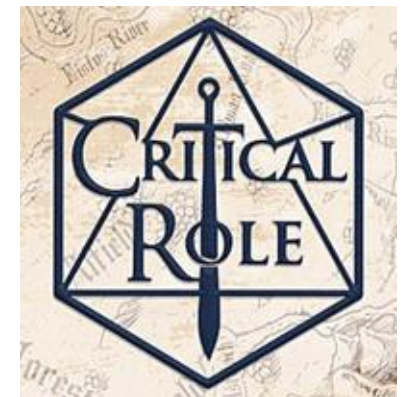
### *The Exorcist, Dungeons and Dragons, and beyond*

- Do villains speak with specific vocal profiles? Do heroes?
- Do listeners perceive different vocal profiles as differently moral (e.g. more villainous/evil)?
- Do we see similarities across types of characters / tropes?
- Are these also similar across cultures?
- Why should villains and heroes speak differently?

## 2.2. Phonatory profiling in *Dungeons and Dragons*

Boyd & Hejná (2025)

- *Critical Role*: Mighty Nein
- 19 characters (Matthew Mercer)
  - ~10 hours of speech (excluding that of other characters)
- Morality ~ alignment
- Alignment: “allies”, “foes”
  - stances of friendliness and hostility/evil
- Other variables considered
  - emotion, gender, race/creature type



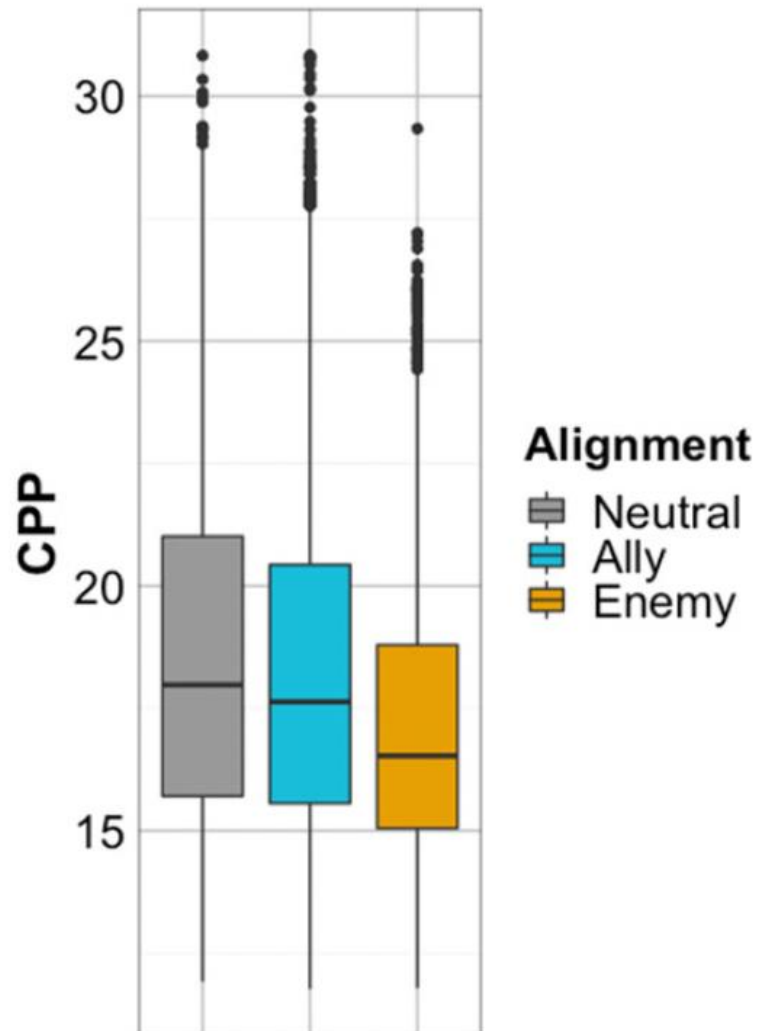
## 2.2. Phonatory profiling in *Dungeons and Dragons*

Mixed methods approach

- Step 1: audiovisual analysis of all data to create vocal profiles (MH); character profiles (ZB)
- Step 2: acoustic analysis of 2-8 mins of speech per character
  - F0, CPP, H1\*-H2\*, H1\*-A1\*, HNR35
- Step 3: qualitative analyses (auditory + acoustic)
  - 4 characters change alignment
  - 1 character is a hive-mind of four morally differentiated characters
  - many characters adopt less habitual stances (emotionally neutral vs non-neutral contexts)
  - meta-comments



## 2.2. Phonatory profiling *in Dungeons and Dragons*

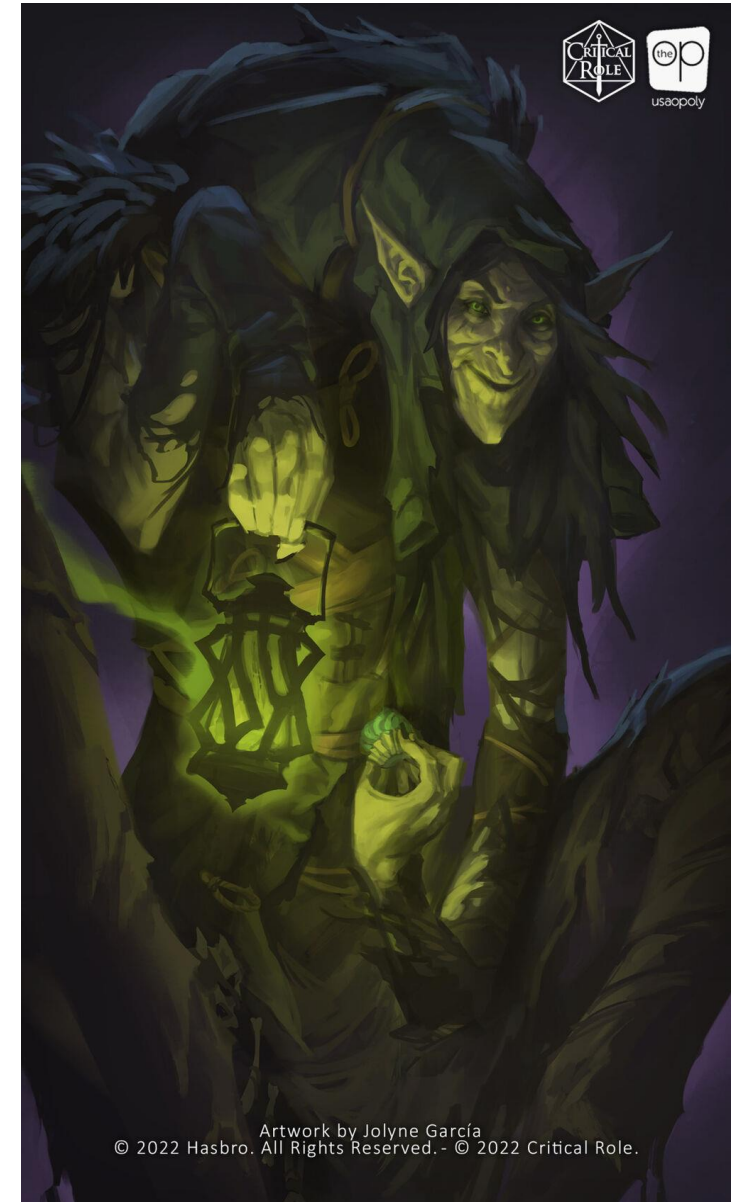


**Figure 7.** Overall CPP for all characters based on Alignment.

## 2.2. Phonatory profiling in *Dungeons and Dragons*

Isharnai's usual evilness

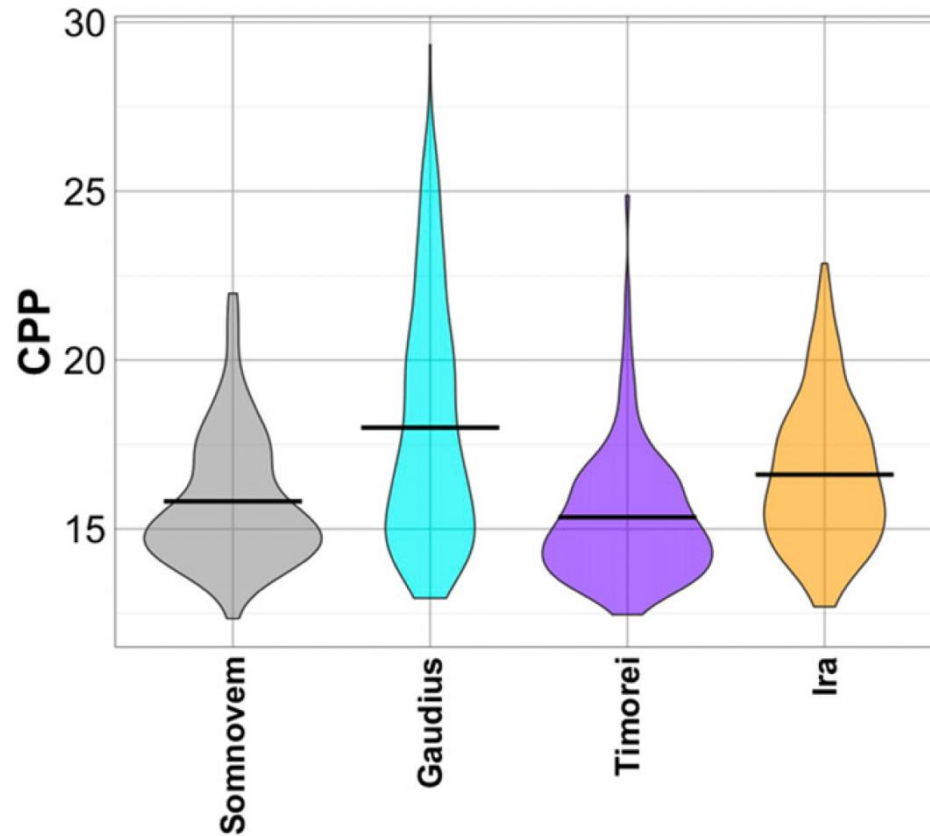
Isharnai consumes a magical cupcake and  
becomes more friendly



## 2.2. Phonatory profiling in *Dungeons and Dragons*

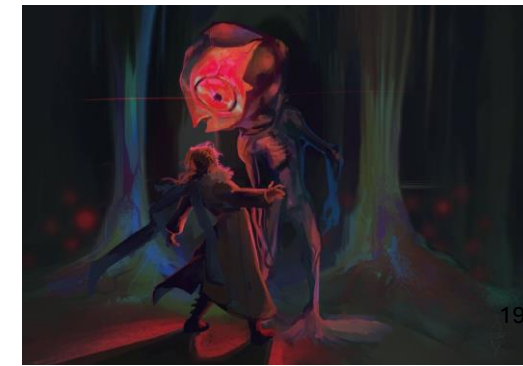


[https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Somnovem?file=Aether\\_Crux\\_-\\_Clara.jpg](https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Somnovem?file=Aether_Crux_-_Clara.jpg)



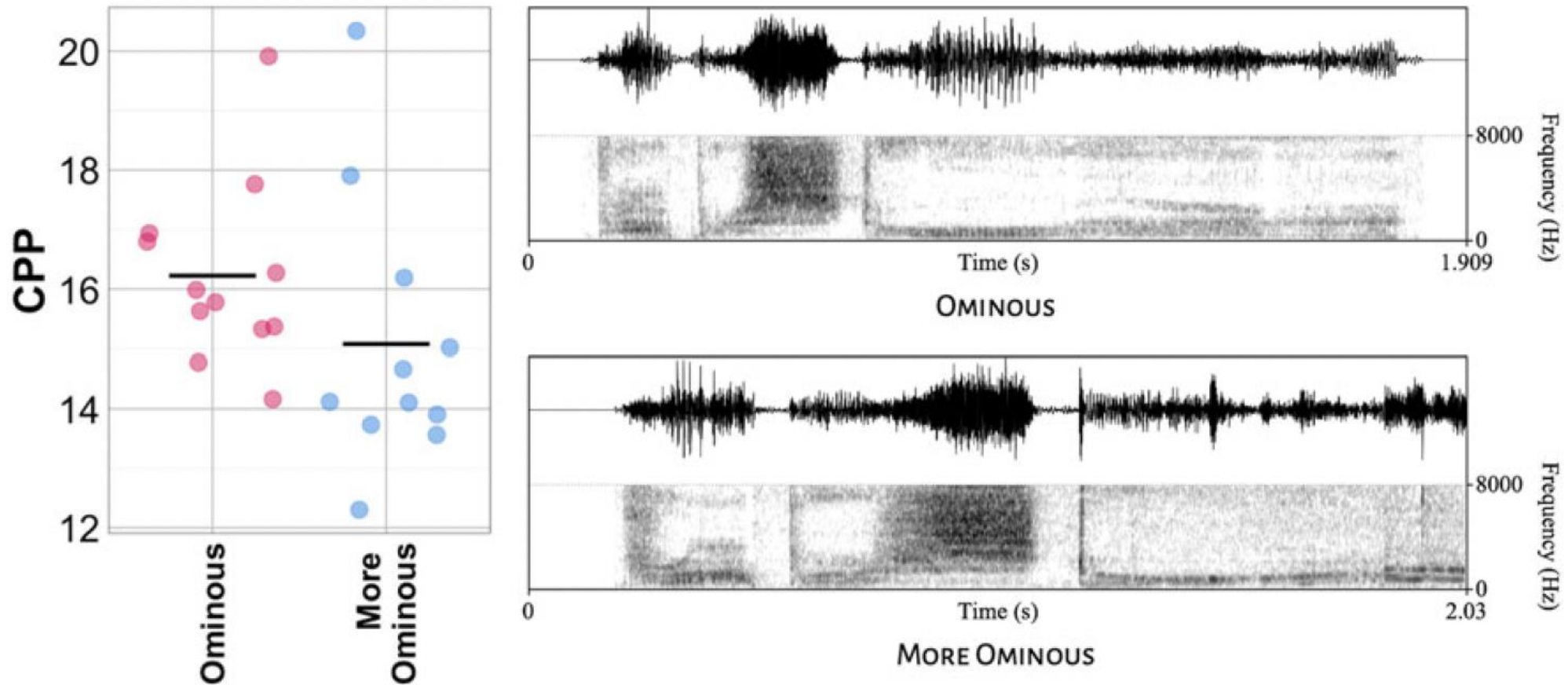
[https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Timorei?file=Timorei\\_-\\_AllentheLost.jpg](https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Timorei?file=Timorei_-_AllentheLost.jpg)

[https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Ira\\_\(Somnovem\)](https://criticalrole.fandom.com/wiki/Ira_(Somnovem))



**Figure 12.** CPP by individual 'minds' of the 'Somnovem hive-mind' (line indicates mean value).

## 2.2. Phonatory profiling in *Dungeons and Dragons*





**Stretch!**



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## 2. Looking ahead

- **How are different types of good/evil constructed vocally?**
  - Do we see ageism and/or gendering?
- **Are there cross-cultural differences?**
- **Is the construction of evil ultimately the construction of otherness?**
  - dragons and dead corpses
  - same phonatory profiles despite divergent morality
  - evaluations of truly pathological voices vs media portrayals of overtly evil voices
- **What is the best methodological practice for this type of research?**
  - acoustics compromised significantly

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# Thank you

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Aarhus University



# References

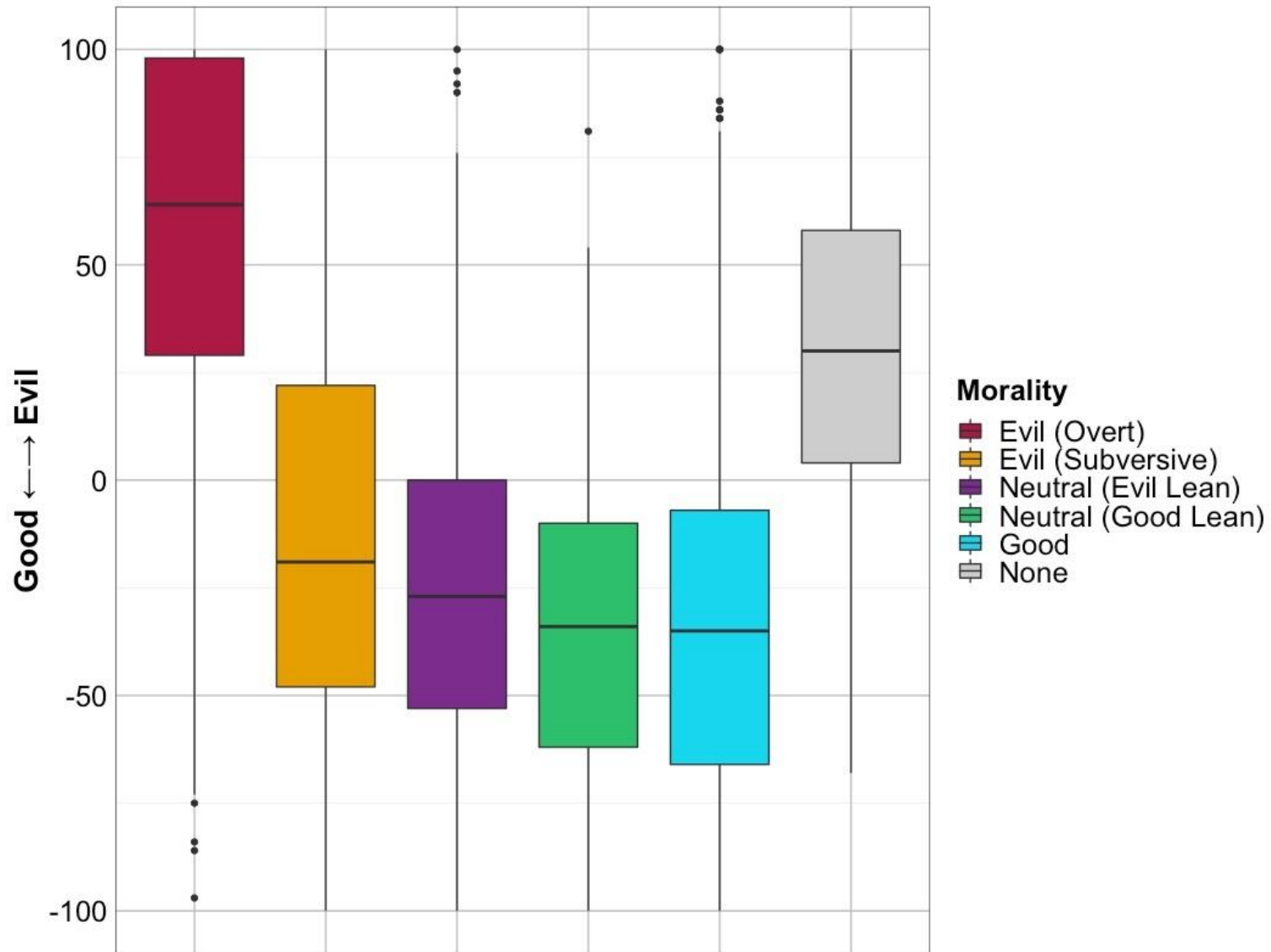
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30 seconds

# EXTRA

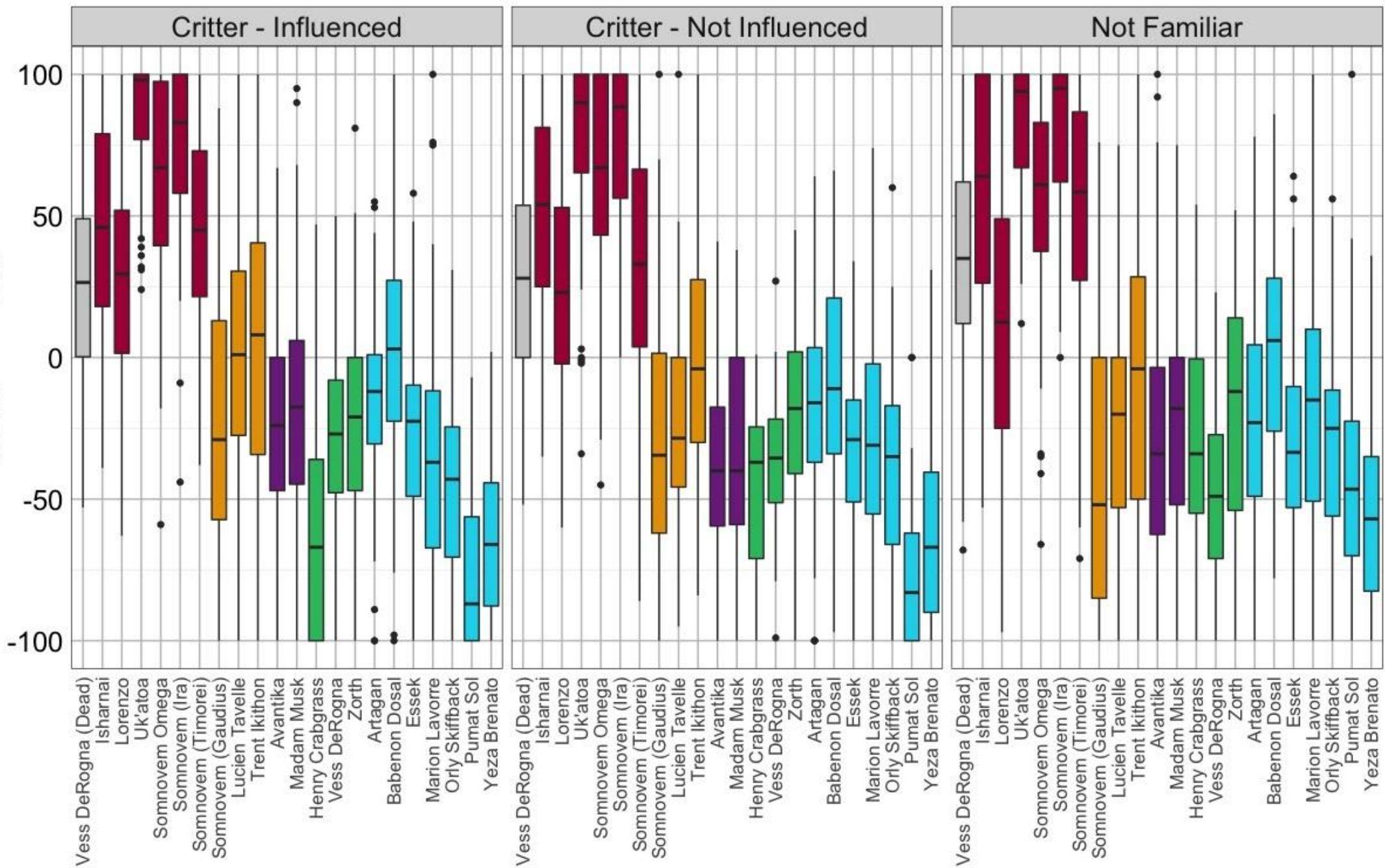
- Is this all also reflected in people's perceptions?
- Do we see differences in vocal cues to morality depending on
  - familiarity with *Critical Role* and Mathew Mercer?
  - one's cultural and linguistic background?
- 250 participants
  - 138 (55%) L1 speakers of English from different English-speaking countries
  - 98 (39%), European non-L1 English speakers
  - 8 (3%), non-L1 English speakers from the Americas
  - 6 (2%), non-L1 English speakers from Asia (including Middle East)



# EXTRA

Kjeldgaard-Christiansen  
et al. (2025)

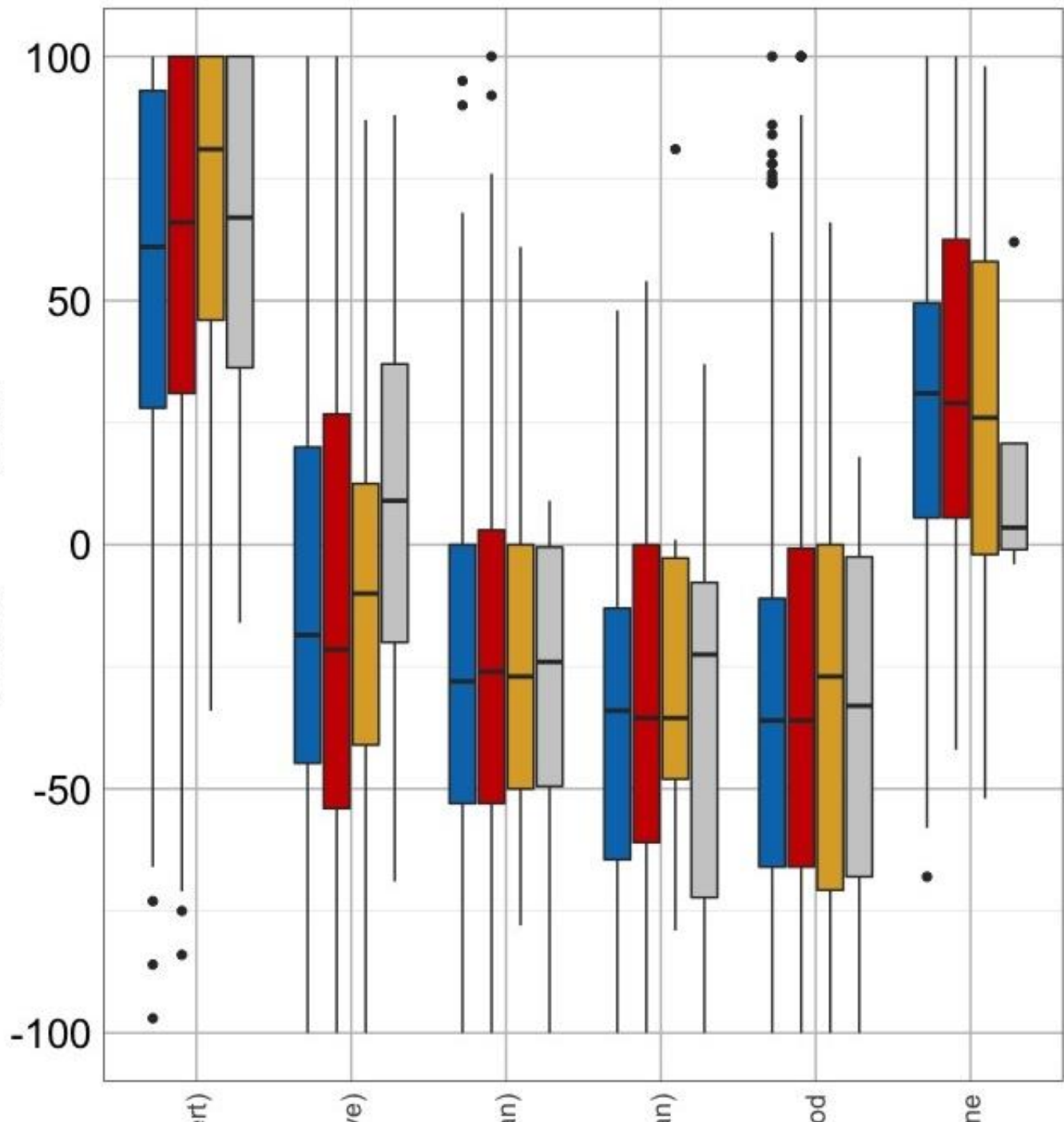
Good ← → Evil



**Morality**

- Evil (Overt)
- Evil (Subversive)
- Neutral (Evil)
- Neutral (Good)
- Good
- None

Good ← → Evil



### Region/Language

- Native English
- Non-English Europe
- Non-English Americas
- Non-English Asia (Including the Middle East)