

**Representations of Non-American “Foreigners” in American Children’s Television**

Meryl Alper

University of Southern California

Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

Presented at ICA 2011

Boston, MA

*Top Student Paper*

*Children, Adolescents, and the Media Division*

### **Abstract**

This study expands upon the discussion of diversity in American children's television to include depictions of non-American foreigners. This project evaluated 53 episodes of the children's television programs highest rated among American children ages 6-11 during the 2004-2005 season on broadcast and cable television. Quantitatively, there were 21 foreign characters among the 282 characters identified in the sample. Fourteen percent of foreign characters were parodies of famous people. In terms of personality traits, foreign characters were more *bad*, *aggressive*, and *uncultured* than non-foreign characters. While 84% of non-foreign characters were in the opening credits or were primary characters, only 52% of foreign characters had leading roles. Qualitatively, two distinct themes emerge: parodies of Central and Eastern Europeans and the negative framing of foreign children and exchange students. The results suggest that American children's television is not preparing children for citizenship in a global society by presenting narrow and negative depictions of foreigners.

*Keywords:* television characters, foreigners, children's television, American television

### Representations of Non-American Foreigners in American Children's Television

Mass media have the potential to shape a more informed citizenry, and in turn, to strengthen local, national, and global communities. Article 17 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes “the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). An implicit message in Article 17 is that children deserve information about the world that is accurate, and this goal requires the depictions of foreigners in the media to be fair. This study examines representations of non-American foreigners in American children's television, with the understanding that construction of children's views towards foreigners takes place in a specific context. In my review of the relevant literature, I will discuss the immediacy of transnational issues in the lives of children, the implications of misrepresenting foreigners in children's media, and the need for research that examines both the potential disproportion and inconsistency in these portrayals.

Anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia are unfortunately transhistorical and universal, with battles currently being waged over the recent laws concerning Mexican immigrants in Arizona, and internationally, intolerance of Roma and Muslim populations in Europe, and rising violence against foreigners in South Africa. Despite growing concerns, there is no unified global commitment to a legal system that protects the rights of all migrants. These policies and debates greatly affect communities, families, and especially children, who are all too often forgotten in the conversation and caught in the conflict of border politics (Banet-Weiser, 2003; Chin, 2003; Prout & James, 1997). The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 30 million foreign-born people live in the U.S., and 25% of those are under 18 years old (United States

Census Bureau, 2008). The recent legislative clashes over the Dream Act and the public debate surrounding “anchor babies” in U.S. reveal the complicated spheres of existence at the intersection of citizenship, geopolitics, and childhood.

The way in which media portray deviations from ideals of local and global citizenship bears significance for both American and international populations (Appadurai, 1996; Rubin & Melnick, 2007), and particularly impact children. Popular characters from children's television programs, such as *Teletubbies*' Tinky Winky or *Sesame Street*'s Bert, frequently serve as icons onto which politics are projected (Hendershot, 2000; Jenkins, 2006; Poster, 2003). For example, both authorized and unauthorized images of Dora the Explorer were appropriated in 2010 for a variety of political purposes (Tareen, 2010). The U.S. Census Bureau's “Children Count Too” campaign employed Dora's official image across multiple media platforms to remind parents to include their young children on Census forms. Meanwhile, both sides of the immigration reform debate adopted the Internet meme of a doctored mug shot of Dora for use as a political and cultural mascot. Whether intentional or not, children's television characters, particularly those with a global presence, can become points of negotiation surrounding political issues.

Within American children's media, there is a striking quantity and quality imbalance in representation of foreign characters. Passing, limited glimpses into the lives of foreigners produce a sort of “cultural tourism.” A growing body of research addresses this disparity in domestic and international adult-oriented media, in both live-action (e.g., Brayton, 2008; Brook, 1999; Cañas, 2008; Kinney, 2001; Low & Smith, 2007; Shim, 1998; Tierney, 2006;) and animation (e.g., Dobson, 2006; Gray, 2007; Lustyik & Smith, 2009; Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2009). However, research has only begun to address this discrepancy in domestic and international media produced for a child audience. Some work has focused on qualitatively assessing

nationality and ethnicity in G-rated animated films (e.g., Doucet, 2005; Faherty, 2001; Giroux, 1995; Lacroix, 2004; Lippi-Green, 1997; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2009; Martín-Rodríguez, 2000; Pimentel & Velásquez, 2009). In regards to children's television, studies on diverse ethnic representations in children's television programs have focused primarily on American minority groups and not on foreign-born populations (e.g., Calvert, Stolkin, & Lee, 1997; Geiogamah & Pavel, 1993; Graves, 1993, 1996; Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Greenberg & Mastro, 2008; Weigel & Howes, 1982).

In terms of representations of foreigners, the richest and most varied portrayals emerge in educational programming, mostly designed for the preschool audience (e.g., Cole, Labin, & del Rocio Galarza, 2008; Hayes, 2008; Moran, 2006; Search for Common Ground, 2004; Shochat, 2003; Wartella & Knell, 2004). The issue of depicting foreigners in children's television is complicated though by portrayals which are not treated as part of any educational curriculum, but rather, are in the subtext of dialogue and voice-over casting (Palmer, Smith, & Strawser, 1993). There is a growing body of research into the content of these representations on domestic and international children's programming (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2007; Brougère, 2004; Conway, 2005; Dobroy & Gidney, 1998; Hendershot, 1999; Katsuno & Maret, 2004; Kinder, 1999; Kraidy, 2002; Lemish, 2007; Lemish & Bloch, 2004; Lemish & Tidhar, 2001; Rashkin, 2000; Schlote & Otremba, 2010; Serrato, 2009). However, much of this research analyzes single programs, as opposed to taking a snapshot of the broader children's television landscape at a given point in time.

Children's television is a global phenomenon that cannot be studied in isolation from economic factors. The medium with which American children age 6-11 overwhelmingly spend the most time is television (Nielsen, 2009; Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). American-

produced cartoons are widely distributed all over the world and viewed in tandem with other internationally imported programming, regional television programs, and local co-productions. One study estimates that 85% of all children's programming sold in the global television market is exported from the U.S. (Bielby & Harrington, 2008). Global and local can co-exist in a dialectic "push and pull" process (Lemish, 2007). This hybridity enables a global/local toggle or transnational imaginary (Wilson & Dissanayake, 1996). However, the current global children's media market is still shaped by a handful of powerful conglomerates, leaving little room for alternative storytelling (Lustiyk, 2010). If a U.S. model of television dominates the children's media market, then it is increasingly important to study the way that American exports portray the countries into which they are imported.

Compared to their international counterparts, American children are potentially growing up significantly less aware of global issues. Surveys conducted by *National Geographic* in 2002 and 2006 found that young Americans age 18-24 have a poor grasp of geography knowledge and skills (National Geographic Society, 2006). Seventy-five percent think that English is the most commonly spoken native language in the world, whereas Mandarin Chinese is most prevalent. Eighty-nine percent do not regularly correspond with anyone outside of the U.S, though this statistic may not account for the rise in global social networks such as Facebook. Many young Americans are potentially struggling with understanding all the ways in which the U.S. connects with people and places around the world. There is a pressing need for educators and media content creators to think globally.

American children's television however might be reinforcing this narrow worldview by misrepresenting foreigners or only broadcasting stereotypical portrayals. A few theories suggest how children might adapt the impressions of foreigners that they see on television into cognitive

schema. Cultivation theory suggests that the constant portrayal or exclusion of foreigners in children's television over time might create, reinforce, or modify children's attitudes and knowledge (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, & Shanahan, 2002). Heavy television viewers may have a skewed perspective of foreigners. For American children potentially living in an environment with limited or cursory contact with non-Americans, stereotyped media portrayals could increase the probability of children having a skewed reality (Kitano, 1980). The creation of stereotypical schema about foreigners during childhood might also negatively impact children who are potentially forming their attitudes towards and knowledge about foreigners (Anderson, 1983; Berry & Asamen, 2000). Over time, schemas may affect a child's worldview of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about those from another country.

One way in which schema may develop is through the development of the "unmarked" normative form. Understanding the construction of the "other" is essential to deconstructing the mapping of national identity on bodies (Hall, 1974). The linguistic theory of "unmarkedness" (Jakobson, 1963, 1990; Trubetzkoy, 1939/1969) posits that within a text, any element may consist of a "marked" and "unmarked" form. The unmarked category is the norm, while the marked category is a deviation from the norm. There are politically and culturally hegemonic issues at play based on who or what or where is the marked form. Though unmarkedness usually applies to semiotic systems, expanding the definition of "text" to include film and television subsumes aural and visual texts as well. American children's television may be promoting normative unmarked American characters and stereotyping marked foreign characters. Repeated viewings may distort the audience's perception of non-American characters, or self-perception if the audience is non-American.

Media effects research suggests that children connect to television characters on an interpersonal level. Children largely relate to television characters based on personality traits (Hoffner 1996; Reeves & Greenberg, 1977; Williams, 1981). There is a growing body of empirical media effects research specifically on how children understand the marking of a children's television character as foreign (e.g. Lemish, Drotner, Liebes, Maigret, & Stald, 1998; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Gorn, Goldberg, & Kanungo, 1976; Graves, 1999; Hemelryk, 2005; Pingree & Hawkins, 1981). Younger children equate the unfamiliar look of a foreigner with negative personality qualities, as they are more dependent on external appearance in evaluating TV characters than older children (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Reeves, 1979; Wartella & Alexander, 1978). This is particularly significant considering the heuristic processing model of cultivation effects and the potential relationship between viewing frequency, cognitive accessibility of social perceptions, and formation of attitudes and beliefs (Shrum, 2009). What psychological effects research there is suggests that minimal television exposure can produce short-term attitude change toward televised children of other national and ethnic groups.

Exposure to foreign peoples via television is particularly significant in regards to how children form stereotypes about foreigners. Children's knowledge about other countries and their peoples greatly expands during middle childhood (Jahoda, 1962; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Piaget & Weil, 1951). Though children have relatively poor knowledge of another nation's geography by age 11, they are at that age able to describe behavioral and psychological traits; physical features, appearance, and clothing; language; and religious and political beliefs (Barrett & Farroni, 1996; Jahoda, 1962; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Piaget & Weil, 1951). Before children of middle childhood age even have a strong grasp of knowledge about foreign people, they have the ability to develop very strong negative or positive feelings about certain national or

ethnic groups (Barrett & Short, 1992; Johnson, Middleton, & Tajfel, 1970). If producers neglect to populate their fictional worlds with foreigners or represent these characters in negative ways, then children may be misinformed about foreigners just when they are the most receptive.

The aforementioned literature demonstrates the perils of promoting a limited global perspective in American children's television. Children can potentially cultivate negative schema as a lens by which they see their real world. Based on the growing foreign-born population in the U.S., potential rises in worldwide xenophobia, an economic model of American children's media that increasingly relies on global distribution, and children's capacity for learning from TV characters, we need to examine the worldview that American children's television promotes.

The previous research on representations of foreigners in children's television indicates that foreign characters can be narrowcast or shown in stereotypical ways. The purpose of this study was to fill a void in the literature in order to be more specific about what marks these characters as foreign and the purposes that these markings serve in a children's television program. This research took both a quantitative and qualitative content analytic approach. The design was intended to provide a critical cultural analysis while also drawing from the strength of quantitative concepts and the operationalization of variables that might be valuable for a child's schematic construction of foreigners. Given the small nature of the sample, the author was solely responsible for all content analytic and character portrayal analysis noted below. The author may have also been unintentionally biased due to being of U.S. origin. The questions this study proposed to answer was the following:

*RQ1:* How frequently do non-American foreigners appear in American children's television?

*RQ2:* In what context are non-American foreigners depicted in American children's television?

## **Method**

### **Materials**

This study selected data based on Nielsen ratings for both the broadcast and cable network television viewership of children age 6-11 years old from the 2003-2004 U.S. television season (Nielsen Company, 2004). The 15 highest rated unique broadcast programs and 15 highest rated unique cable programs with the median viewer-age closest to age 6-11 were selected, and two episodes of each show were chosen for analysis. However, during the sampling, a number of programs ceased to air. Due to these conditions, the sample consisted of 27 unique TV programs and 53 unique episodes. The sample was taken between December 1, 2004 and April 9, 2005 (see Table 1, for programs and channels).

### **Procedure**

All of the sampled programs were content analyzed using a two-part coding sheet. The first part of the coding sheet addressed RQ1 and analyzed each speaking character that appeared in the opening credit sequence, was integral to the plot of the screenplay/sketch, moved the plot along, or was important to the essence of that screenplay. The second part of the coding sheet addressed RQ2 and analyzed the themes and settings of each screenplay within each half-hour episode. A screenplay was considered a self-contained set of scripted action with a beginning and resolution. For example, two 11-minute screenplays within a 22-minute episode were analyzed separately. In a sketch comedy show, each sketch was treated as an individual screenplay. After foreign characters were identified, the screenplays in which they appeared were rescreened for descriptive critical analysis, with particular attention paid to recurring themes and character traits.

**Character foreignness.** “Foreignness” was defined within the study in terms of nationality and how this quality is depicted and marked in non-American characters in American children’s television programming. Lambert and Klineberg (1967) coded descriptive statements that children from around the world gave to describe how people of other nationalities are foreign. This study adapted those categorizations into a list of 13 statements that indicated different ways in which a character can be marked as foreign (e.g., “marked as an outsider,” “singled-out because they act differently,” “is a minority character,” “speaks a language other than English”). For the purposes of the study, “marked” was operationally defined as having an identifying trait that differentiates someone as different from others. The author coded these traits on a 5-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree* = -2, *disagree* = -1, *neutral* = 0, *agree* = 1, *strongly agree* = 2). A list of operational definitions accompanied the coding and clarified the statements (e.g., “A minority character is a character that is marked as being a member of a group that is not the majority”). If the character had an accent, then an additional section was used to describe that character’s particular accent (e.g., American regional, British, French).

Foreignness was identified by a factor analysis and comprised of four items: (a) *Is the character an American?* (b) *Does this character speak a language other than English?* (c) *Is the character a minority character?* and (d) *Is the character an immigrant?* The four-item scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .80.

**Character personality traits.** Lambert and Klineberg (1967) also asked children to give descriptive personality trait statements about peoples of countries other than their own. They organized these responses into dyads such as *good* and *bad*, *happy* and *unhappy*. This study employed 10 dyads to code the characters’ personality traits and descriptions on a 5-point Likert scale (*not at all strong* = -2, *very strong* = 2).

**Character role types.** Children Now (2004) categorized how frequently minority characters appeared in prime time television programming and the strength of each character's contribution to the plot of within an episode. This study employs a variation of the Children Now role type schema for opening credits, primary, secondary, and tertiary characters accordingly that takes into account screening a few episodes of a show, rather than an entire season. Opening credits characters appeared in the opening credits sequence of the episode and were integral to the plot of the screenplay. Primary characters did not appear in the opening credits sequence of the episode but were integral to the plot of the screenplay. Secondary characters did not appear in the opening credits sequence of the episode but contributed to moving the plot in the screenplay, though they did not play an integral role. Tertiary characters spoke but did not move the plot in the screenplay.

**Differentness and non-American cultural themes and lessons in screenplay.** For the purposes of this study, "differentness" measured the extent to which one is marked as different. "Non-American culture" was operationally defined as culture not originally of U.S origin. Four items identified these themes and lessons: (a) *Differentness was a major theme of this screenplay* (b) *Differentness was part of the moral lesson of this screenplay* (c) *Non-American culture was a major theme of this screenplay*, and (d) *Non-American culture was part of the lesson of this screenplay*. The author coded these statements per screenplay on a 5-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree* = -2, *disagree* = -1, *neutral* = 0, *agree* = 1, *strongly agree* = 2).

**Foreign setting in screenplay.** In order to determine the settings of episodes, the study coded for five different types of locations, and to what extent each location was the primary setting for each screenplay. It was also determined if the screenplay involved characters taking a journey to another nation or region outside of their country. The study coded for five following

types of locations: (a) *The United States of America* (b) *a non-American region or nation* (c) *a non-descript American English speaking location* (d) *a non-descript non-American English speaking location* and (e) *a fantasy location*. The first four of these categories are mutually exclusive. The fifth category, a fantasy location, was defined as a location unlike one in which people would live in real life. It may apply to the categories of non-descript American English speaking location or non-descript non-American English speaking location.

### Results

To address RQ1, quantitative analysis showed that the sample contained 21 foreign characters out of the 282 total coded characters in the surveyed programs (7% foreign). Approximately five percent of all characters (14/282) were parodies of famous people. For all characters that were parodies of famous people, 21% were foreign (3/14). Fourteen percent of foreign characters were parodies of famous people.

The most common foreign accent was Central/Eastern European (5.3%) followed by Latin/Central American (4.6%) and British (3.5%). In terms of personality traits, foreign characters were less *good* ( $M = -.04$ ) than non-foreign characters ( $M = .36$ ). Foreign characters were also significantly less *peaceful* ( $M = -.37$ ) than non-foreign characters ( $M = .13$ ). Foreign characters were also less *cultured* ( $M = .26$ ) than non-foreign characters ( $M = .03$ ).

There was also a significant difference in the types of roles played by foreign and non-foreign characters. Eighty four percent of non-foreign characters were in the opening credits or were primary characters ( $n = 198$ ), compared to 52% of foreign characters ( $n = 11$ ). Additionally, 16% of non-foreign characters were in secondary or tertiary roles ( $n = 38$ ), as opposed to 47.6% of non-foreign characters ( $n = 10$ ).

To address RQ2, quantitative analysis revealed that differentness was a major theme in 18.1% of the screenplays, and a part of the moral lesson in 8.4% of the screenplays. Non-American culture was a major theme in 13.2% of the screenplays/sketches. Non-American culture was also incorporated into a moral lesson in 2.4% of sampled screenplays.

Foreign locations were the primary setting of 8.4% of the surveyed sketches and screenplays. Non-American regions or nations were the primary setting in 4.8% of the sample and non-descript non-American English speaking locations were the primary setting of 3.6% of the sample. Non-foreign locations were more frequently the primary location of the screenplays and sketches. The United States of America was the primary location in 42.2% of the sample. A non-descript American English speaking location was the primary setting of 44.6% of the sample. A fantasy location was the primary setting of 13.2% of the sample. Seventeen percent of the screenplays involved characters taking a journey to another nation or region outside of their country. Those screenplays in which characters traveled outside of their nation or region were not necessarily also coded as having non-American culture as a major theme. Characters may have traveled to a foreign nation or region in a fantasy or non-descript world in which America does not specifically exist. Thus, discussion of non-American culture would not be applicable to the screenplay.

An additional qualitative line of inquiry revealed certain characterizations of foreigners in the sampled programs that merit further discussion. First, the representation of “Arnold Schwarzenegger-like” foreigners across multiple programs and networks and Bavarian foreigners in an episode of *Pokémon* are examples of distinct parodies of Central and Eastern Europeans. Secondly, the representation of foreign children in an episode of *All That* and the comic relief of foreign exchange student Bolbi Stroganofsky in multiple episodes of *Jimmy*

*Neutron: Boy Genius* highlight the negative stereotypes that American children's television may perpetuate.

**Parodies of Central and Eastern Europeans.** Across multiple programs and channels, a pattern concerning the representation of Central and Eastern Europeans emerged. All of the foreign characters that were parodies of famous people had a Central or Eastern European accent and were parodies of the characters the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger has portrayed in such films as *Terminator* and *Eraser*. In an episode of *The Proud Family* entitled "Ain't Nothin Like the Real Thingy, Baby," Mr. Proud and his daughter Penny visit a television studio and encounter a security guard who will not let them pass. The guard has extraordinary strength, a gap in his front teeth, and his eyes are perpetually squinting. "Do you have a pass?" he asks Mr. Proud, accenting the "ahhh" sound in "pass." After winning a game of tic tac toe against the security guard, Penny Proud taunts him by saying "Hasta la vista!" As a car pulls up to his security kiosk, he tells Penny, "I'll be back!" recalling the famous line from *Terminator 2*.

Another foreign character that bears the physical markings of Arnold Schwarzenegger and his cinematic personas is the recurring character of Jorgen von Strangle, the fairy inspector, in Nickelodeon's *Fairly Odd Parents*. As his name suggests, he is a highly militaristic character, like many of Schwarzenegger's roles, sporting a buzz cut hairstyle, army fatigues, and an ammunition belt barely fitting around his large muscles. Jorgen von Strangle's accent also possesses very Arnold-like inflections. "Your puny slide show does not amuse me," he tells the fairies Cosmo and Wanda, as they attempt to evade his inspection.

How do we explain the frequent occurrence of representations of Arnold Schwarzenegger-like foreigners, in terms of physicality and caricatures of the foreigners he has portrayed in film? One line of reasoning may be that the mannerisms, catch phrases, and accent

are highly comedic; that hearing the line "I'll be back!" strikes a familiar and funny chord with those familiar with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Depending on the age, children might pick up on the parody, perhaps never having seen any of Schwarzenegger's movies but being familiar with his likeness. Another explanation for this pattern may be that it is easier to use a commonly known set of markings suggesting foreignness as portrayed by Arnold Schwarzenegger than it is to develop a novel set of characteristics.

Arnold Schwarzenegger the person and Arnold Schwarzenegger as film characters is thus transmuted into Arnold Schwarzenegger the caricature. The representations of the security guard and Jorgen Von Strangle reflect a resistance within the conventions of American children's television against dealing with foreigners as individual people with distinct backgrounds and stories but rather as iconic figures. Schwarzenegger himself has become a brand for a sort of American dream (Boyle, 2010). He becomes the placeholder for a Central European foreigner in a world of children's television that may be stuck within the Cold War era in which the industry matured and developed its conventions.

The characterization of Arnold Schwarzenegger-like foreigners was based less on the common national markings of someone of Austrian origin and more on the markings made famous by one Austrian immigrant. The following *Pokémon* example of a distinct portrayal of foreigners relies upon stereotypical national markings, specifically Bavarian, which is particularly of note because said representations take place in a fictional world devoid of non-fictional geographic locations.

One of the most popular children's television franchises in recent years has been *Pokémon*. The show was originally created in Japan and then distributed to an American audience in a translated form. *Pokémon* bears certain national markings, as it is drawn in the

Japanese animation “anime” style or cartoon “manga” style. While most of the human characters in *Pokémon* are drawn in anime style (with characteristically wide eyes) certain characters such as Brock are drawn with slanted eyes and marked as recognizably Asian to a Western audience (Iwabuchi, 2004). However, the setting for the program is a non-descript American English speaking Pokémon World. The show is not explicitly set in Japan, or any real geographic location, thus enabling its’ global distribution and localized reception.

While the characters in *Pokémon* are immersed in a fantasy world devoid of explicit nationality, it is interesting to note when certain characters bear distinct national markings. In an episode entitled “Delcatty Got Your Tongue,” aspiring Pokémon master Ash and his friends encounter a doctor who can heal their sick Pokémon. Their rivals, Team Rocket, follow the kids to the doctor, and arrive disguised as Bavarians. Team Rocket consists of a woman, Jessie, a man, James, and a cat, Meowth.

The team disguises both their appearance and their intentions by pretending to be foreigners. Jesse and James (a reference to American outlaw Jesse James) physically attempt to masquerade in lederhosen and other Bavarian garb, as well as wear sunglasses to cover their eyes. Jesse’s long magenta hair is placed into two long pigtails. James wears a green cap with a feather to match his green lederhosen. Jesse and James speak in vaguely Central or Eastern European accents, heavily stressing words like “ya” as opposed to “yes.”

What particularly misleads Ash and his friends is that the usually conniving Jesse and James arrive at the doctor’s office politely asking for help. They innocently claim that their cat was injured in a “bizarre yodeling accident” involving falling off of his clogs. Pretending to be Bavarian in this sense is as much a costume through the way one looks and speaks, but also a performance through the way one acts. The episode marks Jesse and James as Bavarians by

having them be harmless, in addition to wearing regional clothing and speaking in a heavy accent. By adopting a foreign persona, the villains also adopt more innocent and peaceful personas.

Marked and unmarked categories of nationality and race in anime may explain Jesse and James' Bavarian markings in the "Delcatty Got Your Tongue" episode. Japanese creators and viewers of anime may accept characters drawn in anime style as Japanese by default, or even "culturally odorless" (Iwabuchi, 2004; Katsuno & Maret, 2004; Thorn, 2004). In cases when non-Japanese characters appear in a show in which the majority of human characters are Japanese, those characters will be differentiated from the rest of the characters with stereotyped racial markers, as Jesse and James are. Though American audiences may not consider characters drawn in anime style as Japanese, they will see the explicit demarkation of non-Japanese nationality and race (Yano, 2004). This is certainly the case in the depiction of the sole Black character on anime show *Shaman King*. The character is named Chocolove, presumably named for the color of his skin. Besides the stereotypical African traits described above, Choco also has oversized lips and wears large pants in a sort of African tribal pattern.

The marking of foreignness in anime is generally relative. In anime stories set in China or Europe, as opposed to Japan, Chinese or European characters are usually drawn exactly as Japanese characters would, but are marked as "other" through names, clothing, customs, architecture, and other props (Thorn, 2004). The way characters are marked as foreign and understood as foreign depend on a number of variables, including the nationality of the audience and the setting of the anime show. In instances where an episode of *Pokémon* aired in the United States invokes distinctly non-American culture, those representations stand out against the backdrop of a fantasy world that American audiences might not consider Japanese by default.

**Negative portrayals of foreign children.** One of the current recurring sketches on Nickelodeon's *All That* was "Wake Up! With Stacey Chit." The general scenario of the sketch is that the character Stacey Chit is the host of a talk show. When she becomes bored or upset with her guests, she ejects them from their chair with the push of a button. In a season eleven episode, Stacey interviews a filmmaker named Maureen. She tells Stacey, "I've traveled all around the world filming foreign children, so that American children can see what life is like for kids in other countries."

The premise is particularly interesting in light of this study – a character in an American children's television show explicitly speaking of representing foreign children in media designed to educate children, all done in the style of a parody. Various aspects of the sketch merit a deeper look, including the depiction of Maureen the filmmaker, the representation of the foreign children in a short clip Maureen screens, and Stacey's reaction to Maureen's presentation.

Maureen is not played by one of the child actors on the show, but rather a comedic adult actress. However, the role of Maureen is played in a serious way, or rather, in a way that makes Maureen appear as if she takes herself very seriously. She is dressed in all black, her face is tight, and she sits in her chair gripping the arms of her seat. She is oblivious to the fact that Stacey makes fun of her throughout the sketch. Maureen is an outsider, unaware of the joke.

Maureen shows a clip from her documentary on the show. "Did you know," she asks Stacey, "that children from Yursavania make their own music by taking sticks and hitting them against trees?" The clip Maureen has brought shows two sullen children blankly looking into the camera. The title "Yursavania" is beneath them, as they are supposed to be representative of their nation. The children do not talk. Rather, one boy lifelessly beats a stick against a tree trunk in a steady rhythm and one girl in messy pigtails steps in place and flaps her arms, a rudimentary

form of dance. This is supposed to be their distinctly national version of music. It is unclear whether the representation of this boy and girl is purposely bland in order to poke fun at educational films, or is a representation of foreigners that is purposely bland in order to poke fun at foreigners. The child audience might not understand the intended (or unintended) satire.

The character of Stacey may provide a guide for how the audience is supposed to react to Maureen. Stacey is initially eager to learn about Maureen's "cool" job as a filmmaker. Quickly though, Stacey's attitude turns from interest to disgust once Maureen starts talking about the type of films she makes. While Maureen describes how "very few American children know that kids from Gorgenzuelia make their own cheeses by grinding cow udders," Stacey starts to loudly practice the trombone. As Maureen tries to enlighten Stacey about foreign children, Stacey becomes increasingly hostile, rolling her eyes and responding to Maureen in a bored, almost sassy tone. If Stacey's reaction is supposed to represent the reaction of the child audience, then she models a negative reaction to both learning about foreigners and to educational children's media. The negative reaction may be in response to Maureen's naïve idealism, which comes into direct conflict with the sketch's hip satirical attitude. The sketch treats the concept of teaching children about foreigners through media as unappealing and unworthy of attention.

Maureen's parting words, after she has shown her clip of the Yursavian children, are "Isn't it interesting to see how children from other countries are so different, and yet at the same time —" and it is at that moment that Stacey, looking at the camera and speaking to the home viewers, proclaims "So boring!" and presses a button to eject Maureen from her chair. Is Stacey literally finishing the sentence, saying that foreign children are literally "so boring," or that Maureen is the boring one? The ending succinctly captures the sketch's ambiguous tone towards foreigners and the representation of foreigners in educational media. It also symbolizes the

opposition of kid versus adult as a point of contestation, a recurring theme in many Nickelodeon programs (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Hendershot, 2004). It also mocks the clichéd line about how foreigners can be “so different, and yet so similar,” but does not clarify if it is mocking the line’s message or the fact that it is a prevalent theme in educational children’s media. The “Stacey Chit” sketch provides poor modeling for non-foreigners’ treatment of foreigners, as children watching the sketch are supposed to identify with Stacey, the kid, and not Maureen, the adult. Via parody, the sketch purposefully misrepresents the representation of foreigners.

Another show that both negatively portrays foreigners and shows non-foreign children treating foreign children poorly is *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*. The character of Bolbi Stroganofsky is first introduced to Nickelodeon’s *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* in the screenplay “Jimmy for President.” The episode singles out Bolbi for misunderstanding English, the spelling of his name, his country of origin, and his national traditions.

A foreign exchange student from Baktheristan (a country ending in “-istan” code for a former Soviet republic), Bolbi is childlike and eager. “I pretty much like you!” he immediately announces in front of the class after the school principal has brought him in. When the teacher, Mrs. Fowl, tells Bolbi how she was just telling the class about running for school president, or rather, right as she says the word “run,” Bolbi exclaims “I run! I fast!” and he proceeds to run around the room. Mrs. Fowl corrects Bolbi’s English, and he agrees to run, this time for president, even though he has only been at the school for mere minutes. In the next scene, Mrs. Fowl runs down a list of candidates she has written on the chalkboard, the last being Bolbi, whose name, in various misspelled forms, is crossed out until Mrs. Fowl has mastered it on the fourth try. She even refers to Bolbi as “the boy with the funny name.” Bolbi’s last name is also clearly a reference to the Russian dish *beef stroganoff*.

At a school assembly, the school principal also singles out Bolbi's foreignness. He belittles Bolbi by calling him "the little boy from fairy tale land" and patting him on the head. In Bolbi's campaign speech, his main campaign promise is to "slap dance every day, like home," a reference to a simplistic dance involving alternating slap and claps from his country of origin. As in the "Stacey Chit" sketch, ritualistic dance is a marking of foreignness. Bolbi serves as a contrast to the other American child candidates, who promise a guacamole bar in the school cafeteria and school uniforms inspired by the latest fashions. Slightly cross-eyed, sporting a red bow tie, green argyle sweater vest, and cow licked hair, Bolbi is not supposed to be cool. This is key to the irony of Bolbi's eventual winning of the school presidency after all the other candidates are disqualified for cheating. The episode constructs a version of ideal citizenship and a vivid insider/outsider dynamic.

In a screenplay entitled "The Science Fair Affair," Bolbi again provides the comic relief. He only enters the screenplay within its last five minutes, exclaiming in grammatically incorrect English "Wait! Bolbi make science too!" when the awards for the school science fair are about to be announced. While even the non-"boy genius" children have come up with projects such as a Mood CD Player and a machine that turns old sweat socks into sweaters, Bolbi demonstrates his Instant Mud Hut Maker. His is a machine that literally creates rudimentary housing by creating mud bricks. His machine malfunctions however, spraying everyone with greenish mud.

Bolbi conforms to the stereotype of "weird foreign exchange student," popularized by countless media portrayals, including the character Fez on the TV show *That 70s Show* and the Long Duk Dong character from the film *Sixteen Candles*, whose scenes are introduced by a not-so-subtle gong sound. In a world of children on *Jimmy Neutron*, Bolbi is singled out for being extra naïve on account of his foreignness.

### Discussion

There were few instances of foreign representation in the sample, and when foreigners were portrayed, the quality and depth of those depictions were lacking. The foreign characters in the study were consistently less central to the plot than non-foreign characters. With little airtime, foreign characters were not given adequate time to become fully developed characters. Their development was largely restricted to stereotypical portrayals with their foreignness stressed as a cause for comic relief. Foreigners had more negative personality traits than non-foreign characters across all categories. Not only were foreign characters underrepresented, they were also misrepresented.

Foreigners had less positive personality traits than non-foreigners across all categories. This is important because it might lead American children to form negative stereotypes about foreigners. When this material is exported, it might also be considered offensive to non-American populations, or lead non-American children to think less of themselves if they identify with the foreign characters. The gap between the amount of leading roles played by foreign and non-foreign characters may also be problematic. Since foreign characters were less central to the sampled programs, they were less essential to plot lines and given less airtime to become fully developed characters.

It is of note that the most frequent foreign accent within the sample was a Central or Eastern European accent. Dobrow and Gidney (1998) found that this type of accent was one of the most common accents within their sample as well. Within the context of post 9/11 American media, no characters in the sample had Middle Eastern accents. While there were no negative portrayals of Middle Eastern characters, there were no positive portrayals either. This absence

might suggest to children that at least in the world of children's television, and perhaps in their everyday lives, that those of Middle Eastern descent do not exist or belong.

There was also a discrepancy between the number of screenplays in which differentness and/or non-American culture were major themes and the number of screenplays in which differentness and/or non-American culture was part of a moral lesson. This suggests that while programs introduce diversity or international themes, they do not necessarily do so for educational purposes. Few of the sampled programs were E/I, so it is logical that they would not necessarily incorporate non-American culture into a lesson.

A significant number of screenplays also provided the opportunity for children to view and potentially model American characters' interaction with foreigners or characters of various non-descript countries. Seventeen percent of the screenplays involved characters taking a journey to another nation or region outside of their country. Even if non-American culture was not part of the moral lesson of the screenplay, children might still learn about values and ideology about interacting with non-Americans from these screenplays.

This study was limited by a number of factors. In terms of design, the research was restricted by the fact that the author was the sole coder of data and there was not another researcher to test the reliability of the coding instrument. Thus the study does not have intercoder reliability and may have unintentional personal bias. The study also placed certain boundaries on the sampled programs in order to construct a definition of children's television for the purposes of this study. The study sampled programs highly rated among 6-11 year olds and with a median age of viewership close to this age range. Most of the sampled programs were animated and aired on either the WB or Nickelodeon. Children age 6-11 may also watch

television intended for much older audiences as well, and this too presents the opportunity to present stereotypical depictions of foreigners that young children may not fully understand.

The study also focused on the content of children's television, not how children react or think about that content. This study does not make any definitive conclusions about the effect of this content on children's perceptions of foreigners. It does however concern the theoretical backgrounds of how children learn through television, how their knowledge of and attitudes towards foreign people develops, and how one may apply these theories to a content analysis.

Further studies on the representations of foreigners in American children's media may explore the way children connect with these representations, the influence of parental mediation of globally diverse content, and global representations in online worlds and video games (e.g., Fisch, 2010). Additional studies may examine the worldview promoted by non-American produced children's television content imported into America (Kunz, 2010). It may also be of note to study at what age children can discern parodies and purposefully over-the-top representations of foreigners. The present study could also be updated and its sample expanded to cover all of the major children's television networks, including the more recent entries of The Hub and Disney XD.

This study suggests that American children's television currently entertains but perhaps at the cost of misinforming children, not just in the US but also around the world, about non-American foreigners. There may be negative repercussions for an outlook on the world beyond US borders that promotes xenophobia. In the future, broadcasters must remedy this latent prejudice and take responsibility for preparing kids of all nationalities to live in globally networked societies.

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Table 1

*Broadcast and Cable Network Television Programs*


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<u>Program</u>	<u>Broadcast</u>
<i>The Batman</i>	WB
<i>Cramp Twins</i>	FOX
<i>Megaman: NT Warrior</i>	WB
<i>Mucha Lucha</i>	WB
<i>Pokémon: Advanced Challenge</i>	WB
<i>The Proud Family</i>	ABC
<i>Shaman King</i>	FOX
<i>Sonic X</i>	FOX
<i>Teen Titans</i>	WB
<i>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</i>	FOX
<i>What's New Scooby Doo?</i>	WB
<i>Xiaolin Showdown</i>	WB
<i>Yu-Gi-Oh</i>	WB

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<u>Program</u>	<u>Cable</u>
<i>All Grown Up</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>All That</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>The Amanda Show</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Chalkzone</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Drake &amp; Josh</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Fairly Odd Parents</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>SpongeBob SquarePants</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Hey Arnold</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Jimmy Neutron</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>My Life as a Teenage Robot</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Lizzie McGuire</i>	Disney Channel
<i>Romeo</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>Rugrats</i>	Nickelodeon
<i>That's So Raven</i>	Disney Channel