Linguistic Profiling in the World of *Exandria*
An examination of the accents of *Critical Role*'s Matt Mercer

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic profiling involves identifying social information through voice and accent, often leading to stereotyping. In video games, accents can help distinguish non-player characters (NPCs) and navigate fictional worlds. In Dungeons & Dragons *(D&D), a tabletop role-playing game, characterisation more so relies on voice and accents due to fewer visual cues, and a Dungeon Master (DM) voices all NPCs. Therefore, it might be expected that linguistic profiling is more prevalent here. This paper investigates whether Matt Mercer, the DM of the D&D web series* Critical Role*, uses linguistic profiling to help his players distinguish between NPC antagonists and allies. In an auditory analysis, I identified the accents of 20 antagonists and allies, predicting that antagonists spoke Standard British English or Foreign-Accented English, while allies spoke Standard American English or Regional British/American English, as supported by previous research. While antagonists tended to be Standard British English speakers, the allies' accents were more varied. Mercer has acknowledged the potential consequences of linguistic profiling in media and aims to minimise its use, and although NPCs align with accent stereotypes, the balanced distribution of accents in the data set suggests that Mercer does not intentionally use 'good' or 'bad' accents to distinguish between allies and antagonists.*

Keywords: linguistic profiling, accents, characterisation, stereotypes, morality, sociolinguistics, Critical Role, Matt Mercer

1. INTRODUCTION

Accents are often associated with stereotypes, allowing people to infer social information through accents alone. Known as linguistic profiling, it can affect people directly and potentially lead to discrimination (Baugh 2016). Some research, however, shows that linguistic profiling is commonly found in media such as animation films and video role-playing games (RPGs). Here, accents index real-life stereotypes as a means of characterising non-player characters (NPCs) to guide players in fictional worlds (Lippi-Green 2012; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023). In the popular tabletop RPG *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), players verbally impersonate their own characters while a Dungeon Master (DM) serves as the storyteller and controls all NPCs. Almost exclusively improvised, D&D relies more heavily on verbal cues, with accents potentially playing a key role in NPC characterisation. Such performative and verbally improvised gameplay can make linguistic choices more spontaneous, potentially revealing the implicit indexical links between accents and social stereotypes. Therefore, how prevalent is linguistic profiling in linguistically constructed game worlds like D&D, where players depend on verbal cues to gather information about the world and its NPCs?

This paper addresses this question by examining whether Matt Mercer, the DM of the popular D&D web series *Critical Role*, relies on accents to help the players distinguish between NPC *antagonists* and *allies*. In an auditory analysis, I identified the accents of 20 NPCs portrayed by Mercer and classified them into six different accent groups. Based on findings from previous research, I predicted that antagonists would speak Standard British English and Foreign-Accented English, while allies would speak Standard American English and with regional accents. The results show a tendency for antagonists to be speakers of Standard British English, but the allies' accents are more evenly distributed. As such, there is no clear correlation between Mercer's use of accents and moral alignment, and, therefore, I argue that accents are primarily used for characterisation rather than to distinguish between allies and antagonists.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON LINGUISTIC PROFILING

2.1. Linguistic Profiling and Accent Attitudes

People are assessed on both physical and auditory cues, but when physical attributes are unavailable, a speaker's accent might become more central in identifying social characteristics (Baugh 2016, 349). A highly common and often subconscious phenomenon, accents can convey social characteristics such as race, regional origin, gender, age, and social class. For this reason, linguistic features become markers that distinguish social groups from each other (Baugh 2016, 351-354). However, this classification also fosters stereotypes; accents trigger the listeners' 'inferences about the speaker as a person, based on the stereotypical characteristics attached to that particular social group' (Sønnesyn 2011, 11-12). For instance, a study demonstrated that simply hearing the word 'hello' enabled many listeners to reliably infer the racial background of speakers with different accents, even without substantial familiarity with those accents (Baugh 2016, 355).

As such, listeners form judgments about speakers based on their accents, viewing them as a representation of personalities which influence how attributes such as intelligence, likability, and credibility are perceived (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 581-582). For example, Coupland & Bishop (2007) asked British informants of different age groups to rate various British English accents on *social attractiveness* and *prestige* (Coupland and Bishop 2007, 76-77). Standard British English (SBE) was rated higher than regional varieties on both variables, although younger generations were more accepting of regional accents than older generations, suggesting that the attitudes were slowly shifting (Coupland and Bishop 2007, 85). Speakers of SBE, traditionally associated with the upper class, were seen as intelligent yet unsympathetic, while regional varieties were seen as the opposite. Consequently, SBE has often been used as the accent of villains in media (Lippi-Green 2012, 122), illustrating the strong correlation between language and stereotypes.

2.2. Linguistic Profiling in Animation and RPGs

Accents are a common characterisation tool in fictional media. Because people expect that fictional story worlds will somewhat resemble reality, it is assumed that the traits of a fictional character correspond to the real-life implications of an accent (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 582). Some studies suggest that this contributes to stereotyping. Examining accents in Disney's animated films, Lippi-Green (2012) argued that much of Disney's early output perpetuated negative stereotypes and taught children to associate certain accents with specific character types (Lippi-Green 2012, 103-104, 111). Analysing 24 films from 1937 to 1994, she found that Standard American English (SAE) speakers were predominantly portrayed as positive characters, while Standard British English (SBE) and foreign-accented English (FAE) speakers were more frequently depicted in negative roles, highlighting a bias in representation (Lippi-Green 2012, 117-119). Analysing more recent Disney films from 1995 to 2009, Sønnesyn (2011) expected that recent calls for more inclusivity would cause Disney to diversify its use of accents (Sønnesyn 2011, 1). Instead, her findings showed the opposite; SAE was increasingly used for both villains and heroes, yet SBE remained more utilised for villains than heroes (Sønnesyn 2011, 78-81, 90). Sønnesyn argued that Disney's heavy use of SAE for all character types both meets and undermines inclusivity efforts. It avoids offending specific groups by limiting the negative portrayal of regional accents, yet its reliance on SAE reinforces the marginalisation of non-standard accents in media (Sønnesyn 2011, 91-92).

This suggests that accents reinforce language attitudes, but studies of video RPGs highlight accents' practical effects in world-building without upholding negative stereotypes. Massive open-world environments require players to navigate complex storylines and conflicting characters. By indexing salient social characteristics, accents guide players in determining the personalities of NPCs using real-life associations as a way to orient themselves in the fictional setting (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 582). For example, Hellström (2019) found that standard accents in two fantasy video RPGs were reserved for characters central to the narrative, while non-standard accents were assigned to characters 'that do not serve any real purpose to the story other than bringing the world to life' (Hellström 2019, 24). Thus, standard accents signal to players when it is crucial to engage with the story, while non-standard accents help create an elaborate world that feels convincing and fleshed out. Analysing accents in the game *Disco Elysium*, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná (2023) argue

that associating the personalities of fictional characters with real-life accent stereotypes actually heightens players' experience of the story world. The game relies on overt stereotypes and recognisable socioeconomic markers that evoke 'imagistic representations of ideas like privilege, class, capital, race, and nationhood' (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 580). As such, lower-class characters speak regional British and American English, while upper-class figures use prestigious accents like Received Pronunciation (RP) (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 584-585, 589). These stereotypical portrayals, though deliberate, are not indicators of a strict moral divide of characters; nor do they represent inherent truths about the real speakers of these accents. Instead, they encourage players to critically examine social issues and the biases that accents evoke (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2022, 591-592). To further explore the implications of accent use in fictional media, the rest of the article will examine *Critical Role* (CR), a setting where language alone plays a central role in constructing social meaning within an imagined world.

2.3. Critical Role

CR is a popular live-streamed D&D web series featuring eight professional voice actors who have worked in animation, anime, and video games. Divided into campaigns spanning several years, with each episode lasting around four hours, the show recently completed its third campaign. Seven cast members control their own characters, forming an adventuring party, and the outcome of the characters' decisions is decided by dice rolls. CR's game takes place in *Exandria*, a fantasy world created by DM Matt Mercer, who serves as the storyteller and portrays all the NPCs.

NPCs play a crucial role in RPGs, offering quests and information or serving as enemies. Video games use both visual and vocal cues to help players assess NPCs and their possible personality or intentions – for example, ragged clothing may indicate poverty, while fine attire suggests wealth. In contrast, tabletop RPGs such as D&D exclude such methods of meaning-making by predominantly relying on verbal communication, making accents more significant for characterisation. CR enhances storytelling with high production value and character artwork, but NPC visuals remain unseen by players and audiences during gameplay.

The previous research outlined in Section 2.2 revealed two contrasting stances on linguistic profiling in fictional media. Hellström (2019) and Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná (2023) emphasise the practical and socio-critical effects of NPC accents, which contribute to the creation of more nuanced game worlds, while Lippi-Green (2012) and Sønnesyn (2011) argue that accents often reinforce rigid moral binaries, labelling some as inherently 'good' or 'bad'. Given its unique speech context, CR presents an interesting continuation of this research – how does improvised media with mainly linguistically constructed game worlds position itself with respect to these two perspectives on linguistic profiling? Does the DM's use of accents for NPCs correlate directly with their moral alignment, or does the absence of visual information allow for a more complex interplay between language and the construction of social meaning?

3. METHODOLOGY

To examine whether Mercer uses accents and the stereotypes they can index to differentiate between *antagonists* and *allies*, I conducted an auditory analysis to identify the accents of the different NPCs played by Mercer. I selected ten characters from each category to analyse, using an overview of antagonist and ally NPCs from CR's page on *Fandom*, a Wikipedia-type website (Critical Role Wiki 2023, s.v. *antagonists; allies*). The chosen NPCs are major recurring characters who appear in more than one episode and were selected from all three campaigns, though there are fewer from Campaign 3, as it was ongoing at the time of writing. The moral alignment of the NPCs directly affects the players' decisions; antagonists have bad intentions and seek to disrupt the status quo, while allies aid the main adventuring party (Sønnesyn 2011, 41-42). Characters who changed alignment (from evil to good or vice versa) were excluded[1]. See Table 1 for the list of the analysed characters.

Table 1: Overview of NPCs and episodes from which they were analysed.

	Antagonists	Episode	**Allies**	Episode
Campaign 1: **Vox Machina**	Delilah Briarwood	'The Feast'	Allura Vysoren	'Consequences & Cows'
	Sylas Briarwood	'The Feast'	Cassandra de Rolo	'A Cycle of Vengeance'
			Kima of Vord	'Trust'
	Raishan	'Trust'	Shaun Gilmore	'Shopping & Shipping'
Campaign 2: **Mighty Nein**	Avantika	'Temple of the False Serpant'	Artagan	'With Great Power…'
	Lorenzo	'Found & Lost'	Marion Lavorre	'Between a Ball & a Hot Place'
	Lucian	'The Tortoise & the Dare'	Orly Stiffback	'The Ruby & The Sapphire'
	Obann	'The King's Cage'	Pumat Sol	'The Gates of Zadash'
	Trent Ikithon	'Dinner with the Devil'	Yeza Brenatto	'In Love & War'
Campaign 3: **Bells Hells**	Ira Wendagoth	'Breaking Point'	Lord Eshteross	'Trial by Firelight'
	Otohan Thull	'A Race for a Price' & 'Blood and Dust'		

[1] At the time of writing, Ira Wendagoth was an antagonist. However, he changed to be an ally later in Campaign 3.

To gather the data, I chose a short paragraph or a few sentences from transcripts of the episodes in which the NPCs appeared, listened to the corresponding audio, and noted linguistic features indicative of the various accents until I felt it was correctly identified. Given that Mercer's native accent is SAE and CR is an improvised show, I did not focus on minor inconsistencies in his portrayal of NPCs. I also did not repeat the analysis or have someone verify the results. An overview of the NPCs' accents and character traits is presented in Section 4. The accents were then classified into six accent categories: Standard American English (SAE), Regional American English (RAE), Standard British English (SBE), Regional British English (RBE), Other Englishes (OE), and Foreign-Accented English (FAE). Importantly, the term 'standard' is often linked to standard language ideology where standard accents are regarded as the correct way to speak and against which regional accents are compared (Sønnesyn 2011, 16-18). However, this article does not view SAE and SBE as the correct way to speak, but rather as speech without less obviously regionally marked features[2]. Lastly, I anticipated that antagonists generally speak SBE and FAE, while allies would use SAE and regional accents, consistent with what previous studies have found (Lippi-Green 2012; Sønnesyn 2011).

4. ACCENTS AS PERSONALITY INDICATORS, NOT ALIGNMENT MARKERS

This section outlines the results of the auditory analysis and tests the hypothesis of a link between morality and accents by comparing them with the initial predictions. A select group of characters' accents are explored in detail, alongside a consideration of their personality to examine whether it aligns with accent stereotypes. The overall distribution of accents is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, revealing that SBE is the most frequently used accent for antagonists, while the allies' accents are more evenly distributed.

4.1. Antagonists

I originally hypothesised that antagonists would predominantly speak SBE and FAE, while allies would use SAE or regional accents. Initially, grouping SBE and FAE together seemed to support my prediction, as six out of ten antagonists fell into these categories. However, closer analysis of Figure 1 below shows that FAE aligns more closely with accents like SAE, rather than with SBE. Grouping SBE and FAE together obscures this distinction, as Figure 1 makes clear that the dominance is driven by SBE alone. While this undermines my original hypothesis, the strong presence of SBE among antagonists still suggests a link between this accent and moral alignment, implying that Mercer may be engaging in a form of linguistic profiling.

The four SBE speakers, Delilah and Sylas Briarwood, Trent Ikithon, and Ira Wendagoth, are all non-rhotic (lack of postvocalic /r/ with *arcane* pronounced as [ɑːkeɪn] rather than [ɑːɹkeɪn]), while their BATH and LOT vowels are realised as the SBE equivalents [ɑ] (*path* realised as [pɑːθ] rather than [pæθ]) and [ɒ] (*impossible* as [ɪmpɒsɪbl̩] rather than [ɪmpɑsɪbl̩]), respectively (Sønnesyn 2011, 30-

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[2] What I refer to as Standard British English is more accurately Standard *Southern* British English, a region-based accent often regarded as free of regionally marked features. However, Standard *Southern* British English is perceived as the supralocally normative, prestigious speech within the UK.

31). Mercer also uses features associated with Upper-Crust RP, a variant of RP linked with the British upper class, such as making the HAPPY vowel [ɪ] more open and closer to [ɛ] in final position (*assembly* [əsɛmblɛ]) (Wells 1982, 281). The centring diphthongs [ɪə] and [əʊ] are also Upper-Crust RP features as heard in the words *dear* [dɪə] and *homestead* [həʊmstɛd] (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 589). The SBE-speaking characters also embody stereotypical villainous traits (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Delilah Briarwood*; *Sylas Briarwood*; Trent *Ikithon*; *Ira Wendagoth*). Three of them are wizards, a class based on intelligence in D&D (classes refer to a character's occupation), while all are manipulative and self-serving. This reinforces the association of SBE with negative qualities, particularly the stereotype of the intellectual yet malicious 'evil geniuses' (Lippi-Green 2012, 122). Mercer's use of features from Upper-Crust RP further underscores these stereotypes and indexes their higher social status and authority. All are, likewise, associated with powerful and prestigious institutions in Exandria, and thus, part of the elite, 'a social category that [the SBE accent] helps associatively to fill in by its connotations to the tastes, politesse, and schooled edification of the English upper class' (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 585).
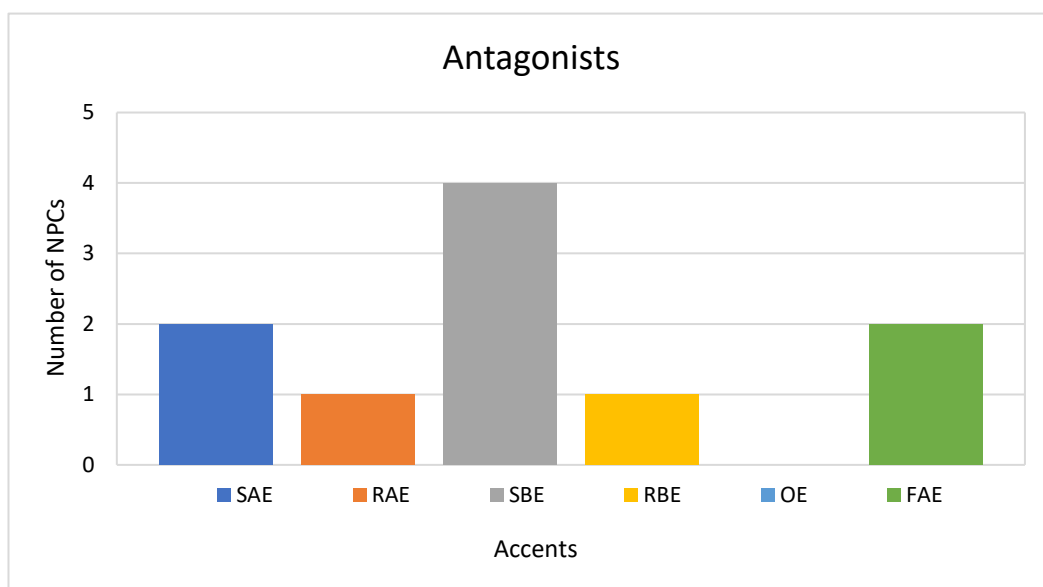

Figure 1: Distribution of accents in NPC antagonists

While SBE marks antagonism more consistently, FAE and other accent groups (excluding OE) appear too infrequently among villains to suggest clear profiling. Still, FAE has long been linked to villainy due to cultural scepticism toward 'outsiders' (Sønnesyn 2011, 82), and both FAE speakers, Avantika and Otohan Thull, may be marked as untrustworthy due to their foreign accents (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Schmidt 2019, 3). Avantika's French accent is characterised by features such as /r/ realised as the uvular trill [ʀ] in *arrangement* [əʀeɪndʒmənt], /ð/ realised as [z] in *that* [zɛt], and the KIT vowel [ɪ] raised to [i], as in *kill* [kil]. Mercer further reinforces this accent through French tag questions such as *eh* or *non* (ThoughCo Team 2019; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 586). French-accented English is often used for romantic/seductive characters (Lippi-Green 2012, 109), and Avantika is indeed portrayed as a femme fatale, a character type that uses flirtation strategically,

often by exploiting the hero for their own self-interest (Abreu 2024; Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Avantika*). Otohan Thull's accent is less clearly defined but features a consistent trill [r]. While her vowels mostly align with SAE, the presence of [r] suggests a general foreignness, possibly Spanish, where this feature is common (Cortez 2022). Still, because only Avantika's accent is recognisably foreign, and because FAE appears with similar frequency to other accent categories among antagonists, it cannot be said to signal antagonism as strongly as SBE.

Conversely, characters like Lucien and Lorenzo have regional accents (Irish English and Southern American English) that are less traditionally linked with evil. As antagonists, both characters share the same core 'evil' traits found in the SBE-speaking villains: deliberate intent to harm the main adventuring party to achieve their own malicious goals. However, their accents also carry distinct cultural associations. Lucian's Irish English accent is marked by rhoticity, where /r/ is realised as the retroflex variant [ɻ], and spirantised /t/, where the incomplete closure of a plosive results in a fricative sound. He also monophthongises the FACE [eɪ] and GOAT [oʊ] diphthongs in words such as *scale* [skel] and *roped* [ropd] (Sønnesyn 2011, 36-37). These features evoke stereotypes commonly linked to the accent: being loud, confrontational, mischievous, and prone to drunkenness or petty crime (Walshe 2012), which Lucian's characterisation reflects (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Lucian Tavelle*). Lorenzo's Southern American accent is characterised by a Southern drawl, featuring an [ə]-offglide following the KIT [ɪ] and TRAP [æ] vowels, as in *spirit* [spɪrɪət] and *back* [bæək], as well as the monophthongisation of the PRICE diphthong [aɪ] to [a], as in *like* [lak] (Sønnesyn 2011, 33-34). Southern American English often carries complex social connotations, including hospitality, openness, and a strong sense of community, yet also associated with working class, low intelligence, bigotry, and crassness (Laughton 2024). Lorenzo's portrayal leans heavily into the more negative aspects of this stereotype, amplifying perceptions of him as rough, unsophisticated, and sadistic. At the same time, as the leader of his group, he is fiercely protective, pointing to his sense of community (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Lorenzo*). Although Mercer has used the broader cultural narratives surrounding these accents to portray Lucian and Lorenzo, he can move beyond the traditional SBE stereotype for his villains. Overall, Mercer relies on linguistic profiling to signal potential antagonists when using SBE, but he does not seem to differentiate between characters in terms of evilness; the SBE villains are no more evil than the antagonists with non-standard accents, despite SBE's closer association with 'classic' villainy.

4.2. Allies

Turning to the results for the allies, Mercer's use of accents appears more balanced. Unlike with the antagonists, there is no clear pattern that suggests reliance on linguistic profiling to mark NPCs as allies. As shown in Figure 2 below, the distribution of accents among allies is relatively even, contradicting my initial prediction that SAE and regional accents would dominate. This indicates that a character's alignment cannot be reliably inferred from their accent, as no single variety stands out as the one consistently 'heroic' and 'helpful'. However, much like with the antagonists, the accents still often index real-world stereotypes.
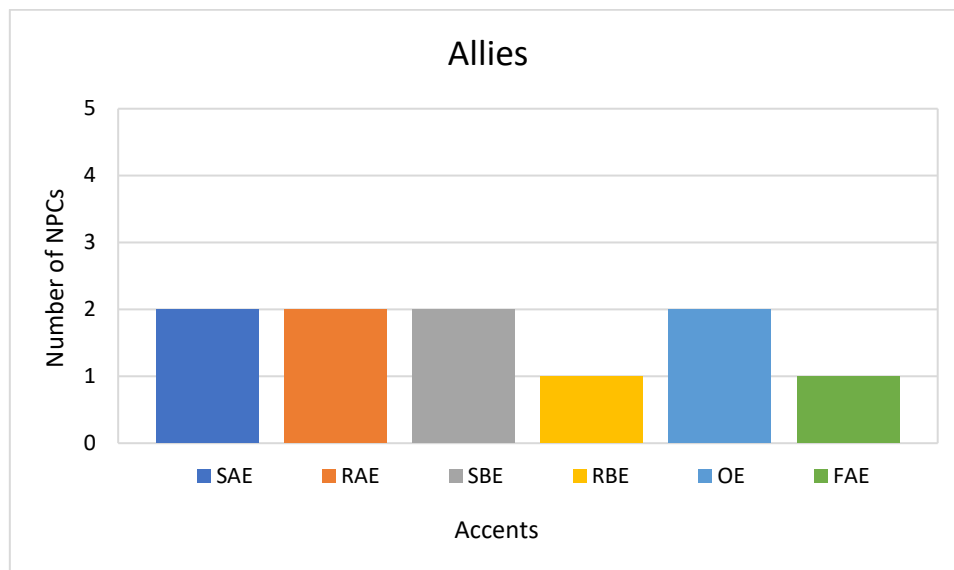
Figure 2: Distribution of accents in NPC allies

The two speakers of RAE, Pumat Sol and Orly Skiffback, have a North-Central and Southern American accent, respectively. Pumat Sol's features include the COT-CAUGHT merger, where both COT [ɑ] and CAUGHT [ɔ] are realised as [ɑ], as in *paltry* [pɑltri], alongside monophthongised FACE and GOAT vowels in *arcane* [ɑken] and *gold* [gold] (Devlin 2018). These features align with the 'Minnesota Nice' stereotype, indexing his personality that is good-mannered and overtly polite, but mildly passive-aggressive (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Pumat Sol*; Hutton 2019). Orly Skiffback's Southern American accent shares features with Lorenzo's, including a drawl in words like *ship* [ʃɪəp] and monophthongisation of the PRICE vowel in *jive* [dʒav]. More specifically, Orly has a Cajun-type accent, partly derived from French and spoken in southern Louisiana, and often uses French vocabulary such as *cherie* and *cher* (Melancon 2005). Unlike Lorenzo, whose accent aligns with negative Southern American stereotypes, Orly embodies more positive associations, such as hospitality and approachability. His Cajun accent also reinforces his sailor identity, as Cajun English is commonly linked to maritime communities and activities along the U.S. Gulf Coast (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Orly Skiffback*; Bradshaw 2020).

Shaun Gilmore and Artagan both speak with a Mid-Atlantic accent, a learned accent blending SAE with SBE elements. Their speech exhibits SBE features such as non-rhoticity, an open HAPPY vowel as in *marvellously* [mɑ:vələslɛ], and the use of [t] instead of the American flap [ɾ] in words like *item* [aɪtəm] rather than [aɪɾəm]. Historically associated with Old Hollywood and stage actors, the accent was used to convey sophistication and upper-class refinement, whereas it is used for an exaggerated theatrical portrayal of the privileged today (Wikipedia 2025). Both characters embody this theatricality. Artagan and Gilmore are flamboyant, overconfident, and charismatic, speaking with fast, rising intonation patterns that enhance their dramatic presence. Their accent also reinforces their elite status and influence within the narrative world. In Gilmore's case, the performative nature of the accent is especially significant. Being born in a poor village, he might have adopted the Mid-Atlantic

accent later as part of his upward social mobility, underscoring its function as a learned and performative speech style (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Artagan*; *Shaun Gilmore*).

One final example worth highlighting is Lord Eshteross, the sole speaker of RBE. While Mercer often realises vowels in line with SBE, such as avoiding the monophthongisation of the GOAT and FACE vowels, his consonants are more indicative of Scottish, such as /r/ realised as a retroflex [ɻ] in *unheard* [ʌnhəɻd] (Sønnesyn 2011, 35-36). Notably, Mercer appears to draw inspiration from Scottish actor Sean Connery's distinctive speech, particularly the retroflex [ʂ] realisation of /s/, found in words like *stead* [ʂtɛd] and *guidance* [gaɪdənʂ] (Hill 2006, 29). As such, Lord Eshteross's character strongly indexes Connery's portrayal of James Bond. A former mercenary with a violent and secretive past, Eshteross is depicted as sophisticated, wealthy, finely dressed, attractive, and cunning (Critical Role Wiki 2025, s.v. *Lord Estheross*; Hill 2006, 5). Using a key feature of Connery's speech may indicate that Mercer wants Lord Estheross to be perceived as the same enigmatic character type as Bond.

5. AVOIDING TRADITIONAL TROPES IN ACCENT CHOICES

Like video games, Mercer appears to rely on players' ability to infer social characteristics through accents. This has previously resulted in certain character types being strongly associated with specific accents that perpetuate stereotyping. Although the analysis shows that accents still serve as a tool for characterisation, conveying characters' personalities and backgrounds through culturally familiar stereotypes, their distribution indicates that accents do not consistently reveal NPCs' moral alignment. Mercer has acknowledged that accents in media can contribute to stereotyping and that he actively tries to counteract this in CR. He states that, as a professional voice actor with a personal interest in accents and languages, he aims to incorporate a wide variety of real-world accents to create a diverse fantasy world (Dimension 20 2019, 32:45). He continues:

> Don't attribute one [accent] to a certain stereotype of a bad person, or you know, you can show that culturally diverse life in the world that you're running and the world that you're building … you might have a bad guy that's Russian, but also make sure to include some good guys that are Russian (Dimension 20 2019, 36:20).

Mercer appears to be aware of the risks of reinforcing traditional tropes that could contribute to linguistic discrimination. The data indicates that he deliberately voices both antagonists and allies with a range of standard and non-standard accents, avoiding rigid moral associations. Moreover, previous research has shown that villains in 1990s children's animations were often depicted with foreign accents like German and Russian, which reflected American attitudes toward their past wartime enemies during World War II and the Cold War (Dobrow and Gidney 1998, 117). In contrast, Mercer opts for less typical choices; Avantika and Otohan Thull speak French and Spanish-accented English, whose speakers are not traditionally considered historical U.S. enemies. Mercer adds: 'try and make it not about the accent, it's just a layer of cultural flavour based on where they're from and how they grew up that adds to the world and the experience and doesn't become a defining characteristic of their personality' (Dimension 20 2019, 36:46). Within the narrative world, a French accent may signal that a character is from the Menagerie Coast, a region in Exandria. Both Avantika

and Orly Skiffback, whose Cajun English includes French-derived features, originate from this region, suggesting that French-accented English represents regional identity rather than moral alignment (@luckthebard 2019).

In this view, accents are intended to add cultural depth, rather than define essential traits of a character. Nonetheless, Mercer's use of accents is not incidental; they do evoke recognisable stereotypes that players are meant to pick up on, similar to the techniques used in *Disco Elysium* (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen & Hejná 2023, 592). This resonates closely with the concept of 'stylisation' – the conscious and deliberate performance of speech styles to index cultural identities and associations. Stylistic performances do not necessarily aim to mirror real-world usage accurately but instead call to mind familiar personas and their social meanings (Coupland 2011, 350). Mercer's accent choices invite players and viewers alike to engage with the world-building, shaping their understanding of characters' social status, as with the upper-class backgrounds of SBE-speaking Delilah and Sylas Briarwood; geographical origin, such as with Orly Skiffback's coastal Cajun accent; and personal traits, such as with Pumat Sol's embodiment of the Minnesota Nice stereotype. As such, accents and their cultural traits become part of the lived experience of the narrative world of Exandria. Crucially, Mercer's use of stylisation should not be understood as a mockery of the accents and their speakers. Stylisation entails an overt awareness of stereotypes, from both performer and audience, without contributing to their essentiality or dismissing their cultural value (Coupland 2001, 372). Although Mercer does reinforce traditional representations of stereotypes, his portrayals are not exaggerated for purely comedic effect, nor does he paint certain accents as inherently negative or positive.

As the DM who must voice all the NPCs, Mercer avoids accents that could be perceived as appropriation or discrimination (Dimension 20 2019, 33:22), such as African American Vernacular English, Asian or Middle-Eastern accents. As a contrastive example, Hank Azaria originally voiced Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, an Indian immigrant from the long-running animation *The Simpsons*, although Azaria himself is not Indian. His stereotypical accent for the character recently came under scrutiny as it upheld a racist depiction of Indians, with people of South Asian descent recounting experiences of discrimination as a result. Azaria ultimately stepped down from the role (Jacobs 2021). Although Mercer faces understandable constraints in the range of accents he can use, his intent to create a diverse and inclusive cultural world is evident in the even distribution of accents among allies. No single accent dominates the group, and Mercer emphasises that both good and evil characters can speak with the same accent. This undermines the possibility of 'profiling' NPCs as good based on their speech. However, the same cannot be said for antagonists. The more frequent use of SBE among characters within this category suggests a potential link between this accent and an evil morality, and players perhaps have a higher chance of accurately deeming a character evil due to their SBE accent. Still, if the distribution of accents for the allies had also shown a preference for a single accent, I could more reliably conclude that Mercer intentionally uses accents to signal moral alignment. Rather than guiding players to predict morality through accent alone, I argue that Mercer uses linguistic profiling primarily for characterisation. Accents are deliberately performed to index the NPCs' personalities and backgrounds, much as accents function in real life.

6. CONCLUSION

Accents can characterise NPCs by reinforcing stereotypes, and in D&D, the role of accents in identifying social information may be even more central, as this kind of fictional media has fewer visual cues to denote characters as evil or good. This study aimed to examine whether this was the case for *Critical Role*'s DM Matt Mercer. Through an auditory analysis of ten antagonists and ten allies, I examined whether Mercer uses accents to distinguish between these moral positions to guide his players. While antagonists were predominantly speakers of SBE, allies had a more varied distribution of accents.

Given these findings and Mercer's awareness of the consequences of linguistic profiling in media, I argue that Mercer does not use accents to differentiate between antagonists and allies. Although there are signs of linguistic profiling with the antagonists, in that players might suspect that SBE speakers are evil, the balanced distribution of allies' accents prevents players from associating any single accent with an ally. Therefore, relying on a binary view that sees some accents as 'good' and others as 'bad' doesn't adequately explain how accents are distributed in CR. While accents do help characterise NPCs by drawing on stereotypes, Mercer ensures his NPCs remain linguistically nuanced, ultimately helping his goal of creating a diverse fantasy world.

Lastly, the small data sample of ten characters per category limits the ability to draw broader generalisations. Moreover, focusing solely on the correlation between accents and moral alignment potentially overlooks other meaningful patterns. Including other non-linguistic variables, such as social class, gender, geographical origin, or species (e.g. elves, half-orcs, dragons), might reveal that Mercer assigns NPC accents in ways that mirror real-world patterns of regional or social variation.

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