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Meaning and ideology in Ellian's speech: Female representation in Spellbound

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ABSTRACT

Animated films play an important role in shaping how audiences understand gender roles, especially through the ways characters speak and negotiate their positions within the narrative. This study examines how Ellian, the main character in Spellbound (2024), constructs female representation through her spoken language in several central scenes. The aim of this research is to identify how her dialogue reflects ideas of leadership, responsibility, and femininity. Using Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (1997), Ellian's utterances were analyzed and grouped into three thematic categories: leadership and decision-making, moral and familial obligations, and emotional expression as part of feminine identity. The data were selected purposively from key scenes of Ellian's speech that prominently display her expressions of leadership, responsibility, and emotional involvement, and analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach to examine how these meanings are constructed within the film context using Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (1997). The analysis shows that Ellian often uses assertive and purposeful language, suggesting a shift toward a more empowered female role. However, her speech also reveals traces of traditional expectations tied to care, emotional restraint, and duty. These findings indicate that Spellbound presents a negotiation between progressive portrayals of female agency and long-standing cultural norms. This study highlights the importance of language in animated films as a medium that shapes and reproduces gender ideologies for its viewers.

Keywords: discourse; femininity; gender; representation; spellbound.

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INTRODUCTION

Animated films do more than provide entertainment, they operate as cultural products that circulate and reinforce social meanings in society. The way women are portrayed in the media is closely tied to the cultural environment that shapes how their roles are imagined and displayed (Vashista, 2024). Through their stories and character dialogues, animated films significantly influence how people understand gender, identity, and social hierarchies. According to Shen and Li (2025), the linguistic choices and speech patterns in animation play a key role in shaping young viewers' interpretations of gender roles and the limitations often imposed on female characters. In today's popular culture, depictions of women remain a contested topic, largely because media continues to echo patriarchal ideas

that position women as secondary or dependent figures (Hall, 1997). Stuart Hall (1997) further argues that representation should not be seen as a simple reflection of reality, but rather as an active process of meaning-making through symbols, language, and imagery. From this viewpoint, examining depictions of women in animated films becomes crucial for understanding how cultural values inform societal beliefs about femininity, empowerment, and agency. Animated films also serve as tools for social learning, shaping how children internalize norms, relationships, and moral expectations (Rabani et al., 2024; Saneleuterio & Soler-Campo, 2025), while offering older audiences material for interpreting cultural shifts across generations.

Even with the rise of strong female protagonists, women in animation are still frequently framed as dependent, secondary, or confined by conventional gender norms (Clarke et al., 2024). Disney films, for instance, still lean on traditional representational patterns, often giving women supportive roles even in narratives that appear more progressive (Anwesa & Bhadra, 2023). Many studies show that female characters are associated with nurturing tasks and interpersonal roles, reinforcing the view that leadership and strategic authority belong to male characters (Jimenez, 2022). Major studios such as Disney and Studio Ghibli continue to depict gender imbalances, with male characters typically driving the main storyline, while female characters are positioned in emotional or supportive functions (Cho & Macomber, 2022). These portrayals subtly reinforce long-standing assumptions about women's social roles and influence how young audiences develop expectations about gender, professional ambitions, and emotional responsibilities (Rabani et al., 2024). As Hall (1997) points out, animated films are not neutral, they encode messages about power and social order that audiences decode depending on their cultural backgrounds. Purnawati (2023) shows that women are often portrayed as those who must regain control over their bodies and lives, especially in social contexts that limit their freedom.

Several studies also show that even central female characters are often shaped by traditional beauty ideals and emotional dependency. Tiwiyanti and Sofiani (2020) demonstrate that Hinata, for example, remains tied to classical notions of femininity, where bravery or skill does not fully shift her away from expectations of gentleness and obedience. Clarke et al. (2024) similarly observe that female characters are often portrayed as emotional, cautious, and "sensitive," reinforcing boundaries around how women are expected to behave. Disney heroines usually embody idealized femininity: slender bodies, soft voices, and graceful movements which align with patriarchal standards (Hazem Elboraie, 2025). These repeated patterns support beliefs that women's worth lies in appearance and compliance rather than intelligence or strategic capacity (Michael et al., 2012). Saneleuterio and Soler-Campo (2025) add that these portrayals shape children's understanding of gendered power relations, contributing to the internalization of limiting norms among young female viewers (Daulay & Ulfah, 2022). Anggita and Esther (2023)

found that women are often positioned as subjects who do not have a voice in the family structure, so that their representation often shows a marginalized position.

More recent developments in animation, however, indicate a gradual move toward more complex portrayals of female characters. Wang and Pan (2024) note that the shifting depiction of heroines in Disney films reflects broader changes in social attitudes that increasingly frame women as independent and influential. Wardah and Kusuma (2022) point out that contemporary animated films tend to highlight women's leadership and moral strength through narrative agency, even as some traditional expectations remain. Leon and Schmidt (2021) argue that although many animated works aim to represent aspirations for gender equality, portrayals still remain shaped by cultural norms that situate women within emotional and domestic spheres. The shift from Snow White's passivity to Moana's autonomy shows a broader cultural movement toward empowerment (Z. Wang, 2023), while characters like Elsa and Anna still operate within boundaries defined by family and moral obligations (Putri, 2022). This mixture of empowerment and constraint reflects animation's role as a cultural space where conflicting gender ideologies coexist (Leon & Schmidt, 2021).

The changing portrayal of women in animation highlights the need to examine the relationship between narrative, ideology, and audience interpretation. Hall's (1997) reflective, intentional, and constructionist models offer useful tools for understanding how meaning is produced and negotiated. These models help researchers identify how animated films both reinforce and challenge dominant ideologies about women's agency. They also allow scholars to consider the historical and cultural contexts that shape film production, including global and local influences that create hybrid forms of female representation (Andayani Praptiningsih et al., 2024).

Despite the growing attention in scholarly work, several gaps remain. Much existing research still focuses on older or globally recognized films from major studios, leaving newer productions that address contemporary issues less examined (Leon & Schmidt, 2021; Wardah & Kusuma, 2022). There is also limited discussion on how female characters exercise agency in narratives that combine political, magical, and social conflicts, especially in films that merge Western animation styles with localized storytelling (Daulay & Ulfah, 2022; Silalahi et al., 2023).

Spellbound (2024), directed by Vicky Jenson and released on Netflix, provides a timely example for exploring these issues. The story follows Ellian, a young princess confronting internal political tensions and magical threats. Unlike many traditional princess figures, Ellian displays intelligence, resilience, and leadership throughout the film. Her role illustrates what Hall (1997) describes as a space where ideology and audience meaning-making intersect: Ellian shows qualities of empowerment, yet her actions remain shaped by a patriarchal context that limits her agency. The film offers a useful site for examining how narrative structure and dialogue either reinforce or challenge ideological norms.

Ellian's speech offers rich material for analyzing how animated films construct ideas about gender, power, and identity. Previous studies note that leadership among female characters is often represented symbolically rather than structurally, women are praised when their actions align with moral or familial expectations (Andayani Praptiningsih et al., 2024). Analyzing Ellian's dialogue helps reveal how animation reflects and negotiates cultural assumptions about women's roles.

Spellbound also enables a closer look at how gender ideology is expressed through language. Ellian's assertive statements, reflections on responsibility, and moral reasoning place her between empowerment and tradition. Wardah and Kusuma (2022) observe that animation often highlights women's strengths while reinforcing conventional expectations, a tension clearly visible in Ellian's speech. Her tone, emotional expression, and communication patterns show how femininity is shaped through discourse. Ellian's character is constructed not only visually but through the way she speaks and responds, making language crucial for understanding how patriarchal norms are upheld or challenged in animated storytelling.

This study aims to analyze how Ellian's speech constructs female representation in Spellbound (2024) using Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (1997). The analysis centers on three themes: (1) leadership and decision-making as signs of empowerment; (2) moral and familial duties as elements of traditional ideology; and (3) emotional regulation and speech as markers of internalized femininity. Scholars such as Wang (2023), Putri (2022), and Andayani Praptiningsih et al. (2024) argue that recent animated films blend progressive portrayals with subtle patriarchal elements, a dynamic evident in Ellian's characterization.

By bringing together research on gender representation, animation, and cultural theory, this study shows how female identities are formed through language in contemporary media. It stresses that representation in animation is shaped not only through visuals but also through discourse and ideology. Examining Ellian in Spellbound highlights animation as a cultural space where women's autonomy, power, and societal roles are continuously negotiated (Hall, 1997; Clarke et al., 2024).

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (1997), which views meaning as socially constructed through language and cultural context. Hall's framework is relevant for analyzing how ideology is encoded and negotiated through language practices. Therefore, this research focuses on Ellian's utterances in the animated film Spellbound (2024), directed by Vicky Jenson and produced by Netflix. By examining Ellian's dialogue,

this research examines how verbal language plays a role in constructing or challenging the meaning of gender within a patriarchal cultural framework.

The primary data for this study consisted of all of Ellian's dialogue throughout the film. Data collection was conducted through repeated viewings of the film to identify scenes containing utterances related to leadership, agency, moral obligation, emotional regulation, or representation of gender identity. After that, the data were analyzed through several closed-readings to ensure consistent interpretation. The coding results were also reviewed to maintain reliability. From this process, approximately 10 key utterances were selected from 10 main scenes, based on their relevance to the research focus. Each utterance was recorded along with its immediate conversational context to ensure accurate interpretation. This research intentionally excludes visual description or cinematic analysis because the scope of the study is limited to verbal language.

The unit of analysis is the individual utterances uttered by Ellian. An utterance is defined as a complete sentence or series of interconnected sentences that expresses an intention, decision, emotional state, or ideological position. Each utterance is analyzed using Hall's (1997) three representational modes. The reflective mode examines how the utterance reflects dominant cultural expectations about women, such as responsibility, obedience, or emotional composure. The intentional mode interprets the ideological intent encoded by the filmmaker through the characters' language choices. The constructionist mode explores how meaning is produced through discourse and how audiences can negotiate or reinterpret these utterances in relation to broader cultural ideologies.

The analysis was conducted through a coding process that categorized Ellian's utterances into three main themes aligned with the research focus: (1) leadership and decision-making as forms of empowerment; (2) moral and familial obligations as indicators of traditional gender ideology; and (3) emotional control and polite discourse as forms of internalized femininity. According to Wang (2023), Putri (2022), and Andayani Praptiningsih et al., (2024) assertive utterances such as commands, strategic reasoning, or declarative decisions can be coded as forms of empowerment. Consistent with their findings, utterances emphasizing duty, protection, or relational responsibility are understood as representing traditional ideologies. Meanwhile, these researchers also explain that utterances with a moderate tone, emotional control, or careful word choice reflect the internalization of femininity. This categorization also aligns with current research on gender representation in animation.

Data interpretation is presented descriptively to explain how Ellian's utterances communicate ideological assumptions about women's roles. This method highlights the function of dialogue as a medium for meaning-making, where patriarchal norms can be reinforced, negotiated, or questioned. By focusing on verbal discourse, this study provides a unique understanding of how Spellbound constructs female identity through language, in line with Hall's view that

representation is produced through social and cultural processes (Hall, 1997). Finally, this methodological design ensures consistency between the research questions, theory, and scope of analysis. Through a systematic qualitative analysis of Ellian's narrative, and by referencing previous research on gender representation in animated media (Andayani Praptiningsih et al., 2024; Wardah & Kusuma, 2022), this study demonstrates how Spellbound contributes to shaping contemporary cultural understandings of women, agency, and ideology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Results

Tabel 1. Leadership & Decision-Making (Empowerment)

No	Ellian's Statement	Timecode	Category
1	Bad king. Bad queen. Don't worry. I'm on it.	04:15	Leadership
2	That's it. Over here. Good queen.	04:22	Leadership
3	I need to tell Bolinar and Nazara.	12:42	Decision-making
4	I'll agree. But only if we try the oracles first.	16:56	Negotiation / Decision
5	What are you doing? Stop. Don't do this. Listen to me. Mom! Dad!	32:11	Situational control
6	Soldiers! Put down your weapons.	35:31	Authority
7	I said drop 'em.	35:35	Assertive command
8	We need something… A carriage	36:04	Planning
9	Flink, here. Stall them.	37:09	Command
10	Flink, hold the gate!	37:52	Command
11	No thanks! I don't need to be rescued!	39:05	Autonomy
12	Tell me what to do, and I'll do it for them.	43:13	Goal-directed action
13	Mom, Dad, follow me.	46:47	Directive
14	Bolinar, all we have to do is get my parents to the Lake of Light.	47:44	Strategy
15	Relax, Bolinar… whatever the darkness is should be afraid of us.	48:19	Leadership morale
16	Quick, everyone down there.	48:44	Situational leadership
17	Bolinar, stop it… they'll be banished.	49:04	Risk assessment
18	Stop! Stop it!	51:34	Command
19	Okay, you guys. We need to start heading in the direction of that light.	54:46	Strategic leadership
20	Knock it off, both of you.	54:52	Group control
21	No more schemes. No more trails.	01:03:07	Assertive decision
22	We're getting to that beacon.	01:03:10	Goal-setting
23	We need to stay in the light.	01:04:05	Directive
24	Dad, we all have to agree on a plan.	01:04:30	Leadership negotiation
25	Dad! Can you get us over there?	01:06:16	Coordinating action
26	Mom, can you carry me over there?	01:06:41	Coordinating
27	Guys, let's test this baby out.	01:33:37	Command / empowerment
28	Spreading my wings, doing cool things.	01:34:27	Self-empowerment

Table 1 shows 28 of Ellian's utterances that fall into the Leadership and Decision-Making category. These utterances demonstrate how Ellian is constructed as an empowered woman, capable of taking charge of situations, directing the actions of others, and making important decisions under stressful conditions. This pattern demonstrates a shift from the stereotype of passive women to a figure with

authority, initiative, and strategic capacity. Within Stuart Hall's representational framework, this construction can be understood as a form of encoding that intentionally positions Ellian as a capable young leader capable of challenging the ideological boundaries that typically limit women's roles. At the same time, through Hall's constructionist mode, the meaning of Ellian's leadership will be negotiated by the audience based on their individual experiences and cultural values. Overall, the data demonstrates a consistent depiction of Ellian as a woman exercising autonomy and power, rather than simply waiting for help or being directed by male characters.

Data 1: "Soldiers! Put down your weapons."
Time code : 35:31
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This statement illustrates how leadership in a military context is generally perceived as a male-dominated domain. In patriarchal cultures, women are rarely depicted as having the authority to direct or command in armed situations. However, this scene demonstrates a shift in values, as a young woman takes control in a threatening situation. Reflectively, this statement demonstrates that women also have the space to emerge as authoritative figures in a realm of public power that was previously largely attributed to men.
2. Intentional Mode: Through clear and direct imperative speech, the filmmakers portray Ellian as a figure capable of taking leadership in critical situations. The choice of words like "Soldiers" and "Put down your weapons" suggests she is positioned with the authority to give orders to the troops. In this way, the film suggests that women can also occupy strategic positions and have the authority to direct the actions of others, especially when facing high-stakes situations.
3. Constructionist Mode: Viewers with a dominant reading would likely interpret this scene as a form of female empowerment. Meanwhile, viewers with a negotiating reading might accept that Ellian holds a leadership role but still see it as a special situation due to her status as a royal princess. Conversely, viewers with an opposing reading might criticize that, despite Ellian's leadership role, the film still positions women within a moral framework because she gives orders to stop the violence, not initiate the offensive action.

Data 2: "Mom, Dad, follow me."
Time code : 46:47
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This statement illustrates traditional family norms that typically place children, especially girls, in the position of following their parents' directions, rather than leading them. However, this scene demonstrates a shift in values, as a teenage girl makes decisions and guides her parents in a critical situation. This indicates that leadership roles are no longer solely limited by family hierarchy or conventional gender constructs.

2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers deliberately frame Ellian as a figure taking control in a crisis. When she orders her parents to follow her, the film sends the message that leadership doesn't always depend on age, gender, or position within the family structure, but rather on a person's ability to understand the situation and make the right decisions.
3. Constructionist Mode: Viewers with a dominant reading might view this scene as a positive reversal of the family hierarchy, in which the daughter is given the space to lead. Viewers with a negotiating reading might judge that Ellian's leadership emerges primarily from emotional impulses and family closeness, rather than from structural authority. Meanwhile, viewers with an opposing reading might argue that although Ellian appears to be a leader, this authority arises only because her parents are in an unhealthy state, making her leadership only temporary.

Data 3: " Bolinar, stop it. If they find us before my parents change back, they'll be banished."
Time code : 49:04
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This statement demonstrates a form of strategic leadership, as Ellian assesses risks, stops impulsive actions, and ensures the safety of the group. Culturally, the ability to make rational decisions is often associated with men, while women are often portrayed as more emotional. This scene challenges this stereotype by demonstrating that women are also capable of acting logically and carefully considering consequences.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers deliberately portray Ellian as someone capable of weighing political and social consequences before acting. This statement not only demonstrates courage but also demonstrates mature tactical thinking. Through this construction, the film emphasizes that women can make decisions that consider long-term impacts, rather than simply reacting to immediate situations.
3. Constructionist Mode: Viewers with a dominant reading might view this statement as a sign of Ellian's intelligence and maturity in leadership. Viewers with a negotiating reading might judge that her strategy remains closely aligned with the interests of her family, particularly her parents. Meanwhile, viewers with a dissenting reading might argue that Ellian's leadership is still framed through an emotional drive to protect her family, rather than as a decision that represents the broader interests of the kingdom.

Data 4: "Okay, you guys. We need to start heading in the direction of that light."
Time code : 54:46
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This statement demonstrates a form of coordinative leadership, where Ellian directs the group to move in an orderly and

coordinated manner. In traditional social norms, decisions regarding direction or navigation are often associated with men. However, this scene demonstrates that women can also take on this role without hesitation, while also emphasizing that leadership abilities are not limited to specific gender constructs.

2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers deliberately portray Ellian as a figure capable of calmly yet firmly directing the group. The phrase "We need to start heading..." demonstrates her authority without raising her voice or displaying aggression. Through this strategy, the film encodes a rational, effective, and collaborative female leadership, not one based on domination.
3. Constructionist Mode: Viewers with a dominant reading might see this utterance as evidence of Ellian's natural leadership abilities in unstable situations. A negotiating reading might see Ellian's authority as arising from the urgency of the situation, not from her position of authority within the kingdom's social structure. Meanwhile, viewers with an opposing reading might see that, despite her apparent leadership, the film still limits her leadership to a small sphere, rather than a broader institutional realm.

Tabel 2. Moral & Familial Obligations (Traditional Gender Ideology)

No	Ellian's Statement	Timecode	Category
1	Sorry guys, duty calls.		Duty / responsibility
2	This year it's just family. Super small.	02:18	Family priority
3	I'm 15… want to spend more time with my parents.	02:26	Family-centered identity
4	Hanging out with friends? But can I?	03:18	Restricted freedom
5	Think about what she'd do if she found out.	08:07	Fear of parental punishment
6	She's not exactly the chill type.	08:11	Family constraint
7	Wait. What about my parents?	16:45	Familial focus
8	Mom? Dad? I'm sorry… I miss you both.	25:15-26:13	Apology + attachment
9	These are my parents… your king and queen.	32:19	Duty + loyalty
10	Flink, we have to do something.	34:04	Saving parents
11	Mom? Dad? You okay?	40:40	Caregiving
12	Anyone who could help my parents?	42:38	Seeking help
13	Tell me what to do, and I'll do it for them.	43:13	Devotion
14	They're my parents, and they know what I'm saying.	51:03	Trust
15	Don't say that… They're in there.	51:45	Loyalty
16	Mom! Dad! You can talk!	53:16	Relief / love
17	You are my parents, and I am your daughter.	01:02:23	Identity
18	Mom. Dad. Are you back?	01:15:06	Emotional bond
19	If you can fall out of love… you can fall out of love with me!	01:21:25	Fear of abandonment
20	Families don't all grow in one straight line.	01:28:55	Family ideology
21	Dad, it's my birthday	01:33:43	Negotiation in family

Table 2 shows 21 of Ellian's utterances that fall into the Moral and Familial Obligations category, all of which demonstrate her portrayal as a woman deeply bound by family values, moral obligations, and traditional roles. This data demonstrates that Ellian frequently places the interests of her family above her own

desires, demonstrating submissiveness, caring, and loyalty traits classically associated with traditional constructions of femininity. From Stuart Hall's perspective, this pattern reflects an encoding process that places women within the realm of domestic morality, where values such as loyalty, obedience, and emotional responsibility are associated with female identity. However, through Hall's constructionist model, the interpretation of this role can vary: some viewers may see it as a sign of maturity and empathy, while others identify it as a reinforcement of patriarchal norms that restrict women to family functions. Overall, the data demonstrates that while Ellian possesses assertive leadership qualities, she remains strongly bound by family ideology that positions women as guardians of harmony and moral stability. This indicates that the representation of women in film is still defined through emotional and relational demands, not solely through individual capacity or personal autonomy.

Data 1: "Mom? Dad? Mom? I'm sorry I got so mad… I just really miss you both."
Time code : 25:15 - 26:13
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This utterance reflects a cultural expectation that daughters often carry the emotional responsibility within the family. Her apology, combined with expressions of longing, illustrates a traditional moral framework in which young women are expected to maintain harmony and emotional closeness. The scene mirrors social norms that associate femininity with gentleness, reconciliation, and moral duty toward family unity.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers deliberately frame this moment as an emotional turning point that anchors Ellian's actions in familial devotion. Through her soft tone and vulnerable phrasing, the film encodes the idea that Ellian's sense of obligation toward her parents is central to her identity. The scene reinforces the message that a daughter's moral grounding and her motivation throughout the story, comes from her commitment to protecting and restoring her family.
3. Constructionist Mode: A dominant reading would interpret this as a touching expression of love and responsibility. A negotiated reading might appreciate the emotional depth while recognizing that Ellian carries a disproportionate emotional burden compared to male characters her age. An oppositional reading may critique the film for reinforcing the stereotype that young women are expected to manage family emotions and perform the role of emotional caretaker.

Data 2: "You don't understand. These are my parents. This is your king and queen."
Time code : 32:19
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: The utterance reflects a traditional value system where loyalty to one's family and to established hierarchy is presented as morally

non-negotiable. By emphasizing both familial ties and royal status, Ellian positions herself within a cultural framework that views daughters as protectors of family honor. The scene underlines how social and familial obligations overlap in patriarchal structures.

2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers intentionally construct Ellian as someone who safeguards her family's dignity, reinforcing a conventional expectation placed upon daughters within royal or noble settings. The encoded message is that her moral duty is aligned with protecting her parents' authority and identity. This portrayal underscores a gendered ideology in which female characters uphold familial and social legitimacy.
3. Constructionist Mode: A dominant reading might view this as admirable loyalty. A negotiated reading may see her stance as influenced by her royal upbringing rather than by gender alone. An oppositional reading could argue that the film continues to situate women within roles tied to loyalty, honor, and familial protection rather than allowing them independent political or structural power.

Data 3: "You are my parents, and I am your daughter."
Time code : 01:02:23
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This utterance presents identity through the lens of family roles, aligning with cultural norms that define women primarily by their relational positions. The statement highlights a traditional ideological framework in which a daughter's role is grounded in emotional bonds and obligations to her family.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers encode this line as a reaffirmation of Ellian's identity and moral center. By emphasizing the parent–daughter relationship, the film reinforces the idea that her sense of purpose is inseparable from her family ties. It signals that her decisions and emotional motivations stem from her position within the family rather than from individual or institutional aspirations.
3. Constructionist Mode: A dominant reading interprets this as a sincere expression of familial connection. A negotiated reading acknowledges her strength while noting that her identity remains anchored in her role as "daughter." An oppositional reading may argue that the film limits female agency by keeping female identity tied to domestic and emotional spheres, whereas male characters in many narratives are permitted more autonomous identities.

Tabel 3. Emotional Control & Polite Discourse (Internalized Femininity)

No	Ellian's Statement	Timecode	Category
1	Minister Nazara.	02:58	Polite address
2	How to break the spell… what now?	08:48	Anxious self-talk
3	So tragic… little scroll in his beak.	10:11	Soft tone
4	Third moon… that's tonight.	12:13	Self-reflection
5	I have a good feeling about this.	20:57	Optimism
6	Sorry about that.	21:48	Apology
7	Sorry, Bolinar!	39:24	Polite apology
8	Not at the top of my to-do list.	40:03	Light sarcasm / softening
9	I'll never see my parents again.	43:48	Emotional vulnerability
10	That's no problem. I don't have dark feelings.	46:36	Emotional denial / control
11	Don't be scared. We'll be fine.	01:29:05	Comforting others
12	The new normal surprisingly works.	01:34:01	Acceptance
13	Free to just be regular me.	01:34:24	Self-acceptance

Table 3 lists 15 of Ellian's utterances categorized as Emotional Control and Polite Discourse, demonstrating how this character embodies internalized femininity. These utterances demonstrate politeness, self-control, a gentle tone, and a tendency to reassure others, even when she herself is under stress. This pattern indicates that Ellian maintains conventional feminine performativity, namely being cautious, non-aggressive, and managing emotions stably. Within Stuart Hall's theoretical framework, this representation reflects an encoding process that maintains traditional feminine values as part of female identity. Meanwhile, through a constructionist mode, viewers can interpret Ellian as an emotionally mature figure, or conversely, as a representation of women expected to remain calm and maintain social harmony a form of gentle yet constraining social control. Overall, these categories demonstrate that although Ellian is portrayed as a strong and youthful leader, the film still reproduces elements of a "soft" and controlled femininity. This shows that the representation of women in films is still influenced by cultural norms that require women to appear friendly, polite, and emotionally stable, even when they are in leadership positions.

Data 1: “Minister Nazara.” (spoken politely)
Time code : 02:58
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This utterance reflects a cultural norm that encourages girls and young women to communicate with politeness, restraint, and deference especially toward authority figures. Ellian’s tone signals respect and self-control, aligning with traditional expectations that femininity should be expressed through soft speech, courtesy, and emotional moderation. The scene mirrors social patterns in which young women are encouraged to present themselves as agreeable and considerate in public interactions.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers intentionally frame Ellian as a polite and well-mannered princess whose communication reflects her upbringing. By having her address the minister with a controlled tone, the film encodes a

feminine ideal centered on civility and emotional balance. The choice to emphasize her polite demeanor reinforces an image of femininity that values calmness and social grace.

3. Constructionist Mode: A dominant reading may view her politeness as a sign of maturity and respect. A negotiated reading might acknowledge her courtesy while recognizing that the expectation to be "polite" is more strongly imposed on girls than boys. An oppositional reading could critique the scene as reinforcing the notion that young women must soften themselves to be heard, whereas male characters often speak with more direct authority.

Data 2: "Sorry about that." (to the oracles)
Time code : 21:48
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This utterance reflects cultural norms in which women are expected to apologize frequently, even for minor disruptions. The apology signals emotional self-management. Ellian is careful not to appear rude, demanding, or overly assertive. The scene captures a common expectation that young women maintain harmony in social interactions by softening their presence through apologies.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers use this brief apology to encode Ellian as someone who manages conflict in gentle and socially acceptable ways. The line reinforces her internalized femininity: she regulates her emotions, stays composed, and ensures that her actions do not offend others. The film seems to highlight a feminine communication style rooted in empathy, caution, and self-adjustment.
3. Constructionist Mode: Dominant viewers may read this as evidence of Ellian's kindness and respectful nature. Negotiated viewers might recognize her politeness while still noting that such habitual apologizing reflects gendered expectations. Oppositional viewers could argue that the film subtly reinforces a stereotype that women must constantly moderate themselves and apologize, even in situations beyond their control.

Data 3: "Don't be scared. We'll be fine."
Time code : 01:29:05
Analysis:

1. Reflective Mode: This utterance reflects cultural expectations that women should act as emotional stabilizers: soothing others, offering comfort, and maintaining calm during distress. Ellian's reassurance positions her as a source of emotional balance, a role traditionally linked to femininity. Instead of expressing fear or tension, she restrains her own emotions to care for the feelings of those around her.
2. Intentional Mode: The filmmakers deliberately portray Ellian as emotionally grounded and nurturing. By giving her a line that comforts others rather than

signaling panic, the film encodes a feminine ideal centered on empathy, composure, and emotional maturity. This reinforces the idea that her strength is expressed not through aggression, but through calm guidance and reassurance.

3. Constructionist Mode: A dominant reading might interpret the utterance as admirable emotional leadership. A negotiated reading may appreciate her composure while acknowledging that the emotional-caregiver role is often placed on women in media. An oppositional reading could argue that the film keeps Ellian within a traditionally feminine emotional script providing comfort rather than asserting more direct authority.

1.2. Discussion

Research findings show that the representation of Ellian in Spellbound (2024) is dominated by constructs of leadership and decision-making, far outnumbering those in the moral-familial or emotional regulation categories. A total of 28 utterances included in the leadership category indicate that the film intensively positions Ellian as the center of control, strategy, and direction throughout the storyline. Through Stuart Hall's representational framework (Hall, 1997) , the dominance of this category indicates that the construction of meaning about women in the film is no longer limited to domestic and emotional roles, but rather shifts toward becoming figures who actively shape the course of events.

In Hall's reflective mode, the numerous utterances regarding command, navigation, group direction, and tactical decisions reflect social changes that are increasingly opening up space for women as public leaders. Commands such as "Soldiers! Put down your weapons," "Mom, Dad, follow me," or "Quick, everyone down there" (Data is provided in the table 1 above) emphasize that Ellian is not portrayed as a figure awaiting protection, but rather as one who provides protection to others. The high number of data in this category also indicates that the filmmakers position women's decision-making abilities as an integral aspect of Ellian's identity. In the intentional mode, the dominance of leadership utterances indicates that the filmmakers consciously encoded representations of female empowerment through direct action, rather than purely symbolic visualization. The bold choice of words, the use of imperative sentences, and Ellian's involvement in every stage of conflict resolution are narrative strategies that position women as the primary drivers. With 28 data points falling into this category, the film displays a more consistent pattern than the representation of women in traditional animation, where women often act as companions, not as plot drivers. In the constructionist mode, the abundance of leadership data provides interpretive space for viewers to view Ellian as a modern female figure with strategic capacity. Viewers with a dominant reading might see this as a progressive representation of female empowerment. Negotiating viewers might acknowledge her strength but still consider her exceptional due to her status as a royal princess. Meanwhile, opposing

readings might argue that although Ellian leads, female leadership remains framed within certain moral boundaries: she avoids violence, prioritizes safety, and leads with gentleness. However, despite this, the sheer volume of data suggests that the leadership space afforded to female characters is undergoing transformation. Compared to the first category, the second category, containing 21 items related to morals and familial obligations, shows that the film also maintains traditional feminine aspects. Many of Ellian's statements focus on her sense of responsibility towards her parents, worry, and affection. Within Hall's framework, this category reflects the film's continued upholding of the long-standing ideology in which women are seen as the guardians of the family's emotional stability. While significant in number, this portion remains subordinate to the leadership category, preventing Ellian's moral role from overshadowing her position as a leader.

Meanwhile, the third category, with only 13 items related to emotional control and politeness, shows that Ellian's feminine side is depicted, but not central to the representation. She still displays politeness, empathy, and the ability to calm others, but this small number of items indicates that the film does not construct Ellian as a woman whose identity hinges on gentleness or obedience. Through Hall's theory (Hall, 1997), this category demonstrates how feminine elements are positioned not as limitations, but as part of a broader character construction. Overall, the comparison of the number of items across categories makes it clear that Spellbound strives to present a more progressive representation of women. With the leadership category heavily dominating, Ellian is constructed as a character who drives the narrative, makes critical decisions, and carries out strategic functions in almost all conflicts. However, the presence of moral and emotional categories indicates that this representation remains layered, empowering women but still framed by traditional values. This aligns with Hall's concept that representation is the result of negotiation: neither completely abandoning old ideologies, but also no longer fully subservient to traditional patterns (Hall, 1997).

The findings of this study are in line with the research objective, which is to examine how Ellian’s speech constructs female representation in *Spellbound* (2024). The analysis shows that her dialogue reflects a combination of empowerment and traditional expectations, with a clear dominance of leadership-oriented expressions (28 items) compared to moral-familial responsibility (21 items) and emotional regulation (13 items). This distribution indicates that Ellian is primarily constructed as a decisive and strategic leader, while still maintaining elements of familial responsibility and emotional awareness. This suggests that female characters in contemporary animated films are increasingly portrayed as complex and multidimensional figures, rather than being confined to a single fixed identity. These results are also consistent with previous studies by Vashista (2024), Wang and Pan (2024), and Saneleuterio and Soler-Campo (2025), which show that female characters in modern media are increasingly represented as independent and active, although they still carry certain traditional gender roles. This combination

indicates that gender representation in film is not static, but constantly negotiated through character dialogue and narrative context. However, this study is limited to verbal data only, so it does not analyze visual or cinematic elements that may also contribute to the meaning-making in the film. Therefore, the interpretation of representation in this study focuses specifically on language use. Future research is suggested to explore other aspects such as visual representation or to compare different animated films in order to gain a broader understanding of how female characters are constructed in media.

CONCLUSION

The consequences of this observe imply that Spellbound (2024) offers a more innovative representation of women than traditional animation styles. through the dominance of utterances expressing management, initiative, and choice-making capabilities, Ellian is portrayed as a woman individual who has real manage over the storyline. This representation emphasizes that ladies can play strategic, rational, and influential roles in conflict dynamics, rather than sincerely occupying helping roles. however, the film continues factors of traditional ideology thru utterances emphasizing family relationships, morality, and emotional manage. This demonstrates that discourse on ladies in animation stays in a realm of negotiation: transferring toward empowerment, but not but completely liberating itself from hooked up female values. based on these findings, this have a look at shows that studies of female illustration in current animation need to consciousness now not simplest on visuals or narrative roles, however also on the linguistic buildings utilized by lady characters. Speech analysis has been shown to provide a clearer photograph of how ideology operates and how meanings about women are fashioned and negotiated. similarly studies can expand the item of examine to other lively movies that function girl characters as the middle of the story, so that a more complete understanding may be received approximately the direction of development of lady representation inside the cutting-edge animation enterprise. Based on these findings, more studies on female illustration in animation movie needs closer investigation, particularly on the linguistic elements utilized by the female characters. In addition, I suggest on how the popular music video and other cultural visual forms, representing the female character needs further elaboration. Speech analysis also becomes an important element to be more investigated, because it provides a clearer photograph of how ideology and meanings about women are negotiated and reconstructed. Similarly, this studies also contribute to more examination to other lively movies that function female characters as the middle of the story, so that a more complete understanding may be taken approximately into the direction of development of female representation inside the cutting-edge animation enterprise.

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