

Symbolic Connotations in Animated Movie Songs -A Semiotic Analysis of "Let It Go" from the Movie Frozen-

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Abstract:

This study explores the power of audio-visual symbols in media products, particularly animated movies; and their influence on children's beliefs and perceptions. Animated movies often appeal to young audiences through dynamic action, vibrant colors, music, and aesthetic beauty. Algerian children, like their peers worldwide, display a natural curiosity that makes them receptive to such content. Even when exposed to foreign languages, they readily recall specific words, gestures, and melodies, which in turn shape broader aspects of their behavior, including clothing styles and haircuts.

Among these cultural products, Frozen stands out as one of the most celebrated animated movies, achieving global popularity and enduring resonance. Children frequently imitate the characters' actions in everyday contexts and often acquire toys modeled after beloved figures such as Elsa, Anna, and Olaf. This study focuses on the song **Let It Go** as a case for semiotic analysis. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Christian Metz and Roland Barthes, the research examines the signs and symbols embedded in the song, highlighting their role in shaping meaning and cultural impact.

Key words: Symbolic Connotations, Songs, Lyrics, Animated Movie, Algerian Child.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary movie industry has undergone profound transformations at both the technical and creative levels, marked by innovations, diverse thematic explorations, and dynamic visual storytelling. These developments have been facilitated by advances in modern technology, the refinement of high-definition audio-visual devices, and professional expertise in integrating sound effects, colors, and music.

In this context, discussions of cinematic creativity inevitably turn to the United States, which is home to globally renowned media corporations such as Walt Disney. Beyond its dominance in international production, Disney has played a pivotal role in disseminating American culture and lifestyle worldwide, while simultaneously contributing to the diffusion of both colloquial and formal English.

Within this framework, every element of a film carries significance; however, songs often assume a particularly crucial role in animated films. Children may forget specific narrative details, yet they rarely forget the songs, which encapsulate melodies, lyrics, and choreography that resonate across developmental stages and exert strong emotional and behavioral influence.

Both animated and live-action movies are saturated with meanings, symbols, and implicit messages. Consequently, cinematic works frequently provoke debate among audiences and critics, the latter often emphasizing that nothing in cinema is accidental, but rather constructed through signs and symbols that reveal hidden meanings and objectives.

Among contemporary animated movies, *Frozen* stands out as one of the most celebrated, particularly for its iconic song **Let It Go**. This song conveys complex emotions and illustrates Elsa's liberation from fear, even as she abandons her kingdom and sister due to the burden of her magical powers, which isolate her from a normal childhood.

Beyond its narrative, the movie employs symbolic colors, evocative melodies, and powerful lyrics that encourage children -especially young girls- to imitate Elsa's gestures, movements, and body language. Such imitation extends beyond play, potentially shaping values, principles, and behavior in real life.

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Considering these points, the present study seeks to identify the symbolic elements embedded in Frozen's song Let It Go and to interpret their connotations by addressing the central research question: **What are the symbolic connotations in the song "Let It Go"?**

2. Methods.

In this study, we employed a **descriptive qualitative method** that "has become a general procedure for researching in multiple academic fields, such as education, psychology, and social sciences. Logical approaches, discourse analysis, case studies, ethnography, open-ended interviews, direct participant observation, counselling, therapy, grounded theory, biography, comparative approaches, introspection, focus groups, literary criticism, meditation techniques, and other techniques are all part of qualitative research" (Furidha, 2024).

In order to analyze the symbolic connotations used in animated movies, we began with the recognition that cinema encompasses numerous visual, verbal, and nonverbal signs. To address this complexity, our study adopts two theoretical approaches, drawing on the work of Roland Barthes and Christian Metz. Speaking of Roland Barthes, his work on semiotics highlighted the complex relationship between signifiers and signified, revealing how meaning is constructed through layers of interpretation. "Signifiers (1) directly point to signified (2), forming the denotative level of meaning. Barthes' theory emphasizes that connotative signs are not merely arbitrary additions to denotative ones. They are intricately intertwined, with connotative meanings emerging from and enriching the denotative level". (Hilma Safitri, 2025)

He "took semiotics further to describe how researchers must move beyond the common and obvious meanings of signs to see the hidden meanings in complex messages., **Barthes'** theory describes a bi-level reading of messages that must take place. The initial level, denotation, is a starting point in which one reads the direct, specific meaning of the sign. This is followed by the connotation, the second level, in which the meaning that is evoked by the object is read. Barthes describes connotation as something that reflects the cultural meanings, mythologies, and ideologies" (Emily B.

Rhoades, 2008).

For the second researcher, **Christian Metz** introduced a significant epistemological shift in movie theory. As Warren Buckland explains, Metz “had adopted a new epistemological attitude that Warren Buckland describes as a shift from the realist epistemology of classical movie theory to the relativist epistemology brought about by the linguistic turn, an epistemology that avoids the Hegelian fallacy of identifying the real object with the object of knowledge because it realizes that the scientific paradigm does not discover its specific object of study but must construct it, as Metz points out in the beginning of *Language and Cinema*: the cinema or the movie in itself is not the object of knowledge, but a heterogeneous phenomenon that can be studied from different points of view. Instead of the ‘cinema is’ perspective, the new approach was the ‘cinema can be studied as’” (Pärn, 2012). This perspective reframes cinema not as a fixed entity but as a heterogeneous phenomenon open to diverse analytical approaches

From this perspective, our research unfolded in two phases. The first phase involved selecting the movie **Frozen**, chosen for its global popularity and its rich symbolism, which provides fertile ground for semiotic analysis. The second phase focused on the song **Let It Go**, examined through the technical interplay of image and soundtrack across its 4 minutes and 3 seconds of duration. To address the central research question, the semiotic study was organized into three key components:

- 1- Denotative level.**
- 2- Connotative level.**
- 3- Linguistic messages.**

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3. Results.

3.1 Technical cutting.

Visual Track					Soundtrack				
Shot Number	Shot duration	Type of shot	Shooting angle	Camera movement	Type of music	Other sound effects	Commentary or dialogue	General atmosphere of the shot	Signs meaning
1	0:0-0:15	Establishing wide shot	High angle/Bird's eye	Dolly	Instrumental intro – soft piano + ambient wind sounds (atmospheric)	Strong wind+ piano+ a sound resembling soft whistling or a howling wind.	/	Snowfall on the mountains accompanied with a strong wind	Harsh weather, enforced exile, and deep isolation
2	0:15-0:25	Long shot/down shot	High angle	Tracking	Vocal solo begins – soft, reflective singing starts	Piano + a sound resembling soft whistling.	The snow glows white on the mountain tonight not a footprint to be seen.	On the great mountain stands a young girl, crowned and cloaked in purple, her face marked by sadness as she shivers in the cold.	Withdrawing from those dearest, and sinking into loneliness.
3	0:25-1:01	Long shot/medium shot	Eye level	Dolly	Vocal solo continues – gentle and emotional (low dynamic range)	Piano	A kingdom of isolation and it looks like I'm the queen. And it looks like I'm the queen. The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside.	She moves slowly across the snow-laden mountain, wearing only a glove on her right hand as she clasps her left. Her head is bowed, her voice low in song, and she strives to reveal her feelings through gestures and the language of her body. She continues her	Feelings of disappointment, the magic still hidden, and a lingering sense of fear

							Don't let them in, don't let them see. Be the good girl you always have to be Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know	slow walk, singing softly while burdened with self-blame.	
4	1:01-1:04	Low shot	High - angle	Tilt	Crescendo – sudden rise in vocal intensity	Piano+ The sound of a glove being removed	Well, now they know!	Suddenly her voice rises with newfound confidence. She removes her glove and casts it aside.	Feeling of freedom+ the self-confidence.
5	1:04-1:12	Medium shot/long shot	Eye-level to slightly low	Pan/dolly	Chorus starts – powerful and expressive	The sound of magic+ sound of the Olaf creating + piano	Let it go, let it go Can't hold it back anymore	She delights in practicing magic wherever she goes, conjuring a snowman (Olaf) with a mere shake of her hands.	The beginning of changes+ self acceptance+ no need to hide any secret anymore.
6	1:12-1:19	Low shot/medium shot	High - angle / Eye-level	/	Chorus continues – strong, confident musical tone	The sound of magic movements+ piano	Let it go, let it go Turn away and slam the door!	She conveys her emotions through song and the graceful control of her body, her happiness shining through.	The past does not matter anymore+ keeping going without looking back.
7	1:20-1:28	Medium shot/long shot/	Eye-level	Pan/dolly	Chorus extension intensified vocal + orchestral build-up	The sound of magic+ the piano	I don't care What they're going to say Let the storm rage on,	She seems to dance as she moves, practicing her magic wherever she goes. Her voice shifts, rising higher, more vibrant and expressive.	The power of magic+ feeling special+ neglecting the others opinion+ The challenge.
8	1:29-1:42	extreme close-up	Eye level / eye	Dolly /	Bridge (transition) –	Piano + The sound of a cloak flying	The cold never bothered	She removes her cloak, as the formal garments	Confronting harsh weather

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		medium shot. low shot/extreme close-up medium shot	bird angle		slightly calmer, introspective but still confident	through the air	me anyway! It's funny how some distance Makes everything seem small.	weigh upon her. Freed, she walks on, her gaze wandering joyfully in every direction.	+freedom from royal duty
9	1:42-1:50	Extreme Close-up shot/medium shot/long shot	Eye-level	Dolly/tracking	Bridge continues – vocals and orchestration start rising again	The sound of the magic+ piano	And the fears that once controlled me Can't get to me at all!	She runs across the snow-covered mountain, searching intently for something unseen.	Searching for a suitable place, ensuring distance from others.
10	1:50-2:03	Long shot/medium shot	Eye-level to slight low	Dolly/Tilt/tracking	Musical climax build-up – full orchestral support, inspiring mood	Piano+ the sound of creating a magical bridge+ sound of magical movements.	It's time to see what I can do To test the limits and break through No right, no wrong, no rules for me I'm free!	She builds an ice bridge with the movements of her hands and feet, spanning from one mountain to another.	Unveiling the power of magic + rebelling against social norms + rejecting established rules
11	2:03-2:20	Down close-up shot/medium shot/wide shot	Eye-level / Slight low	Dolly	Chorus (variation) – expressive high notes	The sound of ice beneath her feet on the bridge + the sound of magic unfolding.	Let it go, let it go I am one with the wind and sky Let it go, let it go You'll never see me cry	She transforms the snow bridge into shimmering ice, crystalline and radiant. Smiling, she walks across, eager for the next act of magic.	Appreciation of the magical gift + reverence for nature's powers
12	2:20-2:31	High close-up shot/low shot/medium shot	Low - angle + High -	Tilt /dolly	Climax – dramatic vocals with strong	The sound of magic + the sound of her feet on the ground	Here I stand And here I'll stay	She chose the summit as her dwelling, placing her feet once more upon the snow, where a	Recognizing one's own possessions + feeling empowered +

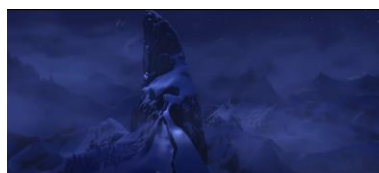
			angle mix		orchestration		Let the storm rage on!	market of her own design appeared on the ground, shaped like a snowflake.	cautioning others.
13	2:31-2:36	Long wide shot	High - angle	Tilt	Orchestral solo – brief instrumental break as she raises her hands	The sound of ice walls rising from the snow + the echo of their emergence.	/	She raises her hands, preparing to build something new.	Experimenting with magical power + finding true happiness in solitude, away from everyone.
14	2:36-2:59	Long shot/down-high shot	High - angle to Eye-level	Dolly/tilt	Chorus + Instrumental Dance Section – flowing melody, magical rhythm	The sound of creating a magical castle + the sound of every phase of its construction.	My power flurries through the air into the ground My soul is spiralling in frozen fractals all around And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast	With a magical movement that resembled a dance, she finally conjured a magnificent ice castle.	An alternative kingdom + the truest sense of home
15	2:59-3:10	Medium shot	Eye-level	Dolly	Chorus reprise – emotional reaffirmation	The sound of the crown	I'm never going back, Let it go, let it go.	She cast away her crown and transformed her hairstyle, embracing a new sense of freedom.	Relinquishing authority + breaking free from royal protocols.
16	3:10-3:22	Low shot/high shot/long shot	High - angle	Tracking/dolly	Final chorus rise – rising vocal line with visual transformation	The sound of her dress transforming + the sound of a beautiful cloak being created.	And I'll rise like the break of dawn Let it go, let it go That perfect girl is gone!	She transformed the rest of her garments into crystal attire, shimmering with light, and conjured a new cloak to complete her look.	A profound transformation + the beginning of a new life
17	3:22-3:29	Long shot/medium	Eye-level	Tracking/dolly	Anthemic declaration – strong and	The piano	Here I stand In the light of day	Her body language grew stronger and more defined,	Demonstrating capacities

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		dium shot			confident melody			each step firm and assured, radiating newfound power..	
18	3:29- 3:36	High shot/ establish ing wide shot	High - angl e / Bird 's- eye	Tilt	Closing line of chorus – final high note	The piano.	Let the storm rage on	From the castle's balcony she gazes at the sunset, her eyes filled with quiet wonder.	Hope renewed + the dawn of a new day
19	3:36- 3:42	Extreme medium shot/ establish ing shot /Wide pull back/	Eye- level to High - angl e	Dolly /Trackin g	Instrumen tal outro – soft piano with echoing final words	The sound of her cloak shifting + the sound of the door closing	The cold never bothered me anyway	Her gaze has changed from the beginning; now it carries satisfaction. A faint smirk lingers as she turns to enter her castle, and as her song ends, the door—marked with the image of a snowflake— closes behind her.	Overcoming the past + leaving the past behind + adapting to the snow

3.2 Denotative level.

The video begins with a wide shot of the wintry landscape, showing snowfall over the great chain Mountains accompanied by the sound of a strong wind. Soon, a soft and beautiful wordless melody starts to play. Meanwhile, the camera gradually zooms in on one of the tallest peaks, focusing on a small figure moving toward the summit, later revealed to be a young girl walking alone.



Elsa is fleeing from her kingdom and her closest sister, Anna. She appears sad and disappointed, dressed in a green and black royal gown with a purple

cloak draped from her shoulders to her feet. A crown rests upon her head, and she wears only a glove on her right hand, while her left hand remains bare, exposed to the cold..



Her right hand clasps the other, as if to ward off the cold. With her head bowed and her steps slow, she expresses herself by singing softly. She seems uncertain of her destination, especially in such harsh weather.



The sky is dark and grey, with heavy snow still falling, making the mountains difficult to traverse. Amid these harsh conditions, she begins to warn and blame herself through body language and expressive gestures. Suddenly, she halts, recalling that her people have discovered her secret. At that moment, she removes her glove and raises her voice to a higher tone, appearing transformed-different, yet confident.



The essence of the scene lies in the way she practices her magic. She shakes her hands in every direction -right, left, and upward- as though the power originates from within her body, with her hands making it visible in the form of thin, sparkling snow. No longer afraid to reveal her secret, she

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embraces her abilities, which clearly stem from snow and ice. By nature, she is a wintry soul, perfectly attuned to this weather.



As she continues her ascent, Elsa keeps singing, declaring her rejection of the rules and norms of her society. Indifferent to others' opinions, it becomes clear that she is searching for a place of her own a sanctuary where she can truly belong. Her next act is to cast away her crown and change her hairstyle.

After a few steps, she removes her cloak and lets the wind carry it away. With a graceful movement of her hands, she conjures a magical creature, Olaf. In parallel, she uses her feet to form an ice bridge connecting her mountain to a higher peak. Upon reaching the summit, she presses her feet into the ground, leaving behind her mark in the shape of a snowflake.



Her journey does not end there. Raising her hands, she conjures a magnificent crystal castle from the snow with magical, elegant movements reminiscent of Victorian-era dancing. Once her creation is complete, she transforms her appearance, donning a crystal gown and cloak that harmonize with the grandeur of the castle. Empowered by her magic, she walks with confidence, like a model, toward the balcony, where she gazes at the sunset.

The camera then pulls back to reveal a sweeping wide shot of the mountains and the castle's location. Before she turns to enter, the camera closes in on Elsa, capturing her gaze -now different from the beginning-and her subtle smirk. The video concludes with her shutting the great ice door behind her.



3.3 Connotative level.

- ✓ **Context and Intertextuality:** The **Let It Go** sequence in Frozen reflects Elsa's transformation and independence. Its narrative is loosely inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen, published in 1844. In Andersen's version, "the character is a mute, whose role is visible only through her actions, she casts a spell on Kay, without any motive behind it and keeps him captivated in her castle. She is represented as an evil character. There are two play mates Kay and Gerda, Kay the boy gets splinters in his eyes and heart and he turns hateful towards everyone. Gerda finally resolves to bring her friend back and she breaks the spell cast on Kay." (Mehwish Ali Khan, 2017)

In stark contrast to Andersen's original story, Frozen is a modern adaptation of The Snow Queen, "revolves around two sibling princesses and how they resolve misunderstandings and acrimony surrounding the magical powers of the eldest, Elsa, who proves ill equipped to handle her potentially lethal powers to freeze anything and anyone in the world around her.

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Unknown to her younger sister, Anna, the parents isolate a young Elsa to protect Anna and everyone else from Elsa's unwitting misuse of her powers. When the parents later die at sea and Elsa is crowned, she unintentionally drives the kingdom into perennial winter because she is incapable of managing her power. After Elsa flees in shame and fear, Anna then searches for Elsa." (Madeline Streiff, 2017)

- ✓ **Colors:** By looking at the video content, we can identify the most prominent colors, such as pure white, green, blue, purple, and other shiny, sparkling tones. Although many studies attempt to interpret their meaning, overall "color is a perception not a property; it exists as a function of our vision and cerebral function, hence, a color can symbolise anything we want it to symbolise." (Hutchings, 2012)
- **White:** "as a color originating from the fundamental experience of something that has not yet been stepped on, such as a snowy white earth, a white paper that has not been written on anything yet, or a freshly blooming white flower that has not yet been touched, for example. Therefore, she said that all these things meant virginity and chastity implicit in white" (Kyunghee Ma, 2023)
- **Blue:** "Blue is not only connected to the sky, but also has links to depression and also to fear, connections which may be due in part to the proximity of dark blue to black on the color scale". (Philip, 2003)
- **Black :** We observed this color in the weather, the clouds, her royal dress, and the cloak; predominantly black "represents a lack of color, the primordial void, emptiness. It can also mean sorrow or mourning, in the Christian tradition of wearing black to funerals. In this respect it can also symbolise death. Black is also linked to witchcraft (Black Magic), evil, and the unknown, as the predominant color worn by "evil witches" in colonial America" (TORHOVETS, 2022).
- **Purple :** We see this color on her cloak; it is a striking and elegant shade, described as the "most royal color that is associated with wealth, prosperity, rich sophistication. This color stimulates the brain activity used in problem solving. However, when overused in a common setting it is associated with putting on airs and being artificial. Use purple most carefully to lend an air

of mystery, wisdom, and respect. Young adolescent girls are most likely to select nearly all shades of purple as their favorite color" (Meghamala. S. Tavaragi, 2016)

✓ **Shapes and Symbols.**

- **Snow:** This symbol carries multiple meanings, ranging from purity to death. "Snow often conveys a sense of bleakness and death. It is often described as a covering that mutes noise and blocks sight. With this description, snow effectively isolates a person from the world" (Brodowicz, 2024)
- **Snowflake:** In Western culture, the snowflake is associated with symbolic geometry. "The geometrical form of the hexagonal snowflake, the six-pointed star, is a widespread mythological symbol. There are striking parallels between the traditional connotations of the six-rayed star and some of the main connotations of snowfall" (Klujber, 2022).
- **Mountains:** In fairy-tale movies, mountains often represent height, strength, and transcendence. In American cinema, however, they carry a mythical dimension, symbolizing the relationship between sky and earth and often denoting the dwelling place of God. "Mountains in cinema can provide not simply a backdrop or setting, nor an abstract symbol, but something that absorbs and exceeds all of these. Within a story a mountain becomes more than a place or geological feature. Its manifestation on movie conjures a range of associations and meanings, which the movie as a whole articulates. We might call these symbolic if we understand this term from a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective, rather than an abstract signification of meaning" (Christian Quendler, 2025)
- **Castle:** Before examining the symbolic meaning of the castle in media content, it is important to recall that the logo of Walt Disney itself is a castle, signifying its dominance in international production. Returning to the song, we can observe that although Elsa abandoned her kingdom and fled from her people, she never relinquished her identity as queen. This is why she created an ice castle. (Here I stand and here I stay)

- **Bridge:** The ice bridge in the song functions as a tool of transition and connection between mountains. When we explored its semiotic significance, we found multiple interpretations. The "Bridges have semiotic characteristics, at least on two levels. On one level, they connect different parts of the universe. In this capacity, bridges are signs, connecting two distinct parts of something. It is not easy to say, whether they are parts of the same continuum (as e.g. 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 etc., where the 'fives' and the 'tens' are chain-like 'bridges' in a set of numbers), or they connect different parts" (VOIGT, 2012).

3.4 Linguistic messages: In this section of the paper, we aim to examine the meaning and impact of the lyrics and melody of **Let It Go**. To contextualize this analysis, it is important to note that the original vocalist of the song is the American actress and singer Idina Menzel. The lyricists, Robert Lopez, and Kristen Anderson-Lopez, both American songwriters, composed the piece in **2013** for Disney's animated musical movie **Frozen**. Turning to the implicit messages embedded in the lyrics, we have divided the song according to its connotations, specific sound elements, and accompanying non-verbal communication, as outlined below.:

- **Disappointment:** The snow glows white on the mountain tonight / Not a footprint to be seen /A kingdom of isolation /And it looks like I'm the queen.(low note)
- **Self-Blame:** Don't let them in, don't let them see /Be the good girl you always have to be /Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know.
- **Revealing the secret :** Well, now they know /Let it go, let it go/ Can't hold it back anymore.
- **Indifference:** Turn away and slam the door /I don't care what they're going to say.
- **Adaptation to Harsh Weather:** Let the storm rage on /The cold never bothered me anyway.
- **Beginning to Overcome Fear:** It's funny how some distance makes everything seem small /And the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all.
- **Self-exploration:** It's time to see what I can do /To test the limits and break through

- **Rebellion against norms:** No right, no wrong, no rules for me /I'm free /Let it go, let it go.
- **Self- confidence:** I am one with the wind and sky...../ You'll never see me cry...
- **Choosing Isolation:** Here I stand and here I stay /Let the storm rage on.
- **Pride in the magical abilities:** My power flurries through the air into the ground /My soul is spiralling in frozen fractals all around /And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast.
- **Rejection of the past:** I'm never going back; the past is in the past... / And I'll rise like the break of dawn.
- **Confession of transformation:** That perfect girl is gone /Here I stand in the light of day /Let the storm rage on /The cold never bothered me anyway.

4. CONCLUSION/DESCUSSION.

After analyzing the technical cutting, denotative, connotative levels, and the linguistic messages, we can summarize the most important results as follows:

For the **denotative Level** there is a clear variety in camera movements, shot types, and angles. Most notably, the close-up shot is emphasized, highlighting Elsa's facial expressions and emotions.

-The song incorporates three layers of sound:

1. Musical instruments, particularly the piano.
2. Natural and magical sound effects, such as wind and shimmering movements.
3. Elsa's singing voice, which serves as the most crucial element.

-The dominant color is pure white, seen in the snow, the castle, and Elsa's dress. Blue follows as the secondary color, appearing in both her attire and the castle.

As for the **connotative level**, the song portrays Elsa as a victim rather than the direct cause of the eternal winter.

- Winter itself is symbolically associated with sadness and depression.

- Elsa's actions reveal irresponsibility; she chooses to flee, leaving her sister behind.

-Negative values emerge, such as giving up, isolation, and indifference to the kingdom's fate.

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- The narrative encourages choosing easy solutions and accepting fear as a central emotion.
- Magic is depicted as a forbidden sin, which Elsa conceals instead of sharing with her sister leading to familial misunderstanding.
- The song content reinforces rebellion against societal norms, rejecting the ideal of being “the perfect girl” and promotes hiding rather than confrontation.

With respect to the **linguistic messages**, the beauty and melodiousness of **Let It Go** are undeniable. The lyrics are clear, direct, and easy to repeat, especially when paired with Elsa’s expressive body language.

- The song is skillfully performed: Elsa lowers her voice at the beginning and raises it as she ascends the mountain, reflecting her inner transformation.
- The combination of lyrics, melody, and visuals conveys her growing confidence. This artistic synergy has a significant impact on children’s perceptions and beliefs, particularly when supported by excellent sound design and high-definition imagery.

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