

**“They’re better people than most of us
‘normal’ people will ever be.”**

A linguistic analysis of Othering practices in YouTube comments about people with Down syndrome

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Abstract

This article examines how people with Down syndrome are discursively constructed as a social group, differentiated from, and subordinated to people without disabilities in YouTube comments. Such routinized processes of outgroup construction, differentiation, and subordination realized through linguistic patterns are conceptualized as discursive practices of Othering. The analysis is based on a corpus of 1,101 user comments posted in response to three YouTube documentaries featuring individuals with Down syndrome in French, Spanish, and English. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, it draws on the analytical framework of racial Othering proposed in Zapf (2025), explores the applicability of this model to discourse on disability, and extends it. The findings show that most processes of Othering identified in Zapf (2025) also occur in the corpus analyzed here, although the majority of comments express a positive stance toward people with Down syndrome. Three additional processes are identified: idealization, which involves the generic attribution of moral exemplarity to people with Down syndrome; exceptionalization, through which positively evaluated characteristics and behaviors are construed as unexpected and therefore exceptional when displayed by people with Down syndrome; and functionalization, through which the “value” people with Down syndrome are said to provide for nondisabled society is foregrounded. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that at the linguistic level, Othering frequently operates implicitly, for instance, through comparisons that leave the reference group unspecified. Overall, the study highlights the analytical utility of the concept of Othering for the linguistic study of constructions of social difference.

1 Introduction

In the spring of 2025, AI-based video manipulation tools that simulated facial characteristics associated with Down syndrome gained popularity on social media. Consequently, AI-altered content circulated on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram in which predominantly young women, often in sexualized ways, were portrayed as having Down syndrome. Many of these videos included captions posing questions such as whether the viewer would consider dating a woman with Down syndrome, and some were linked to pornographic websites. This trend sparked public debates concerning the representation of individuals with Down syndrome, and,

more specifically, the risks associated with creating and circulating such representations. The *New York Post* cited Charlotte Woodward, Programs Associate for the U. S. National Down Syndrome Society, who clearly condemned the use of such tools and stated that such representations would “put[...] people with Down syndrome at risk of sexual abuse and sexual assault” (Schlott 2025).

This particularly striking – and troubling – trend exemplifies how disability can serve as a basis for Othering practices: individuals with Down syndrome are presented as a deviation from a presumed norm, and are thus constructed as an outgroup. They are not only differentiated from the ingroup (namely, from people without Down syndrome or, more generally, nondisabled people), but, through the openly sexualized representation, also fetishized – the videos appear to have been created by people without Down syndrome, and are intended to address viewers without Down syndrome. Through the video captions, in which dating a woman with Down syndrome is framed as noteworthy and exceptional, a norm is implicitly reproduced according to which only women without Down syndrome are legitimate romantic partners.

By analyzing user comments posted beneath YouTube documentaries featuring individuals with Down syndrome, the present article examines discourses about people with Down syndrome on this platform. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, it explores how they are constructed as an outgroup and positioned relative to an ingroup, i. e., nondisabled people. These constructions are conceptualized as instances of Othering and analyzed by applying the Othering framework proposed in Zapf (2025). The article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines common conceptualizations of disability and forms of discrimination against disabled people. Section 3 examines the role of language in conceptualizing disability, provides an overview of research on the discursive construction of disability across different domains, and argues for the analytical utility of the concept of Othering in the study of disability discourse. Section 4 describes the corpus and methodological approach. Section 5 reports the results on the discursive practices of Othering identified in the data, and Section 6 offers a discussion of these results. Finally, Section 7 concludes with a summary of the main findings and outlines directions for future research.

2 The concept of disability

The designation “Down syndrome” is often used as an umbrella term for several chromosomal conditions, encompassing not only the presence of a free extra chromosome 21 (Trisomy 21), but also forms in which an extra chromosome 21 is attached to another chromosome (Translocation) or in which a mixture of two cell lines is present (Mosaicism). It is the most prevalent chromosomal reason for intellectual disability and frequently co-occurs with health issues, such as congenital heart disease or hearing and vision problems (cf. Bull et al. 2022). As stated by the U. S. National Down Syndrome Society, “[p]eople with Down syndrome are part of the Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IDD) community” (NDSS 2026). The category “people with disabilities” encompasses people with a wide range of physical and intellectual conditions; the World Health Organization includes people with physical disabilities, blind and deaf individuals, people with chronic illnesses as well as older adults (cf. WHO 2012: 3).

Disability, according to the WHO, “is neither a biological nor a social construct but the result of interactions between health conditions and environmental and personal factors.” (ibid.,

referencing WHO 2001) Nevertheless, across disciplines such as medicine and disability studies, as well as in public discourse, disability has been framed in different ways which emphasize either an individual or a societal understanding of disability. In the literature, these conceptualizations have been captured through several models. Models focusing primarily on the individual include the medical model, which, within biomedical and clinical discourse, views disability as a medical condition of individuals requiring special treatment or intervention by medical professionals, and the tragedy model, which frames disability as a personal misfortune and is associated with lay understandings of impairment. By contrast, other models, particularly those emerging from disability studies and disability activism, shift attention to social structures and societal contexts. The social model, for instance, emphasizes that disability is socially produced, as access to public resources and basic rights is often limited for those featuring specific bodily and mental characteristics that conform to socially established norms of nondisabledness (cf. Grue 2011: 538, 540; Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla 2016: 3; Bogart/Dunn 2019: 652), and the minority model conceptualizes disability “as primarily a form of cultural otherness” (Grue 2011: 539), drawing parallels to the oppression experienced by other social groups (cf. Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla 2016: 3). The affirmation model offers an alternative, rather empowering perspective on disability. People embracing this model “assert a positive identity” (Swain/French 2000: 578), highlighting “the positive experiences and identity of disabled people [which come] from being impaired and disabled” (ibid.: 579).

The minority model and the affirmative model in particular suggest that disability can be regarded as an identity marker, similar to other social identities based on categories such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or class, with which it can intersect (cf. Grue 2011: 532; Bogart/Dunn 2019: 652). However, disabled people have received relatively little academic and societal attention compared to other minoritized groups (cf. Branco/Ramos/Hewstone 2019: 815). This seems to be particularly problematic as disability appears to be a highly salient marker of difference. In two experiments, social psychologists Rohmer/Louvet (2009) found that participants tended to describe individuals with visible disabilities immediately in terms of their disability, regardless of gender or ethnicity; the latter categories were found to be more frequently used when describing nondisabled people. From this, the authors conclude that disability can “be considered a superordinate categorical attribute” (Rohmer/Louvet 2009: 80).

People with disabilities are commonly associated with stereotypes, particularly with paternalistic ones. This can be explained with Fiske et al.’s (2002) Stereotype Content Model developed in social psychology, which categorizes stereotypes along two dimensions – competence and warmth – which are predicted by perceptions of the outgroup’s status (associated with high vs. low perceived competence) and competition (associated with low vs. high perceived warmth). For instance, individuals from Asian countries tend to be perceived as high in competence but low in warmth by US-Americans (i. e., as a high-status and competitive outgroup), eliciting envious stereotypes. People with disabilities, on the other hand, are typically viewed as low in competence but high in warmth (i. e., as a low-status, non-competitive outgroup). This combination produces paternalistic stereotypes, eliciting emotions such as pity, compassion, and sympathy toward the outgroup (cf. Fiske et al. 2002: 878–881; Branco/Ramos/Hewstone 2019: 817). However, judgements of warmth can vary. For instance, Wang et al. (2019) found that people with disabilities were rated as less warm after having rejected patronizing help.

Additionally, stereotypes depend on the type of disability and can also interact with other identity categories, such as gender (cf. Coleman/Brunell/Haugen 2015).

Discrimination against people with disabilities is commonly referred to as *ableism*. Bogart/Dunn (2019: 651) define ableism as “*stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities*” (italics in original). Openly negative behaviors like degradation or humiliation of people with disabilities are usually categorized as *hostile ableism*, whereas seemingly positive behaviors, such as paternalism and expressions of pity, constitute *benevolent ableism* (cf. Nario-Redmond/Kemerling/Silverman 2019: 728f.). While explicitly hostile behaviors, such as hate speech directed at individuals with disabilities, tend to be socially taboo (cf. Sties 2013: 195), these more implicit forms of ableism often persist. *Benevolent ableism* also encompasses the admiration of people with disabilities for accomplishing everyday activities, for having “overcome” their “condition” or for being able to perform certain activities extraordinarily well “despite” their disability (cf. Nario-Redmond/Kemerling/Silverman 2019: 729). This latter view has been particularly criticized in the context of sports, where it is captured by the notion of the *supercrip*: “Supercrips are those individuals whose inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that [...] one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible.” (Berger 2008: 648) In this context, TEDx speaker Stella Young introduced the term *inspiration porn* to critique objectifying narratives in which disabled people are framed primarily as a source of inspiration for nondisabled people (cf. TEDx Talks 2014).

3 Disability, language, and Othering

If we conceive disability as a social construct, the question arises of how language contributes to constructing disability. Sties (2013: 197–199) states that group designations such as *disabled people* contribute to homogenizing individuals with very different conditions (cf. also the WHO’s definition cited above) who usually do not form a common group identity themselves.

Forms of reference for people with disabilities are an important arena of debate in both academic research and activism. In this context, a distinction is commonly drawn between person-first and identity-first designations. Person-first designations like *individual with a disability* are often preferred because they foreground the person, and not the disability. However, some scholars and activists argue that such constructions are uncommon when referring to other identity categories; for instance, designations such as *person who is female/queer/African American* are rather unusual. Hence, they argue that identity-first designations such as *disabled individual* might be preferable (cf. Bogart/Dunn 2019: 653f.). Following Gernsbacher (2017) and Dunn/Andrews (2015), Andrews/Powell/Ayers (2022: 3) further argue that “by separating the person from the identity, person-first language implicitly indicates that disability is an undesirable characteristic.” Of course, people with disabilities do not constitute a homogeneous community, and preferred designations vary across and within communities.

The distinction between person-first and identity-first language is widely used across several disciplines, including psychological research on reference preferences among disabled individuals (e. g., Grech/Koller/Olley 2023; Taboas/Doepke/Zimmerman 2023; Janiszewski et al. 2025). It is particularly common in the Anglo-American context. For Romance languages, it is not directly applicable because adjectives are usually postponed. In French, for example, both *une personne handicapée* ‘a disabled person’ and *une personne en situation de handicap* ‘a

person with a disability’ could be categorized as person-first (cf. Trost/Fábián/Sauerwein 2025: 70). Here, the more relevant distinction lies between the use of an attributive adjective and a prepositional construction to denote the disability. Identity-first designations could be formed through nominalized adjectives such as *les handicapés* ‘the disabled’, which, however, are not common in current language use (cf. *ibid.*: 69).

Linguistic research on the construction of disability across different languages has analyzed lexical choices for referring to people with disabilities and for denoting disability itself (e. g., Barnish 2014; Sanz-Simón 2022; Bani 2023; Potts/Bednarek/Watharow 2023; Trost/Fábián/Sauerwein 2025), as well as broader discursive patterns through which disabled people are represented. For example, using van Leeuwen’s (2008) Social Actor framework, both Priyanti (2018) and Al Fajri/Abdul Rahim/Rajandran (2024) found that in the newspapers they analyzed, people with disabilities were frequently represented in beneficiary or other passive roles, with no or limited agency. Some studies explicitly analyze hate speech; for example, Raffone (2022), in an analysis of TikTok comments referring to an individual with an amputation, shows how disability is stigmatized in offensive speech acts, for example in dehumanizing and humiliating comments targeting the individual’s body.

Studies have also examined how disabled people themselves construct disability. For instance, Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla (2016), within a critical discourse-analytical framework, analyzed posts in Facebook groups for people with disabilities and found that most posts conceptualized disability in line with the social model. However, they also identified conceptualizations through the medical and the affirmative models, as well as differences between discourses on different types of disabilities (cf. Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla 2016: 7f.). Moreover, posts in groups for Deaf users portrayed people in agentive roles far more frequently than posts in groups for blind or physically disabled individuals, where portrayals as recipients were more common (cf. *ibid.*: 11). Jerca (2021) examined meta-discourses on disability in Reddit posts by people with Multiple Sclerosis and identified a wide range of stances toward the term *disabled* as a self-descriptor. The author found, for example, that resistance to this term was partly associated with self-representations in agentive roles (cf. Jerca 2021: 58).

With regard to text types and platforms, linguistic research has frequently focused on the press (e. g., Priyanti 2018; Vergara Heidke/Cruz Volio/Torres Calderón 2021; Potts/Bednarek/Watharow 2023; Al Fajri/Abdul Rahim/Rajandran 2024). Studies have also examined discourses on social media platforms, including Facebook (cf. Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla 2016), Instagram (cf. Dias 2025), Twitter/X (cf. Trost/Fábián/Sauerwein 2025), TikTok (cf. Raffone 2022), and Reddit (cf. Jerca 2021). Additionally, some studies have examined disability policy documents (cf. Grue 2009).

Beyond disability as a general conceptual category, some studies have focused on specific types of disability, including physical disabilities (cf. Raffone 2022), sensory disabilities such as blindness and deafness (cf. Stamou/Alevriadou/Soufla 2016), chronic diseases such as multiple sclerosis (cf. Jerca 2021), and neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism (cf. Karaminis et al. 2023).

Some studies have explicitly examined discourse on people with Down syndrome. Tong (2022) critically analyzed the first medical description of Down syndrome, written by John Langdon

Down in 1866. His study demonstrates how this report, within the colonial scientific discourse of the time, constructs individuals as Other; this Other “is simultaneously a ‘racial other’, a ‘disabled other’, and an ‘idiotic other’” (Tong 2022: 661). Moreover, previous work in linguistics and beyond has investigated discourses on Down syndrome in television, magazines, and newspapers (cf. Wardell et al. 2014), in children’s literature (cf. Kalke-Klita 2005; Digman 2021), and on social media platforms (cf. Burch 2017; Johnson/West 2021). Some of these studies touch upon the issue of prenatal screening. This topic is tied to ethical concerns regarding its eugenic potential, which has been examined more explicitly in other studies (cf. Gottfredsdóttir/Björnsdóttir 2010; Barter et al. 2017). In addition, some studies have focused on maternal narratives of raising children with Down syndrome, showing how mothers are positioned as deviating from normative constructions of motherhood (cf. Lalvani 2011; Gabel/Kotel 2018). Most of these studies adopt (critical) discourse-analytical approaches, but they rarely focus explicitly on linguistic structures and mechanisms.

The concept of Othering has occasionally been invoked in research on disability discourse (e. g., Mik-Meyer 2016; Raffone 2022; Tong 2022; Potts/Bednarek/Watharow 2023), but it has rarely been conceptualized and operationalized in greater depth and from a linguistic perspective – including in research on other social dimensions such as gender, sexual orientation, or religion (cf. Zapf 2025: 4f.). However, focusing on Othering mechanisms in discourse on disability offers a way to integrate a range of findings from prior work under a shared analytical perspective. For instance, many studies demonstrate that individuals with Down syndrome are framed as a deviation from a norm – that of being nondisabled –, and even discourses which critique ableist positions have been shown to reproduce such narratives (cf. Johnson/West 2021). Approaching such phenomena through the framework of Othering, rather than through the concept of ableism, enables the analysis of a broader spectrum of discursive practices, including not only overtly hostile expressions but also subtle forms of constructing groups according to their bodily or cognitive condition. Moreover, when Othering is conceptualized as a linguistic phenomenon concerned with how an outgroup is constructed and positioned in relation to an ingroup, this concept provides an analytically fruitful framework for linguistic analysis without necessarily requiring moral evaluations of these practices.

The present paper therefore contributes to existing research in three respects: first, by expanding the still limited body of work on discourses relating to people with Down syndrome; second, by focusing explicitly on Othering practices; and third, by approaching these questions from a linguistic perspective.

4 Corpus and method

The corpus analyzed in this study consists of user comments posted in response to YouTube documentaries. For the corpus compilation, videos in three languages – French, Spanish, and English – were selected, with the aim of not restricting the findings to a single linguistic or geographical context. The multilingual corpus thus makes it possible to examine how Othering processes are realized across different languages. For each language, YouTube searches were conducted using the following search queries: “trisomie 21 documentaire français”, “trisomía 21 documental español”, and “trisomy 21 documentary”. For each language, the first video returned by the search that exceeded 30 minutes in length and fulfilled the criteria of a

documentary was selected. Specifically, only videos that primarily portray individuals with Down syndrome and/or their families were considered, whereas videos focusing exclusively on medical information were excluded. The French-language video was uploaded in 2022 from an account based in France, the Spanish-language video in 2015 by an account based in Uruguay, and the English-language video in 2019 by a UK-based account.¹ Subsequently, all publicly available comments posted beneath the selected videos were extracted. The resulting corpus is summarized in Table 1.

Language of video	Number of comments	Number of tokens	Date of extraction
French	259	4,594	October 27, 2025
Spanish	325	10,502	October 27, 2025
English	517	14,345	November 3, 2025
Σ	1,101	29,441	

Table 1: Overview of the corpus

The analysis draws on principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, insofar as it seeks to explain how structures of social power are (re)produced, legitimized, and perpetuated through language use (cf. Fairclough/Mulderig/Wodak 2011: 357; van Dijk ²2015: 466). More specifically, based on an understanding of discourse as a form of social practice (cf. Blommaert/Bulcaen 2000: 449), it examines how nondisabled people construct people with Down syndrome as Other, thereby reaffirming their hegemonic position. Critical Discourse Analysis is defined by its problem-oriented and critical perspective, but not by a fixed methodology. Instead, appropriate methods are selected according to the specific research question (cf. Fairclough/Mulderig/Wodak 2011: 358f.). Earlier approaches have nevertheless highlighted a number of linguistic features that frequently contribute to power-related meaning-making. On the lexical level, nouns and pronouns used to refer to social groups have often been identified as relevant, as well as metaphorical expressions that frame such groups in specific ways (e. g., Wodak 2010: 194f.; van Dijk ²2015: 475). On the morphological level, diminutives may influence how social groups are perceived (e. g., van Dijk ²2015: 475). On the syntactic level, nominalization and passivization can obscure responsibility or agency by omitting explicit reference to actors (e. g., Blommaert/Bulcaen 2000: 448; Fairclough/Mulderig/Wodak 2011: 361f.); in this context, the allocation of semantic roles has been highlighted as especially revealing (e. g., van Leeuwen 2009: 282). Moreover, implicit assertions about social groups, such as those encoded in presuppositions or conveyed through implicatures, have been identified as significant for the construction and maintenance of social inequalities (e. g., Wodak 2010: 196; van Dijk ²2015: 473).

Othering is understood here as encompassing processes of constructing alterity, or, more specifically, as those processes through which an outgroup and an ingroup are constructed and positioned in relation to each other. The analysis of racial Othering in Zapf (2025), based on a corpus consisting of a missionary text from the 17th century, a travel account from the 19th century, and an anthropological account from the 20th century, identifies various processes of Othering, as illustrated in the right-hand part of Figure 1, which fall into three main categories (see the left-hand part of Figure 1).

¹ Additional information on the videos, including their titles, channels, and URLs, is provided in the appendix.

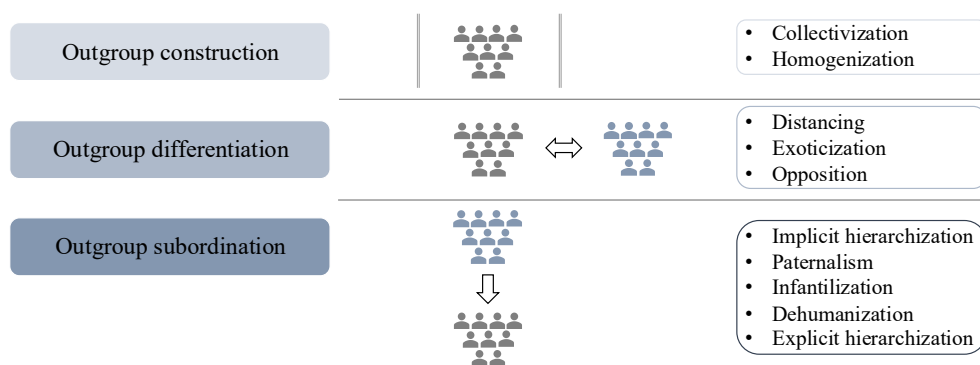


Figure 1: Processes of racial Othering (Zapf 2025: 8)

Outgroup construction refers to the discursive constitution of social groups. Within Othering practices, these groups are constructed in a way that establishes one group as an outgroup in relation to an ingroup. *Outgroup differentiation* refers to representations of the outgroup as distinct from the ingroup in terms of characteristics, behaviors, or physical appearance, without clearly establishing a hierarchical relationship between the two groups. *Outgroup subordination* refers to representations of the outgroup as socially inferior to the ingroup.

These processes of Othering can be realized through various linguistic patterns. For example, as described in Zapf (2025: 9f.), the use of group labels in the singular form with an indefinite or definite article (e. g., “un Indien ne se perd pas” ‘an Indian does not get lost’ (Clastres 1972: 236)) homogenizes the outgroup, as it constructs a prototypical figure that appears to represent the entire group, thus attributing the same characteristic to all its members.

When processes of Othering are recurrently realized through specific linguistic means, this recurrence can be interpreted as evidence of routinization, and, consequently, as indicative of a discursive practice, building on a conceptualization of *practice* as “a routinized type of behaviour” (Reckwitz 2002: 249). Accordingly, discursive practices of Othering are defined here as the routinized deployment of specific linguistic means through which specific processes of Othering are realized. Crucially, these linguistic patterns are not used merely to describe a pre-existing alterity; rather, their use actively brings it into being and must therefore be regarded as performative. For example, the routinized use of group labels does not simply refer to already given social groups but constructs these groups (cf. also Keller ³2011: 247). The linguistic resources employed thus function as a means to realize Othering processes and, at the same time, may be regarded as indicators of the outcomes, i. e., the effects, of these processes.

The framework of racial Othering proposed in Zapf (2025) serves as the point of departure for the present study, which pursues two objectives: first, it aims to examine which processes of Othering occur in discourse about people with Down syndrome and which specific linguistic patterns are used to realize them, thereby identifying discursive practices of Othering. Second, it seeks to examine the applicability of the model of Othering proposed in Zapf (2025), which was developed for discourse on racial difference and based exclusively on French data, and extend it. This involves assessing whether the Othering processes identified in the present data diverge from those identified in Zapf (2025), as well as determining whether the material analyzed here contains additional linguistic devices used to realize these processes that have not previously been categorized. Hence, by applying a model developed for racial Othering to

discourse on disability, this study aims to advance the development of a more comprehensive model of Othering, one that can account for discourses across various social dimensions, and that is further expandable through applications to discourse on, for instance, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and religion, as well as on intersections (cf. Crenshaw 1989) among these dimensions.

To address these questions, all comments were analyzed using MAXQDA (VERBI Software 2025). The qualitative analysis was performed in three steps. First, the specific processes through which an outgroup and an ingroup are constructed and positioned in relation to each other, understood as interpretatively identifiable effects of Othering, were coded deductively, applying the coding scheme developed in Zapf (2025). Second, the linguistic resources through which these processes are realized, i. e., the linguistic means that give rise to the respective effects, were identified, again using the coding scheme. In this way, the interpretatively established effects of Othering were related to specific linguistic resources that are assumed to produce them. Additional processes and linguistic patterns encountered in the corpus were incorporated inductively into the coding scheme. Third, systematic co-occurrences between Othering processes and linguistic resources were examined in order to identify routinized forms of Othering, i. e., discursive practices. The comments in the three languages were analyzed collectively, as the research question did not concern cross-linguistic or cross-cultural comparison but rather aimed to identify overarching discursive patterns of Othering.

Importantly, the distinction between the outgroup and the ingroup in the following analysis does not suggest that the actual social identities of YouTube users can be reconstructed from the comments, nor does the analysis aim to do so. Rather, it focuses on the discursive positioning established within the comments. For instance, when comments are analyzed as constructing an outgroup of disabled people, this refers to the social categories created within the discourse, for example, through group labels, and to the ways speakers position themselves in relation to these categories, for example, through pronominal reference.

5 Results

5.1 Outgroup construction

5.1.1 Collectivization

When individuals are presented as belonging to a seemingly objectively existing social group, a process of collectivization takes place. This is commonly realized through generic references that categorize individuals by means of group labels (cf. Zapf 2025: 8f.). Across the corpus, many generic references to people with Down syndrome explicitly mention the disability, thereby constructing a group whose members are defined by a shared characteristic: their disability. Such references occur in three patterns: prepositional phrases containing a noun denoting human beings (e. g., *person*) followed by a prepositional expression specifying the disability; nouns denoting human beings modified by an attributive adjective referring to the disability; and nominalized disability-based group labels. In the English and Spanish comments, the disability is most frequently designated by the term *Down (syndrome)*, or (*síndrome de*) *Down*; in the French comments, *trisomie 21* is used. These three patterns will be examined in more detail.

Prepositional phrases, which correspond to person-first designations in the three languages examined here, are frequently used in the English and Spanish comments, for instance, “people with Down Syndrome” or “niños con síndrome de Down” (‘children with Down syndrome’). Abbreviated variants occur, such as “people with Downs”, “folks with DS”, or “una niña con down” (‘a child with down’), as do variants with a demonstrative article and a more generic noun to refer to Down syndrome, like “people with this disorder” or “los niños con esa discapacidad” (‘the children with this disability’). In the French corpus, however, prepositional constructions using the term *trisomie 21* are notably absent.

Nouns modified by an attributive adjective or adjective-like element are also widely present in the corpus. In English, these constructions can be categorized as identity-first designations, whereas in French and Spanish, given that postnominal adjective placement is canonical, they typically display a person-first structure. Notably, only the French data contain a genuine adjectival form derived from the term *trisomy*, e. g., “un enfant trisomique” (‘a trisomic child’). In English and Spanish, *Down syndrome* or, in Spanish, its abbreviated form *Down*, are used adjective-like; they appear in syntactic slots normally occupied by adjectives, in constructions such as “Down Syndrome people” or “los niños down” (‘the down children’).

Nominalized, disability-based group labels, which metonymically reduce individuals to a single attribute – the genetic condition –, are frequently used in the French corpus (e. g., “les trisomiques” ‘the trisomics’). In the other two languages, the reference forms “Downs”, “Downies”, or “los down” (‘the downs’) are used, but only occasionally and in denigrative ways.

These forms of reference construct a social group – people with Down syndrome, opposed to those without Down syndrome – through collectivization based on a shared genetic condition. The three types of reference described above establish a relationship between the individuals and Down syndrome in different ways. Prepositional constructions cast the disability as an attribute; modifications through adjectives (or adjective-like elements) frame it as a characteristic;² and nominalizations convert it into an identifying label. These forms can be aligned along a continuum of reduction on the syntactic level, with the effect that the disability becomes increasingly foregrounded.

In some comments, the term *disabled* is used as a broader category label, as in “les personnes handicapées” (‘the disabled persons’). The coherence of comments using such references within the comment section relies on a mental representation in which people with Down syndrome are perceived as belonging to a superordinate group; *handicapé* thus functions as a hypernymic category label encompassing *trisomique*. Hence, people with Down syndrome are construed as a subgroup within a broader category of “disabled people”.

The collectivization through group references is even more evident in some expressions that refer to people with Down syndrome without explicitly naming the disability. Many comments employ generic nouns referring to human beings accompanied by demonstratives, for instance, “these people”. Such expressions appear to function anaphorically; however, the antecedent is

² Two comments employ *Down syndrome* in a predicative construction: “mi sobrino [...] era síndrome de dawn” (‘my nephew was Down syndrome’) and “mi hijo es down” (‘my son is down’). Through the use of the verb *ser* ‘to be’ instead of *tener* ‘to have’, they present Down syndrome as the individual’s defining characteristic.

often not provided. Hence, their interpretability depends on an underlying mental representation of “the” group of people with Down syndrome as an objectively recognizable social group.

Furthermore, forms of reference used for the ingroup, i. e., nondisabled individuals, are revealing in terms of group construction, as they set apart the outgroup from an ingroup. Apart from the use of prepositional phrases structurally parallel to those used for the outgroup to designate the ingroup, e. g., “people without Down syndrome”, more abstract collective nouns such as *society* are employed. In these cases, the context indicates that they only refer to the nondisabled population, as in examples (1) and (2).³ In (1), the assertion that “society” stigmatizes people with Down syndrome logically suggests that “society” is composed of individuals who do not have this syndrome. Similarly, in (2), affirming that “they” have the right to be part of “our society” constructs individuals with Down syndrome as a distinct group, external to “society”, and their inclusion in the ingroup is presented as requiring justification rather than taken for granted. Hence, the use of generic collective nouns to refer to the ingroup, and expressions with a more restricted referential scope for the outgroup, constructs two social groups and positions people with Down syndrome outside of the socially unmarked category of “society”.

5.1.2 Homogenization

Other means of reference not only construct a social group, but also portray its members as sharing the same characteristics, thus homogenizing it. This process of homogenization (cf. Zapf 2025: 9f.) frequently occurs in constructions in which a noun referring to human beings, preceded by a demonstrative determiner, is modified by an adjective or a prepositional construction that denotes one or more characteristics, as in (3) (“estas bellas personas” ‘these beautiful people’) and (4) (“ces gens au coeur énorme” ‘these people with a huge heart’). These reference forms present the whole group as sharing the same qualities. This structure is particularly frequent in the English subcorpus. The adjectives used in these generic references are almost exclusively positive; they include *awesome*, *beautiful*, *wonderful*, *delightful*, *great*, *lovely*, *happy*, and *lucky*.

A particularly noticeable form of reference, which appears in numerous Spanish comments, is the use of the manner adverb *así*, as in “un niño así” (‘a child like this’). In this usage, the adverb functions deictically to evoke a set of attributes associated with people with Down syndrome, assumed to exist as shared background knowledge among readers and writers. By implying that these characteristics are shared by all individuals with Down syndrome, the use of this adverb homogenizes the outgroup, which becomes particularly visible in comments like (5), which suggests that “vivir con un niño así” (‘to live with a child like this’) constitutes a uniform experience and, consequently, that the outgroup is characterized by a stable set of traits.

Apart from such forms of reference, the outgroup is also homogenized through generic predications, as in (6). Here, a physical characteristic (“beautiful”) as well as an emotional state (“happy”) are generically ascribed to all people with Down syndrome, again homogenizing the group. The assumption that all people with Down syndrome share the same characteristics

³ For reasons of space, all comments cited as examples in the main text are reproduced in the Appendix under their respective example numbers.

becomes particularly explicit in (7), a response to a commenter who announces that she is pregnant and that her baby will likely have Down syndrome. In this comment, the fact that a child has Down syndrome is treated as sufficient grounds for predicting a range of personality traits, which are thus again presented as universally shared by the whole group. Through the repeated use of the verb *ser*, they are presented as stable characteristics (in contrast to the verb *estar*, which is used for temporary states in Spanish). Particularly noteworthy is the shift from singular to plural reference and back: the commenter initially refers to the specific child in question (“te ense[ñ]a” ‘it will teach you’, “es sano” ‘it is healthy’), then switches to plural forms (“tienen” ‘they have’, “luchan” ‘they fight’, “quier[e]n” ‘they love’, “son” ‘they are’), thereby moving to a generic reference to people with Down syndrome (“ellos” ‘they’), and finally back to singular reference (“alimenta” ‘it nourishes’).

5.2 Outgroup differentiation

5.2.1 Distancing

When the outgroup is distinguished from the ingroup by constructing the latter as the norm and the former as a deviation from it, a distance between these groups is constructed (cf. Zapf 2025: 11f.). In many cases, the outgroup and the ingroup are differentiated through pronominal reference and associated with different ways of experiencing life: the ingroup, referred to via first-person plural pronouns, is treated as the normative reference point, and the outgroup, referred to via third-person plural pronouns, is presented as distinct from this norm, as illustrated in (8) and (9). The construction of a norm implicitly associated with the ingroup is evident in the comparative structure of these comments. In both examples, the outgroup is compared to the ingroup, and not vice versa; hence, the ingroup is established as the reference point. These comparisons thus distance the outgroup from the ingroup by creating a relationship between them in which the experiences of the ingroup are presented as ordinary or unmarked, while those of the outgroup are foregrounded as noteworthy.

Some of the comments which explicitly ascribe “difference” to the outgroup by using lexemes from the semantic field of difference have a similar effect, as in (10). By stating that “he was different”, difference is asserted without specifying the reference group, i. e., the group that constitutes the underlying norm from which the individual referred to is supposed to differ. As a result, this reference group – people without Down syndrome – remains implicit and is thus treated as self-evident. Moreover, the characterization of the individual as “different” itself is presented as a given rather than as a claim requiring justification. This is achieved through the factive construction “it made him sad to remember he was different”, which presupposes the truth of its complement clause (cf. Bußmann 2008: 545, s. v. *Präsupposition*). Thus, the sentence does not assert the existence of this difference, but rather its emotional impact on the individual.

Some comments appear to contest such assumptions by asserting that individuals with Down syndrome are not “different”, but “normal”. Interestingly, these counter-statements often still implicitly reproduce the very premise they seek to challenge, as in (11) and (12). In these examples, an individual portrayed in the video is described as “normal”, and, as such, positioned as an exception to her group. This suggests that people with Down syndrome are generally not

normal. This assumption is particularly striking in (12), which implies that once it is known that a person has Down syndrome, they can no longer be perceived as normal. In other words, having Down syndrome is presented as inherently incompatible with “normality”, regardless of the individual’s actual behavior or abilities. Hence, even though the individual referenced in the comments appears to challenge a strict distinction between “nondisabled/normal” and “disabled/different”, the distinction itself is not called into question, but rather reaffirmed – a pattern typical for discourse on disability, in which “qualities that are best understood on a finely graded or continuous scale [...] become divided according to a dichotomy of able-bodiedness and disability” (Grue 2011: 535; cf. also Johnson/West 2021: 289).

5.2.2 Exoticization

Depending on the qualities ascribed, the generic use of predicative adjectives can serve as a means not only to homogenize the outgroup, but also to exoticize it. The term *exoticization* refers to processes through which the outgroup is constructed as remarkable or astonishing (cf. Zapf 2025: 12–15). In the corpus, this occurs when people with Down syndrome are described not merely as “different”, but as “special”, as in (13) and (14). Notably, these comments do not single out a specific trait, but rather construe the whole individual as “special” – a depiction reinforced here by the adverb *very* in (13) (“they are very special”) and the expression “con todo el sentido de la palabra” (‘in every sense of the word’) in (14).⁴

In a similar logic to that observed above, some comments exoticize the outgroup even though they appear to resist presentations of the outgroup as different from the ingroup. Both (15) and (16) refer generically to children with Down syndrome and ascribe “normality”, while simultaneously reintroducing “specialness” as a defining characteristic of the outgroup (“no son diferentes, son especiales” ‘they aren’t different, they are special’ in (16)). As a result, these ostensibly counter-discursive statements ultimately still exoticize the outgroup.

In some cases, this “specialness” is attributed to the genetic condition itself, as in (17). In this example, individuals with Down syndrome are endowed with a quasi-magical quality (“sparkle”), which renders them enchanting. This quality is attributed to all members of the outgroup (“each one”) and causally linked to the “extra chromosome”, thereby biologizing the attributed “specialness”.

5.2.3 Idealization

Furthermore, many comments in the corpus construe people with Down syndrome generically as morally exemplary – a process of Othering referred to as *idealization* here. This is frequently articulated through attributions of unconditional love, innocence, and an absence of malice, as illustrated in (18), (19), and (20). Again, these comments homogenize the outgroup; additionally, because these portrayals present the outgroup as morally superior to the ingroup, they also idealize its members. Here, people with Down syndrome are not presented as multifaceted

⁴ However, some comments resist such representations of children with Down syndrome as “special”, for example: “Son niños igual que todos. [...] Que tengan este síndrome no los hace especiales ni nada parecido. Son niños y ya” (‘They are children just like all the others. [...] Having this syndrome doesn’t make them special or anything similar. They are children and that’s it.’).

individuals with varied traits, emotions, and behaviors, but as simplified, almost static figures defined by a single attribute. This idealization is relational; it relies on the suggestion that the ingroup lacks these qualities. In (18), this contrast is highlighted through the use of the third-person plural pronoun *ellos* ‘they’ (“ellos son inocencia” ‘they are innocence’); given that Spanish is a pro-drop language, the overt realization of the subject pronoun is pragmatically marked, and the effect it produces here is the indication of a difference to the ingroup. Similarly, the negation structure in (19) (“no saben de maldad” ‘they don’t know malice’), as well as the preposition *sans* ‘without’ in (20) (“sans malice aucune” ‘without any malice’), suggest that familiarity with malice constitutes the default condition – implicitly associated with the ingroup –, while its absence is exceptional.

This idealization becomes fully explicit in comparisons that juxtapose the outgroup with a morally deficient ingroup, as in (21) and (22). Notably, in these comparisons, references to the ingroup are often not generic, but restricting through quantitative markers (“certains” ‘certain’, “90 %”), thus referring only to parts of the ingroup. These formulations delimit the scope of moral deficiency, suggesting that many – but not necessarily all – members of the ingroup fail to exhibit the positive traits generically attributed to the outgroup. Nevertheless, the ingroup is again positioned as the normative reference point. This norm is made most explicit in (21) through the expression “gens normaux” (‘normal people’). In (22), the generic collective noun “les gens” (‘the people’) similarly positions the ingroup as the default social category, implicitly aligned with the ingroup.

While many comments specify particular domains in which the outgroup is portrayed as superior – most frequently with respect to a supposed moral purity –, the comparison in (23), which describes people with Down syndrome as “better people”, evaluates the outgroup as entirely superior. As in previous examples, the outgroup is referred to generically via the third-person plural pronoun *they*, whereas the ingroup is only partially referenced via the quantifier *most*. The use of quotation marks around the word *normal* (“most of us ‘normal’ people”) is also noteworthy. This means of typographical distancing, which is frequently used throughout the corpus, signals a critical stance toward the concept of normality itself and indicates an awareness that constructions of people with Down syndrome as “abnormal” might be problematic. However, as in previous examples, this comment still reproduces a categorical separation between outgroup and ingroup.

In some cases, comparisons are again made without explicitly naming the reference group, thereby treating this normative group as self-evident, as in (24) (“son mejores” ‘they are better’). This comment engages with the discourse of difference outlined above; however, rather than asserting equality between outgroup and ingroup, it elevates the former, once again idealizing its members by generically referring to them as *heroes* – a designation that suggests that a person of moral integrity has accomplished something despite adversity, through exceptional strength or courage. Within the broader context of the corpus, this adversity appears to be linked to Down syndrome itself and reflects a construction of disability grounded in the tragedy model.

The perceived difference between outgroup and ingroup is maximized through the frequent use of superlative forms, as seen in (25) and (26). These forms (“los niños más lindos” ‘the most beautiful children’; “the best”) position people with Down syndrome at the extreme positive

end of evaluative scales, reinforcing the perception of this constructed group as outstanding, and as fundamentally different from the ingroup.

As observed previously, some comments explicitly link these positive qualities to the genetic condition itself, for example in (27). In an essentializing logic, a causal relationship is established between the (erroneously assumed missing) chromosome (“ellos no tienen el gen de la maldad” ‘they don’t have the gene of malice’) and an alleged moral exemplarity. This biologization of character traits not only reduces individuals to their genetic condition, but also portrays them as fully determined by it. The positive traits ascribed are thus presented as natural and automatic consequences of their genetic condition, and not as socially developed. Consequently, people with Down syndrome are rendered one-dimensional, stripped of complexity, ambivalence, and the capacity to act otherwise.

Idealization is realized not only through the explicit attribution of qualities, but also through the use of metaphors, most notably drawing on a religious frame. Across the corpus, particularly in the Spanish subcorpus, people with Down syndrome are repeatedly designated as “angels”, as in (28) and (29). These comments employ the angel metaphor generically to refer to all children with Down syndrome, with the *tertium comparationis* being their presumed innocence or moral purity, thus reinforcing the idealization. However, this locates them outside the human social order: angels occupy a liminal position between the human and the divine; they are morally elevated, yet not fully human anymore.

The angel metaphor is also mobilized to challenge the assumption that the outgroup is “different”, as in (30). This comment even goes beyond the counter-discursive statements discussed above by reversing the attribution of difference: it presents the ingroup as deviant (“LOS DIFERENTES SOMOS NOSOTROS” ‘it is we who are different’) and, as a consequence, the outgroup as normative. However, this stands in tension with the first part of the comment, which frames people with Down syndrome as angelic, and thereby as an exceptional and utopian Other. Again, this comment thus challenges the assumption that people with Down syndrome are “different” from those without, yet at the same time reproduces it.

5.3 Outgroup subordination

5.3.1 Implicit hierarchization

In Zapf (2025: 16), instances in which speakers “evaluate the behavior of outgroup members” are categorized as cases of implicit hierarchization. This process was identified where speakers characterize outgroup behavior as incorrect or inappropriate, and/or where they present themselves as possessing a superior level of knowledge compared to the outgroup (cf. *ibid.*: 16–18). In the present corpus, this process also emerges in seemingly positive evaluations, namely when commenters felicitate individuals with Down syndrome, as in (31) and (32). Beyond highly conventionalized forms of felicitation, such as birthday or wedding congratulations, acts of felicitation are inherently asymmetrical, as they position the speaker as someone entitled to assess the conduct or qualities of others. In this sense, the act of praising itself positions the commenter in an authoritative evaluative role. In (31), this asymmetry is reinforced through the use of the affective form of address “ma petite” (‘my little one’), conventionally used toward children. In (32), the congratulatory act is generalized to all people with Down syndrome (“Bravo à tout les

trisomie” ‘Bravo to all the [people with] Trisomy’), without reference to a specific achievement that would warrant praise. This seems to suggest that the mere act of living with Down syndrome is construed as an achievement and implicitly invokes a concessive logic according to which everyday functioning or existence “despite” a disability is worthy of commendation, a logic further detailed in Section 5.3.2.

5.3.2 Exceptionalization

Another form of outgroup subordination identified in the corpus consists in presenting positively evaluated traits or behaviors of people with Down syndrome as occurring “despite” their disability. Such utterances invoke the assumption that these characteristics or behaviors are not expected of the outgroup and therefore construe their possession or enactment by members of the outgroup as exceptional. This specific process of Othering, where qualities or behaviors are constructed as exceptional when displayed by members of the outgroup because of their group membership, is referred to as *exceptionalization* here. In doing so, the comments implicitly establish a hierarchical relationship between the outgroup and the ingroup with the latter being constructed as the unmarked standard, whose possession or enactment of such traits or behaviors is not noteworthy. Notably, however, the concessive logic underlying such comments is only rarely marked explicitly. One such example is given in (33). The comment addresses people with Down syndrome generically and praises them for their perceived ability to endure stigmatizing social reactions, referred to as “regards pesants”. It subsequently affirms that people with Down syndrome are like anyone else (“comme les autres”). The segment “malgré votre handicap vous y arriver commeme” is semantically ambiguous, as the reference of the pronoun *y* is not clear: it may refer to succeeding in life more generally or to coping with stigmatization. In either case, the concessive marker *malgré* ‘despite’ frames the outcome as unexpected and thus exceptional, implying that disability would normally constitute an obstacle to success or resilience. This effect is reinforced by the redundant use of the concessive marker *quand même* ‘nevertheless’ (spelled “commeme” in the comment) within the same clause.

In many other comments, exceptionalization is realized through the use of focus particles, such as *even* in (34) (“even with their disability”) and *même* ‘even’ in (35) (“même avec un handicap” ‘even with a disability’). These focus particles mark the described state of affairs as noteworthy and unexpected. This activates a background expectation according to which people with Down syndrome are not normally assumed to enjoy life or to live in the same way as nondisabled people.

A similar concessive logic in seemingly positive evaluations is conveyed by markers of unexpectedness, as in (36) (“it has always amazed me”) and (37) (“it is great”). Their use signals a mismatch between what is observed and what would normally be expected. As a result, positive characteristics – happiness, motivation, autonomy – are framed as unexpected, and therefore exceptional. This, in turn, allows the reconstruction of background expectations according to which people with Down syndrome are presumed to be unhappy, unmotivated, and dependent. Hence, again, these comments reproduce deficit-based representations despite their overtly positive stance.

In some cases, however, the effect of exceptionalization is conveyed more indirectly and arises only through pragmatic inference, as in (38). The implicit devaluation emerging from this

comment can be explained with reference to Grice's (1975: 47) maxim of relation. Since the explicit mention of a state that is presented as non-occurring through negation ("There's no sign of them suffering") would be communicatively irrelevant if its occurrence were not expected in this context, the comment invokes the assumption that people with Down syndrome are expected to suffer. Their apparent wellbeing is consequently construed as exceptional, as it is presented as occurring "despite" their disability.

5.3.3 Functionalization

Furthermore, some comments present members of the outgroup in terms of a supposed function they fulfill for the ingroup. This process of Othering is referred to here as *functionalization* and is understood as a form of outgroup subordination: by depicting members of the outgroup in terms of their perceived value for the ingroup, such representations establish an asymmetrical relationship in which the outgroup is positioned as fulfilling a role for the benefit of the ingroup. In some comments employing the angel metaphor, functionalization emerges insofar as children with Down syndrome are framed as having been "given" to their families, as illustrated in (39) and (40). Through the use of verbs of transfer typically used with inanimate objects rather than with human referents (*dar* 'give'; *mandar* 'send'), where the children appear in the semantic role of patients, they are presented as passive entities. Their parents are positioned as the recipients, i. e., as those for whom these "angels" are designated, and thereby elevated. Consequently, the angel metaphor is somewhat ambivalent; although it elevates the outgroup by attributing moral superiority, it simultaneously deprives its members of autonomy and situates them in a functional, passive role, namely that of a means through which a higher purpose is fulfilled.

Particularly in the Spanish subcorpus, other metaphors drawn from a religious frame are used, such as "gift", "blessing", or "treasure". The gift metaphor (cf. (41)) opens up a frame comprising a donor, a recipient, and a gift, attributed respectively to God, parents of children with Down syndrome, and the children with Down syndrome themselves. Hence, these children are assigned a passive role, a device through which parents, as part of the ingroup, are favored or rewarded, and thus elevated. The presentation as a "blessing" (cf. (42)) follows the same logic: children with Down syndrome are described as devices through which God bestows benefits upon their families. Finally, presenting children with Down syndrome as a "treasure" (cf. (43)) frames the outgroup members as "valuable", but only in relation to the ingroup as the possessors of this "treasure".

In other comments, children with Down syndrome are presented as "examples to follow", as in (44). Again, individuals with Down syndrome are positively evaluated, but represented as passive entities whose function is to serve as exemplars for the ingroup – whose members are the ones to become active by following their example.

A comparable effect emerges when the outgroup members are presented as sources of inspiration, as in (45) and (46). Here again, individuals are not described as acting and thereby inspiring others, but their mere existence is framed as inspiring (cf. also the notion of *inspiration porn* mentioned in Section 2).

On the other hand, some comments do present members of the outgroup in an agent semantic role. Frequently, they are described as giving love and joy to others, as in (47), (48), (49), (50), and (51). However, even though the outgroup members are assigned an active role here, their actions are reduced to their function for the ingroup (namely, their parents). This becomes particularly visible in comments addressing members of the ingroup directly, as indicated by the use of the second-person object pronoun *te* in (47) (“te regalan una sonrisa” ‘they give you a smile’), (48) (“Te llenan el alma” ‘They fill your soul’), and (51) (“las alegrías q te dan” ‘the joy they give you’), as well as the use of the verbs in the first-person plural form in (49) (“necesitamos” ‘we need’, “estamos” ‘we are’), which include the ingroup as the recipient of “lessons”. Furthermore, the actions attributed to them – spreading love and joy – are presented as largely unintentional; they seem to be a logical result of their supposed way of being – particularly evident in (49), where this supposed function is explicitly referred to as a “mission”, echoing the logic of the angel metaphor. Similarly, through the nominalization “she is a happy giver” in (50), which “types” (cf. Graumann/Wintermantel 1989: 192f.) the child referred to, “giving love” is presented as a stable personal trait rather than as an action. Furthermore, (51) casts the outgroup in a position of guilt (“compensa todo el trabajo que uno pueda tener con ellos” ‘makes up for all the work one might have with them’). In addition to functionalizing people with Down syndrome, this affirms an obligation of contributing to (nondisabled) society.

Finally, several comments present members of the outgroup in a function of “teaching” the ingroup about life, as in (52) and (53). These comments attribute a function of helping the ingroup cope with life, which culminates in contributing to “saving this world” in (53).⁵ Hence, outgroup members are not treated as independent human beings, but – again – as beings fulfilling “their” task. This shows that, even when presented in active roles, the outgroup is described as fulfilling a function that enhances the ingroup’s moral, emotional, or social life, and not as autonomous, independent individuals with their own goals.

5.3.4 Paternalism

When actions performed by the ingroup toward the outgroup are presented as benevolent interventions and the outgroup members are positioned as passive recipients of these actions, this constitutes paternalism (cf. Zapf 2025: 18–20). This process is frequently realized through verbs from the semantic field of care, assistance, and guidance, such as *help*, *teach*, *educate*, or *care for*, as in (54) and (55). The use of the first-person plural pronoun (“We’re giving [...] opportunities”; “We finally have a much better understanding”) constructs a collective ingroup subject, thereby reinforcing the *us* vs. *them* dichotomy, and presents the ingroup as uniformly benevolent and actively supportive of people with Down syndrome, rather than referring to specific actors such as teachers, researchers, or medical professionals. This generalized attribution of agency to the speakers’ ingroup produces an asymmetrical relationship: the ingroup is constructed as the provider of care, knowledge, and opportunities, while the outgroup is positioned as the recipient of these resources.

In some comments, the agents of these actions – namely, (members of) the ingroup – are left implicit, for example in (56) and (57). In (56), the passive construction (“they are [...] educated

⁵ However, they are not presented as those “saving the world”, but only as “teaching” the ingroup how to do it.

and cared for”) places the outgroup in the position of beneficiary while omitting the agent responsible for education and medical care. This omission presents the attribution of responsibility for such interventions as self-evident and further foregrounds the outgroup as mere objects of intervention. Consequently, such comments reflect a construction of disability grounded in the medical model (cf. also Tong 2022: 656, who, in his analysis of John Langdon Down’s medical report, states that “the medical professional is positioned with power and agency, whereas the idiotic patient is constructed as passive and inferior”). In (57), a similar pattern occurs: people with Down syndrome are in the semantic role of beneficiaries (“hay que darles oportunidades” ‘it is necessary to give them opportunities’), and ingroup members are implicitly understood as those acting, i. e., giving opportunities. Moreover, the adjective *normal* (“desarrollo normal” ‘normal development’) again reproduces a norm-deviation dichotomy, as it invokes an ingroup-defined standard against which the outgroup’s development is evaluated.

5.3.5 Infantilization

Paternalism is closely related to infantilization, which emerges when members of the outgroup are framed as childlike or evaluated through categories typically associated with childhood (cf. Zapf 2025: 20–22). This occurs in the comments on the English and French videos, which feature adolescents and adults. In these comments, attributes conventionally associated with children are ascribed to adolescents or adults. The individual referred to in (58), for instance, is 46 years old, and describing him as “cute” infantilizes him, which is further intensified through the exclamation “omg” (‘oh my God’), a marker of emotional overexcitement. In the same comment, the same physical characteristic (“the sweetest faces”) – again one associated with children – is ascribed generically to all individuals with Down syndrome. Similarly, in (59), an 18-year-old man is described as “mignon” (‘cute’), and the evaluation of being “bien avancé” (‘very advanced’) draws on a register typically used for children.

Other comments refer generically to people with Down syndrome, as in (60) and (61). Here, child-associated traits such as tenderness, affection, and emotional warmth are ascribed to all people with Down syndrome; most of such comments use the gnomic present tense, and partitives or hedges are absent. Additionally, adverbs of intensification (like *très* ‘very’ in (60)) are frequently used, thus emphasizing the qualities ascribed. The Spanish comments also frequently employ the diminutive morpheme {ita}, particularly in the lexeme *personita* (cf. (61)), suggesting that individuals with Down syndrome are not fully adult or fully autonomous persons.

Additionally, some comments generically characterize people with Down syndrome as perpetually happy. This contributes to infantilization, as outgroup members are associated with carefreeness and emotional simplicity, as seen in (62), (63), and (64). In such ascriptions, adverbs of frequency (like *always* in (62)) as well as universal quantifiers (like *all* in (63)) are frequently used, constructing happiness as a stable trait shared among all members of the outgroup. Moreover, in (63) and (64), happiness and kindness are attributed to the “extra” chromosome, thereby biologizing them. Furthermore, this framing presents happiness and kindness not as a context-dependent state, but as an innate and automatic disposition, further stripping individuals of emotional complexity and agency. As a result, people with Down syndrome are presented as emotionally childlike subjects whose affective life is simplified, predictable, and fundamentally different from that of the ingroup.

6 Discussion

In his examination of John Langdon Down's report on Down syndrome, Tong (2022: 662) states that "[w]hilst contemporary medical discourses are less essentialist than Down's, the visual, behavioural and intellectual 'otherness' of T21 are still focused upon therein". The various ways of producing this "otherness" in contemporary online discourse were examined in the present study. The analysis identified various discursive practices of othering people with Down syndrome. It has also shown that many of the practices identified in Zapf's (2025) examination of racial Othering are likewise operative in the discourse on Down syndrome examined here. However, several notable differences have emerged.

The use of group labels presents individuals with Down syndrome as members of a specific and seemingly discrete social category. At the same time, the group of people with Down syndrome is constructed as part of a broader category, i. e., that of people with disabilities. Conversely, generic collective labels such as *society* are frequently used to refer exclusively to nondisabled individuals. Together, these patterns reproduce a distinction between disabled and nondisabled – a distinction that is treated as dichotomous rather than as a continuum (cf. Grue 2011: 535). Interestingly, in her analysis of interviews with managers and colleagues of individuals with disabilities, Mik-Meyer (2016: 1352) observes that when talking about specific individuals with a disability, references are also made to other social groups perceived as "different", such as homosexuals, transvestites, and immigrants. This suggests that the construction of Otherness can operate on a very broad basis.

Homogenization operates primarily through the generic attribution of traits to outgroup members, realized through both attributive and predicative adjectives, as well as through the adverb of manner *así* in the Spanish subcorpus. However, in contrast to the findings described in Zapf (2025), the corpus analyzed here shows little evidence of constructions of a prototype through the use of group labels in the singular form, either with a definite or with an indefinite article (such as *un trisomique* or *le trisomique*). Several explanations may account for this absence. One possibility is that a prototypical figure of "the person with Down syndrome" is less firmly enregistered than prototypes associated with other social categories. Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, such constructions may be perceived as overtly reductive and therefore discriminatory, leading speakers to avoid them.

A distance between the outgroup and the ingroup is produced, both in the present corpus and in the corpus analyzed in Zapf (2025), by ascribing different traits and behaviors to the outgroup and to the ingroup. Pronoun use (*us* vs. *them*) reinforces this distance. However, whereas negation structures through which the outgroup is categorically denied specific qualities or behaviors were frequently used in the corpus analyzed in Zapf (2025), the material of the present corpus rather distances the outgroup from the ingroup through ascriptions of "difference" as well as through explicit and implicit comparisons. These statements construct a norm, defined by the ingroup, from which the outgroup is said to differ. Notably, such a norm-deviation dichotomy is even reproduced in seemingly positive statements about the outgroup. Moreover, some of these statements do not specify the reference group from which the outgroup is said to differ – the ingroup –, which thereby appears as a self-evident norm. Research in social psychology demonstrates that, in intergroup comparisons, the reference group, i. e., the group that

functions as the standard, is commonly associated with greater power, agency, and social status than the group treated as the deviance from this norm (cf. Bruckmüller/Abele 2010). In the present case, the reference group – frequently associated with greater power and agency in the corpus – appears to be so self-evident that a specification to whom the outgroup is being compared is often deemed unnecessary.

Exoticization in the present corpus is realized primarily through the explicit attribution of “specialness” to the outgroup – even in ostensibly counter-discursive statements that deny that people with Down syndrome might be “different”. A similar pattern is identified by Mik-Meyer (2016), who concludes that “despite co-workers’ efforts to not regard or represent colleagues with impairments as ‘other’, they actually end up othering them and reinforcing the same discursive representations that they in fact were trying to de-emphasize” (Mik-Meyer 2016: 1358).

A process not observed in the present corpus is opposition, understood as instances in which the outgroup is constructed as the antithesis of the ingroup, for example through the use of antonymic adjectives (cf. Zapf 2025: 15f.). Instead of being positioned as opposites, people with Down syndrome are consistently described as “different” or “special” in the present corpus.

Conversely, the process of idealization was not identified in Zapf (2025), but is very frequent in the corpus analyzed here. In these instances, the outgroup is constructed as morally superior to the ingroup. On these grounds, idealization is conceptualized as a subtype of *outgroup differentiation* in the model of Othering developed here. At the same time, however, this idealization is ambivalent: paradoxically, the very qualities that are praised – purity, innocence, unconditional love – are implicitly framed as incompatible with a social world where most people are morally deficient or corrupt. In this way, people with Down syndrome are simultaneously portrayed as ill-equipped or unsuited to cope with the conditions of contemporary society, constituted by the ingroup. Interestingly, the image constructed in these comments bears strong resemblance to the trope of the Noble Savage (cf. e. g., Ellingson 2001): the Noble Savage is also constructed as innocent, emotionally authentic, and uncorrupted by “civilized” society, yet ultimately incompatible with life in the “modern” social order.⁶

Idealization in these comments is not confined to moral attributes, but extends to physical appearance: people with Down syndrome are frequently described in generic terms as “beautiful”. Cherney (2011) observes a strong linkage between supposed physical and moral deficiency in ableist discourse, where “physical imperfection” is understood “as evidence of moral imperfection”. On the other hand, and more generally, Klebl et al. (2022) demonstrate a strong association between perceived physical attractiveness and the attribution of moral traits, showing that the beauty-is-good stereotype particularly affects the attribution of moral traits, compared to that of non-moral positive traits. This linkage between physical and moral qualities is

⁶ Previous work has indeed pointed to a close linkage between discourses on race and disability (cf. e. g., Erevelles 2006; Cleall 2015; Tong 2022). Cf. also Grech/Soldatic (2015), who argue that postcolonial studies and disability studies should be more closely aligned, as they can productively inform each other. Erevelles (2006: 1276) explicitly highlights the concept of Otherness to explore such intersections: “It is in engaging Otherness that scholars in both postcolonial studies and disability studies find common ground, especially in their deconstructive analyses of how representation, hegemony, and normativity produce both the postcolonial and the disabled Other.”

reproduced here by attributing both positive moral traits and positively evaluated physical appearance to the outgroup.

A process of implicit hierarchization is observable in the present corpus primarily in acts of felicitation. In these instances, by felicitating outgroup members, speakers evaluate their personal qualities or behavior and, in doing so, assume an authoritative stance. In the corpus analyzed in Zapf (2025), in contrast, implicit hierarchization was realized through evaluations of outgroup behavior as incorrect or inappropriate. Taken together, these findings show that implicit hierarchization can be realized through both positive and negative evaluations; in both cases, speakers position themselves as entitled to assess, commend, or validate the behavior or qualities of outgroup members, thereby reproducing a hierarchical relationship.

The corpus also contains several comments that attribute positively connotated characteristics or behaviors to people with Down syndrome “despite” their disability, thereby constructing these characteristics or behaviors as exceptional. For this process, the term *exceptionalization* was introduced. In many cases, the concessive logic underlying these comments is not expressed explicitly, but is conveyed through focus particles and markers of unexpectedness. In the analysis of racial Othering, these very markers have been shown to be used to exoticize the outgroup (cf. Zapf 2025: 12f.). Other comments convey a concessive sense through negation structures – which, in Zapf (2025: 11), have been identified as a means of distancing. These observations underscore the context-dependence of the effect produced by linguistic devices. Focus particles and markers of unexpectedness function as markers of salience, and the specific Othering effect they generate depends on what is foregrounded as salient. Structures of negation, on the other hand, highlight a deviation from an implicit expectation, and the resulting Othering effect depends on the evaluative status of the negated property. When the outgroup is denied a property that is implicitly construed as normative, a distance is constructed; when a negatively evaluated quality is denied, and this absence is framed as noteworthy and unexpected, the outgroup is indirectly devaluated.

Another process attested in the present corpus that is not elaborated on in Zapf (2025) is functionalization. Across numerous comments, people with Down syndrome are construed primarily in terms of their presumed function or value for nondisabled society. According to this logic, the ingroup, positioned as the beneficiary, occupies a hierarchically superior position. Beyond the frequently used angel metaphor – angels being culturally understood as guardian figures whose role is to protect and watch over human beings –, this functional framing is evident in metaphors such as “gift” and “treasure”, which frame individuals with Down syndrome in terms of their “value” for the ingroup – a pattern also identified in Wardell et al.’s (2014: 246) analysis of media portrayals of Down syndrome in New Zealand.

Moreover, functionalization manifests in representations of the outgroup as moral exemplars or sources of inspiration. In these instances, people with Down syndrome are depicted as exemplary or inspiring, not on the basis of specific actions or achievements, but through their mere existence. This static mode of representation deprives them of intentionality and situates their social relevance exclusively in relation to their contribution to the ingroup’s moral or affective improvement. Even in comments where individuals with Down syndrome are assigned an agent role, they are framed in terms of a predefined role or purpose – explicitly described as a

“mission” in one instance – namely, to help nondisabled individuals grow socially or emotionally. This logic of functionalization has also been identified by Johnson/West (2021) in their analysis of Facebook comments about people with Down syndrome. One comment classified by the authors as a “counter narrative” – insofar as it ostensibly challenges ableist assumptions – nevertheless reproduces the idea that people with Down syndrome serve to help nondisabled individuals develop social skills. Johnson/West (2021: 298) describe this as a “form of relational-value resistance narrative” and characterize it as “disturbingly ableist”. This functionalizing perspective is also reflected in a children’s book analyzed by Digman (2021), where a character with Down syndrome is “used as a teaching tool” (Digman 2021: 4) for another character. From a broader discursive perspective, such functionalizing representations may be interpreted as a reaction to societal discourses that question the legitimacy or desirability of disabled lives, e. g., by depicting people with disabilities as an economic burden (cf. Johnson/West 2021: 291–293). In case of Down syndrome, this is particularly salient against the backdrop of debates on prenatal screening and selective abortion, which frame the existence of people with Down syndrome as contingent or debatable. Emphasizing the positive “value” that they bring to their families or to society at large may therefore function as a counter-strategy aimed at affirming their right to exist – yet grounding the outgroup’s legitimacy in its utility for the ingroup and thus reproducing this utilitarian logic.

Paternalism emerges in the present corpus insofar as people with Down syndrome are repeatedly framed as passive beneficiaries of benevolent actions carried out by the ingroup. This is evident in numerous comments in which they are assigned the semantic role of beneficiaries, namely of education and medical care provided by the ingroup. While references to education also occur in the corpus analyzed in Zapf (2025), the additional and recurrent focus on medical intervention in the present data reflects a construction of disability within the framework of the medical model. Notably, several comments employ the first-person plural pronoun *we* to designate the actors responsible for these educational or medical interventions, thereby constructing the ingroup as a collective that is uniformly benevolent and supportive. In doing so, the comments reinforce an *us* vs. *them* dichotomy, in which the ingroup is presented as active, while the outgroup is cast as reliant and in need of guidance.

At first glance, this paternalistic framing appears to be in tension with the process of functionalization, where the outgroup is portrayed as “teaching” the ingroup. However, these forms of “education” are invoked in distinct domains. People with Down syndrome are framed as exemplars in terms of moral behavior, but simultaneously as requiring instruction in the domain of institutional education. While exemplary moral behavior is idealized but implicitly framed as socially insufficient or impractical, formal education – defined and controlled by the ingroup – is understood as a necessity for succeeding in life.

Concerning the process of infantilization, a difference compared to the findings described in Zapf (2025) emerges with regard to the evaluative tone: while infantilization in the corpus analyzed in that study is predominantly denigrating – involving, among others, ridicule or mockery –, the comments examined here tend to be rather affectionate. Distinct communicative intentions might account for this difference: in the corpus on racial Othering, the childlike framing seems to be strategically mobilized to legitimize the ingroup’s hegemonic position (cf. Zapf 2025: 40f.). In the present corpus, by contrast, it seems likely that comments do not strategically

frame adults as children, but rather treat such representations as self-evident and unproblematic. This is reflected, for example, in the absence of explicit comparisons such as “they are like children” (cf. *ibid.*: 21f.).

Instances of dehumanization and explicit hierarchization (cf. *ibid.*: 22–26) are very rare in the corpus. This may be attributable to the social sanctioning of ableism in many societies, leading speakers to avoid openly derogatory evaluations of people with disabilities (cf. also Sties 2013: 195 and Nario-Redmond/Kemerling/Silverman 2019: 729). It is also possible that nondisabled speakers do not perceive a “need” to assert or legitimize their presumed superior position, as people with disabilities are widely perceived as a low-status, non-competitive social group (cf. Fiske et al. 2002), who tend to elicit pity rather than threat in nondisabled individuals (cf. Cuddy/Fiske/Glick 2008) and are therefore regarded as “naturally” inferior. By contrast, benevolent ableism – which “can manifest as pity, paternalistic protection, and unprovoked praise for everyday activities” (Nario-Redmond/Kemerling/Silverman 2019: 729) – is pervasive in the present corpus.

The analysis further shows that some processes of Othering can co-occur. This is particularly the case for homogenization, which can simultaneously involve, for example, exoticization or infantilization. This suggests that these processes might be located on different levels; specifically, outgroup construction appears to be a prerequisite for outgroup differentiation and outgroup subordination, as the latter can only occur if those differentiated or subordinated are perceived as constituting an outgroup, which is clearly distinct from the ingroup. In the present corpus, people with Down syndrome are discursively constructed as members of a common group (collectivization), with all members portrayed as sharing the same characteristics (homogenization). Depending on the nature of these characteristics, an additional effect can arise. For example, if the outgroup is described as “special” or “exotic”, exoticization co-occurs; if it is described as childlike, homogenization co-occurs with infantilization. Importantly, this co-occurrence is restricted to generic statements. Conversely, when particular individuals with Down syndrome are described, processes such as exoticization and infantilization can occur without explicit homogenization. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that a mental representation of a homogenous group underlies these statements, as statements about individuals may be interpreted as statements about a “representative” member of the outgroup. In this sense, even statements about individuals can implicitly involve homogenization. However, it is important to emphasize that only statements about individuals that are implicitly grounded in a group representation should be interpreted as instances of Othering. By contrast, a remark such as “She is so cute”, directed at a single individual, may exhibit infantilization but does not constitute Othering if the individual is not framed as part of a social group.

Overall, the discourse examined in this study is largely characterized by statements with ostensibly positive intentions, expressing praise and admiration for people with Down syndrome – an important contrast to the corpus of racial Othering analyzed in Zapf (2025). Nevertheless, comparable practices of Othering are observable. This underscores the need to examine seemingly positive statements towards groups perceived as Other in order to uncover implicit mechanisms of Othering. Moreover, it highlights the utility of the concept of Othering for linguistic research and of its distinction from related terms such as *discrimination* or, in the context of disability, *ableism*. The framework allows for an examination of how an outgroup is

discursively produced and positioned in relation to an ingroup without requiring a moral evaluation of such comments (as would be the case if these practices were categorized as discriminatory or ableist). Additionally, it allows for analyses of discourses from diverse social contexts in which outgroups are constructed on the basis of different markers of identity, and the identification of parallels between these discourses.

A question arises as to whether discourses on people with Down syndrome are comparable to those on people with other identity markers, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. It could be argued that Down syndrome is tied to a specific genetic condition, which renders the group construction less arbitrary than constructions based on other markers, particularly in cases where group constructions involve the dichotomization of continuous traits, such as skin “color”.⁷ However, it is important to note that, beyond collectivization, a range of Othering processes occurs. The analysis shows, for instance, that traits not related to the genetic condition, e. g., moral exemplarity or perpetual happiness, are attributed to the outgroup and that people with Down syndrome are discursively excluded from “society” through the use of this term to denote only nondisabled people. Consequently, as Tong (2022: 649) states, “[a]part from the ontological, scientific ‘realities’, there are socially and discursively constructed meanings of T21.” These observations underscore the importance of examining discourses on Down syndrome, as well as discourses on other disabilities, within the framework of Othering, in order to uncover such discursive processes that are based on, but extend far beyond, a biological condition.

7 Conclusion

This paper set out to examine how people with Down syndrome are discursively othered in a corpus of YouTube user comments. It analyzed discursive practices of Othering – understood as routinized processes of constructing and relationally positioning social groups through linguistic patterns –, drawing on and extending the model of racial Othering developed in Zapf (2025). While most of the processes described in the model of racial Othering were also observed in the present data – with the exception of dehumanization and explicit hierarchization, which occur only very rarely –, the main difference lies in the evaluative orientation. Unlike the corpus analyzed in Zapf (2025), which contains numerous overtly negative evaluations of the outgroup, the majority of comments examined here express seemingly positive attitudes toward people with Down syndrome.

Three processes not previously described in the model of racial Othering were identified: Idealization, which was subsumed under the category of outgroup differentiation, as well as exceptionalization and functionalization, conceptualized as part of the category of outgroup subordination. Furthermore, it was emphasized that outgroup construction is a prerequisite for, and may co-occur with, outgroup differentiation and outgroup subordination. This study thus demonstrates the applicability of the model of racial Othering to discourses on disability and at the same time extends it. The resulting extended framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

⁷ However, Erevelles (2006: 1278) highlights that disability is also socially produced: “In fact, postcolonial scholars, for the most part, almost never recognize disability as a political construct and, as a result, seldom include disability in their analyses of difference.”

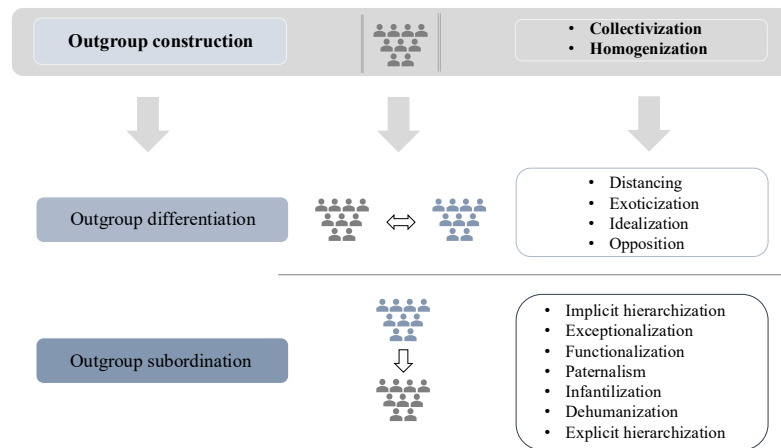


Figure 2: Extended model of processes of Othering

This model should be understood as preliminary: it should be further validated and refined through the application of the methodological approach suggested here and in Zapf (2025) to other discourses. This includes, for instance, discourses on other disabilities, across different communicative domains (e. g., newspapers, talk shows, or even scientific research; for the latter, cf. Finnern/Thim 2013), as well as in different historical contexts (e. g., National Socialist Germany, where ableist ideologies were articulated far more openly). Beyond disability, Othering phenomena should be analyzed in discourse in other social domains in which difference is constructed, for instance, on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, religion, or social class, as well as on the intersections of these categories. The extension of the analysis of discursive practices of Othering to other domains would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Othering as well as allow for an identification of differences across discourse types and social contexts.

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Appendix

The comments referred to as examples throughout the main text are presented below. They are reproduced as they appear in the comments section, including typographic errors. For longer comments, only those excerpts relevant to the analysis are cited. English translations are provided for French and Spanish examples; in these translations, punctuation has been added to improve readability.

- (1) having a child [...] stigmatized by the society (because, yes, the society, regardless the hypocrisy, is still not ready to accept people with issues that the DS brings) [...]
- (2) Les futures bébés trisomiques peuvent vivre heureux, laissons leur la chance de prouver que même avec leur handicap, ils ont le droit de faire partie de notre société
'Future babies with Trisomy can live happily, let's give them the chance to prove that even with their disability, they have the right to be part of our society.'
- (3) estas bellas personas
'these beautiful people'
- (4) ces gens au coeur énorme
'these people with a huge heart'
- (5) Como es vivir con un niño así?
'What is it like to live with a child like this?'
- (6) Also what's wrong with children with down syndrome... nothing their beautiful happy people.
- (7) te ensena el nino que pese a todo es sano no tienen maldad la luchan entendés para ellos no hay diferencia te quier por lo que SOS no x lo que das son más lindos que la gente "normal" son especiales y te alimenta el alma t
'the child will teach you that despite everything, it is healthy and they don't have malice, they fight, you understand? For them, there is no difference, they love you for what you ARE, not for what you give. They are more beautiful than "normal" people, they are special, and it nourishes your soul.'
- (8) They seem to really appreciate life and the things that a lot of us just take for granted.
- (9) i always felt that people with this disorder will tend to live a happier life because they don't feel worry about stuffs that most of us simply can't get over with.
- (10) with my brother it made him sad to remember he was different
- (11) The first girl is mild she acts pretty normal
- (12) Si on ecoute laura sans savoir qu'elle est trisomique on pense qu'elle est tout a fait "normale" elle s'exprime tres bien
'If one listens to Laura without knowing that she has Trisomy, one thinks that she is completely "normal", she expresses herself very well.'
- (13) they are very special
- (14) Estos niños son especiales con todo el sentido de la palabra
'These children are special in every sense of the word.'
- (15) Siempre ví muy normal y muy amorosa a los niños con el dawn y eso que no tengo ni un caso en mi familia son realmente especiales
'I have always seen children with the Down as very normal, and I have always felt very affectionate toward them, and that's even though I don't have a single case in my family. They are truly special.'
- (16) Yo pienso que los niños con síndrome de dan no son diferentes son especiales
'I think that children with Down syndrome aren't different, they are special.'

- (17) Extra chromosome tt gives each one that sparkle!
- (18) ellos son inocencia
'they are innocence'
- (19) estos niños son puro amor, no saben de maldad
'these children are pure love, they don't know malice'
- (20) Ce sont la plupart du temps des boules d'amour. Sans filtre, mais donc sans malice aucune.
'They are most of the time balls of love. Without a filter, but therefore without any malice.'
- (21) Ils sont plus matures et responsables que certains gens normaux
'They are more mature and responsible than certain normal people.'
- (22) Ils sont sûrement de meilleures personnes que 90% des hypocrites que sont les gens maintenant
'They are surely better people than 90 % of the hypocrites people are nowadays.'
- (23) They're better people than most of us "normal" people will ever be
- (24) Claro que no son iguales ,son mejores ,. héroes !!
'Of course, they are not the same, they are better, heroes!!'
- (25) esos son los niños más lindos del mundo ..
'Those are the most beautiful children in the world.'
- (26) They are the best ❤️
- (27) La única diferencia es que ellos no tienen el gen de la maldad
'The only difference is that they don't have the gene of malice.'
- (28) Los niños con síndrome de down en son Ángeles
'The children with Down syndrome are angels.'
- (29) They're all Angels on Earth
- (30) POR FAVOR SI ELLOS SON ANGELES EN LA TIERRA, LOS DIFERENTES SOMOS NOSOTROS QUE NOS AUTODENOMINAMOS NORMALES.
'Please, they are indeed angels on earth; it is we, who call ourselves normal, who are different.'
- (31) bravo ma petite courage à toi.
'Bravo, my little one, courage to you.'
- (32) Bravo à tout les trisomie 🤗 🤗 🤗
'Bravo to all the [people with] Trisomy 🤗 🤗 🤗'
- (33) vous êtes très forts quart sa doit être difficile les regards pesants met après ils faut pas si fier car vous êtes comme les autres et malgré votre handicap vous y arriver commeme
'you are very strong because it must be difficult, the heavy looks, but after all one should not pay attention because you are like the others, and despite your disability you nevertheless manage'
- (34) Even with their disability they all seem to still be making the most out of life.
- (35) même avec un handicap on peu vivre comme les autres.
'even with a disability one can live like the others.'
- (36) it has always amazed me how ppl with down syndrome are always happy, willing to learn n work.. yet "normal" ppl are always complaining n cant hold a part time job
- (37) It is great, that this people can now lead a life like anyone else, or even more impressive. 😊
- (38) There's no sign of them suffering really, they seem happy with themselves
- (39) pienso q Dios escoje a las familias guerreras para darnos uno de sus ángeles 🙏
'I think God chooses warrior families to give us one of his angels 🙏'
- (40) agradezco a Dios haberme mandado mi angelito lo amo mucho gracias ❤️ ❤️ ❤️ Dios
'I thank God for having sent me my little angel, I love him very much, thank you
❤️ ❤️ ❤️ God'

- (41) there are just the sweetest, and definitely a gift from god ❤️
- (42) Ellos son una bendición para la familia su llegada trae amor, abundancia y armonía en la familia
‘They are a blessing for the family, their arrival brings love, abundance, and harmony to the family.’
- (43) creo q un bebé down es un gran tesoro
‘I believe that a Down baby is a great treasure.’
- (44) Ce sont des exemples à suivre.
‘They are examples to follow.’
- (45) Ils sont incroyable inspirant et super intelligent.
‘They are incredible, inspiring, and super intelligent.’
- (46) estos niños no solo son personas completamente normales sino que además son una fuente de inspiración y aprendizaje para muchos de nosotros...
‘these children are not only completely normal people, but moreover, they are a source of inspiration and learning for many of us...’
- (47) siempre te regalan una sonrisa que te cambia la vida
‘they always give you a smile that changes your life’
- (48) eso chicos. Te llenan el alma con todo su amor.
‘these kids. They fill your soul with all their love.’
- (49) Las personas que nacen con algún tipo de discapacidad física o mental son seres realmente especiales que vienen a este mundo con una misión igualmente especial: dar y recibir amor, ternura, compasión, empatía. Vienen a ser maestros de la vida, a enseñar lo que necesitamos realmente, lo esencial. Están dispuestos a dar lecciones muy duras a quienes por una u otra razón no estamos preparados para aceptarlos, reconocerlos, acogerlos.
‘People who are born with some kind of physical or mental disability are truly special beings who come into this world with an equally special mission: to give and receive love, tenderness, compassion, empathy. They come to be teachers of life, to teach what we really need, the essential. They are willing to give very hard lessons to those of us who, for one reason or another, are not prepared to accept them, recognize them, welcome them.’
- (50) She is a happy giver
- (51) las alegrías q te dan y el amor que entregan compensa todo el trabajo que uno pueda tener con ellos
‘the joy they give you and the love they offer makes up for all the work one might have with them’
- (52) ils nous donnent une belle leçon sur la vie
‘they give us a beautiful lesson about life’
- (53) nos vienen a enseñar que para salvar a este mundo hay que dejar el ego atrás.
‘They come to teach as that, to save this world, it is necessary to leave ego behind.’
- (54) We’re giving these great people better educational opportunities than what was available when you and I were kids.
- (55) We finally have a much better understanding of how to help people with Downs.
- (56) it’s because they are actually educated and cared for medically now
- (57) hay que darles oportunidades de educación y desarrollo normal
‘it is necessary to give them opportunities for education and normal development’
- (58) Omg.. could Joe be any cuter? People with DS have the sweetest faces but then couple that with an Irish accent? <3
- (59) Louis est trop mignon et bien avancé
‘Louis is too cute and very advanced.’

- (60) Ces personnes trisomiques sont très tendres et donnent beaucoup d’amour et elles ne demandent qu’à être aimées.
 ‘These people with Trisomy are very tender and give a lot of love, and they only ask to be loved.’
- (61) Estas Personitas Son Maravillosas Y Muy Cariñosas
 ‘These little people are wonderful and very affectionate.’
- (62) They always seem so loving and happy.
- (63) Them all seem just all so awesome! It’s like they all got the extra happy chromosome.
- (64) Ils ont un chromosome en plus celui de la gentillesse !!!!!
 ‘They have one extra chromosome, that of kindness!!!!!!’

Table A.1 provides information on the YouTube videos to which the comments analyzed in this study were posted. At the time of data collection (cf. Table 1 in Section 4), all videos were publicly accessible.

Title	Language	Channel	URL
Trisomiques, des vies presque comme les autres	French	La Vie	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grnK9718Kzg
Informe especial sobre Síndrome de Down	Spanish	Cámara Testigo	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcnzHcSVCfo
My Extra Chromosome And Me	English	Real Stories	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zCoEa5WRBs

Table A.1: Information on YouTube videos used for corpus compilation

Table A.2 provides information on the user comments quoted in the analysis. At the time of data collection (cf. Table 1 in Section 4), all comments included in the corpus were publicly accessible. Usernames are reported for the purpose of source transparency; however, the analysis focuses on discursive patterns rather than individual users and does not make assumptions about commenters’ personal identities, backgrounds, or intentions.

Example	Video source	Author	Date posted
(1)	Real Stories 2019	@marleoca2644	27.04.2018
(2)	La Vie 2022	@Moreoverhell	27.10.2023
(3)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@maryjaramillo9947	08.01.2017
(4)	La Vie 2022	@stephanedelgadodeandrade923	25.02.2022
(5)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@SamVianyFG05	03.02.2017
(6)	Real Stories 2019	@eviebatson3518	15.04.2018
(7)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@piafernandez655	10.07.2017
(8)	Real Stories 2019	@Jenners23	18.03.2018
(9)	Real Stories 2019	@cyberdyne9090	14.03.2018
(10)	Real Stories 2019	@roseadams8003	24.12.2020
(11)	Real Stories 2019	@kylerjanovec1761	23.04.2019
(12)	La Vie 2022	@cunegondeffy	02.03.2024

Example	Video source	Author	Date posted
(13)	Real Stories 2019	@signwithwilfred5689	26.05.2019
(14)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@karinezorozcomurillo4128	02.08.2019
(15)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@carlosalbertodelossantos7660	30.03.2024
(16)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@blancadiaz5602	26.07.2017
(17)	Real Stories 2019	@aclp003	10.05.2024
(18)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@EltigreTafur	20.05.2021
(19)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@albameyer192	09.12.2018
(20)	La Vie 2022	@oponthus	02.10.2023
(21)	La Vie 2022	@marielaperle5361	22.02.2022
(22)	La Vie 2022	@Hellosun1260	05.04.2025
(23)	Real Stories 2019	@carolinesconcertvids860	13.03.2018
(24)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@marvazquez5275	14.02.2021
(25)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@millanperez9755	13.12.2016
(26)	Real Stories 2019	@taraclarissa	13.05.2022
(27)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@anaisabelsanchezsoto4261	24.01.2023
(28)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@adelaydacruz6771	13.11.2019
(29)	Real Stories 2019	@sedevacante6591	02.04.2018
(30)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@rorrororron4646	29.04.2016
(31)	La Vie 2022	@dalilaabichou8653	21.02.2022
(32)	La Vie 2022	@Princesse_officiel007	25.10.2022
(33)	La Vie 2022	@Sydney0876_S	06.01.2023
(34)	Real Stories 2019	@BudBundy007	09.08.2024
(35)	La Vie 2022	@LeGrandBazarDeLaVer- minBE	12.06.2022
(36)	Real Stories 2019	@againstallodds6341	08.03.2018
(37)	Real Stories 2019	@lisahofer4899	05.05.2018
(38)	Real Stories 2019	@LeBronyaJames	16.03.2018
(39)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@galemalucana6750	25.04.2018
(40)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@JTLSPOWERSDESDENUE- VOLAREDOTAMS	25.02.2024
(41)	Real Stories 2019	@bbygirlmua	12.03.2018
(42)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@gabrielafleitas2133	08.01.2019
(43)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@byosio259	17.11.2016
(44)	La Vie 2022	@missdior888rive7	05.12.2023
(45)	La Vie 2022	@newme4077	24.02.2022
(46)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@adrianporresgonzalez618	20.01.2024
(47)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@mariar9772	21.08.2020
(48)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@josebenitez1541	01.08.2020
(49)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@AnaEmiliaMejiaEslava	15.02.2022
(50)	Real Stories 2019	@samuelprecious713	13.02.2021
(51)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@catalinavergara6352	09.04.2021
(52)	La Vie 2022	@estellelepretre8279	21.02.2022
(53)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@damianramella7342	08.05.2020

Example	Video source	Author	Date posted
(54)	Real Stories 2019	@deaconsmom2000	10.03.2018
(55)	Real Stories 2019	@T3hXinro	11.03.2018
(56)	Real Stories 2019	@louisacapell	02.04.2018
(57)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@paulinagarcia503	15.04.2019
(58)	Real Stories 2019	@Jenners23	18.03.2018
(59)	La Vie 2022	@claramuco	23.02.2022
(60)	La Vie 2022	@sabrinasoulaf5308	22.02.2022
(61)	Cámara Testigo 2015	@MargaritaHernandez-qb5sz	06.11.2019
(62)	Real Stories 2019	@UsernamesForDummies	08.03.2018
(63)	Real Stories 2019	@kenyaasurrenderedves-selrpa8874	16.07.2018
(64)	La Vie 2022	@flaviapicarde3777	22.02.2022
FN 2	Cámara Testigo 2015	@sandramolina1177	29.05.2020
FN 2	Cámara Testigo 2015	@luishernanbecerraperez2011	10.01.2021
FN 4	Cámara Testigo 2015	@florenciacastillo1010	19.07.2019

Table A.2: Information on comments quoted in the analysis