

How the PJ Masks Become “PJ Heroes”: A Contrastive Corpus Study of Gender Portrayal in Dubbed Children’s Animation

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Abstract

A quantitative and qualitative corpus analysis of a popular TV series was conducted in this study of dubbing for children. The parallel corpus consists of twelve episodes of the animated series *PJ Masks*, and its corresponding Dutch (*Pyjamahelden* [Pyjamas heroes]) and Swedish (*Pyjamashjältarna* [Pyjamas heroes]) audiovisual translations. The focus of the analyses is the portrayal of the main characters. In light of ongoing criticism of children’s animation regarding a lack of diversity and gender stereotyping, this translation analysis studies potential changes in gender representation with a particular interest in the female main character. First, the character portrayal in all language versions was systematically analysed based on the characters’ utterances. Subsequently, a closer qualitative analysis revealed some interesting translation shifts, particularly, in the Dutch target text. These were contrasted against the Swedish translation to check if this results in subtle or less subtle changes in the depiction of the heroes vis-à-vis the source text. Needless to say, such translation shifts in audiovisual translation for children and their effect on the representation of children in this multimodal “glocal” product are highly relevant amidst the ongoing criticism of gender and diversity issues in children’s television.

Keywords: dubbing, gender, children’s animation, corpus analysis.

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Introduction

Several studies on children's television were conducted focusing on diversity and inclusion. The "Children's Television Worldwide" project launched in 2007 by Maya Götz and her team, mapping children's television in 24 different countries (Götz & Lemish, 2012), as well as their smaller follow-up study in 2017 (Götz et al., 2018) is notable in this regard. The main findings of these studies were that there are ongoing issues in terms of the overrepresentation of male main characters, who are also mainly white and have more privileged socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, compared to their male counterparts, female characters "are less often leaders of a group, and solve problems more often by talking and applying magic and less often by using STEM or physical power" (Götz et al. 2018, p. 65). Another media scholar, Kirsten Drotner (2018), pointed out that, compared to 50 years ago, boys and girls, to a large extent, are still typecast in a similar way in mainstream animation. She refers to Götz and Lemish (2012), essentially confirming the findings of Thompson and Zerbinos's (1995) diachronic study of child depiction in American animated programmes, positing "that boy characters are more likely than girl characters to be inventive, outgoing and problem-solving, while girl characters are more likely than boy characters to be attentive to relations and in need of assistance" (Drotner, 2018, p. 384). These findings are also reflected in the research on superhero depiction. Kaysee Baker and Arthur A. Raney (2007, p. 36) analysed superhero animation for children, specifically focusing on gender-role stereotypical portrayals and established that "[f]emale superheroes were more likely than males to ask questions" and "[m]ales were more likely to be presented as tough and more likely to threaten others". The overrepresentation of male superheroes was also confirmed by Jane Shawcroft and her colleagues, who also pointed out that they "often possess stereotypically masculine attributes such as assertiveness, confidence (Harriger et al., 2022), emotional stoicism, and resistance to help-seeking (Shawcroft & Coyne, 2022)." (Shawcroft et al. 2023, p. 3).

It is also noteworthy that the majority of children's content, to wit 77% in the 2007 study (Götz et al., 2008, p. 5), is imported (mainly from the United States and Canada). Children's content in non-English speaking countries consists primarily of imported animation (*idem*). Nonetheless, the fact that these programmes undergo a localisation process before they are distributed in non-English speaking countries is not given ample consideration. Could this localisation process potentially impact the diversity and inclusion issues raised? In Sweden, for instance, audiovisual translators have, at times, compensated for this gender stereotyping or the lack of diversity in the dubbing process of several imported children's animations (De Ridder, 2019, 2022). While some research (Von Flotow & Josephy-Hernández, 2018) has already been conducted on audiovisual translation (AVT), and more particularly on gender stereotyping in dubbing in Southern Europe (Bianchi, 2008; De Marco, 2012; 2016; Feral, 2011), this research project focuses specifically on dubbing for younger audiences in the Low Countries and Sweden. These are known to be so-called "subtitling countries." Nonetheless, children's content, especially the content aimed at pre-schoolers, is dubbed. As a result, it is important not to limit AVT research in these language areas to subtitling, but also to include dubbing research (De Ridder, 2022).

The present study is part of a larger research project focusing on AVT for children. The broader aim of this project is to establish how internationally distributed popular animations, such as the *PJ Masks*, are localised for different markets and how this may impact gender portrayal. A quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis is conducted for this first part of the project. To this end, a trilingual parallel corpus of twelve episodes of the English *PJ Masks* source text and their corresponding Dutch (*Pyjamahelden* [PJ heroes]) and Swedish (*Pyjamashjältarna* [PJ heroes]) audiovisual translations was built. Such a systematic contrastive analysis of a larger corpus aims to minimise the risk of confirmation bias or cherry-picking certain scenes and sweeping generalisations. Subsequently, a multimodal analysis was conducted, zooming in, in greater detail, on a number of interesting scenes that this systematic corpus analysis revealed (Van Meerbergen & De Ridder, forthcoming).

Audiovisual fiction transfers information through images, sound, and language. As a result, the target audience's cognitive load when processing such fiction is substantial. In children's audiovisual fiction, relevant information conveyed through sound and images is often explicitly rendered again through spoken text to ensure all relevant information can be processed. This example taken from *Catboy's Flying Fiasco*, in which Catboy (C) asks what happened to the missing hot-air balloon, illustrates this: Gekko (G) thinks aloud, as he is trying to find an explanation, while Owlette (O) rushes to the scene looking for clues on site. She then finds a piece of frayed rope, which she demonstratively holds up when uttering her line with her own findings. This is rendered as follows in the source text:

[G] I guess the wind could have blown it away.
[O] Or someone cut the ropes and flew it away.
[C] Right. And we're going to find out who.

Here, we see an illustration of the team's problem-solving process. Catboy finally calls on the team to take action and find the culprit.

Because what is conveyed in the images and sound is often also rendered again in the dialogue lines, even a purely linguistic corpus analysis in itself could be insightful. However, it does not give the full picture, as meaning is conveyed through all audiovisual channels. This corpus analysis focuses on the representation of the main characters based on their own utterances. In light of ongoing criticism of animation regarding gender stereotyping, this analysis of both source text and target texts is concerned with gender representation – with a special interest in the female superhero – and potential changes in this portrayal that may occur in the dubbing process. It aims to establish if, and if so, to what extent, the characterisation and, more specifically, their gender portrayal changes in the “glocalised” products.

It is important to note that AVT is characterised by certain constraints (e.g. Chaume, 2012; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007) that inevitably have an impact on the localised audiovisual product that is ultimately distributed. Dubbing translators need to provide a translation that can be uttered within the time constraints imposed by the medium. Similarly, mouth movements and lip synchronisation in the images need to be borne in mind if they are visible. This, for instance, impacts certain translation

choices and the number of syllables that can be used. Also, kinetic synchrony (Chaume, 2012, p. 70) is important, as the lines uttered need to match gestures and body language. For example, when a character nods in agreement, this is usually accompanied by an affirmative rather than a negative sentence. Such translation choices may trigger translation shifts, which arguably may also affect gender depiction.

1. Corpus and Methodology

In the next section, we explain the corpus selection and subsequently discuss the methodology developed for this analysis.

1.1. Corpus Selection

Since a large part of children's content distributed globally is imported from the United States and Canada, this popular animation series was chosen for this project. Another criterion for our corpus selection was that the main characters are represented as human beings rather than animals (e.g. *Paw Patrol*) or objects (e.g. *SpongeBob*) commonly used in children's content. This is because gender representation is at the core of this analysis. When we started this project, the animated series *PJ Masks* was popular in the Low Countries and Sweden. To this day, the same audiovisual translations still have reruns on different platforms. This is another reason this particular show was selected for our research project. We chose to focus on dubbing into our native languages, Dutch and Swedish. A very practical choice lies behind the selection of the episodes, in that the corpus consists of all the *PJ Masks* episodes that are available on DVD in Dutch, since there are no DVDs with the Swedish version of the *PJ Masks*. The two DVDs, which comprised twelve Dutch-language episodes, were purchased, and all of these episodes were taken from Season 1 (2015–2017) and comprised 52 episodes. At present, however, 6 seasons are available of around 150 episodes. This means that our corpus is by no means representative of the entire animated series, let alone children's animation or dubbing in both languages, in general. The original English-language and Swedish versions of these twelve episodes can be streamed from the Netflix and Disney+ streaming platforms and SVT Play of the Swedish public service broadcaster. Half of the episodes under investigation focus on the character of Catboy, who is also the team leader of the PJ Masks. The remaining 6 episodes revolve around his female team member Owlette (3 episodes) and the youngest PJ Mask Gekko (3 episodes). The episodes have been listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Selected Episodes

	Original title	Main focus
01	Gekko and the Snore-A-Saurus	Gekko
02	Catboy and the Shrinker	Catboy
03	Blame it on the Train, Owlette	Owlette
04	Looking after Gekko	Gekko
05	Catboy's Tricky Ticket	Catboy
06	Clumsy Catboy	Catboy
07	Speak Up, Gekko!	Gekko
08	Catboy and Master Fang's Sword	Catboy
09	Catboy vs. Robo-Cat	Catboy
10	Owlette and the Giving Owl	Owlette
11	Catboy's Flying Fiasco	Catboy
12	Owlette and the Flash Flip Trip	Owlette

For all the episodes, the scripts were obtained in all language versions, which served as the basis for our transcription of all the lines uttered in the episodes. The scripts were then post-edited while watching every single episode in all language versions to ensure our corpus consisted of the actual words uttered in the distributed versions. Subsequently, only the dialogue lines of the heroes were extracted. Codes were added indicating which line was uttered by which hero in which language: C for Catboy/Connor, O for Owlette/Amaya, and G for Gekko/Greg. No other tagging or labelling was used. The entire parallel corpus of the heroes' dialogue lines in all language versions consists of 29,285 words or tokens. The number of tokens uttered by each hero, either in isolation or together with one (or all) team members (e.g. in each episode, they all shout out their battle cry at the same time), were tallied in Table 2. While there are two male heroes, there is a discrepancy between both in terms of the number of words uttered. Catboy, the team leader, is the most dominant character in our corpus, and Gekko is the youngest team member who plays a significantly less dominant role in the series. This also becomes apparent when looking at the number of words uttered by his character in the corpus in Table 2.

Table 2

Corpus Structure

Heroes	English-language version	Dutch-language version	Swedish-language version
Catboy	4,634 tokens	4,135 tokens	4,292 tokens
Owlette	3,550 tokens	3,089 tokens	3,221 tokens
Gekko	2,866 tokens (-38.1% compared to C)	2,551 tokens (-38.3% compared to C)	2,612 tokens (-39.1% compared to C)
TOTAL	10,391 tokens	9,309 tokens	9,585 tokens

1.2. Methodology

As previously mentioned, Drotner (2018, p. 384) posited that boys and girls are still typecast in similar ways in animation today, in that “boy characters are more likely than girl characters to be inventive, outgoing and problem-solving, while girl characters are more likely than boy characters to be attentive to relations and in need of assistance”. From this, three categories were drawn for the contrastive analysis of the original *PJ Masks* and both audiovisual translations: problem-solving, need of assistance, and attention to relations. This is also in line with Baker and Raney’s initial hypothesis relating to communicative behaviour in that

female superheroes were expected to be more likely to ask questions, ask for advice, and praise others, while male superheroes were expected to interrupt more, laugh more at others, brag, order or boss others, insult, threaten, and show more anger. (2007, p. 29)

Since the PJ Masks are a team, an additional category, team spirit, was added to analyse utterances emphasising their own, or rather the team’s contribution. This also allowed us to cover the bragging aspect mentioned by Baker and Raney’s (2007) above. Subcategories were established within each category. These are listed in Table 3. By way of illustration, in Category III Need of Assistance, we found utterances relating to asking for instructions (e.g. “OK, Catboy – what’s the plan?”), asking for an explanation (e.g. “But how can a big train... disappear?”), calling for help (e.g. “I need help with my tail.”), or admitting they are not in control (e.g. “Can’t... hold... on! Agh!”).

Table 3

Four Main Categories and Their Subcategories

Main categories	Subcategories
I. Team spirit	team contribution vs. own contribution
II. Problem-solving	instructions/commands, explaining/observing, taking initiative/action, suggesting solutions/action, showing defiance towards the villains, criticising each other
III. Need of assistance	asking for instructions, calling for help, admitting not being in control/mistakes, asking questions/for an explanation
IV. Attention to relations	asking how they are/feel about something, reassuring, apologising, expressing gratitude, offering help, expressing worry (about the others), expressing despair or disappointment, expressing admiration

While analysing the corpus, a score of 1 was given for each (part of an) utterance that matched a given category. Subsequently, the number of instances of such utterances by the heroes in each category is counted and compared to check if there are significant gender differences in the portrayal of the heroes and if these differences also occur in all language versions. This quantitative analysis aimed to establish, in the entire parallel corpus if there are noteworthy gender differences in the number of utterances of the male and female heroes in all four categories. Since there is a gender imbalance in the team, the utterances of both males within each category were added up and the average was calculated to gauge possible gender differences. Considering the number of tokens uttered by both Catboy and Gekko, their average was close to the number of tokens uttered by Owlette, which made it easier to compare the data. The aim of this qualitative and quantitative analysis of our corpus of *PJ Masks* episodes is to examine if gender stereotyping occurs in this specific parallel corpus.

2. Analysis

Before we started with the systematic corpus analysis, we conducted a pilot study focusing on the first-person plural pronouns throughout the corpus. This allowed us to quickly examine the extent to which team spirit (Category I) is expressed. In the first section, we discuss the main findings of this study. Then, in the second section, we zoom in on a number of interesting scenes reflecting shifts in the categories we used for our analysis in both target texts. Finally, we discuss the results of our systematic corpus analysis based on all four categories.

2.1. Pilot Study Focusing on Pronouns

During the transcription process, we could take a closer look at our corpus, and it quickly became apparent that the Dutch translation deviates the most from the source text compared to the Swedish translation. This begs the question, do these deviations also affect the gender portrayal? A systematic corpus analysis was needed to establish this. Before we started with the corpus analysis based on the categories, we conducted a preliminary analysis of the use of the first-person plural pronouns *we/us/our(s)*. In this way, we wanted to get a first impression of both male and female heroes emphasising teamwork, as opposed to (boasting about) their personal contributions, by using these pronouns across all the language versions.

We immediately noticed that the Swedish version contained +50.5% more instances of *vi/oss/vår(a/t)* [*we/us/our(s)*] than the original English version. By contrast, in the Dutch translation, -21.8% fewer instances of the corresponding pronouns *wij/we/ons/onze* [*we/us/our(s)*] could be found, as conveyed in Table 4.

Table 4

First-Person Plural Pronouns

English-language version	Dutch-language version	Swedish-language version
216	169 (-21.8%)	325 (+50.5%)

However, a closer qualitative analysis of the concordances revealed that, in the Swedish version, constructions often included a pronoun rather than an imperative without a pronoun. By comparison, in the Dutch version, calls on the team to take action are sometimes rendered as questions, as this example from *Blame it on the Train Owlette* demonstrates. The pronouns were put in bold and between square brackets; the language codes EN, SV, and NL are used for English, Swedish, and Dutch, and the first letter of the characters' names indicates who utters this line.

[EN C] Now **let's** see who's driving...

[SV C] Nu ska **vi** se vem som kör det. [Now we will see who drives it.]

[NL C] Maar wie is de bestuurder? [But who's the driver?]

Such "let us" constructions are used in the source text to explicitly call on the team and express team spirit, but they are not systematically translated with the corresponding construction in both target languages, as was done in this example from *Catboy vs. Robo-cat*.

[EN C] Oh yeah? **Let's** shine some light on this mystery.

[SV C] Jasså? **Låt oss** kasta lite ljus över det här mysteriet. [Really? **Let us** cast a little light on this mystery.]

[NL C] O ja? **Laten we** dit mysterie even ophelderen. [Oh yes? **Let us** quickly clear up this mystery.]

This construction, in English mostly contracted to the one-syllable “let’s”, is used 61 times in the source-text hero lines. Its direct Dutch translation, “laten we”, as used in the previous example, consists of three syllables and cannot be contracted. Its Swedish counterpart, “låt oss”, consists of two syllables and cannot be contracted either. Potential lip sync issues, thus, may explain why it is not that often used in the translation. Furthermore, this “let’s” construction in English shows clear signs of grammaticalization, i.e. phonological reduction and semantic bleaching, because of which its original meaning (“allow us”) has become diluted (Xiang & Liu, 2018). This is not the case in the Swedish “låt oss” or in the Dutch “laten we”. Because of this and in line with grammaticalization theory, the “let’s” construction is used in a wider range of different contexts and thus more frequently in English. This could also explain why this construction is not used as frequently in the target texts. Other solutions, like using an imperative without pronouns, were found, as the following examples from *Catboy and the Shrinker* and *Gekko and the Snore-A-Saurus*, respectively illustrate.

[EN C] **Let’s** go, PJ Masks!

[SV C] Kom nu pyjamashjältar! [Come now, PJ Heroes!]

[NL C] Kom op, Pyjamahelden! [Come on, PJ Heroes!]

[EN C] She’s going to wake him! **Let’s** stop her!

[SV C] Hon kommer väcka honom. **Vi** stoppar henne. [She will wake him up. **We** [must] stop her.]

[NL C] Ze maakt hem wakker! Hou haar tegen! [She is waking him up! Stop her!]

Table 5 displays how this construction was translated in our corpus. In the Swedish translation, the “let’s” construction was mostly (80.3%) rendered by another construction including the first-person plural pronoun (e.g. “I know! Let’s do it!” becomes “Jag vet! Nu kör **vi**!” [I know! Now **we** [should] go!] in Swedish), while this was only done in 39.3% of the Dutch translations and a translation leaving out the pronoun altogether occurred in 45.9% of the Dutch translations, and only 14.8% in the Swedish translations.

Table 5

Translation of the “Let us” Construction (n=61) in the Corpus

Options	Dutch version	Swedish version
Use of the source-text “Let us/Let’s” construction	9x (14.8%) “Laten we”	3x (4.9%) “Låt oss”
Use of a different construction with the personal pronoun in the first-person plural	24x (39.3%)	49x (80.3%)
Use of an imperative, question, or other translation without a pronoun	28x (45.9%)	9x (14.8%)

In the PJ Mask corpus, the use of the pronouns “we” vs. “I” is in itself rather interesting, as “we” is also used by characters to hide their own contribution, not only for the sake of team spirit but, arguably, also when they try to conceal their own role in failing the team. In the episode *Clumsy Catboy*, for instance, Catboy utters the line:

[EN C] I’ve got it! When we tried not being clumsy, we were even clumsier. **We** crashed the Cat Car.

[SV C] Jag har det! När vi försökte att inte va klumpiga blev vi ännu klumpigare. **Vi** kraschade Kattbilen. [I’ve got it! When we tried not to be clumsy, we became even clumsier. **We** crashed the Cat Car.]

[NL C] Ik weet het! Wanneer we probeerden om niet te klungelen, werd het alleen maar erger: **we** crashten de Katkar. [I know it! When we tried not to fumble, it only got worse: **we** crashed the Cat Car.]

Yet, the viewer clearly saw that it was, in fact, Catboy who drove his Cat Car and eventually crashed it. In the corresponding translations, however, this first-person plural pronoun is maintained. In some cases, as in the below example taken from the same episode, the first-person plural pronoun is, nonetheless, replaced by the first-person singular pronoun in the Dutch translation:

[EN C] You two are really clumsy. How are **we** going to unzip you?

[SV C] Ni två är väldigt klumpiga. Hur ska **vi** få bort det nu? [You two are extremely clumsy. How are **we** going to remove this now?]

[NL C] Jullie twee zijn wel erg onhandig. Hoe kan **ik** jullie ooit *ontklungelen*? [You two really are very clumsy. How can **I** ever *unclumsify* you?]

However, this not only happens in Catboy’s lines. In *Catboy and Master Fang’s Sword*, for instance, Owlette is working on their holographic computer while uttering the line:

[EN O] Great! Now **let’s** look closer.

[SV O] Bra. Och nu tittar **vi** närmare. [Good. And now **we** [should] look closer.]

[NL O] Super! **Ik** zoom even in. [Superb! **I’ll** quickly zoom in.]

She is the character the viewer sees using STEM, as she is working on the computer and zooming in. Yet, the use of “ik” [I] draws the attention of the viewer even more to her agency (Castro & Clark, 2018) in this scene. The team spirit expressed by “let’s” is lost here because of this change in personal pronoun in the Dutch version. However, in this case, the female character is clearly in charge, which is meaningful from a gender perspective in terms of her agency. The translator probably took into consideration what happens in the accompanying images but, at the same time, arguably empowered the heroine. Yet, this translation choice may also be informed by the fact that the verb form in the plural would be one syllable longer in Dutch (i.e. “kan ik” [can I] vs. “kun-nen we” [can we] and “ik zoom” [I zoom] vs. “wij zoo-men” [we zoom]). A similar example is this one taken from *Owlette and the Flash Flip Trip*, in which this female character undeniably conveys a belief in her own potential, by saying “ik stop hem!” [I’ll stop him!], which was not in the source text nor the Swedish target text:

[EN O] Whatever he’s up to, **we**’ll stop him!
 [SV O] Vad han än har gjort stoppar **vi** honom! [Whatever he’s done, **we**’ll stop him!]
 [NL O] Wat hij ook van plan is, **ik** stop hem! [Whatever he’s up to, I’ll stop him!]

This change in pronouns sometimes happens in the Swedish translation as well, as this example from *Catboy’s Flying Fiasco* illustrates:

[EN O] **Let’s** see. Owl Eyes!
 [SV O] **Jag** ska se. Uggleblick! [I will see. Owl Look!]
 [NL O] Eens kijken. UilOgen! [Taking a look, Owl Eyes!]

In this example, the source-text “Let’s” construction is rendered in Swedish by “**Jag** ska se” [I will see] rather than “Vi ska se” [We will see], which has the same number of syllables, after which Owlette activates here *Owl Eyes* superpower to take a closer look.

A common characteristic of children’s content is the use of rhyme and song. This poses an additional challenge to translators, as they have to try and keep the rhythm and the rhyme in the translation. In *PJ Masks*, the heroes shout two battle cries that include rhyme and their motto in each episode, which are always translated in the same way. See Table 6 below. When looking at the translation of these lines, we notice that the pronoun “we” is used in all Swedish versions, even an additional “we” is introduced in “Vi räddar dagen” [We save the day] to convey the source-text infinitive “to save the day”. This pronoun, however, is not used in the Dutch version. Interestingly, here the singular “Een Pyjamaheld” [a PJ Hero] is used rather than the source-text plural “PJ Masks”. In their motto, the first-person pronoun “ik” [I] is even introduced in “Ik moet een echte held zijn” [I have to be a real hero], while the other versions keep the more general statement “It’s time to be(come) a hero”.

Table 6

Translations of the Battle Cries and Motto

English-language version	Dutch-language version	Swedish-language version
PJ Masks, we’re on our way! Into the night to save the day!	Een Pyjamaheld staat paraat! De hele nacht tot dageraad! [A Pyjama Hero is always on standby, the whole night until dawn!]	Pyjamashjältarna. Vi är på gång! Vi räddar dagen hela natten lång! [The Pyjama Heroes we are on our way!] [We save the day all night long!]
PJ Masks all shout hooray... ‘Cos in the night we saved the day!	Een Pyjamaheld verslaat het kwaad De hele nacht tot dageraad! [A PJ Hero defies evil	Pyjamashjältarna ropar hurra! För mitt i natten så rädda’ vi da’n! [The Pyjama Heroes shout

English-language version	Dutch-language version	Swedish-language version
	The whole night until dawn!]	hooray!] [Because in the middle of the night we save the day!]
It's time to be a hero!	Ik moet een echte held zijn. [I need to be a real hero.]	Det är dags att bli en hjälte. [It is time to become a hero.]

These first exploratory corpus searches in the parallel corpus, however, were of course, not sufficient to get a better idea of the gender portrayal throughout this corpus. To be able to analyse the entire corpus systematically, not merely pronouns, but all utterances had to be considered. That is why the entire parallel corpus of lines uttered by the heroes was categorised based on the aforementioned categories, so that their utterances could be studied more closely. By way of illustration, in this dialogue line taken from *Blame it on the Train, Owlette*, the personal pronouns Owlette uses in her utterance emphasise her own, as well as the team's contribution, as she states "I told you **we** could catch", which is also conveyed in the Swedish version, but not in the Dutch translation. In this episode, the villain Romeo steals a train, which he uses as his lab, but then the train gets out of control, and the heroes have to catch it. Thus, only the source-text utterance and the Swedish translation were categorised in Category I, with a score given to teamwork and own contribution:

[EN O] See, Romeo?! I told you **we** could catch your lab!

[SV O] Du ser Romeo. **Jag** sa ju att **vi** kunde fånga ditt labb. [You see, Romeo. I did tell you that we could catch your lab!]

[NL O] Kijk, Romeo. Is dat hier niet jouw mooie lab? [Look Romeo. Isn't this here your lovely lab?]

By contrast, in the Dutch version, "Is dat hier niet jouw mooie lab?" was categorised under Category II Problem-solving (subcategory: explaining/observing). Such shifts in categories that occurred in the translation process were particularly interesting when analysing the parallel corpus. In the next section, we will discuss some noteworthy examples of such shifts.

2.2. Shifts in Categories

Analysing the corpus, we sometimes noticed that utterances in the source text matched one of our categories but matched a different category in the corresponding translations. However, the quantitative analysis of the entire corpus, discussed in the next section, suggests that these shifts in categories are mostly compensated elsewhere. An interesting example is the opening scene of the episode *Clumsy Catboy*, in which the team leader stumbles into the classroom carrying a model volcano. He pretends he does not need any assistance (see Shawcroft et al., 2023), but eventually trips and nearly ruins their joint school project. Here, we also notice a discrepancy between what is said and what is visible in the co-occurring images. In the original version, Catboy expresses control

by using the personal pronoun “I” in combination with expressions suggesting he is in full control of the situation (“I’m OK” and “I’ve got it”). This is conveyed in a similar vein in the Swedish translation, in which an additional personal pronoun was introduced in line (8). The Dutch version, however, uses constructions without a personal pronoun. Below, the dialogue lines in all language versions are added:

1. [EN C] Don’t worry, **I’ve got it**.
[SV C] Ingen fara. **Jag har den**. [No worries. I’ve got it.]
[NL C] Geen zorgen... het lukt wel! [No worries. It’ll be fine.]
2. [EN O] Let us help you get through the door.
[SV O] Låt oss hjälpa dig genom dörren. [Let us help you through the door.]
[NL O] Laat ons helpen met dragen. [Let us help carry it.]
3. [EN C] Thanks, but **I’m OK**.
[SV C] Tack men **jag grejar det**. [Thanks but I’ll manage it.]
[NL C] Dank je, maar het gaat wel! [Thank you, but it’s okay!]
4. [EN G] Careful!
[SV G] Försiktig! [Careful!]
[NL G] Pas op! [Watch out!]
5. [EN C] See? **I’ve got it**.
[SV C] Ni ser! Det går ju bra. [You see! It’s going well, right.]
[NL C] Kijk? ’t Is OK. [Look? It’s OK.]
6. [EN C] Ohh...Whoa! Agh! Agggh! Whoaoao!
[SV C] Ååh. Oååh! Aaah! Aah! Uh-ååh!
[NL C] Waa!! Wow!
7. [EN GO] Huh?
[SV GO] Va? [What?]
[NL GO] Huh?
8. [EN C] Told you **I’ve got it**.
[SV C] **Jag** sa ju att **jag grejade det**. [I told you that I’d manage it, right?]
[NL C] Zo, niks aan de hand. [There, nothing happened.]

In line (1), (3), (5), and (8) of the original version, Catboy expresses control of the situation and stresses his own role in dealing with the situation by using the first-person singular in combination with expressions of control “I’ve got it” and “I’m OK”. In line (5) and (8) he is even boasting. This is similarly conveyed in (1), (3), and (8), in the Swedish translation, with a similar boasting in line (5), although no first-person pronoun is used. In the Dutch translation, by contrast, all first-person singular pronouns have disappeared, which only happened once in the Swedish translation of line (5). There is also a shift in categories from being in control of the situation, conveyed in his boasting “Told you I’ve got it”, to “Niks aan de hand” [Nothing happened] in line (8), which merely reassures his team members. All of these show that there is a shift in categories from Category I, emphasising own contribution, rather than team spirit, to Category IV Attention to relations, in reassuring the team members.

It has to be said, here as well, that this not only happens in the lines of the male characters. In the following example taken from *Owlette and the Giving Owl*, the same shift occurs in the lines of the female character. Catboy is concerned about Gekko, who is trapped and unsure Owlette made the right decision to leave him with the villain. However, she reassures him, calling on their team spirit to solve this issue and then gives him a number of instructions in the original and Swedish version. In the Dutch version by contrast, there is a noteworthy translation shift:

[EN O] **We**'ll get him free, and get my statue back too.

[SV O] **Vi** befriar honom. Och får tillbaka min staty. [We'll free him. And get back my statue.]

[NL O] Dat komt wel goed, **ik** heb al een nieuw plan bedacht. [It will turn out fine, I've already thought of a new plan.]

Rather than calling on their team, "We'll get him free" is conveyed as a reassurance "Dat komt wel goed" [It will turn out fine]. Here again, we see a shift from Category I Team spirit to Category IV Attention to relations. Yet, most significantly, she turns the original call on the team to get the statue back into a rather smug comment that she herself has conceived a new plan. This is nowhere in the source text, but it makes perfect sense, as it is followed by Owlette giving detailed instructions to her team leader. In the Dutch translation, we notice two shifts. On the one hand, there is the aforementioned shift from Category I Team spirit to Category IV Attention to relations in the first part of her utterance. On the other hand, in the second part of her line, there is also a shift within the first category, between subcategory 1, expressing teamwork, and subcategory 2, emphasising own contribution, as she indulges in the fact that she "already thought of a new plan" conveyed in Dutch with "ik heb al een nieuw plan bedacht". Moreover, she also makes a swift downward arm movement when uttering these words, reinforcing her smug statement. This scene is discussed in greater detail with the help of multimodal translation grids in the multimodal analysis (Van Meerbergen & De Ridder, forthcoming).

2.3. Systematic Corpus Analysis Based on Four Categories

All utterances of the three superheroes in all twelve episodes were categorised and analysed accordingly in all three language versions. The data tallied for each character in each category were calculated. Subsequently, the male average was taken since there are two male heroes and only one heroine. This allowed us to compare the data for male and female utterances to establish if there are any noteworthy gender differences. The data is populated in Table 7. In Table 8, the difference between the female and male characters' utterances across all language versions was presented in percentages to establish noteworthy gender differences in each category.

Firstly, the source-text gender analysis revealed that, in this corpus, the heroine expresses a need of assistance significantly less (-27.3%) compared to her male team members, which is remarkable since Shawcroft et al. (2023, p. 3) pointed out a stereotypical resistance to help-seeking in male superheroes. This is also the case in both translated versions, in which similar percentages were

calculated. However, this difference is highest (-28.8%) in the Swedish translation. Sometimes, a need of assistance is conveyed in the target texts, while it is absent from the source-text lines, or the other way around. We noticed, for instance, that in the Swedish translation, what could be considered as random shouting in the source text is sometimes lexicalised and rendered as a question “What?” or a call for help, as the below example from *Catboy's Tricky Ticket* shows:

[EN G] Whoaoao!

[SV G] **Va?** Uh! Ah! **Hjälp!** Åååh. [**What?** Uhgh? **Help!** Aaah!]

[NL G] Huh? Aah! Nee! Waa! [Huh? Aaah! Noo! Whoa!]

Focusing on the use of the word “help”, we also observed, for instance, that explicit calls for help in the source text were not always conveyed in the Dutch translations, as the following example from *Catboy's tricky ticket* illustrates. In the source text, the team leader's tail got stuck, and he asks the others to free him:

[EN C] I **need help** with my tail.

[SV C] Jag **behöver hjälp** med svansen. [I need help with the tail.]

[NL C] Ik zit hier nog steeds vast. [I'm still stuck here.]

However, this call for help is rendered in the Dutch version as a simple statement “Ik zit hier nog steeds vast [I'm still stuck here]”, which was not the case in the Swedish translation.

Similarly, when the heroine wants to offer help and explicitly conveys this in her dialogue line in *Catboy vs. Robo-Cat*, this is omitted in the Dutch translation, unlike in the Swedish version:

[EN O] Great work, Catboy! Now let us out **to help!**

[SV O] Bra gjort Kattpojken! Men låt oss **hjälpa** dig! [Well done, Catboy! But let us help you!]

[NL O] Goed zo, Catboy! Laat ons er nu maar uit! [Nice one, Catboy! Let us out now!]

Yet, looking at all data collected for Category III Need of assistance, we did not notice substantial differences between all language versions.

Likewise, there are fewer (-8%) utterances of the female main character relating to Category IV Attention to relations, in the source-text lines of the heroine vis-à-vis her male counterparts. In short, this suggests that, in this animation series, the heroine, counter to Drotner's and other scholars' claims, may, in fact, even be the least attentive to relations and in need of assistance since her male team members produce more utterances relating to both categories. Furthermore, she also plays a substantial role in solving the problems with which the heroes are confronted. Owlette utters even slightly more utterances relating to Category II Problem-solving (+2.6%) compared to her male team members, as shown in Table 7 and 8. Still, Owlette is not the team leader. The leader of the PJ Masks is male, in accordance with the findings of Götz et al. (2018), who also put forward that female characters “solve problems more often by talking and applying magic and less often by using STEM or physical power” (Götz et al., 2018, p. 65). This increase of +2.6% may indicate that she indeed solves problems, particularly by reasoning aloud. Nonetheless, Owlette does use STEM, as the

aforementioned examples in which Owlette is shown looking for clues on site and analysing images on their holographic computer illustrate.

Looking at the translations, the significant decline (ca. -66%) in utterances relating to teamwork in the Dutch version for both male and female characters, compared to the source-text utterances, is most noteworthy. The effect of this is a better balance between utterances relating to team spirit and utterances emphasising own contribution (110 vs. 116 for the male and 100 vs. 104 for the female superhero), in the Dutch version. As opposed to the English source text and the Swedish version, revealing roughly three times more utterances relating to teamwork vis-à-vis own contribution for both male and female characters. What is more, in the Dutch version, the number of utterances by Owlette emphasising her own contribution (104) is significantly higher compared to the source-text number (82). We notice that +26.8% more utterances than in the source text reflect her own contribution, but there is also a rise of +12.1% in the male heroes utterances stressing their own contribution in the Dutch version vis-à-vis the English version. Nonetheless, this results in what arguably could be referred to as a portrayal of a more empowered female character in the Dutch *Pyjamahelden* compared to the source text since her agency is more often emphasised in the Dutch version.

Table 7

The Number of Utterances by Male and Female Heroes in Each Category Across All Language Versions

Categories	EN male	EN female	NL male	NL female	SV male	SV female
I. a) Teamwork	313.5	300	110	100	302	292
I. b) Own contribution	103.5	82	116	104	103	85
II. Problem-solving	361.5	371	370	378	361.5	368
III. Need of assistance	93.5	68	97	70	102.5	73
IV. Attention to relations	130.5	120	131	113	132.5	120

Comparing the Swedish and Dutch versions with the source text, we see that there are only small differences between the Swedish and the original English version in terms of the gender differences expressed through the categorised utterances, as the percentages in Table 8 by and large remain the same. Even the significant increase of first-person plural pronouns in the Swedish translation (see section 3.1.) did not result in more utterances relating to teamwork in this dubbed version.

Table 8

Standardised Average of All Male and Female Utterances in Each Category

Categories	EN difference female vs. male	NL difference female vs. male	SV difference female vs. male
I. Teamwork	-4.3%	-9.1%	-3.6%
I. Own contribution	-20.8%	-10.3%	-17.5%
II. Problem-solving	+2.6%	+2.2%	+1.8%
III. Need of assistance	-27.3%	-27.8%	-28.8%
IV. Attention to relations	-8%	-13.7%	-9.4%

In the Dutch version, we see bigger differences when we compare the number of utterances in Category I Team spirit, teamwork vs. own contribution, and Category IV Attention to relations. The gender differences increase the most when we compare the Dutch version vis-a-vis the source-text utterances in both categories. In the source text, there were -4.3% fewer female utterances relating to teamwork and -20.8% focusing on their own contribution. In the Dutch version, there is a decline of -9.1%, rather than -4.3% in the source-text, female versus male teamwork utterances. The difference between female and male utterances relating to their own contribution becomes smaller with -10.3% (compared to -20.8% in the source text) fewer female utterances focusing on her own contribution. Also, the decline of -8% female vis-à-vis male source-text utterances relating to attention to relations becomes -9.4% in the Swedish version and even -13.7% in the Dutch version.

3. Conclusion

In terms of agency, it is quite striking that in the source text, the heroine used -20.8% fewer utterances emphasising her own contribution compared to her male team members. Yet, the fact that she utters -27.3% fewer utterances expressing a need for assistance compared to her male team members is probably the most striking from a gender perspective. Although, put bluntly, Owlette wears pink and tends to giggle in this show (see Van Meerbergen & De Ridder, forthcoming), concerns relating to gender stereotyping, e.g. in terms of expressing a need for assistance, do not seem to apply to *PJ Masks*, based on our corpus analysis. Moreover, focusing on the dialogue lines, there is a -8% decrease in the heroine utterances expressing attention to relations, as well as a +2.6% increase in the utterances relating to problem-solving in comparison to her male counterparts.

But what happens in the Dutch and Swedish translations? Our first impression that the Dutch translation deviated more from the source text than the Swedish translation was confirmed in the systematic gender analysis of our corpus. We established that the gender differences based on our categories in the Swedish target text are roughly comparable to the ones in the source text. The Dutch version, by contrast, revealed the largest differences. Particularly since, in the source-text hero lines, teamwork is emphasised mostly, rather than their own individual contribution. The main finding of this AVT analysis is probably that in the Dutch version, the difference between teamwork and own contribution is significantly smaller for all heroes. This results in a smaller difference between teamwork and own contribution, which is expressed in all male and female utterances. As a result, the gender difference in both other versions, in which the male heroes emphasised their own contribution more than the heroine, is almost neutralised.

These results were shared with the translator of the Dutch version. The translator is aware of the fact that she often uses the first-person singular, rather than the first-person plural because the corresponding verb form is indeed shorter and, as a result, tends to better match the mouth movements. She explained that together with the dubbing director, she particularly wanted to make sure the dialogue lines sounded natural as if they could be uttered by a Dutch-speaking child. However, she stated that she was not consciously trying to empower the female character more, but she thinks this might have happened unconsciously. This corpus analysis focused on the dialogue lines of the heroes to establish if the audiovisual translations revealed gender differences. In a follow-up study (Van Meerbergen & De Ridder, forthcoming), a multimodal analysis is conducted zooming in on one episode taken from this corpus, in which we analyse the interplay between all visual and aural channels in greater detail to establish if significant gender differences occur.

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