Gender-Fair Audiovisual Translation: First Considerations on How to Address Non-Binary Genders

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, non-binary people have appeared in numerous English-language TV series such as *Sex Education*. While in English the use of singular "they" in reference to non-binary people has become widespread, there is no equivalent in other languages such as German, Italian, and Croatian – languages that express gender in nouns, articles, and verbs. Such differences represent a challenge for translators, because gender fairness can be achieved using different strategies. Audiovisual translation presents further difficulties: e.g., space and time constraints in subtitling and dubbing complicate gender-neutral rewording of actors' lines.

In this contribution, we build on existing research and analyse the German, Italian and Croatian subtitles and dubbing of selected scenes from English-language TV series, including *Sex Education*, *One Day at a Time* and *Heartbreak High*. While research confirms that misgendering is a widespread phenomenon, there are substantial differences among subtitles and dubbing, and translators' solutions suggest that they often lack awareness of non-binary genders. We propose tentative gender-fair alternatives and discuss their implications, considering elements such as the comprehensibility and acceptability of different strategies. Our study has both practical and theoretical implications, underscoring the need for gender-fair and community-informed practices as integral to both professional ethics and translation quality.

KEYWORDS

Gender-fair language, non-binary genders, queer translation, audiovisual translation.

Trigger warning: this paper contains examples of misgendering or misrepresenting translations that could be offensive or triggering for trans and non-binary individuals.

1. Introduction

With the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies (TS) in the 1990s (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990), translation was redefined as a complex process of cultural, political, and ideological negotiation. Venuti (1992) even called translators to action, urging them to become visible or, in other words, involved in cultural and ideological matters. Translation, from this perspective, can either uphold or challenge the dominant regimes of power and knowledge (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002). These ideas permeated and paved the way for feminist TS. Simon, for instance, noted that the language used to describe translation often "dips liberally into the vocabulary of sexism, drawing on images of dominance and inferiority, fidelity and libertinage" (Simon, 1996, p. 1). Feminist TS asks how social, sexual and historical differences among genders are expressed and how they can be transferred across languages (Simon, 1996; von Flotow, 1997), sharing sociolinguistic views of language as actively creating meaning and contributing to reality (Fairclough, 2015). One method to counteract the prevailing sexism in Western societies is gender-fair language (GFL):

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the term subsumes both gender-neutral approaches that conceal gender, such as the use of indefinite pronouns and passive constructions, as well as gender-inclusive strategies that make gender visible, e.g. by using typographical characters such as the gender star (*) in German and neomorphemes like schwa (ə) in Italian (Lardelli & Gromann, 2023c).

While GFL originally aimed to increase women's visibility, e.g. by feminising function nouns such as minister and avoiding masculine generics, the debate around gender fairness has come to include non-binary genders as well (López, 2019). Since languages differ in how they express gender, a multitude of GFL strategies have been proposed and there is still no one-size-fits-all solution to challenges of non-binary representation (Lardelli & Gromann, 2023c). This is an important cross-linguistic issue. Numerous English-language TV series such as *Sex Education* (2019-2023) feature non-binary individuals. While English is mostly a gender-neutral language and the singular "they" has become common when referring to non-binary people, other languages such as German, Italian, and Croatian often require gender-marking and have no established GFL solutions.

Given these considerations, the present article has three objectives. First, it seeks to analyse the German, Italian, and Croatian subtitles and dubbed versions of selected scenes from different English-language Netflix series. Second, it examines gender-fair alternatives in case of misgendering and/or misrepresenting translations. Third, it explores the implications of GFL use considering aspects such as the strategies' comprehensibility and acceptability. We demonstrate that translators still often lack awareness of non-binary genders and that GFL translation requires a certain degree of creativity, with solutions being highly dependent on context. We also observe that subtitles and dubbed versions can differ substantially from one another. Finally, we share Attig's (2023) call for community-informed translation and advocate for the use of inclusive rather than neutral strategies.

2. Preliminaries

To introduce gender-fair audiovisual translation (AVT), we first discuss how language influences and shapes gender representation (§ 2.1). We then touch upon differences in gender marking across languages (§ 2.2) and provide a concise overview of GFL strategies in German, Italian, and Croatian (§ 2.3). We also summarise some of the challenges in AVT that might complicate the selection of a GFL strategy (§ 2.4).

2.1 Language and Representation

The interrelation between language and society positions gender as a socially embedded construct rather than a purely linguistic category. Linguistic gender reflects and reinforces broader sociocultural structures and power dynamics, as posited by several philosophers and sociologists.

For instance, Butler (1990) argued that language is performative – it not only reflects but actively constitutes identities, including gender. Through repeated linguistic acts, gender norms are reproduced, policed, or subverted, making linguistic intervention a

potent site for contesting hegemonic gender binaries. Bourdieu (1991) introduced the concept of *habitus* to explain how language use is shaped by social structures while simultaneously reinforcing them; linguistic choices are neither neutral nor purely individual, but are conditioned by the speaker's position within a field. This means that GFL initiatives are not just linguistic modifications but efforts to shift embodied and historically sedimented patterns of social behaviour and perception. Hall (1997) emphasises that meaning is constructed through representation and language plays a central role in producing and circulating cultural meanings. Thus, gender-fair linguistic practices contribute to redefining who can be seen, named, and legitimised within the symbolic order. Within this framework, GFL is a form of socio-political intervention with the potential to challenge dominant ideologies and promote inclusivity. These theoretical insights underscore why GFL strategies are culturally and politically significant, despite their uneven uptake across languages and societies.

Research in the field of psycholinguistics also shows that the use of GFL fosters societal equality among genders, reducing stereotyping and discrimination (Sczesny et al., 2016). For this reason, there have been efforts to promote fairer communication (see, e.g., Ashwell et al., 2023; Silva & Soares, 2024). The adoption and strategy of GFL also depend on societal, cultural, and political factors. For instance, the use of the neomorpheme "e" as a marker of gender has become widespread in Spanish-speaking countries and its introduction dates back to 1976 (López, 2022). GFL is being increasingly adopted, e.g. in administrative contexts (República Argentina, 2020). Similarly, in German-speaking countries such as Austria, institutions like the Ombud for Equal Treatment have been proposed (En et al., 2021) and universities are adopting GFL guidelines. While similar efforts have been made in Italy as well, the government banned the use of neomorphemes from institutional communications (Fregonara, 2025). In Croatia, no official initiatives – other than the European Union guidelines (e.g. European Parliament, 2018) or guidelines issued by some universities (e.g. Sveučilište u Rijeci 2022) which, however, do not mention non-binary pronouns – have been taken so far in order to make Croatian more gender-neutral and open toward non-binary people (for more on this, see Šincek 2020).

2.2 Language and Gender

Based on McConnell-Ginet (2013) and Stahlberg et al. (2007), we distinguish among (i) grammatical gender languages such as the ones we work with in this contribution, (ii) notional gender languages such as English, and (iii) genderless languages, such as Turkish. In (i), every noun is assigned a grammatical gender and gender marking is required in several parts of speech, e.g. pronouns, articles, adjectives, and some verb tenses. In (ii), gender is usually expressed in third-person pronouns and in some nouns, e.g. kinship and/or professions. In (iii), gender is usually not marked, with few exceptions such as kinship.

In both (i) and (ii), the gender of person-referring terms usually coincides with the extra-linguistic reality, i.e. the gender identity of the speakers. German, Italian, and Croatian mark gender often, though they present morphological differences. For instance, Italian and Croatian are pro-drop languages, hence unmarked subject pronouns are omitted. Moreover, some tenses are inflected based on gender. Adjectives in German present

gender inflection only in the attributive position. For these reasons, each of the aforementioned languages presents different difficulties in terms of GFL use that we discuss along our gender-fair translations in (§5).

2.2 Gender-Fair German, Italian, and Croatian

Due to space constraints, we provide a concise overview of GFL strategies in German, Italian, and Croatian. For more information, we refer to Lardelli & Gromann (2023c), Šincek (2020) and Mihaljević et al. (2022).

In German, two approaches are quite common. First, sentences can be structured to avoid gender, e.g. by repeating proper nouns instead of pronouns, using passive constructions and neutral nouns such as "person". Second, typographical characters such as the gender star (*) are used to combine masculine and feminine forms of words as in *der*die Schauspieler*in* (masculine*feminine article, masculine*feminine noun, the actor) also to include non-binary people. Non-binary people and language enthusiasts are also developing new systems that introduce a fourth gender and hence new morphemes like *-ens* in *dens Schauspielens* (Hornscheidt & Sammla, 2021). These neosystems, however, are still rare.

In Italian, too, sentences can be structured to avoid gender, similarly to German. Moreover, a multitude of typographical characters (e.g. asterisk) and symbols (e.g. schwa "ə") are used to replace traditional gender suffixes, as in *lə attorə* (the actor).
In Croatian, the discourse around gender fairness is just starting to develop. While gender may be avoided by using neutral nouns and archaic verb tenses, there are no official guidelines nor consensus regarding strategies to replace masculine and feminine suffixes. For the translation of singular "they", some proposals have been made (see Šincek 2020 and Špoljar 2021): the use of the third-person neuter pronoun *ono* (corresponding to *it*), which, however, is mostly deemed derogatory; the third-person plural and masculine pronoun *oni* as a calque translation from English, which, however, is not gender-neutral; and alternating masculine and feminine pronouns. The neologisms, such as *onie*, *onu* or *onx,* were discussed by e.g. Mihaljević et al. (2022), but are neither linguistically accepted nor widely used by non-binary people (Špoljar 2021 and Mihaljević et al. 2022).

2.3 Challenges in Audiovisual Translation

In AVT, both linguistic and non-linguistic signs of the audiovisual content are important in translation, e.g. translating sounds for the deaf and hard of hearing, visual content for blind and visually impaired audiences, or visual symbols or sounds that are part of the scene and referred to in standard subtitles. Such non-linguistic signs, which would otherwise be incomprehensible and inaccessible to the audience, must be translated into written or spoken text, thus enabling viewers to follow and understand a specific plot or content. This process is governed by time and space constraints as well as by constraints arising from the multimodality of the audiovisual content. For instance, dubbing respects the image whereas subtitling respects the original voices of the characters (Matamala et al. 2017). Dubbing requires synchronisation of the oral target text to the lip movements of the on-screen actors in close-ups, to the actors' body

movements and to the duration of the utterances (Bosseaux, 2018). Subtitling is mainly governed by the space-time constraints to which the written target text has to be adapted and takes into account the original dialogue, the image and all other information conveyed by the soundtrack (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2019).

3. Related Work

While research in the field of queer translation has predominantly focused on the use of (binary) gendered language by trans men or trans women (e.g. Rose, 2016), research on non-binary GFL is still in its infancy (Lardelli & Gromann, 2023a) and usually restricted to language pairs with English as the source language.

Attig (2023) and López (2022) analyse the Spanish and French versions of different TV series, including *One Day At A Time* (2017-2020). They found discrepancies between subtitling and dubbing. Moreover, non-binary identities are often erased or misgendered, e.g. linguistic choices reflect the character's sex assigned at birth and not their gender identity. Sometimes, calque translations of singular they and/or neopronouns are found in the translations and do not account for real GFL use within the non-binary community. González Cruz (2024) focuses on the translation of sex-related language into Spanish, noting for instance that GFL strategies for reference to non-binary people in *Sex Education* differ between dubbing (e.g. neutral rewording) and subtitling (e.g. neomorpheme "e").

Similarly, Cuscito (2024) analyses the translation of queer language in Italian for *If These Walls Could Talk II* (2019) and *Sex Education*. While she focuses on slang expressions, sexual terms and euphemisms, she also briefly touches upon non-binary language, showing how translations are often vague and misrepresenting.

Misiek (2020), Šincek (2020), and Lardelli & Gromann (2023c) focused on the translation of audiovisual products and news reports in Polish, Croatian, Italian and German. In this case, too, misgendering and/or misrepresentation occurred frequently and singular "they" was often translated literally.

While most of the work on GFL focuses on AVT, studies also analyse the GFL translation process or the translation of other text types. Lardelli (2023) and Lardelli & Gromann (2023b) investigated cognitive processes involved in the translation and post-editing process of different GFL strategies in German, whereas Paolucci et al. (2023) conducted a survey with translators and asked them to rate GFL readability and comprehensibility.

While not specifically focused on non-binary genders, Daems (2023) conducted a survey with translators of the international governing body for quadball (IQA), a sport known for its inclusivity, finding that GFL strategies vary both within and among the eight IQA working languages.

Vecchiato (2025) analysed the German-Italian translation of two books containing GFL. Of particular interest is *Blutbuch* (2022), where the non-binary protagonist is referred to using the gender star (*) in German while the Italian translator opted for gender-neutral rewording, e.g. infinitive clauses. Finally, Rose (2021) contributed to

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the field with an in-depth analysis of language use by trans* communities, with several references to translation.

The present contribution is inspired by Attig (2023), López (2022), Misiek (2020), Šincek (2020), and Lardelli & Gromann (2023c). However, these researchers simply analyse GFL use or lack thereof in the translation of audiovisual products and/or news reports. As GFL experts and professional translators, we were interested in discussing alternative translations to advance the field of GFL AVT with practical considerations that might be relevant for other language professionals.

4. Method

We restricted our research to Netflix series. The streaming platform was selected because English-language series are subtitled and dubbed in numerous languages. Moreover, the platform strives for a balanced representation of marginalised groups and several shows feature non-binary individuals[1].

We decided to select brief scenes (15-60 seconds) for our analyses because we wanted to specifically focus on GFL use. Selection criteria were: a non-binary character (i) had to be in the scene and (ii) talk about themselves or someone to them, meaning that GFL was required; (iii) the scenes had to present different challenges in regard to GFL such as singular "they" and/or neopronouns, terminology related to gender identity terms, non-binary nouns and adjectives, and humorous lines or jokes.

Our objective was not to create a large, representative corpus of translations but rather to cover a wide range of GFL phenomena in a small dataset that could be analysed in depth and re-translated. Therefore, we proceeded with the scene selection by means of opportunity sampling, i.e. choosing series based on their availability. Our dataset contains four brief scenes from four different English-language Netflix series featuring non-binary individuals, i.e.:

- *One Day At A Time* (2017-2020), season 2, episode 3.
- *Sex Education* (2019-2023), season 4, episode 8.
- *Heartbreak High* (2022 - …), season 1, episode 1.
- *Degrassi: Next Class* (2016-2017), season 4, episode 6.

For this contribution, we specifically drew on Attig (2023) and López (2022): we transcribed the original dialogues in English, copied the subtitles provided by Netflix in German, Italian, and Croatian, and transcribed the dubbed versions when they differed from the subtitles. Unfortunately, no Croatian subtitles were found for *One Day At A Time* and *Degrassi: Next Class*. Nonetheless, to maintain consistency across the analysed data, a tentative Croatian translation was produced by one of the authors for these two series. Subsequently, our analysis focused on misgendering, GFL use or lack thereof, and the translation of gender identity terms and puns or jokes on gender.

Contrary to Attig (2023) and López (2022), we also propose gender-fair re-translations and discussed the implications of our solutions based on literature on GFL language and translation (Lardelli, 2023; Lardelli & Gromann, 2023c; Šincek, 2020). We adhered

to Netflix's subtitling requirements[2], e.g. spaces available for a certain subtitle duration according to Netflix's reading speed limit of 17 characters per second, the limitation of 42 characters per line, and general requirements regarding line treatment and segmentation. To adhere to such standards, a certain degree of creativity is required (for a detailed overview regarding translating subtitles, see Díaz-Cintas & Remael 2019). It is also important to keep in mind that dubbing has been the dominant practice in German-speaking countries and in Italy, but not in Croatia. Therefore, dubbing in Croatian for the selected film material is not available, and this article will discuss dubbing only for the German and Italian versions.

5. Results

In each of the following subsections, we address one main challenge regarding GLF and introduce the TV series and the scene we analysed. We provide tables with dubbing and subtitles in German, Italian, and, where available, Croatian, and discuss them. Finally, we provide our GFL alternatives for the subtitles, which, due to space constraints, can be found in Zenodo[3]. In each table, we do not follow a colour-coding scheme but rather use different colours for each element of interest, e.g. pronouns, nouns, and jokes, to emphasise them and guide readers. The correct segmentation of the subtitles could not be replicated due to layout limitations.

5.1 One Day At A Time

One Day At a Time is the reboot of an American sitcom of the same title, following the life of a Cuban-American family in Los Angeles. The scene analysed addresses the challenges associated with the translation of non-binary pronouns, particularly neopronouns. Elena – one of the main characters – brings home her friends Dani, Syd, and Margaux. There, they meet Elena's mother, Penelope, and grandmother, Lydia. Each friend introduces themselves with their name and pronouns, confusing Penelope and Lydia and leading to a funny misunderstanding. Table 1 contains the original English subtitles along with their translations into German and Italian and, where applicable, GFL differences in the dubbed versions. Both in German and Italian, the singular "they" and "them" used in line 3 are translated into plural options, which are far from ideal in the context, whereas the pronouns "ze" and "zir" used in the next line are kept in Italian, although they are not understandable in that language, but are translated into not common, but definitely usable neopronouns in the German version.

Line #	EN	DE	IT
1	PENELOPE: Welcome. What's everybody's name?	Willkommen. Wie heißt ihr?	**Subtitles:** Benvenuti. Come vi chiamate? **Dubbing:** Benvenute. Come vi chiamate?

2	DANI: I'm Dani. My pronouns are she and her.	Dani. Meine Pronomen sind "sie" und "ihre".	**Subtitles:** Io sono Dani. Pronome "lei". **Dubbing:** Io Dani. I miei pronomi sono "lei" e "sua".
3	SYD: I'm Syd, my pronouns are they and them.	Syd. Meine Pronomen sind "alle" und "deren".	**Subtitles:** Syd. Pronome "loro". **Dubbing:** Syd. I miei pronomi sono "essi" e "loro".
4	MARGAUX: I'm Margaux, pronouns ze and zir.	Margaux. Pronomen "xier" und "xies".	**Subtitles:** Margaux. Pronome "ze". **Dubbing:** Margaux. Pronomi "ze" e "zir".
5	PENELOPE: I'm Penelope, my thoughts are huh and what? Seriously, what is happening?	Penelope. Meine Gedanken sind "Hä?" und "Was?" Was ist hier los?	Penelope. Penso: "Cosa?" Cos'è questa storia?
6	ELENA: Well, because some people are gender non-conforming, they have certain preferred pronouns.	**Subtitles:** Da manche Leute genderneutral sind, haben sie bevorzugte Pronomen. **Dubbing:** Menschen, die geschlechtlich nicht konform sind, brauchen ihre eigenen Pronomen.	**Subtitles:** Alcune persone non si rispecchiano in un genere e si scelgono un pronome. **Dubbing:** Visto che qualcuno è di genere non conforme, *hanno* dei pronomi preferiti.
7	LYDIA: Ah, I am Lydia. Pronounced "Lee-dee-ah."	**Subtitles:** Ich bin Lydia. "Ly-die-a". **Dubbing:** Ah, ich bin Lydia. Pronomen „Ly-di-a."	**Subtitles:** Io sono Lydia. Come "Ly-di-a" **Dubbing:** Ah, io mi chiamo Lydia. Pronomi "Ly-di-a"

Table 1. One Day At A Time: subtitles & dubbing

In line 1, "welcome" is as neutral in German as in English, but not in Italian, where the translation is masculine for the subtitles and feminine for the dubbing, which sounds

more intuitive since the people in the scene have a feminine appearance. For Croatian, there is no official translation available; however, possible gender-neutral solutions would be: **"Želim vam dobrodošlicu" (I wish you a warm welcome)** or **"Drago mi je" (Nice to meet you)** — which would preferably be used in this subtitle as it is shorter. Since Croatian is a language in which participles show gender and number, translating the interjection *welcome* requires the use of an adverb–participle construction that agrees with the subject in gender and number (e.g. *dobro došle* [feminine plural]).

In line 3, Syd's pronouns, i.e. they/them, were translated as "alle/deren" (all/their) in German. This made-up solution hinders comprehensibility; therefore, the **pronoun "dey"**, which is a transliteration of "they" gaining use in German-speaking countries, would be more appropriate. In Italian, "loro" (along with "essi" in the dubbed version) was used, but this is a literal translation that leads to confusion. Note that Italian is a pro-drop language, therefore subject pronouns are used less frequently than in English or German. Options such as "ləi" or "lxi" are used rarely. Some people use "they" as in English, others use masculine, feminine, both or no pronouns. Therefore, line 3 could be translated with **"non uso pronomi di genere" (I don't use gendered pronouns)**. Strategies used by the non-binary community in Croatia also include alternating the masculine and feminine pronouns. In a possible translation, **"on/ona" and "njemu/njoj"** could be used in reference to Sid.

In line 4, the neopronouns "zi/zer" were translated using "xier/xies", a neopronoun the German-speaking audience might not yet be very familiar with. However, it is used by non-binary people and represents a well-functioning solution. In Italian, "ze" was maintained. Based on the previous considerations concerning the use of neopronouns in Italian, a more common solution may be the translation **"uso qualsiasi pronome" (I use all pronouns)**. Since there is no consensus on gender-neutral pronouns or neopronouns in Croatian, a calque translation could be proposed for the Croatian subtitle **"Margaux, zamjenice "ze" i "zir" (Margaux, pronouns "zi" and "zer"),** thus respecting the choices of foreign speakers (see Šoljar 2021).

Unfortunately, both in the German and the Italian versions, Lydia's misunderstanding of "pronouns" for "pronounced" (lines 6-7) is lost in the translations because "pronouns" and "pronounce" are completely different words in these languages. Note that the expression "preferred pronouns" should be avoided in English (better: identified pronouns, see also APA recommendations). To keep the humorous element, the misunderstanding should be circumnavigated. In German, Elena (line 6) could say **"also, manche Menschen sind gender-nonkonform, und sprechen daher ihre Pronomen aus" (well, some people are gender non-conforming and, therefore, pronounce their pronouns)** to get some kind of connection to Lydia's statement, **"Ah, mein Name ist Lydia. Aussprache Ly-di-a" (Ah, my name is Lydia. Pronunciation Ly-di-a")**. Similarly, in Croatian the pun in the last subtitle (pronouns/pronounced) could be substituted by incorporating **"izgovaraju zamjenice" (they pronounce their pronouns)** and using **"izgovara se" (is pronounced)** in Lydia's line. In Italian, Elena's statement could become **"siccome esistono persone di genere non conforme, usano o meno diversi pronomi." (as there are people who are gender non-conforming, they might or might not use different pronouns)** and one could play with "genere non conforme" (gender non-conforming) making Lydia say **"genere non**

comunista" (non-communist gender) instead of her name as she fled Cuba when she was in her teens – a fact frequently addressed in the series.

5.2 Sex Education

Sex Education is a teen sex comedy-drama that follows the lives of a group of teenagers in the fictional town of Moordale. In this scene, Cal — a non-binary student at Cavendish College — has gone missing. Cavendish College is famous for its progressive and inclusive environment. The other students get together and decide to look for Cal. The transcription of the English subtitles with the translations in DE, IT, and HR are reported in Table 2. This time, there was no difference between subtitles and dubbing into German and Italian. The main issue in the scene is how to translate singular they, used in the scene as a subject, object and possessive pronoun. In Italian, a "direct" translation is avoided in all instances, whereas in German it is always used except in one case. The Croatian translation alternates gender-neutral with gendered forms.

Line #	EN	DE	IT	HR
1	MICHAEL (teacher): What's going on?	Was ist los?	Che succede?	Što se događa?
2	TEACHER2: Cal Bowman's been missing since last night. That's their mom.	Cal Bowman wird seit gestern vermisst. Das ist Cals Mutter.	Cal Bowman manca da casa da ieri sera. Quella è la madre.	Cal Bowman nema od sinoć. Ono im je mama.
3	MICHAEL: God, that's awful.	Mensch, das ist ja furchtbar.	Diamine, è terribile.	Isuse, to je grozno.
4	STUDENT 1: Yeah, yeah. We'll make sure there's people searching the skate park.	Ja. Wir lassen Leute den Skatepark durchsuchen.	Ci assicureremo che qualcuno vada allo skate park.	Da. Pobrinut ćemo se da ljudi pretraže *skate* park.
5	STUDENT 2: Thank you for coming, everyone. Cal is in a very vulnerable place right now, so we need to start searching for them straight away.	Danke, dass ihr gekommen seid. Cal ist derzeit in einem labilen Zustand, also müssen wir sofort nach si'*em suchen.	Grazie a tutti per essere venuti. Cal è molto vulnerabile in questo momento. Quindi dobbiamo iniziare le ricerche immediatamente.	Hvala svima što ste došli. Cal je trenutačno u osjetljivoj situaciji pa ih moramo odmah početi tražiti.

| 6 | STUDENT 1: Their last text message said they were going to Pinelands Shopping Center. | Laut letzter Nachricht wollte Cal ins Pinelands Einkaufszentrum. | Nell'ultimo messaggio diceva che andava al centro commerciale Pinelands. | Napisali su da idu u trgovački centar Pinelands. |

Table 2. Sex Education: Netflix dubbed versions (for DE and IT) and subtitles (DE, IT and HR)

In German, both in line 2 and in line 6, the name "Cal" is used to avoid pronouns. Only in line 5 a neopronoun, "si*em", is used, combining "sie" and "er" ("she" and "he"). However, the writing is overly complicated and not common, adding an apostrophe in the middle of the word. We would therefore suggest using **"dey"** throughout the scene to avoid repeating Cal's name and ensure consistency, i.e. changing the second sentence in line 2 to **"Das ist deren Mutter"** and in line 5 to **"Cal ist derzeit in einem labilen Zustand, also müssen wir sofort nach denen suchen"**, as well as replacing "Cal" in line 6 by **"dey"**.

In Italian, the pronoun was omitted in line 2 in order to avoid any reference to gender. However, the use of the generic masculine "tutti"/"venuti" in line 5 is not an optimal translation since the students are in a progressive school and they would probably want to use GFL. We therefore suggest two versions for "thank you for coming everyone!". The first, **"Grazie a tuttə per essere venutə" (thanks everyone for coming),** uses the gender-fair suffix schwa whereas the second, **"Grazie di cuore per essere qui" (A heartfelt thank you for being here)** is a gender-neutral formulation. Since the queer component is very important in the series, we would prefer the use of schwa which is more disruptive. However, the gender-neutral alternative may be easier to understand for a broader public, highlighting that different solutions are possible based on different considerations. Finally, in line 6, the tense *imperfetto* is used because compound tenses are gendered or maybe to limit the number of characters by avoiding the progressive form ("stava andando") or the conditional form to express the future in the past ("sarebbe andat*"). We suggest changing the tenses in this line to **"Nell'ultimo messaggio ha detto che si trovava al centro commerciale Pinelands"**; the meaning is slightly different though: **"in the last message [they] said they were at the Pinelands Shopping Center"** (as opposed to "going to Pinelands Shopping Center" in the original).

In Croatian, the name Cal Bowman is not declined, which signals that the students are not speaking about a male person (they might however be speaking about a female person since family names of female persons are never declined nor are they given names ending on a consonant). In the following dialogues "their mother" and "searching for them" are translated using dative and accusative plural pronouns which do not convey the gender. The last line, however, "napisali su" (they wrote) is gendered and refers to a masculine gender. It is, however, possible to change this line to a gender-neutral sentence by using the verbal form aorist that does not convey any gender and dropping the unmarked pronoun (oni/one–they): **"Cal *napisaše* da idu u trgovački centar Pinelands" (Cal *wrote* that they are going to the Pineland Shopping Center)**.

5.3 Heartbreak High

Heartbreak High is the reboot of a comedy-drama of the same title and follows the lives of students and teachers at an Australian high school. This scene shows Darren, a non-binary student, entering the dining room where their mother and stepfather are eating. The ensuing conversation is reproduced in Table 3, in which Darren's stepfather misgenders and belittles them. Here the focus lies on the translation of singular "they" into the different languages, with a special focus on the last line, where the stepfather in the original alludes to the fact that "they" is used to indicate the plural form, which is translated differently in the three languages.

Line #	EN	DE	IT	HR
1	STEPFATHER: You're around tonight?	Du bist abends hier, oder?	Stanotte torni a dormire a casa?	Večeras si kod kuće?
2	DARREN: Why?	Wieso?	Perché?	Zašto?
3	STEPFATHER: Nothing, just the boys are coming over to watch the game, is all.	Nichts, nur, die Jungs kommen, um das Spiel anzusehen, das ist alles.	Niente, è solo che i ragazzi vengono a vedere la partita.	Dolaze dečki gledati utakmicu.
4	DARREN: Mmmm. Okay, and you want me to not be around?	Ok, und du willst, dass ich hier nicht rumhänge?	Mmm, ok. E non vuoi che ti stia tra i piedi.	I želite da ne budem kod kuće?
5	STEPFATHER: He always assumes the worst.	Ha! Er geht immer vom Schlimmsten aus.	Lui pensa sempre al peggio.	Uvijek pretpostavlja najgore.
6	MOTHER: They, they.	Dey. Dey!	Non dire "lui".	Oni.
7	DARREN: They! They always assume the worst.	Dey! Dey gehen immer vom Schlimmsten aus.	Esatto! Non usare pronomi maschili.	Oni! Oni uvijek pretpostavljaju najgore.
8	STEPFATHER: This again. I mean, it's exactly my point. My mates can't be expected to get their heads around this stuff.	Das schon wieder. Ich meine… das ist genau mein Punkt. Meine Kumpels können diese Sachen nicht verstehen.	Ancora? È proprio questo che intendo. Non puoi aspettarti che i miei amici capiscano una cosa del genere.	Opet ovo. Upravo je u tome stvar. Moji frendovi ne mogu shvatiti takve stvari.

9	DARREN: Sorry, what stuff?	Sorry, welche Sachen?	Scusa, quale cosa?	Oprosti, koje stvari?
10	STEPFATHER: The linguistics. "Them." "They." It doesn't make any sense. You know you're not two people, right?	Die Linguistik. Dem/dey ergibt keinen Sinn. Du weißt, du bist nicht zwei Personen?	Sta' a sentire. La linguistica non ha senso. Come faccio a usare il neutro? E inoltre infrange tutte le regole della grammatica.	Lingvističke. "Oni." To nema smisla. Znaš da nisi dvije osobe, zar ne? (To isto krši gramatička pravila.)

Table 3. Heartbreak High: Netflix dubbed versions and subtitles

This is another example where the English language plays with the plural and singular use of "they". "Dey" is a valid translation for the singular use of "they" into German. However, the last instance, where the stepfather points at the plural use referring to two people, doesn't really make sense anymore: the German audience would not perceive "dey" as referring to more than one person. Therefore, in our retranslation we used a different strategy for the whole scene: we used the **pronoun "sier"** in all instances, i.e. lines 6, 7, and 10, combining "sie" and "er" (she and he) and changed the last line pronounced by Darren's stepfather to "**Du weißt, dass du nicht beides sein kannst" (You know that you can't be both)**, conveying a similar meaning of the word's play "they – you know you're not two people".

In Italian, there is a change of perspective, as Darren tells his stepfather not to use masculine pronouns and the stepfather asks "how can I use the neuter form?". As already mentioned, neopronouns are not common in Italian, mostly because personal pronouns can often be avoided. All things considered, this dialogue does not need a re-translation, so we did not produce a new version.

As for the Croatian subtitles, the line of Darren's mother ("oni", they) is not an adequate or logical interjection to what the stepfather said before, as he does not utter the pronoun "he", since Croatian is a pro-drop language and unmarked subject pronouns can be omitted. This above-mentioned incoherence can be fixed by adding **"on" (he)** to the stepfather's line. Furthermore, it would be possible to even avoid using the plural masculine pronoun "oni" (they) altogether by changing the mother's line to **"Ne kaži 'on'" (Don't say "he")** and Darren's line to **"Da, ne koristim zamjenice muškog roda" (Yes, I don't use masculine pronouns)**. This makes it possible to maintain the stepfather's lack of understanding in the subsequent subtitle that could be changed to **"Ne mogu reći "ono". To nema smisla (I can't say "it". That would make no sense)**.

5.4 Degrassi: Next Class

Degrassi: Next Class is a Canadian teen drama, following the lives of a group of students at Degrassi Community School. Yael, one of the main characters, starts

questioning their gender identity, identifying as neither a girl nor a boy. Yael struggles to find the words to express their feelings and, in the presented scene (see Table 4 with the original and the German as well as the Italian translations), their friend Lola suggests that Yael may be genderqueer. The main difficulty in this scene is the use of nouns and labels describing gender identity. In both the German and Italian translations (both in the subtitles and in the dubbing), the person mentioned was misgendered using feminine or masculine forms, while Croatian was not originally provided.

Line #	EN	DE	IT
1	LOLA: My favourite vlogger did a thing about this. They identify as genderqueer. Or, I think there's a name for it. Uhm… genderfluid. They feel like they're between a boy or girl. Or both. Or neither. Does that make sense?	**Subtitles:** Meine Lieblingsvloggerin machte etwas zu dem Thema. Sie definieren sich als "genderqueer". Oder es heißt auch "Gender-übergreifend". Sie fühlen sich zwischen Junge und Mädchen. Oder beides. Oder nichts davon. Ergibt das irgendwie Sinn? **Dubbing:** Eine Vloggerin hat darüber mal berichtet. Sie nennen sich "genderqueer". Ich glaube, da gibt es noch andere Namen. Ähm… genderfluid. Sie fühlen sich zwischen Mädchen und Junge. Sie sind beides oder nichts davon. Kannst du damit was anfangen?	**Subtitles:** La mia vlogger preferita ne ha parlato. Si chiamano genderqueer. O anche… genderfluid. Una via di mezzo tra ragazza e ragazzo. O entrambi. O nessuno dei due. Ti torna? **Dubbing:** Il mio blogger preferito ne parla. Si identificano come genderqueer. Ah, usano un'altra definizione… genderfluid. Sentono di essere a metà tra i due sessi. O entrambi. O nessuno dei due. Ha senso per te?
2	YAEL: No.	Nein	- No.
3	LOLA: Okay, it's like… if being a boy or a girl is made up, then you can be whatever you want, right? There, that's them.	**Subtitles:** Ok, es ist so… Wenn es weder Junge noch Mädchen gäbe, könnte man sein, was man will, ok? Hier, das sind sie.	**Subtitles:** D'accordo, è… Ragazzo e ragazza sono delle definizioni, quindi possiamo essere cosa vogliamo, no? Eccoli. (a single person is shown)

		Dubbing: Ich erklär's dir anders… Würde man sich entscheiden, Junge oder Mädchen zu sein, könnte man doch sein, was man will, oder? So, zum Beispiel.	**Dubbing:** Allora, immagina… Che definire i sessi non abbia senso. Tu puoi essere come vuoi, chiaro? Eccoli, guarda. (a single person is shown)

Table 4. Degrassi: Netflix subtitles

In line 1, the German subtitles refer to the vlogger as a female person in the first sentence, but in a later sentence and in line 3 the subtitles refer to them in the plural form; the same is true for the dubbing ("das sind sie"). Moreover, the dubbed version uses a literal translation for "genderqueer" and "genderfluid", whereas the subtitles use "genderqueer" and "gender-übergreifend" (spanning more genders), which we replace by "genderfluid" to better reflect the English source. In our re-translation, we changed the first sentence using a gender star (i.e. "**mein*e Lieblingsvlogger*in**"), a common strategy to avoid the masculine generic and also refer to non-binary people. We then changed all instances referring to "they" in the plural to the neopronoun "**xier**". In line 3, the German avoids referring to gender as a construct. We therefore slightly changed the wording to **"Wenn die Kategorien Junge und Mädchen ein erfundenes Konstrukt sind, kann man sein, was man will, oder?" (If the categories boy and girl are an invented construct, you can be what you want, can't you?)** to better reflect the English original.

In Italian, in the first sentence of line 1, the subtitles refer to the vlogger as a female person, whereas the dubbing refers to a male person. Just like in the German version, the following sentences use the plural form. Furthermore, the translations of line 3 lead to a mismatch between what Lola says ("eccoli", here they are) and the picture she shows, portraying a single person. Also, instead of mentioning "boys" and "girls", the translation uses the term "sessi" (sexes), which is wrong because the dialogue is clearly about gender identity. Unfortunately, sex is still often used as a synonym for gender. In our retranslation, we use schwa (ə) for nouns, e.g. **"lə miə vlogger preferitə ne parla" (my favourite blogger talks about this)**, and pronouns (**"eccolə", here they are**). We finally changed "sexes" to **"genders"**.

Since in Croatian all person-referring nouns are gendered and there are no standardised strategies that include all genders, non-binary native speakers often use **"osoba"** (person) – which is of feminine grammatical gender but says nothing about the gender of a person – when speaking about a non-binary person (see Šincek (2020) and Špoljar (2021): e.g. **"moja najomiljenija osoba koja snima vlogove" (my favourite person that records vlogs**)).

Line 1 could be actually translated with a gender-neutral rewording in all three languages, e.g. "a person with a blog talks about this" or "my favourite vlog is about this". However, since the target audience of the TV series is adolescents/young adults,

more disruptive options such as a gender star in German and schwa in Italian are more appropriate – a strategy that, however, does not exist in Croatian.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

This study examined how non-binary gender identities are rendered in the German, Italian, and Croatian subtitles and dubbing of selected scenes from four English-language Netflix series: *One Day At A Time*, *Sex Education*, *Heartbreak High*, and *Degrassi: Next Class*. Drawing from feminist and queer translation theory, as well as recent research on GFL, the analysis focused on instances of misgendering, the (non-)translation of non-binary pronouns and identity terms, and the challenges posed by humour, neologisms, and audiovisual constraints. Through a close comparison of existing translations and our proposed gender-fair alternatives, we identified persistent patterns of omission and inconsistency across all three languages and formats (subtitling and dubbing), with significant implications for the representation of non-binary individuals in global media.

Our comparative findings reveal that non-binary representation in AVT continues to be hampered by linguistic, technical, and institutional obstacles. Linguistically, all three target languages — German, Italian, and Croatian — are grammatical gender languages that lack established or widely accepted equivalents for singular "they" and other non-binary forms. In German, some translations incorporate emerging neopronouns such as *xier* or *dey*, but their application is often ad hoc or inconsistent. Italian translators tend to alternate between avoidance strategies (e.g., omitting pronouns) and the use of masculine generics or invented forms, without a consistent standard. Croatian translations frequently default to masculine plural pronouns or rely on paraphrasing, reflecting the early stage of public discourse on non-binary language in that context. These discrepancies point to a pressing need for cross-linguistic collaboration and documentation of community-preferred terms.

In addition, these inconsistencies are symptomatic of a broader issue: the lack of institutional support, professional training, and guidelines for translating non-binary language. Translators may be personally committed to gender fairness but are constrained by the absence of community-validated terminology, editorial standards, or even basic awareness within the production pipeline. This points to the need for systemic change. Community-informed translation is not just an ethical imperative – it is a methodological one. Translation must be accountable to those it represents. Equally important is the question of *who* gets to decide what counts as "acceptable" or "comprehensible" in GFL strategies. Our re-translation proposals demonstrate that strategies such as pronoun avoidance, neomorphemes, or paraphrasing are all viable but must be weighed not only for formal adequacy but also for ideological impact. As feminist translation theory posits, translation is a site of power. Choices that obscure or dilute non-binary identities in the name of readability may reproduce hegemonic norms under the guise of neutrality.

In addition to linguistic complexity, AVT-specific constraints — such as reading speed limits, spatial restrictions in subtitles, and lip-sync requirements in dubbing — pose significant challenges for implementing GFL. The temporal and spatial limitations of

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subtitles often compel translators to prioritise brevity over accuracy, resulting in the omission of pronouns or gendered descriptors altogether. In dubbing, the need for synchronization with mouth movements can limit the feasibility of using neologisms or gender-inclusive reformulations. These challenges are exacerbated by fragmented production pipelines where translators may lack access to full scripts, audiovisual context, or guidance on the creators' intentions regarding gender representation.

The affective dimension of translation also deserves attention. Humorous or emotionally charged scenes — such as Darren being invalidated by their stepfather — require empathy and cultural competence. When humour based on linguistic play (e.g., "they/you know you're not two people") is lost or misrepresented, the audience may miss key aspects of the character's identity. Creative translation is thus essential, but creativity must be grounded in ethical and political solidarity with non-binary identities.

Furthermore, our case studies reveal an important distinction between translation strategies that aim to be neutral versus those that aim to be inclusive. Neutral strategies, while easier to comprehend for broader audiences, often fail to acknowledge the specificity of non-binary identities. Inclusive strategies, such as the use of neomorphemes or visible typographical markers (e.g. schwa and gender star), may initially challenge audience expectations but offer a more accurate and empowering representation of non-binary individuals. As such, we advocate for a shift from neutral to inclusive practices, especially in contexts that explicitly address gender identity.

The implications of our study are both practical and theoretical. Practically, we advocate for more integrated AVT workflows that provide translators with access to complete audiovisual content, character profiles, and context-specific notes on gender identity. Style guides and glossaries should be developed collaboratively with non-binary communities and updated regularly to reflect evolving language practices. Translators should also be empowered to flag gender-sensitive content and propose inclusive alternatives, rather than being bound by rigid templates or character limits that privilege speed over accuracy.

Theoretically, our work contributes to a growing body of research that views translation as a locus of queer intervention and cultural negotiation. It supports Attig's (2023) call for community-informed translation and extends the scope of feminist TS by explicitly engaging with non-binary identities and addressing the limitations of binary GFL paradigms. Our case studies demonstrate that gender-inclusive translation is not a matter of technical correctness but of epistemological and political alignment with the lived realities of queer and trans communities.

This research also carries implications for translator education. The persistent invisibility of non-binary language in mainstream translator training highlights a broader epistemic exclusion that must be urgently addressed. Curricula should incorporate queer and feminist translation theories, as well as hands-on training in gender-fair rewording strategies across different languages and AVT modalities. Familiarity with typographical, lexical, and syntactic GFL strategies must be accompanied by a reflective practice that considers the power dynamics at play in representation.

To conclude, we call for a paradigm shift in audiovisual translation that embraces gender-fair and community-informed practices as integral to both professional ethics and translation quality. This study thus underscores the need for **integrated workflows** giving translators access to full audiovisual content and contextual notes, especially when translating gender-sensitive material; **participatory frameworks** involving non-binary individuals in the creation of glossaries, style guides, and post-editing processes; **pedagogical innovations** equipping language professionals with critical and practical tools to navigate GFL beyond the binary; **institutional accountability** of subtitling and dubbing platforms (e.g., Netflix, public broadcasters), including transparency about the linguistic choices made and their implications.

As non-binary representation increases in global media, our capacity to translate these identities in ways that affirm rather than erase their existence, must evolve accordingly. In doing so, translation becomes not only a site of linguistic transfer but also a space for social justice.

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[3] The re-translations are available under https://zenodo.org/records/15323246.

Data availability statement

Our re-translations discussed in the present contribution can be found under https://zenodo.org/records/15323246.

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