QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN SCREEN TRANSLATION

Thorsten Schröter, Karlstad University, Sweden

Abstract

This article compares the original dialogue, the German dubbing and two different Swedish subtitle versions (TV and DVD) of the American feature film The Nutty Professor. It first discusses the four versions and the quantitative differences between them in terms of the number of words, characters, conversational turns, and subtitles. The focus then shifts to qualitative aspects of the three translations, including content-related changes and clashes with target-language norms. This leads to hypotheses concerning the mode and the medium of a translation and its qualitative profile.

Introduction

By now, hundreds of papers and several books have been published on subtitling and dubbing (see e.g. the bibliographies by Gambier (1997) and Gottlieb (2002)). The requirements of condensation in subtitling and of lip-synchronization in dubbing are among the most well-known constraints, although their consequences should probably not be exaggerated (see e.g. Kovačič (1994) on subtitling and Herbst (1994) on dubbing). Studies have also shown that subtitling is not inherently superior to dubbing or vice versa. Viewers tend to prefer the mode they are most used to, and are critical of alternatives (Kilborn 1993).

Comparisons of the original film dialogue and its translations have been made for both dubbing and subtitling and for different language pairs. The focus has often been on language- or culture-specific elements that are difficult to transfer: humour (e.g. Pisek (1997) for the language pair English-German, Whitman-Linsen (1992: 301-314) for English-German, Spanish, and French; Zabalbeascoa (1996) for English-Catalan and Spanish; idioms (Gottlieb (1997) for English-Danish), references to persons, places, institutions, events, and phenomena largely unknown in the target culture (e.g. Carstensen (1992) for English-Danish and German, and Nedergaard-Larsen (1992) for French-Danish and Swedish).

In my study, I have carried out a comprehensive statistical analysis measuring the differences between the original dialogue of one American feature film and three of its translations, which represent two modes (spoken and written), two media (DVD and TV), and two languages (German and Swedish). As will be seen, it is quite feasible to compare translations representing different types of transfer, which also confirms Stage’s claim to this effect (2002). The present
study indicates that there may be a connection between the mode, the medium, the language, and some qualitative characteristics.

Material

The study is based on transcripts of exactly 40 minutes of the American cinema film \textit{The Nutty Professor}. The film's total running time is approximately 95 minutes, including 7½ minutes of credits. The material thus represents nearly half the narrative part of the film. \textit{The Nutty Professor} (henceforth \textit{Professor}) was chosen as a typical representative of the modern English-language feature films that dominate the market in Europe, and because I had access to the three translations I wished to include, namely the German dubbing, a version of Swedish TV subtitles, and the Swedish DVD subtitles.

The film is a comedy from 1996, partly based on another film from 1963. The 1996 remake did not meet with critical acclaim, but was commercially successful. The plot revolves around an obese genetics professor, Sherman Klump, who, in order to be more attractive in the eyes of graduate student Carla Purty, drinks a potion that transforms him into Buddy Love. This alter ego sports a much-improved physique, but also an irritating personality. However, the effect of the potion lasts only a short time.

The film appeals to young viewers, but in the USA it was considered that "some material may be inappropriate for children under 13" because of crude humour and sexual references.

In order to get a representative, well defined, and yet random sample of the dialogue, three sequences were transcribed: from the beginning of the film (5-25 minutes from the start), from the middle (45-55 minutes from the start), and from the end (70-80 minutes from the start). The three sequences thus correspond to forty minutes of the original dialogue and three of its translations. The six cut-off points all occur in the middle of a scene.

All four versions were transcribed from the screen. The subtitles were copied as displayed, and the transcripts of the spoken English and German versions cover everything that is uttered, including false starts, fillers, and repetitions. Some effort has also been made to indicate non-standard pronunciation, while laughter has usually not been transcribed. These decisions affect the absolute figures in the results, but not to a significant extent.
Overall amount of text

Quantity is an obvious starting point for a comparative study. There are few indications in the literature concerning the amount of text in interlingual screen translations as compared to that of the source-language dialogue. For dubbing, it has been assumed that the ratio would be 1:1. For subtitling, one should be cautious with sweeping claims, since information about reduction in subtitling involves different language pairs. Working with the language pair English-Swedish, Brunskog (1989: 33) reported a normal reduction of about 1/3. Gottlieb, primarily drawing on his studies of the language pair English-Danish, but also referring to sources on French, Belgian and Dutch subtitling (1994: 72), speaks of a reduction span between 20 and 50 percent. An investigation of different TV genres with intralingual subtitles in Britain showed that these contained on average 43% fewer words per minute than the original dialogue (de Linde and Kay 1999: 51).

A quantitative comparison can give us a first idea of the extent of the changes in different translations. Any reduction in text volume may affect the nature and content of the target versions. In order to measure the amount of text in Professor, words and characters were counted. Repetitions, ranging from parts of words (Example 1) to entire clauses (Example 2), were always included:

EXAMPLE 1
W-Was it an accident? (counted as four words and 18 characters)

EXAMPLE 2
So am I. – So am I. (six words, 13 characters)

Transcribed sounds like uh, uhm, oh also contribute to the number of words and characters, and all letters and punctuation marks are included in the character count. Although there are no punctuation marks in spoken conversation, commas, full stops, etc. were added in the transcripts since these were to be compared with the Swedish subtitles, which contain such elements. Decisions of this kind imply that the figures for the spoken versions in Table 1 can only be approximations.
Table 1
Number of words and characters in the entire sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English original</th>
<th>German Dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (TV)</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (DVD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>5,903</td>
<td>5,645</td>
<td>3,399</td>
<td>3,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>25,383</td>
<td>28,789</td>
<td>15,102</td>
<td>17,618</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures give a general impression of the amount of text in the four versions. Those for the German dubbing and the English dialogue are relatively close to each other, while there is a clear reduction in the subtitles. Table 2 provides a summary of the relationships.

Table 2
Text volume of the translations as a percentage of the English original

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (TV)</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (DVD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of orig. no. of words</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of orig. no. of characters</td>
<td>113.4</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between the four versions, and the norms that may underlie them, will be discussed below.

Differences between the languages
The figures for the dubbed version illustrate structural differences between German and English. In principle, there should always be speech in a dubbed version whenever there is speech in the original, and when there is no speech in the original, there should be none in the dubbing. With a few short exceptions, this does indeed apply to the German Professor, too. Consequently, both versions take up the same speaking time. However, German words are longer than English and Swedish words: on average, there are 5.1 characters to a word in the German dubbing, 4.3 in the English dialogue, and 4.4 and 4.5, respectively, in the Swedish TV and DVD subtitles.2
Conversational turns

Structural differences between languages do not necessarily affect the content of translations. There are other quantifiable aspects that depend more on the mode and the medium of a translation and on the choices made by the translators. One such aspect is conversational turns. A conversational turn can range from one word to monologues. Table 3 shows the absolute and relative figures for Professor.

Table 3
Number of conversational turns in the original and the translations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>English original</th>
<th>German dubbing</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (TV)</th>
<th>Swedish subtitles (DVD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.(5-25 min)</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.(45-55 minutes)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.(70-80 minutes)</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of turns in original</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the dubbed version, nine of the original turns are not realized, while eight have even been added. However, the consequences of these changes are limited:

- six of the ‘missing’ turns are hard to notice or virtually impossible to understand
- two turns are missing because in German the professor does not sing along while listening to a song;
- the last missing turn has been compensated for by an ‘added’ German turn a few seconds later;
- five of the other ‘added’ turns are very short and sometimes even hard to notice;
- the last two ‘additions’ are longer and understandable, but express nothing that is not obvious: one of them is the comment Jetzt fängt er an zu furzen [‘Now he starts farting’] when somebody is doing just that.
None of these changes implies a substantial difference for the viewers. The additions seem unnecessary, and some of the omissions may have occurred because the original turns went unnoticed or were not understood.

The subtitled versions skip more conversational turns, but the relative reduction in their numbers is smaller than the overall reduction in text volume, which thus owes more to the shortening than to the complete omission of turns. However, many turns are not realized at all in the subtitles, especially in the TV version, and it is worthwhile looking at their characteristics:

Of the 377 original turns, 36 were left untranslated in the TV subtitles only, 8 were rendered in the TV subtitles but not in the DVD subtitles, and 25 were left out in both versions. Thus, more than one sixth of the original turns (69 out of 377) were left untranslated by at least one subtitler. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the tendency to render more of the original dialogue on DVD than TV, so it is not surprising that the TV version includes fewer turns. Most of those omitted feature few words, and many are exclamations (my goodness!), short answers (yup), requests for clarification (beg your pardon, sir?) etc. Occasionally, turns in heated exchanges are not translated. However, except for those discussed below, the excluded turns are of limited importance in context, and within the range of normal text reduction in subtitling.

**Number and length of the Swedish subtitles**

Tables 1 and 2 show that there are differences in the amount of text between the two Swedish subtitle versions. This is reflected in the number of individual subtitles: in the forty minutes covered by the sample, there are 422 subtitles in the TV version (10.6 per minute) and 608 on the DVD (15.2 per minute). On the other hand, the TV subtitles feature 8.1 words and 35.8 characters on average and are thus longer than their DVD counterparts (6.4 words and 29 characters). Consequently, the difference in text volume is due to the smaller number of TV subtitles which is not made up for by their greater length.

The TV subtitles remain on screen slightly longer, not only because they contain more text, but because they have been produced with greater consideration for slow readers. The goal for the DVD subtitles, on the other hand, seems to have been to include more of the original dialogue. They are also more often one-liners and are displayed for fewer seconds. However, the DVD subtitles are
not identical with those of the cinema version (personal communication from Diana Bilberg, Nordisk Film, 2002).

**Number of speakers per subtitle**

The last quantitative difference between the two Swedish subtitle versions concerns the number of conversational turns rendered in the individual subtitles. A subtitle can represent the utterances of one speaker or of two. In the latter case, each speaker will have one line. Table 4 shows the distribution for the two translations.

Table 4.
Distribution of one- and two-speaker subtitles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Swedish TV</th>
<th>Swedish DVD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 speaker</td>
<td>2 speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.(5-25 min)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.(45-55 min)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.(70-80 min)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of subtitles in each version</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of two-speaker subtitles is nearly the same in both versions (80 and 76, respectively), but they constitute 19% of all subtitles in the TV version and 12.5% on the DVD. Furthermore, the translations have often been segmented in different ways, so that many of the TV two-speaker subtitles correspond to two DVD one-liners, while several DVD two-speaker subtitles occur where the TV subtitle has omitted more of the original. Example 3, where horizontal lines divide the subtitles, illustrates some of the differences:

**EXAMPLE 3**
(Professor Klump (K) walks up to grad student Carla (C) on the campus)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English original</th>
<th>Swedish TV subtitles</th>
<th>Swedish DVD subtitles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K Afternoon, Carla.</td>
<td>-Godmiddag.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Hi, Sherman.</td>
<td>-Hej, Sherman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Pretty good.</td>
<td>-Rätt bra.</td>
<td>-Ganska bra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K I came over to see how things were going with you and Buddy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C I wish I knew. We went out last night. It was great. We had such a wonderful time.</td>
<td>-Om jag ändå visste det. Vi gick ut i går kväll och hade jättetrevligt.</td>
<td>Jag önskar jag visste. Vi var ute igår och hade jättetrevligt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exact meaning of the translations need not concern us here. We see that the equivalents of Afternoon, Carla and How you doin’ today? have been fitted into one line in the TV subtitles, while Hi, Sherman has been omitted. The DVD renders the order and content of the original more closely. In this excerpt, the TV version has three two-liners, including two two-speaker subtitles, whereas the DVD has two two-speaker subtitles and three one-liners. Similar differences characterize the entire sample. Example 3 thus helps to explain the greater number of individual subtitles on the DVD, their reduced length, and the smaller share of two-speaker subtitles in that version. It also shows that both versions conflate redundant information: It was great. We had such a wonderful time is more compact when rendered as Vi ... hade jättetrevligt ['We had a really good time'].

**Quality**

Using categories in order to gain control over unwieldy and heterogeneous material almost inevitably leads to simplification, at least in the humanities. In the following, seemingly clear-cut categories will be imposed on bits of language that might more properly be dealt with in terms of prototypes and family resemblances. That, however, would overshoot the mark, which is to get a general idea of the qualitative differences between the three translations of Professor by iden-
tifying, counting, and discussing problematic instances of broad types of translation choices.

An analysis of qualitative aspects of translations will inevitably be subjective. Nevertheless, I shall explain my approach, argue for some of my choices, and cautiously claim that there is a connection between the quantitative results discussed above and the number of problematic target language items. These are divided into those deviating in semantic content and those that clash with the target-language system.

**Content**

All interlingual translations differ from the originals and most translation choices can be made to appear problematic for one reason or another. Considering the quantitative reductions characteristic of subtitling, equivalence on all textual levels between the source-language dialogue and the written target texts is impossible. Consequently, the examples discussed here will go beyond normal changes in screen translation and represent cases where the denotations or connotations are so different that alternatives ‘closer’ to the original readily come to mind. The following categories were used for the analysis: ‘Translation errors’, Explicitations, Acculturations, Substantial omissions, Substantial additions, Changes of speaker, and Other. These will be discussed in turn and the findings summarized at the end.

Each category has been further subdivided according to the hypothesized differences in response between the source and target-language audiences. These differences may concern the understanding of the whole plot or the reception of elements. Depending on the context, they can be ‘insignificant’, ‘of some consequence’ or ‘significant’. Examples will help to illustrate these distinctions. The grading of problematic subtitling choices is based on assumptions about how viewers who are very dependent on the subtitles understand the film. These are the viewers envisaged by subtitlers and actually in the majority when it comes to difficult source language sequences.

*Translation errors*

The quotation marks used with *translation errors* are meant to indicate that some of the problematic choices may have been made despite the dubber’s or subtitler’s perfect awareness of the alternatives.
EXAMPLE 4

_Oh, yeah, it’s my style, boy. You didn’t know Reggie studied._ vs _[Oh?] Das ist mein Stil, Junge. Du weißt nicht, wo man den studiert._ [back translation of German dubbing: ‘That’s my style, boy. You don’t know where to study it.’]

EXAMPLE 5

_Keep insulting me._ vs _Gör du bara narr av mig._ [Swedish TV: ‘Just keep making fun of me.’]

These two examples represent insignificant ‘errors’. The utterance in Example 4 refers to a style of fighting used by the speaker. The focus of the scene being on imminent violence, the effect on the audiences will be much the same although the contents of the speeches are not.

In Example 5, _insulting_ implies more disrespect than _making fun of_, but as the scene is supposed to be funny, the difference is relatively insignificant.

EXAMPLE 6

_Ms Vindovik_ vs _Mrs Vindovik_ [Swedish TV]

EXAMPLE 7

_Oh, oh, the pleasure was all mine, Miss Purty._ vs _Det var nog trevligare för mig._ [Swedish DVD: ‘It was probably more pleasant for me.’]

Examples 6 and 7 are of some consequence. The problem in 6 is the failure to familiarize Swedes with a form of address that is gaining ground in the English-speaking world but remains relatively unknown in Sweden.

In the original dialogue of Example 7, Professor Klump uses a standard phrase in his reply to Carla Purty, who deemed it “more than a pleasure” to have met him. The subtitle, in contrast, is a non-standard comment on his awkwardness during their first encounter, and therefore slightly amusing.

EXAMPLE 8

_Hey, can you get the bill for me?_ vs. _Betalar du min nota?_ [Swedish DVD: ‘Do you pay my bill?’]

EXAMPLE 9

_The way people talk to him and treat him, and the way she looks at him._ vs. _Wie die Leute mit ihm reden und ihn behandeln, und wie sie ihn anschauen._ [German
dubbing: 'The way people talk to him and treat him, and how they look at him.' (My emphasis throughout)]

Examples 8 and 9 are significant. In Example 8, a character speaks to a waiter at a club, but, unlike what the subtitle suggests, he hardly expects the waiter to pay the bill.

In Example 9, the she in the original utterance is Carla. The speaker, Professor Klump, is infatuated with her, and the pronoun him refers to Buddy Love. It is thus of greater importance how she looks at Buddy Love than how other people, who treat and talk to him with respect anyway, look at him.

Explicitations and Acculturations

Explicitation means that something is expressed more clearly and directly in the translation than in the original. Acculturations are here defined as changes of references to source-culture phenomena into references to target-culture phenomena. The two categories are discussed together because most of the explicitations in the three translations of Professor are also acculturations and vice versa. In the majority of cases, shifts appear to be quite motivated, although the actual results can be problematic. Below are some examples:

EXAMPLE 10

Reggie’s mama is so fat, her blood type is Rocky Road! vs Reggies Mama ist so fett, wisst ihr, wie ihre Blutgruppe heißt? Schmalz! [German dubbing: ‘Reggie’s mama is so fat, do you know what her blood type is? Lard!’]

Example 10 represents acculturation. The candy bar Rocky Road is unknown in Germany and has been substituted by the unrelated Schmalz ['lard'], which, however, conveys a similar idea. The difference for the audiences is negligible.

EXAMPLE 11

It’s time we take the Nestea plunge! vs Det är dags... att ta i... med hårdhandskarna. [Swedish DVD: ‘It’s time we use the hard gloves. / It’s time the gloves come off.’]

EXAMPLE 12

It’s time we take the Nestea plunge! vs Es wird Zeit für den Eistee-Hammer! [German dubbing: ‘It’s time for the iced-tea hammer!’]
It is the same source-text excerpt that is rendered in Examples 11 and 12. In terms of explicitation vs acculturation they are borderline cases. *Nestea* is a brand of iced tea which has *Come take the Nestea plunge!* as its slogan. In the film, the utterance accompanies a hard punch in the protagonist’s stomach. It is one of several instances of spoken product placement (like *Rocky Road* in Example 10), combined with a play on the word *plunge*. The DVD subtitler has chosen to render the hardcore meaning, but the wordplay is lost and the result is therefore judged to be of some consequence to Swedish viewers. The dubbing, on the other hand, retains the reference to iced tea, but the sentence must mystify the German audience: although *Hammer* may be used about a severe blow, the expression *Eistee-Hammer* is a failed explicitation, which must be counted as a significant deviation from the source text.

**Substantial omissions**

‘Substantial omission’ implies that the translation leaves out information that is relevant to the plot and that cannot easily be retrieved through visual or non-verbal aural channels. Most cases are of some consequence to the audience (Example 13), or even quite significant like Example 14.

**EXAMPLE 13**

*And Luther Vandross! Nigger used to be “the black Pavarotti”!* vs *Och Luther Vandross! Den svarte Pavarotti!* [Swedish TV: ‘And Luther Vandross! The black Pavarotti!*’]

**EXAMPLE 14**

*Well, I've been really busy with my research. Ernie. vs Mmh. ich war sehr beschäftigt mit meiner Forschungsarbeit.* [German dubbing: ‘Mmh, I was really busy with my research work.’]

In Example 13, it is of some consequence that the word *nigger* has not been transferred. This can probably be explained by the subtitler’s reluctance to use such a taboo word in written Swedish. In the US, *nigger* has gained currency among some African Americans, and in the film, it helps to characterize the speaker, so its omission implies a loss of information.

Only one word has been omitted in Example 14. However, it is a name and, furthermore, the first time it is mentioned. It turns out to be important for the plot
because it helps the audience to understand the relationships between the members of the Klump family, and its omission is therefore significant.

**Change of speaker**

This category applies only to the dubbing, as one cannot normally see to whom an utterance has been attributed in subtitles. Example 15 represents the only instance found.

**EXAMPLE 15**

_You're rotten!_ vs _Du bist 'ne Sau!_ [German dubbing: 'You're a pig!']

The original is an off-screen utterance by Papa Klump after he has broken wind so much that he has soiled his trousers. He either tries to blame the others for this misfortune or reacts to Mama Klump's preceding comment _You gotta clean them yourself!_ In the dubbing, it is Ernie Klump who comments on his father's behaviour. However, the language is comparable, and the focus is on what happened rather than on who is saying what, so the difference is negligible.

**Other**

A few problematic translation choices could not be fitted into the previous categories. None was significant.

**EXAMPLE 16**

... _but now it is time for Reggie to 'karatesize' your ass._ vs ... _aber jetzt wird es Zeit, dass Reggie dir karate-mäßig den Arsch aufreißt._ [German dubbing: '... but now it is time for Reggie to kick your ass in karate style.]

The differences in Example 16 are rather insignificant. The content and the tone of the source-language utterance are rendered well in the dubbing, but there is no nonce-formation, such as _karatesieren_, that would correspond to _karatesize_. However, the informal way of turning nouns into adverbs by adding the suffix _'mäßig' is stylistically comparable.

**EXAMPLE 17**

_Uh, ah, initially I-I requested a Y-Yugo and, uhmm, this is all they had, so - vs. Öh, öh, ursprünglich hatte ich einen Mini-Zwergo geordert – und das war alles, was sie_
hatten. [German dubbing: \(~\text{"Uh, uh, initially I had ordered a Mini-Dwarfo -- and this was all they had.'\}]  

In Example 17, the professor tries to talk himself out of an embarrassing situation. The Yugo is a cheap, small car made in former Yugoslavia; a Mini-Zwergo is the dubbers’ invention. But although this translation will also trigger connotations of limited size and costs, the joke is more obvious and will therefore have another effect on the target audience than the one in the original on its audience.

**Combined figures**  
Table 5 summarizes the problematic translation choices found. The different types are subdivided according to their significance.

Table 5  
Problematic translation choices with regard to content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Of some consequence</th>
<th>Insignificant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dubbing</td>
<td>TV(^6)</td>
<td>dubbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 1 +1</td>
<td>13 +1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Translation errors’</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
<td>1 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitiations &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 10 3</td>
<td>3 19 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial omissions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial insertions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 - -</td>
<td>0 - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>3 4 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 11 +1</td>
<td>16 +1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned, these values and their distribution are the result of a subjective assessment. But if we assume that they could, in principle, be accepted by most analysts, they are indicative of the quality of the different translations in terms of
content. And although the personal influence of the translators should not be underestimated, some differences in the distribution patterns can be linked to the quantitative results presented earlier.

In particular, the substantial omissions appear to reflect the reduction in text volume: the German dubbing has 6 (11% of the problematic choices in that translation), the Swedish DVD version 10 (14%), and the TV version 32 (48%). If we concentrate on the significant omissions, the German dubbing has 1 (a single word, representing one fifth of the truly problematic dubbing choices), the DVD has 3 (slightly less than one fifth), and the TV version 10. As mentioned, there should, in principle, be no substantial omission in dubbing, nor is there any automatic loss of important information in subtitling. Yet it is striking that the more condensed TV subtitles, which compare well in other categories, should have so many problematic omissions while the DVD version has relatively few.

The second difference concerns ‘translation errors’. There are more ‘translation errors’ in the DVD subtitles than in the TV subtitles. This may be because of different degrees of translation competence or because the DVD subtitler took more liberties with the source text, but one should not disregard the simple fact that the greater volume of the Swedish DVD version has made it possible to insert more ‘translation errors’ there than in the TV version.

Finally, as mentioned, a change of speaker can normally only be noticed in dubbing, and problematic choices of this type are limited to that mode of translation. The same is true of substantial insertions: the two instances found occur in the dubbed version.

**Target language quality**

Some translation choices are problematic not because of the content, but because the solutions clash with norms in the target-language system. They are here categorized as ‘Anglicisms’ and ‘Translationese’, which are discussed together. The category ‘Other’ covers a large variety of cases where a questionable translation choice cannot easily be linked to the form or content of the original.

*Anglicisms and Translationese*

Unless omitted, most English forms of address (like *Mr* and *Mrs*) were transferred unchanged to all three translations. This is normal in both German
dubbing and Swedish subtitling. In dubbing, preserving names and forms of address is one way of attenuating the “expression of nationalism” ascribed to dubbing (Danan 1991). Since current norms have it that proper names and forms of address remain intact in translation, they are not considered problematic Anglicisms here.

The related issue of translating the English you is not reflected in the below figures either. You can correspond to formal and informal forms of address in German (Sie vs du), both of which are used in the German dubbing. A similar distinction is also common in Swedish subtitles, although it is otherwise rare in Sweden. The distinction between the V- and the T-form must therefore be triggered by features in the English original.

In both Swedish subtitle versions, Professor Klump consistently addresses his superior, the dean, by the V-form (ni); and in the DVD version, the professor is addressed in the same way by his assistant Jason. At the very beginning, the dean says ni to Klump (in both versions), but later, when it has become apparent that he is constantly annoyed by Klump, he uses the T-form (du). Klump, in turn, consistently addresses Jason as “du”. However, in the TV subtitles there is some inconsistency concerning the use of ni vs du in conversations between Klump and Jason and between Klump and Carla Purty: apparently, the subtitler had some trouble deciding how to render the original’s you.

English loanwords that are well incorporated in the target languages have not been considered problematic Anglicisms either. They include Fan, Job, and wow in German, and okej, shoppar, and slum in Swedish. However, the following examples contain Anglicisms and Translationese that are included in the count. The problematic sequences are in bold.

EXAMPLE 18
Once you work out, your metabolism starts to speed up. vs Man sätter igång metabolismen ...[Swedish TV]

EXAMPLE 19
Uh, how- how can I help you? vs Wie kann ich Ihnen helfen? [German dubbing]

The translation in Example 18 is problematic because metabolism is unlikely to be used by others than medical specialists in Sweden, and the speaker is an uneducated layman.
The dubbing solution in Example 19 seems to be influenced by the corresponding source-language structures. *Wie kann ich Ihnen helfen?* [‘How can I help you?’] is not a typical way of offering one’s help in German. A more idiomatic solution might have been *Was kann ich für Sie tun?* [‘What can I do for you?’] or *Womit kann ich Ihnen behilflich sein?* [~ ‘In what respect can I be of help to you?’].

**Combined figures**

Table 6 is a summary of the findings concerning Anglicisms and Translationese as well as other problematic choices with regard to target language quality. Many of them would be noticed only by critical, and inevitably also subjective, observers. Nevertheless, one can cautiously distinguish between two degrees of significance.

**Table 6**

Problematic translation choices affecting target language quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF PROBLEM</th>
<th>Of some consequence</th>
<th>Of very little consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German dubbing</td>
<td>Swedish TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglicisms &amp; Translationese</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total for each translation seems to correlate to the amount of text it comprises. Once again, it is a fair assumption that more text is likely to contain a greater number of problematic solutions. However, the individual translators’ stylistic and grammatical skills may have been more decisive.

Also worth a comment are the clear differences in the number of Anglicisms and instances of Translationese. They are more frequent in the dubbing than in the subtitles, even when we allow for the differences in text volume. This is surprising, since the original dialogue is still accessible in subtitled versions and
could therefore be expected to exert a stronger influence on the grammar and vocabulary of subtitles than on the ‘independent’ dubbing. It is possible that German dubbing is more open to including source-language elements than Swedish subtitling, where the audience receives their full dose of English-language items through the audio channel. In any case, the findings here support Herbst’s claim that German dubbing of English-language productions is highly influenced by the original dialogue (Herbst 1994, 1997). While he looked at linguistic aspects that have not been analyzed in the present study, such as intonation, style level, and cohesion, he also identified a considerable number of Anglicisms in dubbing. Henrik Gottlieb, who studied the dubbing and subtitling of three American family films (similar in nature to Professor!) into Danish, a language closely related to German, found that the dubbed versions always had a higher ratio of Anglicisms per time unit than the subtitles (Gottlieb 2001).  

Conclusion

In this article three translations of the American feature film The Nutty Professor (1996) have been analyzed: a dubbing into German and two Swedish subtitle versions (made for TV and DVD, respectively). Quantitative as well as qualitative aspects were investigated. Since there are few empirical studies in screen translation that cite numbers, many of the figures presented here are interesting in their own right. In this article, however, they have also been linked.

The quantitative results in particular, concerning for example the number of words and conversational turns, and the division into subtitles, are reasonably ‘objective’ and relevant for a better understanding of screen translation. The analysis of the qualitative aspects must necessarily rely on subjective assessments, but it has nevertheless led to interesting hypotheses about the relationship between the mode and the medium on the one hand, and the number of substantial omissions and Anglicisms on the other. It should be emphasized that it is the combined figures that have made these tentative suggestions possible. To test them, more data from similar comparative investigations is needed.

Notes
1. A few short sequences were impossible to understand. Two unidentified syllables are counted as 1.5 words or 8 characters in the English version and as 1 word or 8 characters in the German dubbing.
2. These differences are not affected significantly by the fact that punctuation marks are included in the count.
3. All of the nine turns omitted in the German dubbing were omitted in at least one subtitle version, and six turns in both.
4. If we compare these figures with those Gottlieb provides for the Danish TV subtitles of an American feature film, namely 784 subtitles for 108 minutes of film, or 7.3 per minute on average (1994: 140-141), it is obvious that The Nutty Professor is rather dialogue-intensive.
5. There are only two substantial insertions, namely the comment “Jetzt fängt er an zu furzen” (‘Now he starts farting’), which has already been mentioned, and one other short utterance. Both are of very limited consequence for viewers.
6. The +1 in two columns indicates the most obvious attempts at improving the source-language dialogue: in the original, the term euphemism has twice been used inappropriately in the sense of ‘exaggeration’ (apparently without comic intent); the subtitlers have not transferred this malapropism.
7. It is quite feasible to adapt these forms of address to the German target-culture system, but it would be awkward in Swedish, where the corresponding forms fell into disuse several decades ago.
8. The +1 in one DVD column marks the inclusion of an Anglicism that is not induced by the source text.
9. However, Gottlieb also counts types of Anglicisms that are not included in my figures, e.g. forms of address and Anglicisms that have been used in the target language for a long time (2001).

Works cited


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