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**TRANSLATING GENDER IN THE NOVEL *IF
I WAS YOUR GIRL***

ABSTRACT

Milla Tynnyrinen : Translating Gender in the Novel *If I Was Your Girl*
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In this thesis, I examine the relationship between translation and gender and discuss whether the different ways a translator can navigate gender in their work. Moreover, I have approached the topic within a feminist framework and contemplated on whether a translator could or should seek to engage in feminist translation and how this could be done. In addition to discussing translation, I will shortly argue why a translator should be aware of how different identities are represented in their work, in the first place.

To successfully exemplify the relationship between translation and gender, I have, in this thesis, discussed several theories regarding both topics and performed a comparative analysis on both the English original and the Finnish translation of the young adult novel *If I Was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo. I have, specifically, analyzed gendered language and instances where the Finnish translation has been more or less gendering than the English original. In this thesis, I will discuss my findings and contemplate on potential reasons, either linguistical or social, behind the differences.

In total, I analyzed three chapters and inspected gendered personal pronouns and otherwise gendered language, such as gendered names or nouns, such as "girl" or "woman," and the different ways these features were translated in. Prior to completing the study, I expected that the Finnish translation of the book would, in some ways, be less gender neutral than the English original, partially due to the fact that the Finnish language does not feature gendered pronouns. I did, however, suspect that the Finnish translation would not be entirely gender-neutral, either.

My hypothesis was correct, and the most important finding of the study was that the Finnish translation was, in fact, more neutral than the original text. The different strategies used in translating gendered personal pronouns especially supported this claim, since the most commonly used translation technique was to simply substitute a gendered personal pronoun *he* or *she* with the its Finnish equivalent *hän* or the more colloquial *se*, which are both gender-neutral. However, some strategies were not as straightforward and could be very fruitful to study further in the future: for instance, male characters seemed to have a slightly higher chance of being referred to by their names rather than a neutral personal pronoun or a noun, such as "girl," in the translation.

It is, of course, impossible to conclude whether these differences were, in fact, due to differences between the cultures of the source and the target audiences or simply caused by the translator's personal preferences of mere coincidence, but they can function as inspiration for important and insightful cultural conversations.

Keywords: feminist translation, representation, personal pronouns, young adult literature, gender

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tässä kandidaatintutkielmassa tutkin kääntämisen ja sukupuolen välistä suhdetta ja tutkinut erilaisia tapoja, joilla kääntäjä voi työssään käsitellä sukupuolta. Lähestymistapani aiheeseen on hyvin feministinen, joten pohdin työssäni, onko kääntäjän mahdollista tai suotavaa kääntää tekstiä jollain tapaa feministisesti. Sen lisäksi, että puhun varsinaisesta kääntämisestä, selitän lyhyesti myös, minkä vuoksi kääntäjän tulisi olla tietoinen tavoista, joilla erinäisiä identiteettejä ja esimerkiksi vähemmistöryhmiä teksteissään kuvaa.

Esimerkillistäakseni sukupuolen ja kääntämisen välistä suhdetta esittelen tässä tutkielmassa useita eri teorioita niin sosiaalitieteiden kuin feministisen käännöstutkimuksenkin saralta. Lisäksi olen suorittanut konkreettista tutkimustyötä vertailemalla Meredith Russon *If I Was Your Girl* –romaanin englanninkielistä alkuteosta ja suomennosta. Erityistä huomiota olen kiinnittänyt siihen, onko kirjan suomennos joko enemmän tai vähemmän kielellisesti sukupuolittava kuin englanninkielinen alkuteos. Tässä tutkielmassa käsittelen tutkimustuloksiani ja pohdin mahdollisia kielellisiä tai yhteiskunnallisia syitä löytämilleni eroavaisuuksille.

Analysoin tätä tutkielmaa varten kolme kirjan lukua ja tutkin niissä ilmenneitä sukupuolittuneita persoonapronomineja ja muutoin sukupuolittavaa kieltä, kuten sukupuolisidonnaisia nimiä ja substantiiveja (esimerkiksi ”tyttö” ja ”nainen”) käännöksineen. Ennen tutkimustyön alkua ennakoisin, että kirjan suomennos olisi jossakin määrin alkuteosta sukupuolineutraalimpi esimerkiksi siksi, ettei suomen kielessä tunneta sukupuolittuneita persoonapronomineja. Tästä huolimatta en oletanut, että suomennoskaan olisi täysin tai edes lähes sukupuolineutraali.

Hypoteesini osoittautui paikkansapitäväksi, ja tutkimukseni olennaisin tulos oli, että kirjan suomennos tosiaan oli alkutekstiä sukupuolineutraalimpi. Tätä toteamusta tukivat erityisesti havainnot erilaisista sukupuolisidonnaisten pronomien kääntämisen tavoista, joista ehdottomasti yleisin oli sukupuolittavan pronominin *he* tai *she* korvaaminen suomalaisella, sukupuolineutraaleilla vastineilla *hän* ja puhekielinen *se*. Myös vähemmän suoraviivaisten käännösratkaisuiden perusteellisempi tarkastelu voisi tuottaa mielenkiintoisia tuloksia: näyttäisi esimerkiksi siltä, että kirjan suomennoksessa miespuolisiin hahmoihin viitattiin useimmiten etunimellä, kun taas naishahmoihin viitattiin neutraalilla persoonapronominilla *hän* tai jopa sukupuolittavalla substantiivilla kuten ”tyttö”.

On tietenkin mahdotonta sanoa, johtuvatko tutkielmassani esittelemät eroavaisuudet alkuteoksen ja käännöksen välillä kulttuurieroista vai kääntäjän henkilökohtaisista preferensseistä tai puhtaasta sattumasta, mutta uskon, että ne voivat synnyttää inspiroivia ja kiinnostavia kulttuurillisia keskusteluja.

Avainsanat: feministinen kääntäminen, representaatio, persoonapronominit, nuortenkirjallisuus, sukupuoli

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck –ohjelmalla.

Table of contents

1 Introduction	5
2 Literary review	6
2.1 Texts and representation of identities	6
2.2 Translation and gender	9
2.3 Avoiding gendered language	10
3 Primary material	11
3.1 If I Was Your Girl	11
3.2 Tyttösi sun	13
4 Method and expected results	14
4.1 Research question and position	15
4.2 Expected results	16
4.3 Method	17
5 Results and analysis	19
5.1 Analysis of gendered pronouns	19
5.1.1 Equally gendered passages including pronouns	19
5.1.2 Less gendered passages including pronouns	20
5.2 Analysis of other gendered determiners	22
5.2.1 Equally gendered non-pronoun determiners	22
5.2.2 Neutralized non-pronoun determiners	23
6 Conclusion	25
Bibliography	27

1 Introduction

In this thesis, I will examine the relationship between translation and gender from a feminist perspective and, to better understand the topic, conduct concrete research on the English source text and the Finnish translation of the young adult novel *If I Was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo. This thesis, in its entirety, will revolve around comparative analysis of Russo's novel and its translation by Leena Ojalatva, and this particular novel was chosen due to the crucial role of gender in the story, which features a transgender main character. Although my research, due to limited time and space, will mostly function on the level of language, it will consider the main character's marginalized identity, which, in my opinion, only heightens the importance of actively considering how and why language expresses gender the way it does.

As hinted above, I will, more than anything, focus on the different ways in which Ojalatva has navigated Russo's highly gendered language, and, based on cultural and linguistical differences between the source and target audiences, I presume that the Finnish translation of the book will be linguistically less gendered than the original. Some reasons for this claim are the lack of gendered personal pronouns in the Finnish language and the fact that one could argue that Finland, as a society, is more gender-neutral than the United States. Ways of translating gender and even the effects these decisions might have on children's gender identity and self-esteem have been studied before, but I believe my angle is unique since I intend to study literature specifically aimed at teenagers, not children, and since my material features a transgender character, whereas earlier studies have generally established a more normative, and perhaps traditional, way of understanding gender.

First, I will broadly discuss the relationship between translation and gender as well as why it is important that a translator considers ways of translating gendered language, in the first place. Here, I will support my hypothesis with theories from both sociologists and translation theorists including Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Judith Butler, to name a

few. Second, I will introduce my primary material and the methods used for the analysis and briefly discuss the results expected prior to performing the analysis. Then, I will carefully introduce and itemize potential differences found between the original text and the translation and aim to discover whether there are linguistical or social explanations for why certain passages of the text have been translated in an interestingly “different” manner.

2 Literary review

The relationship between translation and gender is one that can be fruitful for many a translator to consider but has remained in the very margins of translation theory. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce some theories concerning said relationship and exemplifying its nature, as well as highlight why it could be beneficial for most translators to at least consider the many ways gender can be expressed within literary texts. Moreover, my aim is to establish a connection between these theories and my own work, which is why I will heavily focus on translating for children and teenagers and whether this specific target audience should affect the ways a translator eventually decides to navigate gender.

2.1 Texts and representation of identities

Before one can consider or problematize whether a translator has successfully navigated gender, it is necessary to establish why “successfully navigating gender,” or any other social aspect, such as race, age or disability, is an important aspect of translating, in the first place. Perhaps the easiest way to first approach the issue is to, instead of explicitly focusing on translation, examine all texts and the effects they might have on their readers. It is easy to claim that the kind of representation of gender that children and teenagers encounter in various forms of media is significant, but why, exactly, is it so?

Máire Messenger Davies discusses the importance of children’s media in her book *Children, media and culture* (2010) and concludes that, although the childhood of an

individual child always exists in relation to the current social situation, literature and other media remain an important part of any child's life (2010, 193). Moreover, Davies states that "media and culture provide means for even disadvantaged children to seize moments of empowerment, enlightenment and joy" and that it is extremely important that adults of any cultured society provide their children with possibilities to experience genuine wonder through culture and children's media (2010, 193). Although appealing, this way of understanding children's and teenagers' literature is quite idealistic, since the aim of writing for and about children has never been solely to entertain young people: one traditional goal of children's literature has always been to transfer current cultural or social values to children (Suojala & Karjalainen 2001, 143).

To use gender as an example, one could ask what kinds of gendered values a society sees as important enough to systematically transfer to entire generations of children – and is any of this up for debate? Of course, there are different "schools" of children's literature that highlight different values: some books might focus on traditional family values, while others emphasize marginalized or forgotten identities. One example of the latter group could be *Lohikäärme jolla oli keltaiset varpaat* (2009), which is a picturebook featuring an intersex character written by Kuura Autere. Books such as these are still fairly rare, and stories that feature "ordinary" heterosexual and cisgender, meaning those who still identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, characters and families are notably more common.

The lack of certain identities, especially those of different social, ethnic, or sexual minorities, in media has long worried activists, mainly because young consumers of any media do not only inherit its values and attitudes but behavioral patterns, as well. In an ideal world, every child can open a book or the television and consume stories that make them feel included, but, unfortunately, for many minority children and teens, reality is much

different. For instance, an African American girl in her teens might struggle with her self-image and femininity because of the narrow roles reserved for black women in mass media: “the tragic mulatto,” “the jezebel” and so forth (Adams-Bass, Stevenson & Slaughter Kotzin 2014, 368). These negative portrayals can be called *outsider representation*, since they are created by people who do not belong to the same social group with the ones represented, and usually stem from decades or even centuries of oppression and misunderstanding (Alia, Valerie, Bull & Simone 2003, 3). Although recent development suggests that creators of both media and science have become increasingly aware of consulting actual minority groups when representing them, negative outsider representation remains more common than a more nuanced and positive one (Alia, Valerie, Bull & Simone 2003, 4).

Although race might be the most commonly studied group regarding representation, several scholars have considered the possible effects of different kinds of gendered expression, as well. For instance, Judith Butler’s theory of *performative gender* could be applied to describe the mechanisms of gendered representation. In Butler’s theory, gender is not innate or absolute but instead upheld by the society, through repetition of gendered attitudes – to simplify, two genders, male and female, exist in the society today not because so would be natural but because people constantly re-construct traditional gender roles by submitting to them (Butler 1990, 42–44). This information of what is deemed correct and natural is not only transferred through the acts of individual people but through representation in the media, as well. Culture, media and individuals repeat the desirable patterns of gender until the “marginal” sexual and gendered identities seem forgotten – and become marginal in the first place. Butler calls this progress *the heterosexual matrix* (Butler 1990, 77). Based on this, one could argue that gendered language based on negative stereotypes is not the only kind of gendering we should avoid because casual yet overt

gendering, in general, contributes to the heterosexual matrix and averts the reader's attention from other meaningful aspects of the referent by simply directing it at their gender.

2.2 Translation and gender

What makes Butler's theory of repetition especially relevant in the context of translation is that translators, more than other authors, repeat words. Of course, every author is, in a way, repeating the words of those who came before them, but translators do not repeat past words merely on the level of intertextuality but take the concrete words of some other writer, locate the meaning, and transfer it into another language using new words. When a text considers gender, a translator is not only repeating what society "thinks" of gender but what an individual thinker thinks, as well.

Why bother, one might ask. Is a translator's job not to simply discover the concrete message of the original author and to translate that into another language? Even if a translator can see that the text at hand might potentially include passages containing stereotypical or otherwise harmful representation of certain groups of people, is there anything they can do? Many do believe that a good translator is as invisible as possible and that a translation is truly successful when absolutely no trace of the translator's presence or impact can be seen, which has been the case in Finland, as well (Oittinen 1995, 33). Some scholars however, perhaps starting with Friedrich Schleiermacher, emphasize the translator's role as a cultural influencer, since a translator is the "missing" link between new information from another culture and the target audience – the writer and the reader of the translation are separate by nature and the translator creates ways them to unite in the middle (Oittinen 1995, 35–36). This, for some, is a position of power. For instance, Susan de Lotbinière-Harwood claims that the act of translation is never entirely neutral by nature but always represents the political and ideological stance of the translator (1991, 94). Even if the translator decides to remain as neutral as possible, the general ideological atmosphere of their society will guide

their concrete strategies, whether the translator agrees with the common norms or not. If a translation is never truly neutral, why should translators not use translation as a way of activism? In the context of gendered representation and gender equality, this can be done, for instance, by deleting unnecessarily gendered expressions that do not affect the plot or the overall message of the work.

Although Lotbinière-Harwood believes that gender-neutral language is an oxymoron and that, instead of attempting to reach it, feminist translators should focus on *feminization* of traditionally, and unnecessarily, masculine language (1991, 100-101), one could argue that, in modern times, discussions of gendered language could divert further away from whether the masculine or the feminine deserve to be heard and towards the question of if it is possible to write in ways that do not uphold gendered stereotypes. In reality, a world where a person's gender no longer affects the ways they are treated might seem a utopist thought, but, in fiction, the possibilities are entirely different. If a translator is faced with the possibility of turning a heavily gendered work of writing into something that does not, as forcefully, indicate any moral position regarding what is societally acceptable of different genders and what is not, why not take it?

2.3 Avoiding gendered language

Determining whether a translation is feminist is not straightforward as feminism can be implemented on a text on a multitude of levels, but it is useful to briefly introduce some very concrete ways in which a translator can alter a distinctively gendered text. For instance, a translator can aim to *neutralize* the text by locating words that are gendered but would not necessarily need to be. This method of feminist translation can, however, be counterproductive at times because our reading and viewing practices are highly androcentric, which means that most people will automatically assume that neutral words, such as *waiter* or *actor*, always refer to a man, while a woman would be called a *waitress* or an *actress*

(Lotbinière-Harwood 1991, 114). This concern inevitably raises a question: if we aim for completely gender-neutral language, will we, unwillingly, advocate for a casually masculine language?

Despite its potential flaws, neutralization, when implemented in moderation, is a powerful tool especially in cases where it is not possible or advisable to alter other aspects of the text, such as the plot or the dialogue. Of course, no professional translator would consider omitting a text of all gendered references a successful translation strategy but, instead, it is important to consider context. When is a reference to gender unnecessary to the plot or general message of the text? Could the potential reader fully understand the meaning of the original author without knowing the gender of the referent? If knowledge about gender is not necessary, neutralization might be the solution and, if not, there are other ways of feminist translation, as well. Without omitting gender, a translator can, for example, *feminize* the language by avoiding using pejorative language about women and, when existing words are not sufficient, creating new possibilities (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991, 117).

3 Primary material

3.1 If I Was Your Girl

If I Was Your Girl is an American young adult novel written by Meredith Russo. The book was first published in 2016 by Flatiron Books, belonging to Macmillan Group, in the United States and has since received several book award nominations. Moreover, in 2017, the book won a Stonewall Book Award, which is annually given to English language works that are published in The United States and exceptionally honor the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender experience and are of special importance to the LGBT community (Stonewall Book Awards).

As the Stonewall Book Award nomination suggests, the protagonist of *If I Was Your Girl* belongs to the LGBT community: more specifically, the protagonist, Amanda, is a transgender girl, which means that her gender identity and expression do not align with the male gender she was assigned at birth. The novel follows Amanda's day-to-day life and portrays both her struggles and triumphs in her new school, where she has transferred due to severe bullying in her previous hometown. Although Amanda's new friends and love interest do not initially know of her transgender identity, themes of gender, identity, and fear of oppression are crucial to the story, as they are often central in Amanda's internal monologue.

The book has been both praised and criticized for its representation of transgender people. While the overall reception among both book reviewers and the transgender community has been positive, several people have expressed concerns that the book falsely portrays the lives of transgender people as easy, as Amanda is a very feminine teenager who always passes as a woman, which means she rarely experiences transphobic harassment or violence. For instance, the Guardian's children's book site teen reviewer claimed the plot of the book was "mildly dull" and lacking in conflict (WIIFYG 2016), and, in the epilogue of the book, Russo herself explains why she decided to make Amanda's life as easy as she did. Russo states that, as a transgender woman with experience of transphobic harassment, she felt a need to create a notably ordinary, but transgender, teen romance heroine that would be relatable not only to other trans people but to the broader cisgender audience, as well (Russo 2016, 341).

In addition to the overall characterization of Amanda, this "easiness to swallow" of the book's representation of transgender people can be seen in the way Russo frequently and almost systematically uses gendered language throughout her book. Apart from occasional remarks or relatively meaningless instances, the characters of the book perform gender in ways that are very traditional. The girls are excited for prom, frequently discuss

beauty or boys, and are often protected by their fathers, older brothers, or other male caretakers. The boys, in turn, are described as mischievous and sometimes reckless youngsters that drink beer, drive around in their cars, and fight over girls. Moreover, most, although not all, of the characters are heterosexual and are often referred to by using gendered personal pronouns, gendered nouns, such as “girl” or “man,” or adjectives that are often associated with only one gender (“beautiful,” “handsome”).

3.2 Tyttösi sun

The Finnish translation of the book was published in 2018 by Karisto and translated by Leena Ojalatva. The Finnish name *Tyttösi sun* roughly translates to “Your girl,” in a relatively old-fashioned or poetic manner. It is noteworthy that the name of the translated book already suggests that one might find differences in the way the original author and the translator have expressed gender in their writing. The name of the English version, *If I Was Your Girl*, suggests that Amanda’s gender, which the title of the book refers to, is debatable and complicated, while the Finnish translation of the name simply expresses Amanda’s female gender as a known fact. Moreover, instead of emphasizing the fact that Amanda is transgender, the Finnish title solely highlights Amanda’s romance with Grant by maintaining the relationship to someone else – *your girl* and *tyttösi sun* – but omitting the conditional verb structure *if I was* of the original. Although it is possible that the name of the translated book was chosen by the publisher, and not the translator, could the differences between the two names indicate that the overall portrayal of the concept of gender is less highlighted in the translation than it is in the English original?

It is interesting to consider whether the Finnish translation has been criticized similarly to the English original, as well, and although there are no easily accessible, official online reviews for the book’s Finnish translation, almost every major Finnish book blogger has both read and written about *Tyttösi sun*. The reception of the translation seems to be

unanimous to the reception of *If I Was Your Girl*, but not as many people have discussed whether the character of Amanda is somehow too privileged. Some bloggers have stated that they found the plot of the book underwhelming or did not especially enjoy the romance between Amanda and Grant, but the reviews do not seem to linger around the use of gendered language or the successful or unsuccessful representation of transgender lives and identities. This lack of criticism could indicate that Ojalatva's translation is less gendered than Russo's original, although it should be noted that the question of whether Amanda's life is too easy does not concern individual choices of words or even sentences but is structural. The issue of Amanda's privilege mostly arises from the central plot and from the characterization of Amanda, both of which are areas of writing that an arguably good translator will not alter. Language, however, can change the general tone of the story and, therefore, affect the amount of attention a reader will grant to a specific theme or detail, such as Amanda's alleged privilege. Another possibility for the lack of critique is that the book's Finnish audience might not be as educated on transgender people's lives and experiences and, therefore, struggles with recognizing whether a portrayal is good and just to the social group in question or simply lacking in drama or depth. Despite this, it can be interesting to consider if an explanation for the difference in the critical reception of the book's two versions can be, at least partially, found from the ways gender has been translated.

4 Method and expected results

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce my research questions and the methods I have adopted to analyze my primary material. Furthermore, I will aim to justify the methods chosen and describe the results that were expected prior to analyzing the material, as well as introduce the specific parts of the text that I have decided to analyze.

4.1 Research question and position

In the epilogue of *If I Was Your Girl*, Russo mentions that a part of why she decided to write the novel, in the first place, was to normalize the transgender experience by presenting the perhaps unexpected reader with a normal teen romance heroine who just happens to be transgender (2016, 339–340). Although Russo’s intentions are justifiable, one cannot help but wonder whether something about her writing could be seen as counter-productive: although Russo does mention that Amanda’s life is, at times, easier than the lives of many other transwomen in The United States today (2016, 341), this information is conveyed through only one sentence of the epilogue, which most readers might skip altogether, while the ultra-normal representation is granted more space.

Since Russo’s significantly gendered writing and the potentially harmful generalization of varying transgender lives have evoked at least some critique, I was interested to examine whether or not the same critique could be directed at the Finnish translation of the book. My curiosity was heightened further by the notable differences between the ways of expressing gender in the English and Finnish languages, namely the lack of gendered personal pronouns in Finnish.

Clearly, one cannot expect a translator to change notable aspects of someone else’s novel, a work of art, and it would not be fruitful to consider how feminist or anti-feminist Ojalatva’s translation is when we are not familiar with her individual stance on feminism and the necessity of feminist readings and translations. Therefore, we cannot expect Ojalatva to have performed a feminist translation on purpose, but it is possible that the society surrounding the translation has left its mark on the translated text. To consider this, one needs to determine whether Finland, as a society, is more or less gender-neutral than the United States. The lack of gendered personal pronouns in the Finnish language could indicate a certain blindness towards gender, and it is notable that Finland has been ranked as the third

most gender equal country in the world, whereas the United States was placed as the 43rd (World Economic Forum 2018, 7).

If I needed to summarize my angle in one coherent question, it could, inspired by feminist translation theory and the differences between the Finnish and English languages, be as follows: *Do the English original and the Finnish translation of the book express and navigate gender in notably different ways, and can the possible differences or the lack thereof be explained by social or linguistical differences between the source and target languages and audiences?*

4.2 Expected results

Based on the theory introduced earlier, the critique directed at the book, and the societal differences between the source and the target audiences, I suggest that it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that the translator of the book has, either consciously or unconsciously, altered the way the genders of the book's many characters are expressed linguistically.

However, there are several reasons why one cannot expect any drastic changes or an omission of "unnecessary" gendering altogether, even solely on the level of language.

Firstly, gendered language, in the case of this book, might not be an unintentional aspect molded only by the society around the author but a concrete decision serving a distinguished purpose – unlike the heterosexual matrix, which is largely unconscious. Since the character of Amanda is transgender, one could expect that not all readers will immediately accept her gender identity. Because of this, it is understandable that Russo constantly reminds the reader that Amanda is, in fact, a woman – in a sense, the kind of gendered language that many would deem restrictive could, in Amanda's case, be empowering. However, this would not explain why all the cisgender characters are affected by the excessive gendering, as well, and it is notable that the Finnish name of the book

expresses Amanda's gender as a simple fact, which might render the constant remarks in the direction of Amanda's gender strange and unnecessary.

Secondly, it might not be possible to omit gendered language without omitting some other meaningful aspects conveyed through language, as well, especially when translating from English to Finnish. This is the case because the Finnish language does not recognize gendered pronouns, which, in this thesis, I have considered to be gendered language. To exemplify, the English phrase *she laughed* contains not only the message of someone laughing but indicates the linguistic agent's, or the laugher's, gender identity, as well. Depending on the context, the reader might be expected to recognize a specific character from this simple phrase, especially if the scene in question only features one character of the gender referred to as *she* (Laakso-Tammisto 2007). When translating this phrase into Finnish, *hän nauroi* 's/he laughed', the author automatically omits the gendered reference, due to the lack of gendered pronouns in the target language. If the reader is expected recognize a character, the translator needs to add a gendered reference, which can, among other things, be a gender-specific name of a character, a gendered noun, such as "man" or "woman," or a clearly gendered adjective-based determine. Therefore, a reader can expect both more and less gender neutrality from a Finnish text.

4.3 Method

To discover whether the English and Finnish editions differ in the ways of navigating gender, I will analyze the two versions of the book and attempt to locate passages where the Finnish translation features language that is notably more or less gendered than the language used in the source text. To contrast and evaluate the potential findings, I will observe instances where both versions feature equally gendered language, as well. By comparing instances of lessened, heightened and equal gendering, I seek to estimate whether the Finnish version of the book, as a whole, is more or less gendered than the original novel.

Since gendered language as a whole is too vast a subject for one to address in such a limited space, I have decided to focus on two specific linguistic aspects: gendered pronouns and other gendered references to characters. More often than not, these references consist of articles and nouns and their modifiers, such as the phrase “the beautiful girl.” The basis of my research consists of the same methods for both groups, the pronouns and the other references, but the concrete ways of analysis might differ between the two. As mentioned earlier, my aim is to determine whether the translated references to gender are more or less extreme than in the original, but, in addition, I will speculate on possible reasons for any differences that might occur.

As my primary material, which consists of two versions of a full-length novel, I have decided to inspect selected chapters instead of the book as a whole. In total, I have analyzed 30 pages of Finnish and 10 pages of English material, latter of which is a digital edition divided into two columns that both roughly correspond to one printed page. The passages I have chosen consist of chapters three and seven and a sub-chapter titled “December, Three Years Ago.” I chose chapters three and December, Three Years Ago because both of them introduce several new characters to both the reader and Amanda, which means that a great number of adjectives and other modifiers can be found. Chapter seven, however, is different but equally interesting, since it, unlike most of the other chapters of the book, mostly focuses on the character of Grant. Therefore, the chapter includes numerous instances of male pronouns, and it is interesting to consider whether the gender of the character affects the ways of translating gendered language.

5 Results and analysis

5.1 Analysis of gendered pronouns

The English passages I inspected included 168 instances of gendered personal pronouns of which 82 were different forms of the feminine pronoun *she* and 86 were forms of the masculine pronoun *he*. Out of all the passages containing gendered personal pronouns, 35.71% were translated in a way that maintained an equally strong gendered message, whereas translations for the other 64.22% were more gender-neutral. This observation corresponds with my hypothesis, which was that the Finnish translation, as a whole, would be less gendered than the English original. However, to better understand the reasons behind these differences and to evaluate whether the findings are useful, in the first place, one should carefully inspect both the equally and the less gendered translations.

5.1.1 Equally gendered passages including pronouns

Since the Finnish language does not recognize gendered personal pronouns, the amount of passages containing equally gendered language seems surprisingly high, at first. However, we have already established that no translation could be successful if the translator was to omit all possible references to gender and that, in the case of Finnish, the translator will, most likely, have to incorporate additional gendered references into the text. This is often the case because an English text will most likely include passages where the reader is supposed to recognize a specific character based on the gendered pronoun alone, which is why, in the case of *If I Was Your Girl*, replacing the gendered personal pronoun with the name of a character was the most commonly used translation technique: out of the 42 instances where the translator had not neutralized the references to gender, personal pronouns were substituted with a character's name. This was especially prevalent in scenes with multiple different characters but notable in scenes where only two characters were discussing, as well, which

could indicate a translator's personal preference to use names instead of impersonal descriptions.

Another frequently used technique was to replace the gendered pronoun with a gendered substantive – for instance, *she said* from the original text was translated into *tyttö sanoi* ‘the girl said.’ This solution was used 18 times, nine times when referring to women and nine times when referring to men. However, masculine pronouns were translated into names 15 times, which is slightly more often than the 12 times feminine pronouns received the same treatment. Moreover, almost all of the instances where a character's name was used in this manner were references to one character, Grant, whereas several feminine names were used. This could indicate that, in the translation, the male character's, especially Grant's, names were used constantly, perhaps to emphasize their individual personality, while feminine names were used less often and only for the reader to be able to distinguish the different female characters. Although one can assume that this difference between the treatment of the male and female characters' names is not a conscious decision that would reflect the translator's personal values and attitudes, it certainly can offer some information about how men and women are typically addressed – it is not quite the same to be “just one of the girls” as it is to be your own, valuable person.

5.1.2 Less gendered passages including pronouns

As expected, the most commonly used, neutralizing solution was to rather straightforwardly translate the gendered pronoun *she* or *he* into the neutral *hän* or its more casual counterpart *se*. This solution was used 81 times, and 74.39% of all female pronouns were translated in this manner, whereas the same applies to only 54.65% of the male pronouns. This may raise the question of whether, rather surprisingly, the men of the book are reduced to mere examples of their male gender. This, however, is not the case, since the smaller percentage of neutralized masculine pronouns is explained by the excessive usage of Grant's name, which, although

gendered, emphasizes his personhood and individuality instead of his gender. Moreover, it would seem that neutralizing, as a strategy, was more often applied to minor characters, such as people encountered at school or discussed by other characters, while the more relevant characters were referred to by their name or, when their names were not yet known, by other determiners, such as *a girl a few years older than me* (Russo 42), which was directly translated into *minua muutaman vuoden vanhempi tyttö* (Ojalatva 68). Prior to giving away the character's name, references to *her* were later translated into *tyttö* 'girl' instead of *hän* to correspond with the *she* of the original text.

Additionally, there were 27 instances where the translator had entirely omitted a gendered reference, although these had little to do with purposeful or ideological decisions and more with the way the Finnish language functions. For instance, the phrase *jumping out of her seat* (Russo 67) was translated into *pomppi istuimellaan* 'bounced on his/her seat,' which, grammatically, does not include a personal pronoun, or a gendered reference, at all. The reason for this is that the suffix *-aan*, here, functions as the grammatical indicator of possession, which, in English, would require the personal pronoun *her*. Similar instances are numerous, but some omissions of pronouns are not as easy to define. For example, *Grant stood his ground* (Russo 54) becomes *miten järkkymätön Grant oli ollut* 'how adamant Grant had been' (Ojalatva 88). Here, the translator has entirely reworded the phrase and replaced the verb phrase *stood his ground* with an adjective that carries a similar meaning, and it is likely that the reasoning for the decision is not strictly grammatical. One can only speculate on the reasons behind decisions such as this, but, since similar translations are numerous, they might have something to do with what is and is not natural for the Finnish language. Perhaps it is not always even possible to implement the systematic and repetitive gendering of English into Finnish.

5.2 Analysis of other gendered determiners

The English passages included surprisingly few instances of other gendered determiners than pronouns, although some were used especially in chapters that introduced several previously unknown characters. Altogether, my primary material contained 24 words or phrases that referred to a certain character or several characters and included a distinctively gendered semantic meaning, such as *girl* and *boy*. Words with only associative meaning, such as *beautiful* or *handsome* were not considered. Out of the 24 phrases, 18, or 75%, contained an equally gender-specific meaning in the translation, as well, while the remaining five, or 20,83%, had been neutralized. In addition, the Finnish translation featured one instance of gendering unknown to the original, English text.

Overall, the results correspond to those regarding the personal pronouns: the Finnish translation seems to be, at least slightly, more gender-neutral than the source text. As with the pronouns, it could prove fruitful to briefly inspect both the unedited and the neutralized phrases.

5.2.1 Equally gendered non-pronoun determiners

It is noteworthy that, out of the 24 determiners, a distinct majority of 17 (70,24%) refer to female characters, which leads to the most commonly used and not-neutralized non-pronoun determiner being *girl*. Ten out of the 18 equally gendered determiners either are or feature the word *girl* and several more, such as *bitch* (Russo 2016, 27) and *a woman with broad shoulders* (Russo 2016, 45) otherwise refer to women, leaving only four instances where neutrally translated non-pronoun determiners refer to men. Of course, this observation does not necessarily regard the translation but the source text, but it is interesting to speculate on why these determiners have not been as excessively neutralized as the pronouns. Moreover, the determiners *girl* and *girls* often occur in contexts where the first could very easily be substituted with *he* ‘(all of) them’ or the latter with *hän* ‘he or she’ or even a character’s

name, although this would not function as neutralization. It would, however, divert the reader's attention away from the subject's gender and towards her personality, as happens when *the man* (Russo 2016, 45) is referred to by using his name, Boone, in the translation (Ojalatva 2018, 70). Moreover, the one instance where *they were all looking at me* (Russo 2016, 27) is translated into *kaikki kolme tyttöä katselivat minua* 'all three girls were looking at me' is an interesting anomaly, although the material is, unfortunately, too limited to inspire more detailed analysis.

5.2.2 Neutralized non-pronoun determiners

The passages I have analyzed include only five instances of originally gendered and later neutralized non-pronoun determiners, but they are especially interesting as they represent many different ways in which the Finnish language navigates gender differently than English. This means that the findings discussed in this sub-chapter are not individual solutions constructed by the translator but echoes of larger, linguistic and societal differences between the source and target cultures.

Some differences can be explained by cultural differences and assumptions about shared knowledge between the author and the audience. For example, in a scene where Amanda is reading a book called *Sandman* and thinking about someone called *the Lord of Dreams* (Russo 2016, 23), who is a real character in the Sandman books and comics by Neil Gaiman. At first glance, the more gender-neutral Finnish translation *untien valtias* 'the leader of dreams' might appear as a generalization of something specific, such as a character that the Finnish reader might not be familiar with. However, the character, officially named Morpheus, is known in Finland, as well, and commonly referred to by the coincidentally gender-neutral term *untien valtias* (Vedenpää 2019). Another example of potentially unintentional neutralization caused by differences in shared knowledge is the saying *stoned like a witch in Salem* (Russo 2016, 24), which, of course, is a pun about being under the

influence of cannabis and the Salem witch trials. The pun created by the two different meanings of the word *stoned* would not work in Finnish, which is why it has been translated to *pilvessä kuin purjelentsikka* ‘high as a glider’ (Ojalatva 2018, 32). Interestingly, the Finnish translation does not include any references to alleged gender, although one could have been created, if it had been seen as important enough.

The remaining three differences are related to differences in gendered vocabulary. Two of these examples, *the blonde girl* (Russo 2016, 25) and *the girl with the red hair* (Russo 36, 25) consider hair color. Whereas, in the original, both descriptions clearly indicate gender, the words used in the Finnish translation, *blondi* ‘blonde’ and *punapäähä* ‘redhead’ (Ojalatva 2018, 34) simply indicate the referents hair color. Interestingly, blonde and redhead are both words that can function on their own in English, as well, yet the phrases still carry gendered meaning that the translated phrases do not. However, one can always speculate on if the Finnish translation is truly gender-neutral, either, since, although the word *punapäähä* is fairly neutral, the word *blondi* carries a strong associative feminine meaning of *stupid, beautiful woman* despite technically being gender-neutral.

The last difference is yet another example of linguistic differences, again on the level of lexicon. In a scene where Amanda and her friends are at a diner, it is mentioned that *a waitress* takes their order. In the Finnish translation the neutral word *tarjoilija* ‘waiter’ is used, although a feminine diminutive *tarjoilijatar* ‘waitress’ exists, as well. In English, the separate feminine and masculine words for waiter/waitress seem to be used frequently, as the *English Web 2015* corpus includes 33,235 instances of *waiter* and 26,687 of *waitress*, while the *Finnish Web 2014* corpus does find 14,165 results for the query *tarjoilija* ‘waiter’ but only 440 for *tarjoilijatar* ‘waitress’ (Sketch Engine). In a way, the Finnish language does hold the capacity to be more heavily gendering than it is, in this example, but Ojalatva, for

one reason or another, has decided to opt for a more gender-neutral solution, which seems to be more natural for Finnish speakers.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the relationship between translation and gender and considered whether or not gender is an important aspect to consider during the translation process, in the first place. Based on several theories, regarding studies of both gender and translation, I have arrived at the conclusion that it is important to at least consider the ways of navigating gender while translating. This is important because, as translators, we transfer messages that are, at times, morally loaded from one culture to another, which, of course, creates a sense of responsibility. In conversations about media representation and its effects, gender is always a relevant topic and its importance is only heightened when the media in question tackles topics of minority experiences. This type of material often attracts minority audiences, as well, and the way certain groups are represented in media can have a long-lasting effect on their self-esteem and self-image.

To better understand and then exemplify the topic, I have analyzed both the English source text and the Finnish translation of the American young adult novel *If I Was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo. The book tells the story of a young transgender girl Amanda, which is why gender, as a concept, is underlined throughout the book, perhaps so heavily that the Finnish reader could find it bothersome, since they are not used to using or seeing gender-specific personal pronouns in everyday language. Moreover, Finland, in general, is thought to be a relatively progressive society in terms of gender-equality, whereas the United States repeatedly ranks somewhat badly on global gender equality indexes. Inspired by all this, I decided to examine whether the Finnish translation of the book would be, in one way or another, more gender-neutral than the English original. In order to do so, I briefly studied feminist translation theory and heavily emphasized Lotbinière-Harwood's theory of

translation as feminist activism on my analysis, focusing on her idea of *neutralization* of language.

After analyzing the usage of both gendered pronouns and other gendered references to characters, I have concluded that the Finnish translation of the book is notably more neutral in terms on signaling gender and that the reasons behind the translation's neutrality were both cultural and linguistical. For example, the lack of gendered personal pronouns and the ways one can use affixes to convey meaning in Finnish led to lessened use of gendered language. Similarly, the source text featured some concepts that are highly gendered in English, such as waiters and waitresses, but less so in Finnish.

To conclude, based on my research, it is a viable claim to state that the Finnish language, at times, functions in ways that are more gender neutral than the ways of English. However, these differences, although often grammatical, do not always exist merely on the level of language but indicate conscious decision-making from the translator, as well. Without consulting the translator, it is not possible to conclude why, exactly, some passages have been neutralized while others have not, but speculating on potential reasons can spark insightful conversations. For example, analysis on the book and its translation showed that the male character's had a slightly higher chance of being referred to with a name while female characters, alongside with less important side characters, were often referred to with the gendered pronoun *she* or a common noun, such as *girl* (or *girls*). Although not possible with a limited material, such as mine, it would be highly interesting to analyze the different ways of translating gendered speech that targets men and women, or cisgender and transgender people. Perhaps now that I have proven, in theory and practice, that differences do occur, studying their mechanics further would be a natural progression of academic events.

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