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## Linguistic diversity in audiovisual media for children in Belgium and Austria

### Abstract

As children are still in the early stages of language acquisition, their exposure to the language used in children's media may affect their language learning, but also their language attitude. Children's television has been criticized for being out of touch with reality when it comes to the portrayal of children. However, *linguistically* children's media can also be out of touch with reality. This chapter discusses audiovisual media offered by different providers and accessed by young speakers of non-dominant national varieties in pluricentric language areas in the light of ongoing concerns about overexposure to the dominant variety. The main focus is on an analysis of media for Dutch-speaking children in Belgium, but German-language media for Austrian children is also discussed. It highlights differences between local and imported fiction and calls for further socio-linguistic research into the language used in different children's media and how it affects language learning and language attitude.

### 1. Introduction

Within media studies, a particular focus on children as media users has emerged over time. Such research into children's television often focuses on issues such as the psychological impact of exposure to violence and aggression on children's behaviour, but also the influence of media on children's attitudes with regard to gender, body image and ethnicity. Children are more malleable than adults are and, as a result, more vulnerable to media content. However, the impact the language used in such media has on their linguistic development in terms of both language acquisition and language attitude, likewise, calls for more research. Particularly, because children are still at an early stage of acquiring this language, which is not always their native language. Children's media consist of a wide range of different amateur (e.g. some content provided by *YouTubers*) and professional, domestic and foreign productions. The latter often have to be dubbed. The linguistic differences between the language used in such translated

vis-a-vis local content can also be significant, as will be elaborated below. Sociolinguistic research into children's media, therefore, is also relevant.

Several media scholars have looked into children's television. It has, for instance, been criticized for not displaying enough diversity worldwide. Programmes have been condemned for being out of touch with reality when it comes to the portrayal of children, for example, with regard to the overrepresentation of Caucasian characters failing to reflect ethnic diversity (e.g. Götz et al. 2018). The ongoing underrepresentation of female characters, but also characters with disabilities and lower socioeconomic backgrounds have also been addressed (idem). Similarly, the way femininity and masculinity are constructed in children's television came under criticism (idem), as well as gender stereotyping (e.g. Drotner 2018). Many children, do not recognize themselves or the people around them in the characters they see in children's programmes. Yet also linguistically, children hear different voices and accents in their day-to-day lives. This however has not yet been studied sufficiently.

Child and adult (dubbing) actors in children's television series, for instance, rarely have a non-native accent or a speech impediment. For educational reasons, usually an attempt is made to produce a flawless language in which often every syllable is clearly enunciated. This results in an over-articulation that is rarely heard in natural speech. More recent British productions such as *Bing Bunny* (Julian Nott 2014) and *Hey Duggee* (Grant Orchard 2014), nevertheless, reveal some deviation from the linguistic standard including non-native accents and even typical language mistakes children make which remain uncorrected (De Ridder 2019). However, such linguistic diversity is normally neutralised in the dubbing process. In translations, the standard variety is typically used. In the case of pluricentric languages, this often means that the dominant national variety is used, or an attempt is made to use a variety that is unmarked for any particular region.

The "Children's Television Worldwide" study conducted by Maya Götz and her team in 2007 mapped children's television in 24 different countries (Götz et al 2007a). It showed that 69.2% of children's television consisted of fiction, primarily animation (idem:5). The majority of this fiction (77.1%), was imported, predominantly from the USA and Canada (idem:9). Only 22.6% was locally produced in the child's home country (idem). Particularly in non-English speaking countries, children, as a result, are exposed to a considerable amount of audiovisual translations, mainly dubbed fiction. As the original dialogues are completely replaced during the dubbing process, dubbing teams could take certain liberties, which subtitlers for instance cannot do. In Sweden for instance, the public service

broadcaster has deliberately changed the gender of non-human characters in children's animation to restore the gender balance (De Ridder 2019). For the same reason, male off-screen narrators have been replaced by female narrators (*idem*). However, Götz and her team did not go into linguistic aspects of children's television, let alone the differences between local and translated content. In the following, both imported and locally produced children's media in Dutch-speaking Belgium and Austria will be discussed drawing on Götz's studies (Götz et al 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) in those countries, but also including additional more recent analyses of children's media.

## 2. Imported productions tend to expose children to the dominant variety

Productions that are imported within the same language area are rarely localised in smaller markets, as is the case in Austria. In pluricentric language areas, such media is also mainly imported from the dominant part of the language area and less so in the opposite direction. Imported productions that have to be translated usually come with a *dubbing bible* containing translation instructions for the casting of the voice actors. It includes information on the programme and its characters, as illustrated in this excerpt taken from Nickelodeon's dubbing bible for *Big Time Rush* (Scott Fellows 2009) cited in Chaume (2012:128):

“Character: Kendall; Age/Gender: male (late teens/early 20s); Vocal attributes: medium pitch, no accent, his voice has a medium pitch, he is confident, the leader of the pack, a guys's guy”.

Nevertheless, audiovisual translators and broadcasters can always negotiate with production companies, for instance, with regard to the accents of the voice actors or their gender. They could even refuse to buy programmes, if they do not reach an agreement. This is something the Swedish public service broadcaster sometimes does when names cannot be localised or the gender of characters cannot be changed (De Ridder 2019).

In this example, the *bible* explicitly states that Kendall is to have “no accent” in the dubbed versions. Linguists will agree that every speaker has an accent and so does the American actor playing Kendall in the original version of this live-action series. He is a speaker of the American variety of English and his accent can easily be tied to that part of the English language area. Big commercial players such as Nickelodeon and Disney may have local channels catering to different parts of pluricentric language areas (e.g. Belgium and the Netherlands). Nonetheless, they tend to invest only in one dubbed version that is distributed all over the

language area. In the case of pluricentric language areas, this often means the dominant variety is used or an attempt is made to produce a “country neutral” translation in which any geographic markedness is avoided. Still, the voice actors tend to come from the dominant part of the language area and their accents will be heard in the programmes. More recently, however, mixed dubbing casts including a few speakers of the non-dominant variety are sometimes used in the Dutch language area, as will be expanded upon below.

Dubbing is the most dominant translation mode used in audiovisual children’s fiction. With regard to the language varieties used in animation, dubbed animated series for children tend to differ from dubbed animated feature films. Companies like Pixar Animation Studios, for instance, are known to invest a lot in the translation and localisation of their animated films even for smaller markets. Since the 1990s, for instance, animated films in the Dutch language area have come out in both a Belgian and a Netherlandic Dutch version. This means that the script is translated and the dubbing recorded separately for the Belgian market. These translations contain features of marked Belgian Dutch and only dubbing actors from Belgium are heard speaking a wide range of different regional and social varieties of Belgian Dutch.

This hardly ever<sup>1</sup> is the case in the German language area. While several children’s films have been released in a separate version for the Austrian market, often Austrian voice actors only replaced the lines of just a few characters in the original German German dubbing. For instance, in the film *Oben* [Up] (Pete Docter 2009) the voices of only two characters, one of which the main character, had been redubbed by Austrian actors. In the German German version of the film *Cars* (John Lasseter 2006), the late Niki Lauda, a famous Austrian formula one driver, featured. In the Austrian German version of this film, additionally the voice of a well-known former Austrian formula one commentator, Heinz Prüller, was included as well. Such Austrian versions are screened in Austrian cinemas, but they rarely are available from streaming services, such as Amazon Prime or Netflix. Technically speaking, however, the existing Austrian version could easily be offered in the language settings.

Imported TV series for children, as opposed to films, however, are seldom dubbed separately for the local markets of pluricentric language areas. Usually, one language version is distributed in the entire language area, particularly by the

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<sup>1</sup> One exception is the popular family film *Ein Schweinchen namens Babe* [A piglet named Babe] (Chris Noonan 1995), which came out in three different German versions: a German, Austrian, and Swiss German version.

international commercial channels. In the Dutch language area, this often means Netherlandic Dutch voice actors provide the dubbing.

One exception is the Dutch version of *PJ Masks, Pyjamahelden* (E-one 2015), distributed by Disney Junior. In this animated series, the entire dubbing cast consists of Belgian nationals and this version is broadcast all over the Dutch language area. The *Pyjamahelden* happen to be rather popular<sup>2</sup> in the Netherlands and expose Dutch children to the Belgian Dutch accent. It has to be noted, though, that the voice actors do not use local dialects. They use the standard Belgian Dutch pronunciation: e.g. they use the "soft g" or soft front-velar fricative, their /v/ and /z/ do not become voiceless at word-initial position, they use a bilabial, rather than a labiodental /w/, long /e./ and /o./ are rendered as pure monophthongs (see description in e.g. Haeseryn 2013). Nevertheless, the translated script does not contain marked Belgian Dutch lexis, syntax or grammar: Only their accent can clearly be recognised as Belgian Dutch.

Götz and her team reported that Austrian children's television series are mainly imported from English-language countries (65%) and only 13% were imported from Germany (Götz et al. 2007b:5). The latter are already in German. The other programmes have to be dubbed to German. The media scholars did not look into the language varieties used in the programmes, but it is highly likely that the German German variety is used in the dubbing, as Rudolf Muhr (2003:110) pointed out. This means that Austrian children watching television are exposed mainly to the dominant variety of German and not their own Austrian variety.

Muhr (2003) already discussed the impact of German satellite television broadcasting on Austrian German. Language attitude of children from both dominant and non-dominant parts of the language area, however, may also be affected by such overexposure to the dominant variety in popular media. German children, for instance, would benefit greatly from exposure to other German varieties, as it allows them to learn about the linguistic diversity within German. Likewise, Austrian children's attitude towards their own variety could improve when they grow up hearing their favourite animation characters speak their own variety of German.

### 3. Local productions tend to expose children to their own variety

While local broadcasters often already provide a substantial amount of local content, in both the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium quotas

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<sup>2</sup> Clips from this series feature three times in the top ten most frequently watched videos on the Disney Channel's Dutch YouTube channel (Disney Channel NL 2020).

were introduced in regard to the percentage of local Dutch and Flemish productions that have to be broadcast in prime time. Since the late 1980s, this is at least 50%. In 2008, both Dutch and Belgian public service broadcasters also started to broadcast significantly more local Dutch-language fiction (De Jonge 2012). From 2012 onwards, the quota for the Flemish Public Service broadcaster's main channels was further increased to 65% local productions in primetime (De Ridder 2019). No specific quotas are available for its children's channel, but a considerable part of its content is locally produced or coproduced, as the results of the studies presented below confirm. The aforementioned worldwide study (Götz et al 2007a) also tallied the number of local and foreign fiction productions in Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria. The Belgian subset consisted of more local fiction than the worldwide average: 39.8%, while only 7.3% in the Dutch subset consisted of local fiction (idem:9). This lower percentage can partially be explained by the higher number of commercial channels in the analysed Dutch sample.

Zooming in on the Dutch public service broadcaster's output, indeed more local fiction was found amounting to 25.3% (Götz et al 2007d:7). Still, a higher amount of local fiction was broadcast by the Flemish public service broadcaster: 37.9% (Götz et al 2007c:7). The Belgians and the Dutch also produce co-productions, like the live-action series *Dierendetectives* (Thijs Brandsma 2018) in which children from both the Netherlands and Belgium feature speaking their own variety of Dutch. Animated series like *George & Paul* (Joost Van Den Bosch & Erik Verkerk 2016) and *Rintje* (Steven de Beul & Ben Tesseur 2016) have likewise been coproduced. In those cases, the voice-over and dubbing is done by Belgian voice actors in the Dutch version for the Belgian market. One of the countries with the lowest amount of locally produced children's fiction in this 2007 study, though, was Austria. The media scholars found that only 4 of the 497 children's programmes, a mere 0.8%, they analysed in the Austrian sample were locally produced fiction (Götz et al. 2007b:5).

One of the explanations for this extremely low percentage is that only two Austrian channels were included in the Austrian subset they analysed: the public service broadcaster's ORF1 and ORF2. The rest of the subset consisted of German state and private channels<sup>3</sup> and the commercial channel Nick (idem:2) that also broadcast in Austria (see Muhr 2003). The local fiction that was found in the analysed Austrian subset was broadcast by ORF1 (7.5%) and Nick (1.1%) (idem:6). On its website, ORF states that 40% of their programmes for children consist of their

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<sup>3</sup> KIKa, ZDF, ARD, Super RTL, and RTL2. These German channels are also popular in Austria.

own productions and 60% of live action and animated series (ORF 2020). They do not specify, however, that this 60% children's fiction is imported.

The Flemish public service broadcaster and the Flemish Audiovisual Fund are known to invest in local productions including a lot of fiction for children (e.g. Droeven 2019). This appears to be less the case at the Austrian public service broadcaster. The variety used in local productions in the part of language areas where a non-dominant variety is spoken, is usually this non-dominant variety. Hence, local productions are important, as they expose their viewers to their own variety, unlike most of the imported productions. In short, a good balance between local and imported productions is desirable. In the following section, the results of a recent linguistic analysis of the varieties used in children's television in Dutch-speaking Belgium is presented.

#### 4. Analysis of children's television in Dutch-speaking Belgium

The studies conducted by Götz et al. (2007a, 2018) did not include a sociolinguistic analysis of language varieties used in children's television, nor did they differentiate between translated and non-translated content. Such a study was undertaken during the summer of 2019, when the online content provided by four television channels in Dutch-speaking Belgium was analysed. This study is discussed in this section.

##### 4.1. Methodology and data collection

The children programmes that were available online, but were also broadcast by four channels on Belgian television between 29/06/2019 and 14/07/2019 were analysed. In total, 309 different programmes<sup>4</sup> were examined. In 290 of those programmes, the audio language was Dutch. The main focus was the content of the more established local channels: Ketnet (Jr.) of the Flemish public service broadcaster (VRT) and VTM Kids (Jr.) of the commercial Flemish private broadcaster VTM. A smaller number of programmes broadcast by the international commercial channels Nick(elodeon) and Disney (Junior) Channel were included in the analysis as well. For brevity's sake, the four channels under scrutiny will be referred to as VRT, VTM, Nickelodeon, and Disney respectively, henceforth. The latter two channels have a lower market share in Belgium, hence their smaller sample. They almost exclusively broadcast imported programmes, mainly animated series. The aim of this analysis was to establish the amount of linguistic diversity reflected in local and imported programmes particularly in terms of the

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<sup>4</sup> To wit, 118 of Ketnet (Jr), 121 of VTM Kids (Jr.), 38 of Nickelodeon/Nick, and 32 of Disney Channel/Junior.

national, but also other varieties of Dutch. Every so often, parents complain about their children copying the Netherlandic Dutch they hear on television (e.g. Van Garderen 2019). This analysis helps to gauge the amount of Netherlandic Dutch children really are exposed to in Belgium.

#### 4.2. Local vs. imported productions in the analysed sample

The local channels offered a better balance of local and coproductions vs. imported productions: 48.3% of the analysed VRT and 46.3% of the VTM programmes were locally produced or coproduced, while 51.7% and 53.7% respectively were imported. However, most of the imported productions did not come from the USA, Canada and Australia. In fact, only 8.2% of the VRT and 25.6% of the VTM programmes were imported from those countries. Foreign productions were particularly imported from neighbouring EU countries, mostly from France and the United Kingdom: 80.3% of the VRT and 33.8% of the VTM imports. The public service broadcaster imported more programmes from the Netherlands: 11.5% of all imports compared to only 2.5% of the VTM imports. In those productions, the original Netherlandic Dutch audio language is usually preserved. Yet occasionally, the original version is completely replaced and the dubbing done by Belgian actors.<sup>5</sup> Films were also included in the sample. Two films in the VRT sample were (co)produced in Belgium and five were imported from the Netherlands.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of the Dutch children's programmes by Götz and her team in 2007 showed that only 3% of the imported programmes came from Belgium (Götz et al. 2007c:6). Although a number of Dutch-language films have been produced in Belgium, the Dutch public service broadcaster, rarely broadcasts these films. None of the films available through the Dutch public service broadcaster's online platform Zappbios in July 2019, for instance, were Belgian films (NPO ZAPP 2019). A total of fifty films, could be streamed through this platform, 94% of which were Dutch (co)productions. In one of these films, however, a Belgian actor featured speaking his own variety of Belgian Dutch. Three films were imported and dubbed into Dutch. Two of those were German fairy-tale adaptations for which only one dubbed version is available in the entire Dutch-language market. The dubbing casts consist mainly of Dutch dubbing actors, but also a few of Belgian dubbing actors are heard. Four of these dubbed adaptations with such a mixed dubbing cast, in fact, were also broadcast by VRT in July 2019.

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<sup>5</sup> This was the case in *Kattenlaan 9* (Villa Achterwerk 2015) broadcast by VTM.

<sup>6</sup> Mainly family films, often popular book adaptations, such as *Abeltje* (Sombogaart 1998) and *Pluk van de Petteflet* (Sombogaart & van Rijn 2004).

### 4.3. Varieties of Dutch used in the analysed sample

The variety of Dutch used in the 290 children programmes was examined to establish if the dominant variety of Dutch or the local non-dominant Belgian Dutch variety is mainly used in children's television for Belgian Dutch speakers. The results revealed that overall both local channels, VRT and VTM expose their viewers mainly to the Belgian Dutch variety, while the international commercial channels tend to expose viewers to the Netherlandic Dutch variety most of the time, though not exclusively.

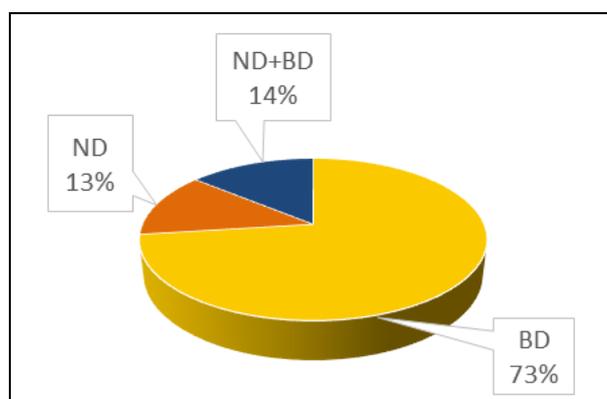


Figure 1: Analysed VRT sample (n=103)

The VRT subset contained the highest number of programmes (73%) in which Belgian Dutch (BD) was used and the lowest number of programmes (13%) in which Netherlandic Dutch<sup>7</sup> (ND) was used (see Figure 1). In 14% of the programmes, (voice) actors from the Netherlands and a few from Belgium were heard. Furthermore, the programmes in which Belgian Dutch was used were scrutinised to check whether only standard Belgian Dutch or other varieties were used. Standard Belgian Dutch was mainly used (67% of the local programmes). In the other programmes (33%), at least some features of colloquial Belgian Dutch and/or regional Belgian Dutch accents could be heard as well.<sup>8</sup> Particularly in the local productions, more linguistic diversity within Belgian Dutch comes across.

The analysis of the VTM programmes showed that here too mainly Belgian Dutch (BD) was used. Nonetheless, the percentage was lower than VRT's (58%) (see Figure 2). In 23% of the programmes Netherlandic Dutch and some Belgian Dutch was heard and in the remaining 19% only Netherlandic Dutch (ND) could be heard. Unlike in the VRT sample, in fact more programmes were found in which (at least

<sup>7</sup> The Netherlandic Dutch accent (see Haeseryn 2013) is heard, but also marked Netherlandic Dutch lexis e.g. "opzouten", "bonbons", "maak je een geintje", "wat krijgen we nou", "alsjemenou zeg".

<sup>8</sup> e.g. the pronoun "gij/ge", colloquial lexis "goesting", "content", "poep afkuisen", diminutive "-ke": "Dries is een specialeke", interjections "allez", "amai", -t deletion in "wat is dat".

some) colloquial and/or regional varieties of Belgian Dutch were used, namely in 56% of the analysed VTM sample. In the remaining 44% standard Belgian Dutch was used.

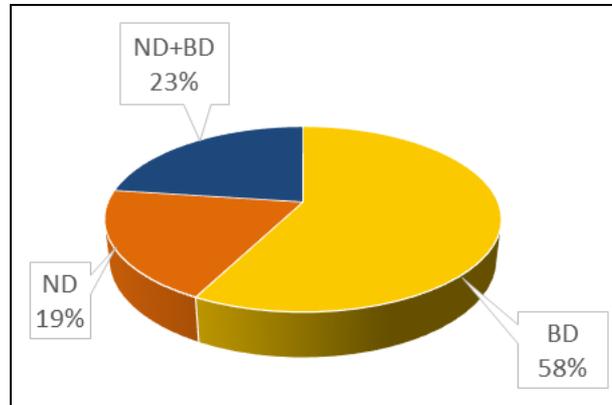


Figure 2: Analysed VTM sample (n=118)

The graphs in Figure 1 and Figure 2 look rather similar visualising that both VRT and VTM expose children in Belgium mainly to their own variety of Dutch. When zooming in on the translated content within both samples, however, the picture changes and more noteworthy differences between both channels become apparent. Table 1 shows that compared to the non-translated content, less Belgian Dutch and more Netherlandic Dutch is used in the analysed translated content of both channels. In the VRT sample, only 66% of the translated programmes were in Belgian Dutch, while 79% of the non-translated programmes were in Belgian Dutch.

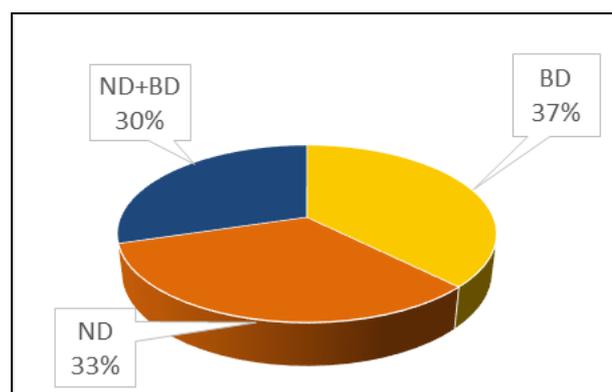


Figure 3: VTM translated programmes (n=64)

The analysed VTM sample, however, revealed that less than half, a mere 37%, of the translated programmes were in Belgian Dutch (see Figure 3 visualising the translated VTM data listed in Table 1). Netherlandic Dutch and the combination of both national varieties is used more often in the translated content com-

pared to the local content, particularly in the VTM sample (33% ND and 30% ND + BD) as Table 1 shows.

non-translated (local)	BD	ND	ND + BD
VRT (n=53)	79%	10%	11%
VTM (n=54)	81%	4%	15%
translated (imported)	BD	ND	ND + BD
VRT (n=50)	66%	16%	18%
VTM (n=64)	37%	33%	30%

Table 1: Local vs. imported translated content

The local Belgian channels of the international commercial broadcasters Nickelodeon and Disney, are often thought to expose children exclusively to Netherlandic Dutch. However, the results of this analysis of an albeit smaller sample (n=69) of Dutch-language Nickelodeon and Disney content, suggest that this is not the case.

The least Netherlandic Dutch was used in the Disney subset. The percentage of productions in which both national varieties were heard was 45.2% and the percentage of productions in which only Netherlandic Dutch was used 51.6%. The aforementioned animated series, *Pyjamahelden* (E-one 2015) was the only series in this sample entirely dubbed in Belgian Dutch (3.2%). Conversely, none of the analysed Nickelodeon programmes were entirely in Belgian Dutch. In 76.3% of the programmes, only Netherlandic Dutch<sup>9</sup> could be heard and in the remaining 23.7% of the programmes, a combination of both Netherlandic and some Belgian Dutch was heard. Here too, usually only a handful of characters, often the main character or their sidekick, are dubbed by Belgian voice actors.

To summarise, the results of this analysis of 290 Dutch-language children's programmes show that particularly the two most popular local children's channels expose Belgian children mainly to their own variety of Dutch. Their content also displays more linguistic diversity within Dutch: Their local content includes standard Belgian Dutch, colloquial Belgian Dutch and at times also regional accents, while the translated content introduces more Netherlandic Dutch into their children's programming. The international commercial broadcasters have started to include some Belgian Dutch in their content; nevertheless, Netherlandic Dutch is still heard predominantly when tuning into Nickelodeon and – albeit to a lesser

<sup>9</sup> Again, this could clearly be heard in the accents, but also Netherlandic Dutch lexis is used (e.g. "mobieltje", "wandkleed", "jack", "(kom) nou", "doei", "jeetje".)

extent – Disney. Traditional television channels, however, are ever more competing with other audiovisual content providers, such as video-on-demand and video sharing platforms. Sociolinguistic research therefore should not be restricted to children’s television, but rather include such media. For instance, the language used by popular *YouTubers*, which is briefly be discussed in the next section.

## 5. The linguistic output of YouTubers in Belgium and Austria

Particularly, younger audiences have increasingly been turning to YouTube for their entertainment. In Dutch-speaking Belgium, 89% of the respondents aged between 16 and 24 indicated in 2018 that they had used this platform in the previous month (IMEC 2018:59). In a similar study conducted in Austria in 2019, 71% of all respondents older than 14 said they had used YouTube in the last four weeks (RTR 2019:16). *YouTubers*, often young people posting amateur videos in line with YouTube’s original motto “Broadcast yourself”, are rather popular. They tend to specialise in a particular sort of content such as comedy, beauty, technology, sports and live gaming. Some of these YouTubers manage to develop a large following. When language is used in such videos, it is usually unscripted, but not necessarily spontaneous speech. Particularly younger YouTubers tend to use their native language in their videos. Interestingly, the most popular YouTubers from Dutch-speaking Belgium come from the linguistic periphery<sup>10</sup>, as a result, they expose their followers to these lesser-known varieties of Dutch.

Some media scholars have started to study this YouTube phenomenon. In Austria, Andreas Gebesmair and his team have analysed the Austrian YouTube channels with the most subscribers. Still, they assume that particularly channels from Germany are popular in Austria (Gebesmair et al. 2017:11). The languages used in the top 100 Austrian YouTube channels in 2017 were English (47%) and German (44%) (idem:22). Disregarding the international commercial channels and the music channels, they found that the language of the remaining channels was, in fact, mainly (Austrian) German (64%). Only 23% of the content consisted of English and 5% of a combination of (varieties of) Austrian German and English (idem:54). In one channel, only Viennese dialect is used and in 7% no language was used at all (idem). Therefore, this study suggests a lot of German is used by popular Austrian YouTubers.

However, some YouTubers use what has been referred to as “YouTube German”. Indeed, the term “YouTube-Deutsch” was mentioned in another Austrian

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<sup>10</sup> “Kastiop” Kacper Przybylski, for instance, is from Limburg and “Acid” Nathan Vandergunst from West Flanders.

report (Safer Internet 2018). In 2018, the then seven most popular German-language YouTube channels in Austria were studied, only two of those were actually from Austria, the others were hosted by German YouTubers. When discussing the challenges for Austrian children watching YouTube, the report mentions language for several reasons. One of those is that YouTubers are said to avoid using marked Austrian German or regional varieties and adapt their German to attract a broader German-speaking audience (Safer Internet 2018:4). This linguistic phenomenon is what they call "YouTube-Deutsch", but needs to be studied in greater detail. Parents complained that their children were copying such linguistic behaviour (idem). The linguistic output of the extremely popular *ViktoriaSarina* channel hosted by two young girls from Graz, for instance, could be described as such. Their German is not marked Austrian German. With 1.67 million subscribers at the time of writing this, their channel ranked 5th in the list of Austrian channels with the most subscribers, the vast majority (80%) of which are located in Germany (Kommaustria 2019:1).

In Belgium too, parents have raised concerns about the influence of YouTube and television on their children's Dutch (e.g. Van Garderen 2019). Some children are said to take over Netherlandic Dutch lexis and pronunciation from popular Dutch YouTubers and dubbed animation series. This phenomenon is not new, however, it tends to disappear in primary school. Dutch national television (NOS) recently reported that Belgian children were very fond of Dutch YouTubers in particular (NOS Jeugdjournaal 2019a). Belgian YouTubers using Dutch in their videos rarely have more than half a million subscribers. By way of illustration, Nathan Vandergunst, is the most popular YouTuber from Flanders. His channel had around 415.000 subscribers at the end of 2019, but more than half of those are based in the Netherlands (Droeven & Grymonprez 2019). Vandergunst also explained that he started to adapt his Dutch to cater to this Netherlandic Dutch audience (NOS Jeugdjournaal 2019b). This could be the Dutch counterpart of the aforementioned "YouTube Deutsch" phenomenon that needs to be studied further. In any case, the Belgian journalists who interviewed him were struck by "his strange accent" [author's translation] (Droeven & Grymonprez 2019). They put it this way: "On YouTube, and while speaking with us, he uses a mixture of Netherlandic Dutch, West-Flemish dialect and General Standard Dutch [author's translation]" (idem).

## 6. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

The media landscape is ever expanding. Children nowadays have access to a

wide range of different global and local media and are no longer restricted to just a few television channels. This study of children's media (including YouTube) shows that, as a result, the linguistic output children are exposed to may vary greatly. While imported foreign media can broaden a child's horizon, their translation rarely reflects the linguistic diversity that is part of their everyday life. Non-native accents or regional varieties, for instance, are rarely used in dubbed television. However, such outdated translation practises may slowly be changing in some countries to reflect more linguistic variety. The Swedish public service broadcaster, for instance, actively looks for dubbing actors from different parts of Sweden and non-native speakers to offer a wider range of different accents in their children's programmes. While the language of audiovisual fiction, of course, will never be *natural* language, the above analysis of the Dutch-language programmes shows that local productions and co-productions reflect linguistic diversity better than the more conservative dubbed productions. This is one of the reasons why it is important to continue to invest in local content and distribute it through different platforms to counterbalance the influx of imported dubbed programmes from international content providers.

Some dubbing studios have started to work with voice actors from different parts of the Dutch language area. However, in such cases often an attempt is made to create a "geographically neutral" translation of the dubbing script: Lexis, grammar and syntax is used that is not marked for geographic region. Sometimes editors are hired to remove Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch features from the scripts. The reasoning behind this is that, as a result, the translations can more easily be distributed all over the language area. Yet, in the Dutch language area, dubbing actors are quickly identified as speakers of a given national variety, but often only based on phonetic and phonological features of their speech. Speakers in the other part of the language area are not expected to be sufficiently familiar with the other variety. However not exposing them to all of this variety's linguistic features (including lexis) reinforces this lack of familiarity, while exposing them to it would enable a valuable language contact situation. These "geographically neutral" scripts need to be analysed further. Similarly, more research needs to be done into this rather similar "YouTube language" phenomenon in which YouTubers from non-dominant parts of pluricentric language areas adapt their language to cater to speakers of the dominant variety. This is the reason why this needs to be studied, as well as their attitude towards their own non-dominant variety. Children's media can play a role in helping children of both newcomers, and native speakers to further develop their language skills. Arguably, this would call

for an exposure to clearly enunciated standard language usage. While this can indeed help in the language acquisition process, still, children would also benefit greatly from hearing more linguistic diversity in television programmes fostering openness towards other varieties. Children from the dominant part of pluricentric language areas, for instance, will come into contact with other varieties of their language and realise their language is not limited to their own country or region. Moreover, they will become acquainted with other varieties and may even gain a passive knowledge of those. Similarly, the language attitude of children from a non-dominant part, may improve when they hear their variety is also used by their heroes on television. In this way, it can help them to become confident language users, but most importantly, children's media would also become more *linguistically* inclusive.

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