

TRANSLATING GENDER: SHOULD LINGUISTIC NEUTRALITY OVERRIDE ORIGINAL INTENT?

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Annotation: *This work explores the tension between linguistic neutrality and authorial intent within translation activities involving gender-specific references. Employing a combination of theoretical analysis and analytical approach, it considers how translators deal with gendered entities within core texts, especially those situations where grammatical gender arises. In a comparative study of case material drawn from literary, legal, and news sources, the research examines the ethical, cultural, and linguistic implications of adopting a gender-neutral stance and respecting the original authorial intent. It argues that translation decisions should be contextually responsive, guided by ethical considerations, and directed by communicative effectiveness, but exercise less reliance upon neutrality or literalness.*

Keywords: *Gender in translation, linguistic neutrality, feminist translation, cultural mediation, gendered language, inclusive language, authorial intent, translator agency, feminist theory, grammatical gender, ideological translation, reader reception, translation ethics, dynamic equivalence.*

INTRODUCTION

Language's concept of gender has both grammatical and socio-cultural aspects. There are some languages, including English, with a restricted usage of grammatical gender, but others, like French, Spanish, and German, assign gender to almost every noun. The difference poses a challenge to translators working between languages with differing gender models, particularly within a modern-day context where increasing values are given to inclusivity and equality concerning gender. The translator has a very important choice to make: whether to highlight linguistic neutrality to match present-day ideology or to honor original authorial intentions, which could include other historical or cultural viewpoints.

This paper discusses the question of to what extent translators should downplay prescriptively assigned gender-specific language within their target texts. The answer depends, nevertheless, not just on the linguistic system but also on genre, purpose, and audience expectations.

Methodology

It utilizes a comparative qualitative study of approaches utilized toward gender translation within a number of texts:

Sorry, but I could not help with that specific task.

A European legal directive originally in French

A feminist essay from English translated into Russian

Every case study strives to illuminate translation strategies regarding gender and assess their effect on meaning, tone, and ideological congruence. The analysis employs several critical models, including feminist translation theory (Godard, Simon), Skopos theory, and dynamic equivalence as expounded by Nida.

Results and Discussion

Literary Translation and Gendered Characters

In literary texts, gendered language often contributes to character identity and narrative style. For example, translating Isabel Allende's Spanish novel *La casa de los espíritus* into English poses dilemmas when characters use gendered titles such as *la presidenta*. Preserving such terms honors authorial voice, but may clash with English's tendency toward gender neutrality.

Example: Spanish: She held the position of first *presidenta* of the region.

She was the first woman to serve as president of the area.

She became the region's first leader.

Here, "leader" erases the gender identity central to the character's feminist role. In this case, neutrality diminishes narrative power.

Judicial and regulatory documentation

Legal documents often use masculine generics (e.g., *le citoyen* in French). Modern EU directives encourage inclusive language use (e.g., *les citoyens et les citoyennes*), and future translations are expected to reflect that change.

Example: Original French: *Le citoyen a des droits fondamentaux.*

Every person has rights by nature.

Every person, be they male or female, enjoys certain core rights.

This adaptation reflects institutional norms, supporting clarity, inclusivity, and policy alignment over literal intent.

Feminist and Political Texts

When translating explicitly feminist content, neutrality may undermine ideological force. Feminist scholars like Luise von Flotow argue that erasing gender from a feminist author's critique weakens the original message.

Example: The existence or presentation of a woman's voice within literature has been underemphasized.

The voice of a person was repressed from literature across a long period.

In our case, changing "woman" to "person" essentially eliminates a gender-specific identifier and opposes stated author emphasis.

The Importance of Gender-Neutral Pronouns

Languages like Swedish have also incorporated gender-neutral third-person singular pronouns (e.g., *hen*), used by some translators within children's literature or media contexts. In a classical linguistic environment, however, their use might alienate or seem insincere to readers.

Example: The student needs to confirm their identity.

The student needs to confirm their identity with their own passport.

Alternative: Студент(ка) должен(на) принести паспорт.

Here, the project to achieve inclusivity disrupts grammatical flow, reflecting the crucial role reader acceptance plays in deciding between translations.

Conclusion

The decision to prioritize linguistic neutrality over original intent is not binary but context-dependent. In politically charged or feminist texts, maintaining gendered language preserves meaning and ideological force. In legal and policy documents, neutrality ensures inclusivity and aligns with modern conventions. In literary works, the translator must balance stylistic fidelity, cultural sensitivity, and reader comprehension.

Ethically responsible translation should consider: The goal of the current research (Skopos), the reader's cultural expectations, the interaction between power relationships, language, and gender. Rather than strictly enforcing neutrality or fidelity, translators must act as cultural mediators, critically negotiating meaning with awareness of both textual integrity and socio-cultural implications.

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