

# Research on Gender Neutral Language in Translation Science

6 September 2024

A woman in athletic wear is running on a paved path in a modern architectural space. The walls are composed of curved, metallic-looking panels in shades of blue and red. The scene is brightly lit, creating strong shadows and highlights.

# Presenters

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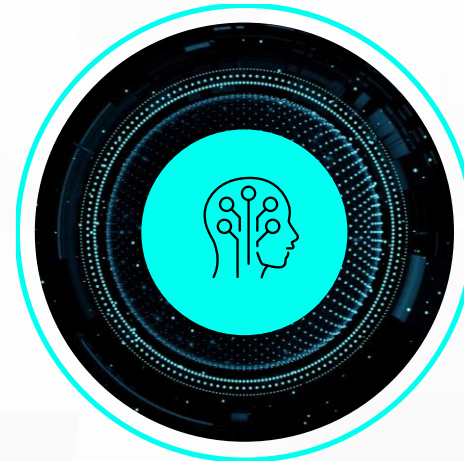


# RWS Regulated Industries - Life Sciences

Full suite of language services and solutions



Translation Services



AI technology



Consulting

# RWS – Linguistic Validation

## Translation and Cultural Adaptation of Clinical Outcome Assessments (COAs)



### Harmonization

Ensuring conceptual equivalence and source text and translations;  
Ensuring cultural appropriateness of translations



### Cognitive Debriefing

Testing of translations among the representative target population samples



### COA Validation and Thought Leadership

COA-related consultation services and COA best-practices research

# Role of Gender Neutral Language at RWS

Moving COA development and validation forward

Prioritizing the patient perspective

Translation Review

Research



# Importance of Gender Neutral Language in Translation

## Accuracy and Consistency of Translations

**Use of gender-neutral language improves translatability of COAs**

**And increases conceptual consistency of translations across different languages**

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## Patient Perspective

Patient-reported outcome measures should prioritize patient understanding, relatability, and comfort to maximize engagement and data quality

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# Examples in our work – PRO wording and translations (French)

## 2. Fatigue

Circle the number that best describes the overall level of fatigue due to your psoriatic arthritis you have experienced during the last week:

Select the number that best describes the overall level of fatigue due to your psoriatic arthritis you have experienced during the last week:

No fatigue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Totally exhausted
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## 2. Fatigue

Entourez le chiffre qui correspond le mieux à la fatigue causée par votre rhumatisme psoriasique au cours des 8 derniers jours :

Sélectionnez le chiffre qui correspond le mieux à la fatigue causée par votre rhumatisme psoriasique au cours des 8 derniers jours :

Aucune fatigue	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complètement épuisé(e)
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# Examples in our work – PRO wording and translations (Russian)

Over the past 4 weeks I have found my Lupus makes me	
20. Resentful	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> A good bit of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Never
21. So fed up nothing can cheer me up	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> A good bit of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Never
22. Sad	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> A good bit of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Never
23. Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> A good bit of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Never
24. Worried	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> A good bit of the time

На протяжении последних 4 недель, я заметил(-а), что заболевание волчанкой делает меня	
20. Обидчивым(-ой)	<input type="checkbox"/> Постоянно <input type="checkbox"/> Почти всегда <input type="checkbox"/> Достаточно часто <input type="checkbox"/> Изредка <input type="checkbox"/> Никогда
21. Настолько раздраженным(-ой), что меня ничто не радует	<input type="checkbox"/> Постоянно <input type="checkbox"/> Почти всегда <input type="checkbox"/> Достаточно часто <input type="checkbox"/> Изредка <input type="checkbox"/> Никогда
22. Печальным(-ой)	<input type="checkbox"/> Постоянно <input type="checkbox"/> Почти всегда <input type="checkbox"/> Достаточно часто <input type="checkbox"/> Изредка <input type="checkbox"/> Никогда
23. Беспокойным(-ой)	<input type="checkbox"/> Постоянно <input type="checkbox"/> Почти всегда <input type="checkbox"/> Достаточно часто <input type="checkbox"/> Изредка <input type="checkbox"/> Никогда
24. Озабоченным(-ой)	<input type="checkbox"/> Постоянно <input type="checkbox"/> Почти всегда



# We are positioned to move the Gender Neutral Language needle

- Leaders in the linguistic validation space
- Many and strong relationships with COA developers
- Little existing research or discussion of this topic in the area
- Suite of **COA validation services** designed to influence COA development / revision with the patient perspective, and GNL, in mind



# COA Validation Services: Face Validity Assessments

Face Validation encompasses expert review of draft or new COAs by survey research analysts, and pilot-testing with subjects or patients, to assess comprehensibility, feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, and the clarity and appropriateness of the language used.

Typical goals for face validity assessments are to:

- Ensure questions are unambiguous, response sets are well constructed
- Remove double negatives / double-barreled questions, etc. to ensure clarity
- Eliminate technical terminology / jargon
- Make revision recommendations for developer input and approval
- Recommend gender neutral language where appropriate
- Pilot testing (with patients or lay people) is an optional component of Face Validation (and Translatability assessments)

# COA Validation Services: Concept Elaboration Guide (CEG) Creation

- Concept Elaboration Guides provide guidance on COA wording, definitions, and translation approaches for linguists and interviewers during the linguistic validation process
  - This document is created prior to initial forward translation of the COA
- CEGs serve a triple purpose of:
  - helping linguists better understand COAs intent and meaning during forward translation and harmonization
  - providing insight to cognitive interviewers about the intent of each item
  - providing opportunities for developers to discuss and elaborate on their intended concepts
- CEG creation also provides an early opportunity for analysis of conceptual structure, wording, and formatting of a COA
  - So that specific conceptual issues, known wording ambiguities, or translatability problems can be discussed with the developer prior to validation work or better-managed during validation work
  - CEGs are a feature of and support all COA validation services, serving as an initial engagement with COAs that can inform and guide subsequent steps

# COA Validation Services: Translatability Assessments

A qualitative process of review by linguists and COA professionals designed to:

- Assess the conceptual clarity and translatability of draft COAs
- With a review of the draft COA by linguists specializing in COA localization and translation from multiple language backgrounds ( 8 – 12 different languages or language types)
- Determine if concepts of the original English source can be adequately captured in translations, with recommendations on how to fix source wording or approach translation with problematic source text
- Creation of a comprehensive, developer-reviewed and approved CEG that accompanies the COA for its lifetime

Ongoing Research Topic

Linguistic Challenges  
and Solutions  
for Gender-  
Neutral COA  
Translations

# Gendered Language Type (GLT) Categories

Language Type	Rules
<b>Genderless</b>	No grammatical gender – pronouns and nouns have no gender
<b>Natural Gender</b>	Nouns are mostly gender-neutral and gender-specific pronouns include more than feminine/masculine, e.g. neuter gender
<b>Grammatical Gender</b>	Pronouns and nouns have grammatical gender and must agree

Classified by European Parliament, 2018: GNL\_Guidelines\_EN.pdf (europa.eu)

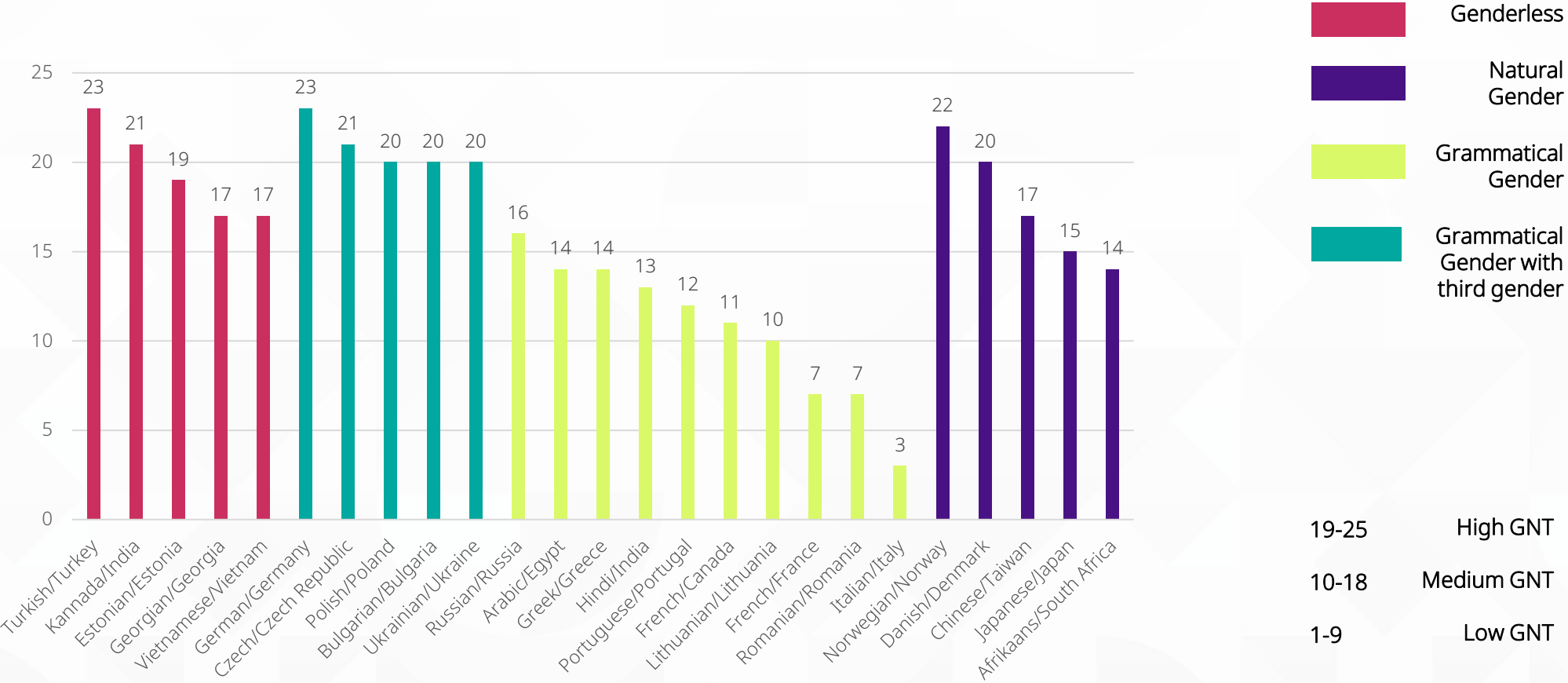
# Target Languages by GLT Categories

Language/Region	Gendered Language Type
Arabic/Egypt	Grammatical
Bulgarian/Bulgaria	Grammatical
Czech/Czech Republic	Grammatical
French/Canada	Grammatical
French/France	Grammatical
German/Germany	Grammatical
Greek/Greece	Grammatical
Hindi/India	Grammatical
Italian/Italy	Grammatical
Lithuanian/Lithuania	Grammatical
Polish/Poland	Grammatical
Portuguese/Portugal	Grammatical
Romanian/Romania	Grammatical
Russian/Russia	Grammatical
Ukrainian/Ukraine	Grammatical

Language/Region	Gendered Language Type
Estonian/Estonia	Genderless
Georgian/Georgia	Genderless
Kannada/India	Genderless
Turkish/Turkey	Genderless
Vietnamese/Vietnam	Genderless

Language/Region	Gendered Language Type
Afrikaans/South Africa	Natural
Chinese/Taiwan	Natural
Danish/Denmark	Natural
Japanese/Japan	Natural
Norwegian/Norway	Natural

# GLT and Gender-Neutral Translatability (GNT) Score





# Common Suggestions for Grammatical Gender Type Languages\*

Original text	Suggestion	Applied Suggestion
No problems washing or dressing themselves	Use both feminine and masculine forms separated by a slash	No problems washing or dressing herself/himself
	Avoid the use of gendered terms	No problems self-washing or self-dressing

\*Note: Translator suggestions for French, Italian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Polish, Hindi, and Russian.

**Grammatical gendered target languages may pose the greatest linguistic challenge for gender-neutrality in COA translation.**

Have we received  
any unwanted  
feedback? Yes...

Attitudes  
Towards Gender  
Neutral Language in  
COA Translations



# A recent Russian linguist's feedback...



“... it seems the reviewer does not understand that there is a difference between the Russian and the English grammar rules... Russian is not gender neutral per definition - even the verbs have gender. And it is common knowledge that the document is written in masculine but refers to both genders. Theoretically the endings may be added, but it makes the document inconvenient for reading, and in our case the text clarity is very important.”

# Samples of previously identified codes

Code	Definition	Example
TRENDING	Translator sees a pattern in discussion of the GNL; consistent occurrence of topic discussion	<i>"there are <b>discussions</b> going on"</i> <i>"<b>hotly debated</b> topic"</i> <i>"in the media"</i>
SOCIAL PROGRESSION	Translator notes movement towards a change (can be change in progress); moving towards gender neutrality in the target population (not individuals)	<i>"the terminology is still <b>evolving</b>"</i> <i>"studying to add a non-gendered pronoun"</i>
SOCIAL HESITATION	Translator notes hesitation towards a change (can be change in progress); moving against gender neutrality in the target population (not individuals)	<i>"gender neutral culture is <b>not popular</b>"</i> <i>"very sensitive"</i> <i>"Don't delude yourselves"</i>
OPINION	Translator expressed a <u>negative</u> opinion about GNL without providing a reason or linguistic explanation	<i>"a sore in the eye in any text"</i> <i>"completely pointless"</i> <i>"I don't see how it can improve healthcare questionnaires"</i> <i>"is a nuisance"</i>

# Samples of previously identified codes

Code	Definition	Example
ACCEPTABILITY	Translator refers to GNL as officially and/or socially approved; GNL as normal in the target population	<i>"gender neutrality is the <b>norm</b>"</i>
RECEPTIVITY	Translator expresses positive reception; agrees that language can achieve neutrality in the target population	<i>"It is <b>great to see such initiatives</b>"</i> <i>"<b>very important issue</b>"</i> <i>"building guidelines for inclusiveness"</i>
DEMOGRAPHICS	Translator mentioned age, ethnicity, nationality, or gender; translation experience, years in field, education; also difference between groups of people	<i>Nationality versus speaker group, Indigenous</i> <i>"<b>old Ukie cowboy's ramblings</b>"</i> <i>"<b>silly Americans</b> who always try to stay politically correct"</i>

# Incidental findings



**Conflicting degrees  
of intention and  
engagement**



**Surprising displays  
of negative  
opinions**



**Uncertainty of GNL  
definitions and  
purpose**

# How can academics or other practitioners help overcome these challenges?

Produce  
comprehensive  
guidelines

Champion the  
attitude shift



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# Thank you

We look forward to continuing  
our conversation





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