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## **Translator Attitudes Towards Gender-Neutral Language in Clinical Outcomes Assessments**

RWS Regulated Industries (RWS) is a leading Language Service Provider (LSP) that specializes in Life Sciences translation. One particularly niche market within Life Sciences translation is Linguistic Validation (LV), a rigorous methodology by which clinical trial questionnaires are translated and culturally adapted for participants in various countries/locales. These questionnaires are known as Clinical Outcomes Assessments (COAs). In the context of clinical drug trials, COAs are used to gather subjective patient feedback regarding perceptions of their treatment, symptoms, and quality of life (FDA, 2020). Therefore, COAs are important research tools that are patient-centric and enable patients to share their experiences through their own reports (Walton et al., 2015).

Few existing COAs in English model gender-neutral language, and there is limited industry guidance. In the United States, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided a 'preferred terms' guide for general communication documents, but there is limited guidance from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a federal regulatory agency. However, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) does provide suggestions on gender-fair language (EMA, 2022). Considering the lack of industry guidance and complexity of gender in different languages and cultures, our research aimed to understand the attitudes of professional translators of gender-neutral pronouns across different languages. Our goal is to provide recommendations that improve data collection and the patient-experience for diverse individuals from all gender identities.

Our on-going larger research project focuses on the linguistics challenges of gender-neutral translation (GNT). We gathered feedback from 125 professional Life Sciences translators across 25 different languages. They were asked via email to complete a brief survey that evaluated the grammatical and stylistic capacity to use gender-neutral pronouns in their language. In gathering the survey responses, we noticed a number of translators provided additional feedback that expressed an array of attitudes towards the use of gender-neutral pronouns. In this exploratory paper we systematically analyzed the unsolicited feedback within survey responses and translator emails using Grounded Theory (Singh & Estefan, 2018). Using this subset of qualitative data taken from our ongoing research, we gained insight into attitudes and prevailing discourses on gender-neutral language in translation.

We analyzed email and survey responses from translators of 25 languages, in which translators of 15 languages expressed various opinions of translating gender-neutral language from English into their native language. Using an inductive coding approach (or ground-up approach) informed by Grounded Theory, we derived 7 codes that specifically related to translator attitudes and opinions. In inductive coding, a researcher's objective is to derive codes from the data. This means the researcher does not approach the data with preconceived or clearly defined codes. The researcher identifies salient extracts (e.g., words or phrases) that capture the emerging narrative in the data. By looking at how patterns from the extracts emerge and coalesce, the researcher can identify recurring themes. The themes are iteratively refined into codes and categories, with the researcher eventually developing a codebook. In this particular research, the codes and categories reveal translators' positive and negative attitudes towards the implementation of gender-neutral language in translation of COAs.

We grouped the feedback from professional translators by language, and further by language families. (See Table 1). The preliminary analysis revealed conflicting degrees of tension and engagement regarding gender-neutral language in translation. Some translators overtly expressed enthusiasm and *receptivity* ( $n=11$ ) that our company extended an interest in how gender neutrality is achieved in translation. Some translators recognized this as a *trending* ( $n=11$ ) topic in the translation industry and a willingness for *social progression* ( $n=5$ ). In contrast, other translators expressed *social hesitation* ( $n=11$ ) and a negative *opinion* ( $n=28$ ) toward gender-neutral translation. Interestingly, sociolinguistic variables or *demographics* ( $n=6$ ) also factor into language attitudes. For example, some translators who expressed hesitation toward trends in gender-neutral language specifically distinguished between the attitudes of native and non-native speakers.

Language family	Language (number of comments with opinion codes)	Subtotal
Asian	Chinese – Simplified (China) (2) Chinese – Simplified (Singapore) (1) Japanese (2)	5
Romance	French – France (9) French – Switzerland (1) Spanish (3)	13
Slavic	Czech (1) Bulgarian (1) Ukrainian (2)	4
Germanic	Danish (5) German (6) Norwegian (3)	14
Semitic	Arabic - Israel (1) Arabic - Egypt (2)	3
Baltic	Latvian (2)	2
Finno-Uric	Estonian (2)	2
Total		43

*Table 1:* Breakdown of comments with attitudinal codes by language family and by language

As our research on the acceptability of gender-neutral translation continues, we hope to build on these early findings on attitudes toward usage of gender-neutral language in translations. As we grow our response set, the codebook will become more robust and offer added insights into the use of gender-neutral language. This proposal is an initial output in our GNT research aspirations and speaks to the prevailing attitudes of our sample on the usage of gender-neutral language. The goals for this research are both internal and external. Internally, outcomes of our research will inform our translation methodologies (Brandt et al., 2020) and how RWS approaches gender-neutral language in COA translations. Externally, we hope to influence the formation of unified guidelines on gender neutral translations that can be adopted across the field. In order to successfully achieve these goals, it is vital to take into consideration the opinions of those at the core of the industry.

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