Gender-inclusive language in interpreting & translation

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Language and Gender

6th September 2024

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About me

- Conference interpreter and researcher based in Brussels

- Experience taught me the importance of being able to use inclusive language in interpreting

- PhD focuses on gender-inclusive language in simultaneous interpreting

- Development of CPD for interpreters and translators, including the Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies in Scotland (2022) and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (2024)

- My work intersects academic research and practical implementation thanks to my professional experience
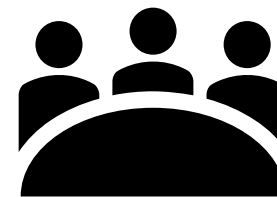
Language provision services: definitions

- Translation: rendering the written word from one language to another

- Audiovisual translation: subtitling, supertitling, etc.

- Interpreting: rendering spoken/signed languages from one language to another

- Simultaneous interpreting: 'live' interpreting

- Public service (*bilateral*) interpreting: facilitates conversation between two people, often in medical, legal or immigration settings

Inclusive language in language provision

- Gender-inclusive language has become a hot topic
- Language service providers have to accurately represent the source text / speaker while adhering to clients' wishes
- Some argue that context or language pair can blur these lines and that inclusivity is not a translator or interpreter's remit
- Others emphasise the importance of preparedness: you are bound by ethics to be faithful to the source speech / text
- This could mean being prepared to use gender-fair forms
- Multilingual institutions have also published guidelines showing the extent to which gender-inclusive language is becoming more mainstream

Problems & Challenges

How can they be resolved?

Simultaneous interpreting

- Simultaneous interpreting is a unique communicative setting

- It is extremely cognitively challenging due to the multitasking required (Korpal, 2016)

- Interpreters have to listen, understand, process, speak and monitor their output simultaneously (Hervais-Adelman and Babcock, 2020)

- Therefore, it could be assumed that using gender-inclusive language would not be possible in this mode of interpreting without sacrificing the overall quality of the interpretation (European Parliament, 2018)

# Public service interpreting

- The importance of gender-inclusive language in such settings cannot be overstated

- Trans and non-binary people could be misgendered because the interpreter is not prepared (Robaey et al., 2023)

- There is usually an existing power dynamic between service users (i.e. a doctor and patient, a police officer and witness) and misgendering could increase feelings of unease (Munyangeyo et al., 2016)

Interpreting solutions

- Make part of interpreting preparation if necessary

- Don't rely on using feminine and masculine forms

- Create glossaries of collective, group and epicene nouns relevant to the specialisation

- Practice in every-day conversational settings to build muscle memory
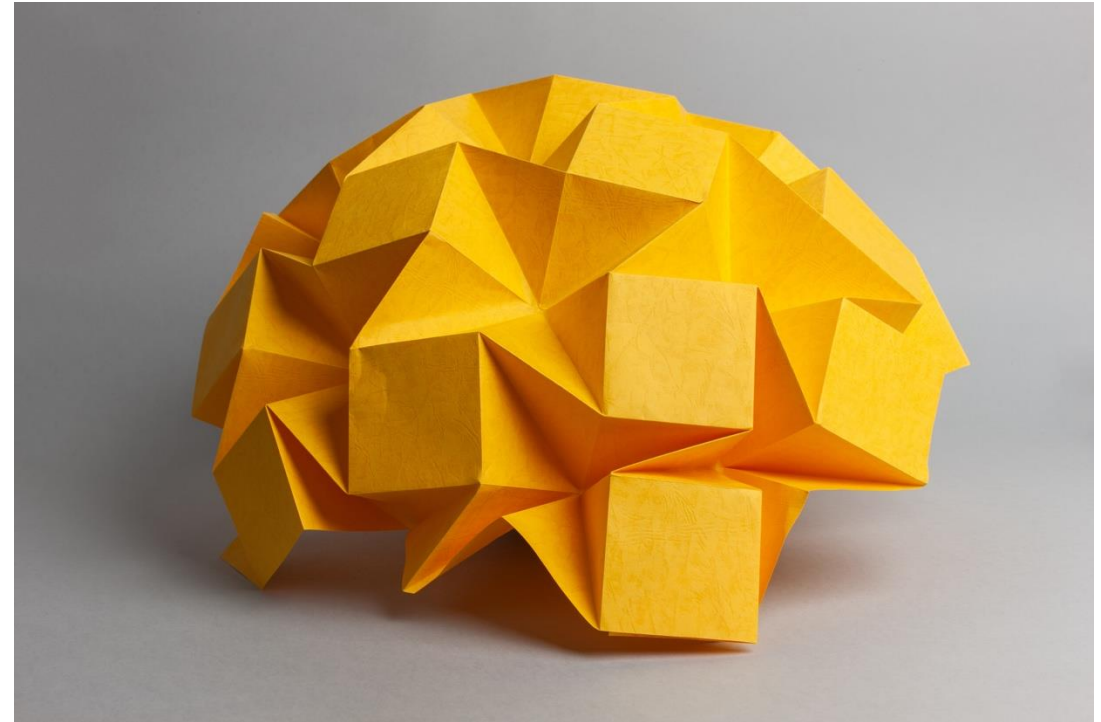
Translation

- There are existing training modules and guidelines for translators

- It could be said to be more straightforward as translation has fewer time constraints

- However, translators can be given word counts, and certain languages are already longer than others

- Concerns have also been raised about the accessibility of inclusive language in its written forms (Manesse, 2022)

- Machine translation also needs to be considered as it can hold gender biases (Vanmassenhove, 2024)

Audiovisual translation

- Audiovisual translation has really come into its own in recent years given the omnipresence of screens and video content (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007)

- Globalisation has also seen a greater consumption of international TV series, made accessible by dubbing or audiovisual translation

- The translator is bound by strict time and space constraints (ibid.)

- With an increase in the representation of non-binary characters on TV, gender neutral language in subtitles has never been more pertinent (Abu Tair et al., 2024)
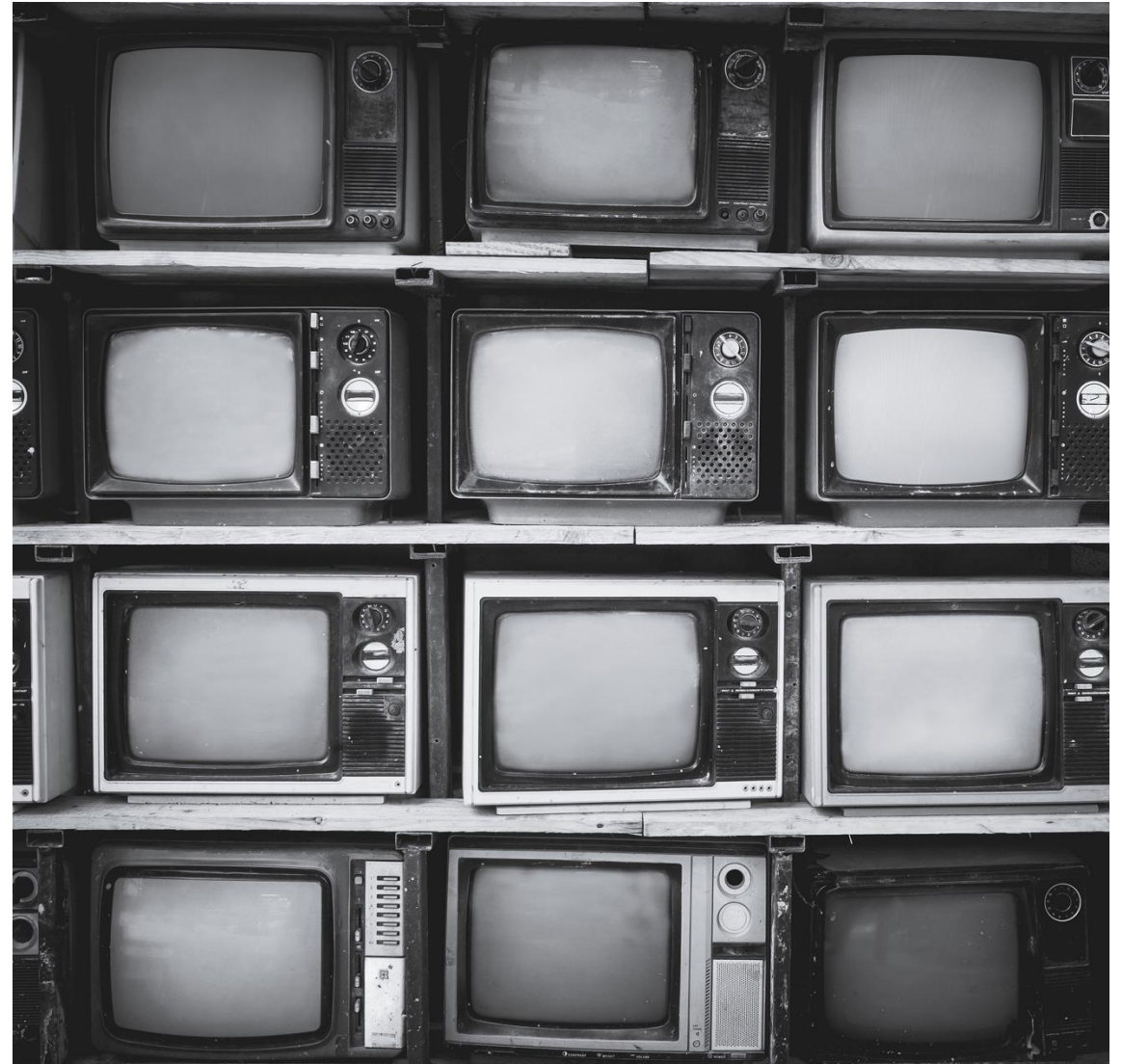
Translation solutions

- Read existing texts or subtitles

- Access online resources or attend workshops

- Follow translators who use inclusive language on social media

- Get playful with syntax

- Using one form of inclusive language consistently can make texts quite heavy, so try mixing it up if possible

- Inclusivity = accessibility (don't let inclusivity get in the way of legibility!)

Interpreting and translation

- There is seemingly a lack of willingness

- Despite research and discussions, there appears to be a lack of awareness

- Interpreters and translators are concerned about audience perception

- Access to resources is fairly limited, especially when it comes to working with gender languages
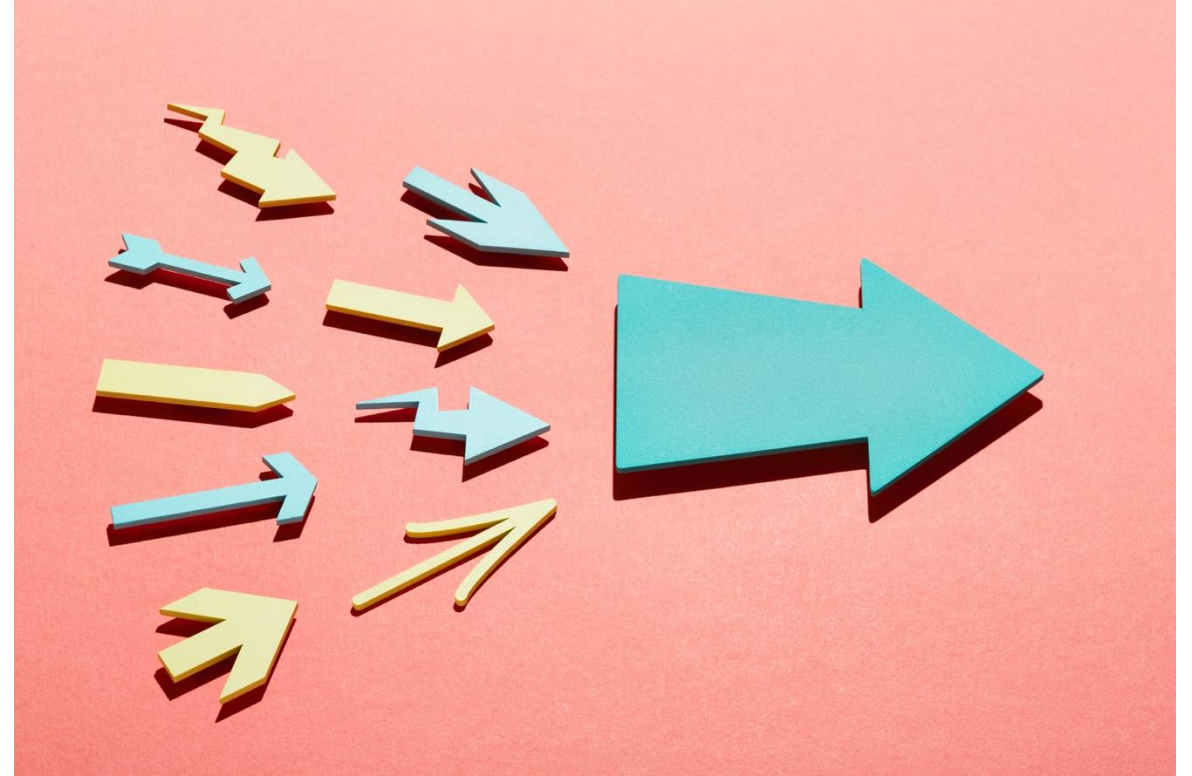
General solutions

- Liaise with the client if possible

- Get creative

- Practice to build habit

- Leave assumptions at the door

- Don't rely on stereotypes

- Don't let inclusivity get in the way of precision and accuracy!

Moving forward

Research and practical implementation

Translation

- **Sausan Abu Tair et al.** (Arabic): the representation of non-binary people in Arabic subtitles

- **Erika Kadlčíková** (French): audience perceptions of gender-inclusive subtitles

- **Maria Muelas-Gil** (Spanish): focussed on gender stereotypes in machine translation

- **Andrea Piergentili** (Italian): investigating gender exclusive language in machine translation

- **(R)évolution inclusive** (French): organise workshops and share resources about gender-inclusive language for translators

- **Alicja Tokarska** (Polish): creating gender-inclusive language resources for translators based on questionnaire responses

Interpreting

- **Igor Facchini** (English/French/Italian): researches gender-inclusive language use by conference interpreters

- **Begoña Martínez-Pagán** (Spanish): organises inclusive language training sessions for conference interpreters

- **Laura Robaey** (Dutch/German): investigates gender-sensitive language use in public service interpreting

- **Charlotte Schinnerl** (German): wrote a paper about gender-inclusive language use by conference interpreters at the European Parliament

My research findings (French)

Most interpreters are aware of inclusive language

Still used by a minority but requests and actual use are increasing

Interpreters should be able to use gender-inclusive language without a notable impact on their performance

Inclusive forms tend to be used alongside 'exclusive' language

It is an issue that interests conference interpreters

The narrative should shift : inclusive language is not *activism* in interpreting but a *style* that is increasingly being requested

ITI training

The training will address the following identified challenges…

- Time constraints and cognitive load
- The role of the interpreter / translator
- Aesthetics
- Audience perception
- Building habits
- Addressing the issue with clients / service users

Institute of Translation and Interpreting

Conclusion

Research needs to be practically implemented, not confined to papers and academic conferences

This means creating dialogue and working together

There needs to be a clear narrative shift when it comes to inclusive language

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Thank you for listening!

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