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Translating non-binary coming-out reports: Gender-fair language strategies and use in news articles

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ABSTRACT

With the increased visibility of non-binary people, more and more strategies have been proposed for gender-fair language in languages that have grammatical gender, such as German. Gender-fair is used as an umbrella term for gender-inclusive, the explicit inclusion of all genders beyond the binary, and gender-neutral strategies, which omit any gender-specific references in language. An in-depth overview of these strategies has not yet been provided and very few studies analyse their use. This article proposes an in-depth introduction to gender-fair language strategies in German and Italian and their use in news articles. To this end, we compiled a corpus of news articles on the coming out of Demi Lovato as non-binary in both languages, which were all based on and translated from Lovato's original Twitter post in English. To investigate translation strategies for gender-fair language, we analyse which gender-fair language strategy was applied to translate the tweet. Furthermore, the use and frequency of gender-fair pronouns, nouns, and adjectives were investigated in each article. Results show that misgendering is still very common, especially in Italian. A dominant strategy was not found in German or in Italian; a mix of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive forms was used instead.

1. Introduction

Translation studies (TS) has long paid attention to gender issues (von Flotow 1991; von Flotow 2016; Nissen 2002; Sabato and Perri 2020; Burton 2010; Spurlin 2014). Paradigms such as feminist translation and, later, queer translation have emerged to address different gender-related topics, such as sexist tropes in translation theory (Chamberlain 1988), the work of feminist and queer translators, the translation of sexist, homophobic and anti-LGBTQIA+ texts, the translation of feminist and queer texts (von Flotow 1991; von Flotow 2016; Burton 2010; Démont 2017), and issues arising from the translation between languages of different grammatical structures in representing gender (Nissen 2002; Di Sabato and Perri 2020).

In recent years, the visibility of non-binary people has increased. Celebrities such as Sam Smith and Demi Lovato have come out as non-binary and trans (binary or not) characters are featured in TV series, such as *Sex Education* (Nunn 2019-…). Accordingly, gender-fair language strategies to include all genders in discourse have been proposed for some languages (e.g. Hornscheidt 2012; Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021). English is a notional gender language, with lexical gender, such as *boy* and *girl*, derivational nouns, such as *waiter and waitress*, and gender-specific pronouns. The predominant strategy that has emerged is the use of *singular*

they and gender-neutral nouns for non-binary individuals, people whose gender is unknown, and also when the author deliberately chooses not to reveal the gender of a person. In languages with grammatical gender, such as German and Italian, each noun, determiner, pronoun, etc., is gender-inflected. It is therefore more difficult to find a common gender-fair language strategy.

Similar to previous studies on gender-fair translation into Polish (Misiek 2020) and Croatian (Šincek 2020), in this article we present an overview of gender-fair language strategies put forward by researchers and/or the non-binary community for German and Italian. We also present an empirical analysis of media texts on Demi Lovato's coming out as non-binary as a case study for the use of gender-fair language and representation of non-binary individuals. Even though the texts analysed are not translations in the traditional sense, they represent an instance of transcultural communication. All news articles in our corpus start from Demi Lovato's Twitter post[1], which the article's authors actively translated, e.g. by using the singular they and adjectives that by definition need to be gender-inflected in Italian. Through descriptive statistics, we then summarised how often strategies for gender-fair language were applied in different word classes, that is, pronouns, nouns, and adjectives. The aim of this study is to discuss and investigate the present situation on gender-fair communication and provide a case study across languages and cultures. Our findings confirm that, unfortunately, non-binary people are not referred to consistently or necessarily correctly, with a higher percentage of misgendering in Italian than in German. This has implications on both the social, i.e. awareness of non-binary genders, and the personal level, i.e. the psychological impact of misgendering.

2. Preliminaries

As the theoretical foundation of the present study, we briefly introduce the interplay of gender and language, gender-fair language and some insights into feminist and queer translation as a field closely related to gender-fair translation.

2.1 Gender and Language

When gender is used in natural language to refer to human beings, it simultaneously refers to the extra-linguistic reality, i.e. to their gender identity (Corbett 1991). Linguistic structures differ greatly across languages, which for gender can be categorised into (i) grammatical gender, (ii) notional gender, and (iii) genderless languages (Stahlberg *et al*. 2007; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013). In (i), e.g. German and Italian, each noun has a grammatical gender and the assignment is mainly based on formal criteria (Corbett 1991; Comrie 1999). Grammatical gender is defined by Hockett (1958, 231) as "classes of nouns reflected in the behaviour of associated words." Accordingly, other parts of speech, such as

adjectives and articles, must be inflected. In (ii), e.g. English and Swedish, gender is mainly expressed in pronouns and only sometimes in nouns, especially with reference to kinship (e.g. mother/father) or professions. In both (i) and (ii), gender assignment for human referents is mostly based on the extra-linguistic reality (Corbett 1991; Comrie 1999). Linguistic representation of non-binary people can thus be challenging in European languages, since they mainly have binary gender systems (Deutscher 2011). In (iii), e.g. Hungarian or Polish, gender is not expressed, with few exceptions, such as references to kinship.

2.2 Gender-Fair Language

Since second wave feminism, attention has been paid to the expressions of gender in language (von Flotow 2016; Kramer 2019). Amongst others, feminists focused on the use of male generics that, as shown by research in the field of cognitive linguistics (see e.g. Stahlberg and Sczesny 2001; Sczesny *et al.* 2016), reinforce discrimination and women's invisibility (Kramer 2019). As a result, different strategies for language as well as language policies to promote equal treatment of men and women have been proposed and introduced (Sczesny *et al*. 2016).

The term gender-fair subsumes the two different approaches of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language (Sczesny *et al*. 2016; Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021). Gender-neutral language seeks to entirely remove gender references from language. For instance, in English *chairperson* is preferred over *chairman* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013). Instead, gender-inclusive language refers to approaches to make all genders visible. For example, in German, a gender star (*) is used to separate word stems and/or male nouns from female endings and thus also include all genders beyond the binary (Hornscheidt 2012; Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021), e.g. *Leser*innen* (readers).

There is substantial evidence (e.g. Sczesny *et al.* 2016; Stahlberg *et al*. 2007) that gender-fair language promotes the visibility of gender with a concrete impact on people's lives, e.g. their employability. Furthermore, misgendering negatively affects the psychological health of people (McLemore 2018), leading to emotional pain, distress and feelings of identity invalidation.

2.3 Feminist and Queer Translation

For a long time, translation was defined as simply a process of cross-linguistic transfer (Tymoczko 2010). Conceptions started to change in the 1970s and 1980s, first with the influence of Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury 2012; Venuti 2003) and then with the cultural turn (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990). Translation is now more commonly considered a complex process involving questions of ethics, ideology, and political practice, among other aspects.

At the same time, during second wave feminism, authors started to create innovative work known as *écriture féminin* (feminine writing) to challenge language that was regarded as patriarchal and thus reinforced the primacy of men in society (von Flotow 2016). Such innovative use of language required novel translation strategies, e.g. supplementing, footnoting, and hijacking. Translation scholars began to investigate gender issues in translation practice (Nissen 2002; Sabato and Perri 2020), sexist tropes in translation theory (Chamberlain 1988), the work of feminist translators, the translation of sexist texts, and the translation of feminist texts (von Flotow 2016; von Flotow 1991; Simon 1996). For instance, practitioners such as Godard (1991) and Lotbinière-Harwood (1991) explained their translation strategies that include the creation of neologisms and reclaiming derogatory terms. Both authors conceive translation as a subversive work in which women take on a more active as well as an activist role in society.

In recent years, the influence of queer theory has led to greater attention to other discriminated minorities in TS, in particular, sexualities and identities that challenge the gender binary. As such, publications on queer translation studies have appeared (e.g. Baer and Kaindl 2020; Baer 2020). Research in this field focuses particularly on the translation of homophobic texts and texts featuring members of the LGBTQIA+ community in literature and/or in films (see e.g. Burton 2010; Démont 2017; Baer 2020). The translation of queer texts is particularly relevant for TS because they contain sociolects used by queer characters, such as camp talk, unusual grammar and syntactical structures, e.g. the alternation of male and female gender markers to challenge the gender binary as well as allusions to characters' or authors' sexualities via reference to other texts (Amenta 2020). Approaches to queer translation can be (i) misrecognising, (ii) minoritising, and (iii) queer translation. In (i) and (ii) queer elements are either removed from target texts or flattened, whereas in (iii) the source texts' queerness is maintained through the use of strategies that are similar to feminist translation and include supplementing, footnoting as well as radical changes to texts (Epstein 2017).

3. Work on non-binary language use

Research investigating the translation of texts that feature non-binary individuals, and thus the use of neopronouns and/or neologisms, is still in its infancy (see Lardelli and Gromann 2023). Publications in TS in which trans individuals are mentioned include work which is conceptual in nature, connecting queer identities and translation theory (Robinson 2019). Related scholarship on gendered language focuses on trans men or trans women who use binary language, for example alternating female and male forms to refer to themselves (e.g. Rose 2016).

López (2019; 2021) introduced the distinction between Direct Non-Binary Language (DNL) and Indirect Non-Binary Language (INL). The former aims

to make non-binary individuals visible through the introduction of neologisms, neopronouns, and neomorphemes. The latter refers to the use of gender-neutral constructions. Finally, they analyse the translation of a book and two TV series featuring non-binary characters from English into Spanish. They found that non-binary gender identities are usually erased or misgendered, i.e. the character's sex assigned at birth is used to define their gender identity (López 2021). López (2019; 2021) advocates the use of DNL when referring to non-binary individuals and suggests that pathologising words should not be translated.

Similarly, Misiek (2020) analysed the Polish version of three English-language TV series and found that characters were often misgendered or had their non-binary identity erased. In detailing the differences between English and Polish, Misiek also provided an overview of strategies that are used in Polish today, such as distortion and/or omission of verb endings, use of passive constructions, and the vowel *u* as a new neutral suffix. Suggestions for the translation of non-binary language include (i) asking the actor interpreting the character how they would like to be represented in Polish, (ii) consulting non-binary or gender-queer communities, (iii) using neuter forms or the vowel *u*, (iv) using neologisms to describe professions, and (v) using neutral words, e.g. person.

Šincek (2020) compared the Croatian version of a film with the English original and collected articles on Sam Smith's coming out as non-binary. In this case, too, it was found that non-binary individuals are often misgendered. Additionally, singular they was sometimes translated as *ono* or *oni*. The first corresponds to the English *it* and the second is the third-person plural masculine pronoun. Šincek also conducted interviews with three non-binary individuals and found that they often use gendered forms according to their sex assigned at birth, they switch between gendered forms, use the third-person plural masculine pronoun as an equivalent to singular they, or use gender-neutral constructions.

Finally, Attig (2022) analysed the dubbed and subtitled version of the Netflix series *One Day At A Time* (2017-2020) and found differences between the two types of translations. Both also had substantial errors. Attig calls for a community-informed translation, i.e. cisgender translators should engage with the queer community to achieve gender-fair translations.

This work in TS therefore suggests multiple ways in which gender-fair language can be incorporated into translations, as well as noting that currently it is not always used where it could be.

4. Gender-Fair German

In German, there are four approaches to gender-fair language, i.e. (i) the rewording of sentences to avoid gendered elements and the use of gender-neutral nouns, (ii) the use of so-called *gender characters*, such as the

gender star (*), to include all genders, (iii) the use of *gender characters or new endings*, such as the *ens* forms, to be used in contexts where gender is unknown or irrelevant, and (iv) the introduction of a fourth gender, such as the liminal, through new pronouns and endings for each world class. These approaches are further detailed in the following subsections.

4.1 Gender-Neutral Rewording

The easiest and most immediate approach to gender-fair language is to construct sentences in such a way that they do not mark gender. This can be achieved, amongst others, by (Universität Leipzig 2020; En *et al*. 2021):

- constructing collective and singular nouns with specific endings and compounds, such as *-kraft*, *-ung*, *-hilfe*, *-person*, *-berechtigte* as in *Lehrkraft* (teaching staff) or *Fachperson* (specialist);
- referring to functions and institutions instead of people as well as using gender-neutral nouns, such as *Person*, *Mitglied* (member), *Mensch* (human), *Ministerium* (ministry), *Leitung* (direction), *Team*;
- constructing plural nouns through nominalisation of the present participle, e.g. *Studierende* (students), *Lehrende*[2] (teachers);
- avoiding reference to gender through infinitive and passive constructions.

4.2 Gender-Inclusive Characters

Typographical characters, as depicted in Table 1, may be used to separate word stems and/or male nouns from female endings to make all genders visible. These characters are "pronounced" through a brief pause in spoken language and their use requires some creativity (Universität Leipzig 2020: 4ff; En *et al*. 2021: 27ff). They are nowadays quite common in German written language (En *et al*. 2021).

Strategy	Nouns	Personal Pronouns	Possessives	Articles	Question Pronouns
*	Student*in Student*innen	sie*er, si*er	ihre*seine	die*der di*er	Welche*r?
_	Student_in Student_innen	si_e, er_sie	ihre_seine	die_der di_er	Welche_r?
:	Student:in Student:innen	si:er, er:sie	ihre:seine	die:der di:er	Welche:r?
/	Student/in Student/innen	si/er, er/sie	ihre/seine	die/der di/er	Welche/r?
'	Student'in Student'innen	si'er, er'sie	ihre'seine	die'der di'er	Welche'r?

Table 1. Strategies for gender-inclusive German (adapted from AG Feministisch Sprachhandeln 2015: 16)

4.3 Gender-Neutral Characters or Endings

When sex/gender is unknown or irrelevant, male and female endings may be replaced by typographical characters (Hornscheidt 2012: 294ff) or new gender-neutral endings (Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021: 53) (see Table 2 for a selective overview). Such characters are then attached to the verb stem, while neutral endings are attached to the noun stem in order to form nouns. They can also be used in a stand-alone manner to replace word classes, such as pronouns. Hornscheidt and Sammla (2021: 53) propose the use of gender-neutral *ens* forms that derive from the German word *Mensch* (human).

Strategy	Nouns	Personal Pronouns	Possessives	Articles	Indefinite Pronouns
x	Studierx (Sg.) Studierxs (Pl.) Lesx (Sg.) Lesxs (Pl.)	x xs (genitive)	xse	dix einx	x
*	Studier* (Sg.) Studier** (Pl.) Les* (Sg.) Les** (Pl.)	* *s (genitive)	*'s	d* ein*	*
-ex	Studentex (Sg., Pl.) Lesex (Sg., Pl.)	ex	ex	—	—
-ens	Studentens (Sg., Pl.) Lesens (Sg., Pl.)	ens	ens	dens einens	ens

Table 2. Selected strategies for gender-neutral German

Some examples formulated with these strategies are (note that the translations into English fail to reflect the diversity of strategies in German, but are simply provided for a better understanding):

- *x sollte zukünftig besser auf xes Sprachhandlungen achten* (they should in future be more careful with their speech acts)
- *einx schlaux Studierx liebt xs Bücher* (Hornscheidt 2012: 294) (a smart student loves their books),
- *Lann liebt es, mit anderen zu diskutieren. Ex lädt häufig dazu ein, einen Roman zu besprechen* (Lann loves to discuss things with others. They frequently invite people to discuss a novel),
- *Lann und ex Freundex haben ex Rad bunt angestrichen* (Lann and their friend have painted a bike colourfully),
- *dens singend Radfahrens* (the singing biker),
- *einens hat das Recht zu gehorchen* (Hornscheidt 2021: 55f) (they have the right to comply).

4.4 Neosystems

The last approach to gender-fair language in German is to develop entirely new grammar systems related to gender that introduce a fourth gender, complementing masculine, feminine, and neuter, in order to make non-binary people visible in language and/or to refer to mixed groups of people. This approach consists of a new inventory of endings for almost each word class.

The *NoNa system* (Geschlechtsneutrales Deutsch n.d.) was and is being developed by two non-binary activists. As a personal pronoun, they propose the use of *hen*. Two sets of endings are introduced, i.e. *-ai/-ais/-am/-ai* for definite articles, relative pronouns, and demonstratives and *-t* plus a mix of usual masculine and feminine endings for indefinite articles and the negation *kein (*none, no, not)*,* which results in *keint* (see Table 3).

Case	Def. Art.	Indef. Artic.	Personal Pronouns	Possessives	Demonstr.	Relative Pronouns
Nom.	Dai	eint	hen	Meint	diesai	welchai
Gen.	dais	einter	hens	meinter	diesais	-
Dat.	Dam	eintem	hem	meintem	diesam	welcham
Acc.	Dai	eint	hen	Meint	diesai	welchai

Table 3. Pronouns and articles according to the NoNa system

As for nouns, this system suggests the use of gender stars to form them, and the adjective declension mixes masculine and feminine endings (see Table 4 for an overview of the declension system).

Case	Declensions with Indef. Artic.	Declensions with Def. Artic.
Nom.	Eint gute Freund*in	dai gute Freund*in
Gen.	einter guten Freund*in	dais guten Freund*in
Dat.	Eintem guten Freund*in	dam guten Freund*in
Acc.	Eint gute Freund*in	dai gute Freund*in

Table 4. Declension system according to the NoNa system (a/the good friend)

Another system are the so-called *SYLVAIN-Konventionen* (de Sylvain and Balzer 2008) depicted in Table 5. With this system, a new grammatical gender, the *Indefinitivum* (also *liminales Geschlecht*) was introduced. In addition to man and woman, *din Lim* is to be used for people who reject the gender binary.

Case	Def. Art.	Indef. Art.	Personal Pronouns	Possessives	Demonstr.	Relative Pronouns
Nom.	Din	einin	nin	Meinin	diesin	welchin/din
Gen.	dins	einins	nims/nimser	meinins	diesins	—/derin
Dat.	Dim	einim	nim	meinim	diesim	welchim/dim
Acc.	Din	einir	nin	Meinin	diesin	welchin/din

Table 5. Pronouns and articles according to the SYLVAIN-Konventionen

Other forms that are proposed include *mensch*, *jemensch*, *niemensch*, and *jedmensch* in order to replace the indefinite pronouns *man* (one/you), *jemand* (someone), *niemand* (no-one), and *jedermann* (everybody). Finally, nouns are created by adding the ending *-nin* to the word stem in singular (e.g. *Studentnin*) and *-ninnen* for non-binary individuals or *-Ninnen* for mixed-gender groups in plural (e.g. *StudentNinnen*). Consequently, new adjective endings for the indefinite article are proposed (see Table 6), whilst female endings are used for the definite article.

	Singular			
Case	**masculine**	**Feminine**	**liminal**	**neutral**
Nom.	Ein junger Mann	eine junge Frau	einin jungin Lim	ein junges Tier
Gen.	eines jungen Mannes	einer jungen Frau	einins jungen Lims	eines jungen Tieres
Dat.	Einem jungen Mann	einer jungen Frau	einim jungen Lim	einem jungen Tier
Acc.	Einen jungen Mann	eine junge Frau	einir jungin Lim	ein junges Tier

Table 6. Declension system according to the SYLVAIN-Konventionen (a young man/woman/liminal individual/animal)

In order to illustrate these strategies in language, we provide some examples according to this system:

- *Wenn din Feindnin uns bekämpft, ist das gut und nicht schlecht. (If your enemy fights us, it is to be considered good and not bad.)*
- *Jemensch könnte zugeben, dass nin es war. (They can admit that it was them).*
- *Niemensch konnte sagen, nin hätte es nicht gewusst. (No-one could say they did not know it).*

Heger (2020) proposes the use of the pronoun *xier* which derives from a fusion of the masculine and feminine pronouns *er* and *sie*. As shown in Table 7, definite articles, relative pronouns and possessives can also be built accordingly.

Case	Personal pronouns	Relative pron./ Def. articles	Possessives
Nom.	Xier	xier	xiesa Freund_in (otherwise: xieser Freund/xiese Freundin)
Gen.	Xieser	xies	xiesas Freund_in
Dat.	Xiem	xiem	xiesam Freund_in
Acc.	Xien	xien	xiesan Freund_in

Table 7. Pronouns according to the xier system

The debate on gender-fair language also takes place on social media. For example, there is a private Facebook group called *Geschlechtsneutrales*

Deutsch (gender-neutral German) where people discuss new solutions to overcome the binary structure of German. Recently, the Facebook group administrators founded the Verein für Geschlechtsneutrales Deutsch and, on its website, they propose the so-called *De-E system* (Verein für Geschlechtsneutrales Deutsch n.d.)*.* In this system, it is suggested that the gender-fair endings *-e* or *-ere* as well as *-erne* should be used to form nouns respectively in singular and plural. The personal pronoun to be used should be *hen* whilst the possessive pronoun should be *deren*. In Table 8, an overview of the declension of adjectives and other forms is presented.

Case	Def. Articles	Indef. Articles	No articles	Other forms	
Nom.	De gute Lehrere	ein gute Lehrere	gutern Lehrere	jedern	jemand
Gen.	dern guten Lehreres	einern guten Lehreres	gutern Lehreres	jedern	jemandern
Dat.	Dern guten Lehrere	einern guten Lehrere	gutern Lehrere	jedern	jemandern
Acc.	De gute Lehrere	ein gute Lehrere	gutern Lehrere	jedern	jemand

Table 8. Overview of the De-E system

In German, the pronouns *er* and *sie* are used to refer to people. There is no official equivalent to *singular they* in order to refer to a person whose sex/gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context of the conversation. Nevertheless, there are different solutions to this issue:

- Impersonal, gender-neutral pronouns, such as *alle*, *diejenigen*, *jene* can be used (Universität Leipzig 2020: 7),
- An individual's name can be repeated instead of using pronouns,
- Sentences can be reworded to avoid the use of pronouns,
- Gender-fair neopronouns can be used (see Table 9 for a selective overview) – it is to be noted that trans, non-binary, inter people may use different, also binary, pronouns. For this reason, it is best to always ask each person for their pronouns (En *et al*. 2021: 38ff).

Nom.	Gen.	Dat.	Acc.
Xier	xieser	xiem	xien
er*sie	sein*ihr	ihm*ihr	ihn*sie
y	y	Y	y
they	their	them	them
dey	deren	demm	demm
hen	hens	hem	hen
ens	ens	ens	ens
nin	nims	nim	nin
x	xs	x	x
ex	ex	ex	ex
per	pers	per	per

Table 9. Overview of gender-fair pronouns in German (Nibi space n.d.a)

When addressing people, for example in emails, salutations are often gendered in German, e.g. Liebe(r) (Dear) and Frau (Ms.) or Herr (Mr.). Different strategies can be applied to formulate a gender-fair form of address (Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021: 77):

- Salutation followed by name and surname, such as *Hallo*, *Sehr geehrt**, *Lieb**, *Guten Morgen/Tag*;
- Salutation only, e.g. *Hallo*;
- *Frau* and *Herr* can be replaced by *Person* or *Mensch*;
- *Guten Morgen Person/Mensch* followed by surname;
- Gender star or other strategies can be applied, for example for job titles, e.g. *Professor*in*.

The German language also comprises several terms which imply a binary conception of gender. These include references to kinship, such as *Mutter/Vater* (mother/father) or *Tante/Onkel* (aunt/uncle), as well as professions ending in *-mann/-frau,* e.g. *Feuerwehrmann* (firefighter) or *Obfrau* (chairwoman). Lists of gender-inclusive alternatives have been proposed (Nibi space n.d.b). Finally, a gender-fair language is also a stereotype-free language, i.e. free from expressions that ascribe certain characteristics to individual sex/genders are or should be like. For instance, *das starke Geschlecht* (German for *the strong sex*) implies that there are only two sexes/genders (En *et al*.: 33).

5. Gender-Fair Italian

In Italian, the debate on gender-fair language is still restricted to the inclusion of women and, more specifically, to the use of female forms in references to offices and high-level professions (Gheno 2019). To the best of our knowledge, there are also no publications that provide an in-depth overview of the most common strategies for gender-fair language in Italian.

Three approaches can be identified in Italian, namely (i) the use of gender-neutral nouns or constructions in order to avoid any references to gender, (ii) the use of letters or typographical characters to include all genders in language, and (iii) the omission of gendered endings. These are summarised in the next subsections.

5.1 Gender-Neutral Wording

In a similar way to German, sentences in Italian can be written in a way that avoids gender-inflected elements. This can be achieved by the following (Vitiello 2022):

- changing the subject to avoid past participles, since these are gendered in Italian,
- using periphrase, for instance, to replace adjectives with adverbs,
- using neutral and collective nouns as well as impersonal pronouns, such as *persona* (person), *membro* (member), *personale* (personnel), *chi* (who)*,*
- changing the perspective in the sentences,
- using verbs as subjects to avoid nouns, pronouns, and adjectives,
- using passive and impersonal constructions (which are sometimes gendered, so special care is needed).

5.2 Gender-Inclusive Characters and Symbols

To avoid male generics and also include non-binary people in a discourse, there are different strategies that consist of using the male forms of nouns and replacing the gendered ending with typographical characters or symbols. This can also be done for articles, pronouns, adjectives, and participles. Table 10 gives an overview.

Strategy	Nouns	Def. Artic.	Indef. Artic.	Pers. Pronouns
*	Maestr*	L*	Un*	L*i
@	Maestr@	L@	Un@	L@i
-	Maestr-	L-	Un-	-
u	Maestru	Lu	Unu	-

x	Maestrx	Lx	Unx	-
y	Maestry	Ly	Uny	-
ə/ɜ	Maestrə (Sg.) Maestrɜ (Pl.)	Lə (Sg.) Lɜ (Pl.)	Unə (Sg.)	Ləi (Sg.)

Table 10. Gender-inclusive characters and symbols used in Italian

One of the most commonly used strategies seems to be the asterisk (*), since it obtained an entry in the grammar section of the Italian Encyclopaedia Treccani (n.d.), and its origins were described in Marotta and Monaco (2016). However, these strategies, except for *schwa (*written as *ə/ɜ*), cannot be pronounced and there is no distinction between singular and plural (Marotta and Monaco 2016). For these reasons, using a *schwa* has been growing in popularity. Gheno (2019; 2022) promotes its use and nowadays it can be found in books (see the decision of publishing house effequ 2020 and, for example, Meloni and Mibelli 2021), journal articles (e.g. Murgia 2021) as well as on the keyboard of input devices (NeXt 2021). It is also strongly criticised, e.g. because it changes the linguistic structures of Italian (e.g. Arcangeli 2022). *Schwa* is the phonetic transcription of the IPA symbol for the mid-central vowel. Originally, it was proposed to use ə for singular and ɜ for plural. However, ə is often used for both (see Gheno 2019; 2022).

5.3 Omission of Gendered Endings

This approach is similar to those mentioned in Section 5.2. In the case of symmetrical nouns, i.e. usually ending with 'o' for the male gender and 'a' for the female, these gendered endings are omitted (e.g. *maestr* instead of *maestro* or *maestra* for teacher). When the nouns are not symmetrical as in *lettore*/*lettrice* (male/female reader), the male form of the noun is used, and the vocalic ending is omitted (e.g. *lettor*). Gendered endings can also be omitted in articles, adjectives, and participles. However, it is not possible to form third-person singular pronouns because the male (*lui*) and female (*lei*) differ only for the central vowel whose omission would change said pronouns to *li*, a definite article.

6. Method

For the present study, we created an event-based corpus on the topic of Demi Lovato's coming out as non-binary in a Twitter post. The corpus consists of 41 German-language articles found online from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and 48 Italian-language articles found online that build on and translate the original English post. It was analysed by means of content analysis (Krippendorff 2018) and annotated according to: (i) misgendering, (ii) strategies to translate singular they or types of pronouns to refer to Lovato, (iii) nouns, and in the case of Italian, also (iv) adjectives, specifically the adjective *proud* used in Lovato's tweet. These annotations

were used to perform deductive category construction. In other words, annotation categories were constructed while reading the articles and descriptive statistical analysis was performed using the statistical analysis software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) based on these categories. Finally, a detailed analysis of cases of misgendering and different strategies was conducted, which provided the basis for the graphical representation in Section 7.

Previous studies (López 2019; Misiek 2020; Šincek 2020) also analysed whether non-binary individuals in TV series or media outlets were misgendered or described with gender-fair language strategies. The main contributions of the proposed approach are a (i) larger size and multilingual character of corpus compilation, (ii) performance of descriptive statistical analysis of the phenomenon in question, and (iii) a detailed analysis of strategies in use as opposed to proposed strategies. The size is novel in so far that the works by López (2019), Misiek (2020) and Šincek (2020) describe only a few examples instead of a systematic analysis of materials. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to take German and Italian into account.

7. Results

The four main categories used in the corpus analysis are (i) misgendering, (ii) translation of singular they, (iii) translation of nouns, and (iv) translation of adjectives. The fourth category in our corpus only applies to the Italian language, since adjectives were found in the attributive position and, in this case, they are not gender-inflected in German. This section details the results for each category in numbers and graphical representations. The overall corpus size for the German part consisted of 41 texts, while 48 articles were found for Italian.

In the 41 German language news texts, Lovato was fully misgendered in 8 articles and partially misgendered in 12. In 21 articles, their gender identity was rightfully respected (see Figure 1). This means that forms of misgendering were found in approximately 48.8% of the cases. The situation is quite different in the 48 Italian-language texts where misgendering occurred in 70.8% of the cases, with 50% full misgendering in the entire text and 20.8% partial misgendering (see Figure 2). This means that in Italian Lovato's gender identity was correctly addressed in only 29.2% of the corpus.
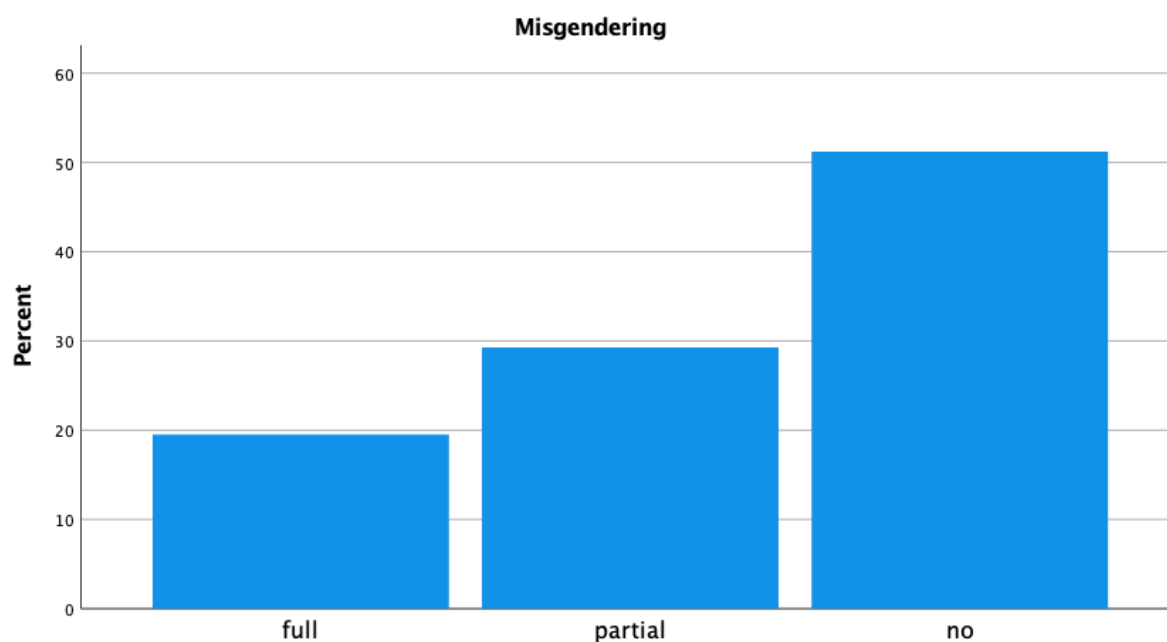
Misgendering

Figure 1. Frequency of misgendering in German-language texts
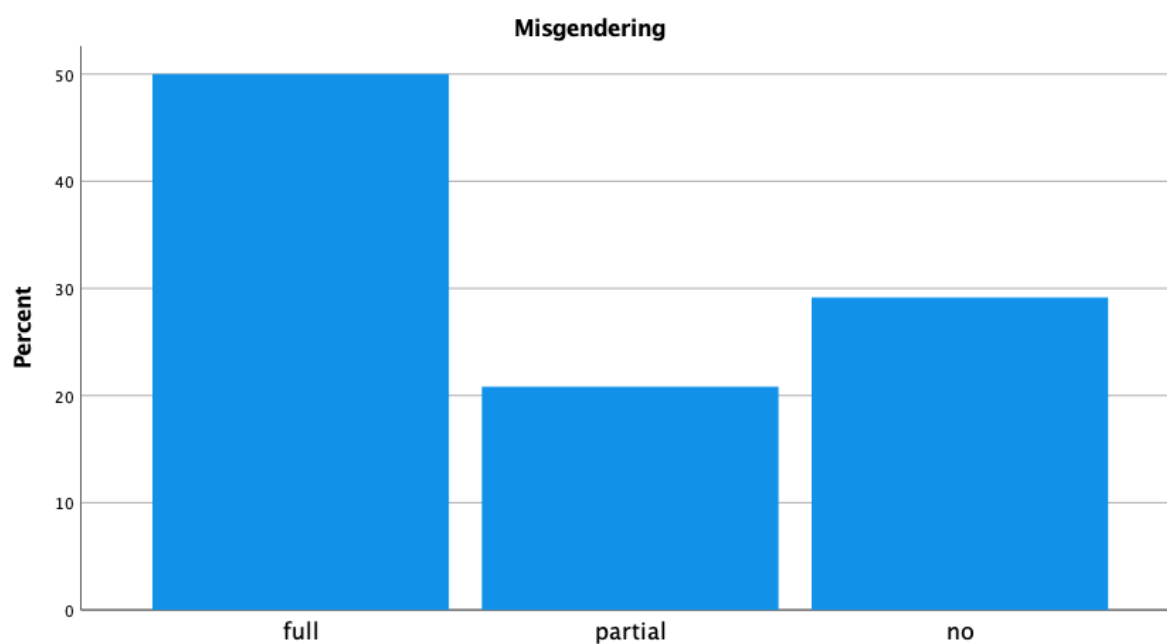
Misgendering

**Figure 2. Frequency of misgendering in Italian-language texts**

As for the singular they, different strategies were applied both in German and in Italian to translate this pronoun used in the original tweet. In the first case, as can be seen in Figure 3, these include: repetition of the name (38.9%), literal translation of singular they as plural *sie* (6.9%), use of neopronoun *xier* (1.4%), and use of the compound pronoun *sie/er* (2.8%). Additionally, singular they was just left untranslated (27.8%) or it was left

untranslated, but its use and meaning was explained in some cases (22.2%). Furthermore, in some texts more than one strategy was used.
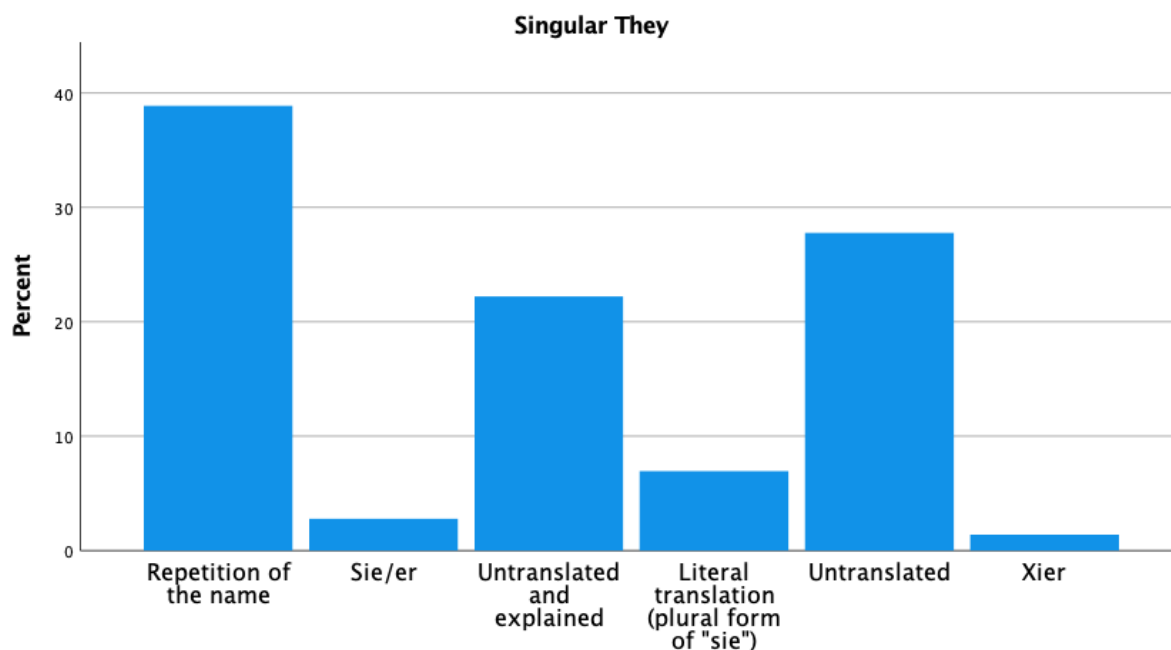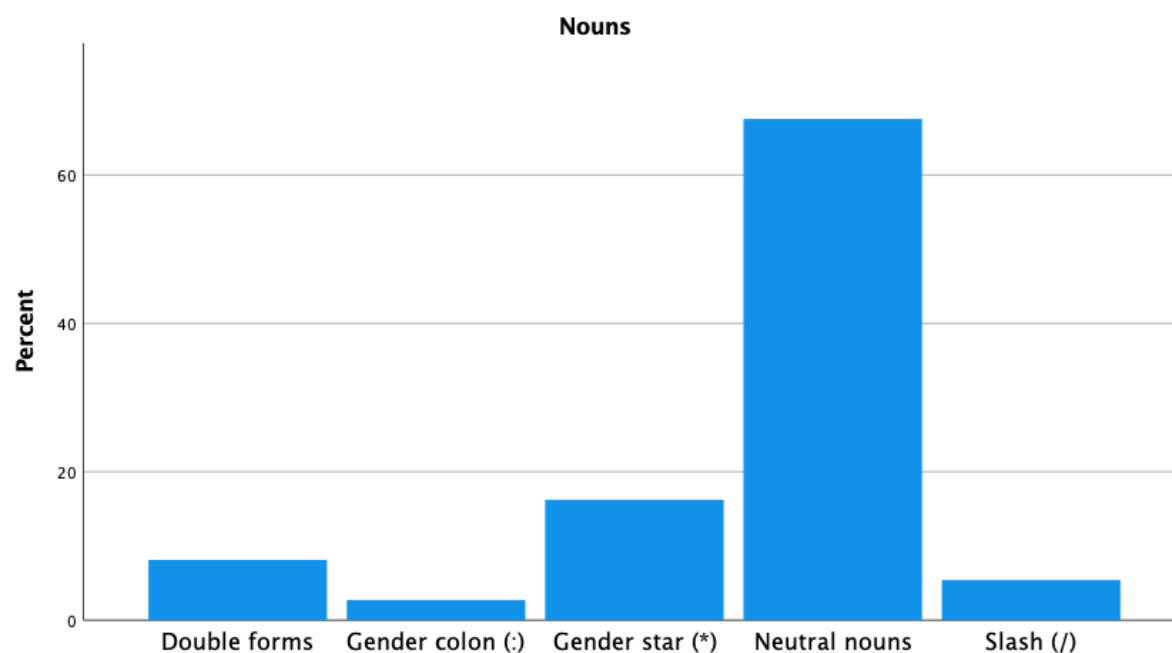

Figure 3. Frequency of gender-fair language strategies for singular they in German-language texts

In the case of Italian, as can be seen in Figure 4, the strategies used include: repetition of the name (25%), compound pronoun *lui/lei* (1.4%) – which is a quite unusual strategy that is not adopted by the non-binary community –, literal translation as *loro* (29.2%), literal translation with explanation of what it stands for (5.6%), and no translation (37.5%). In just a few cases (1.4%), the pronoun was not mentioned at all. Italian-language articles also used more than one strategy.
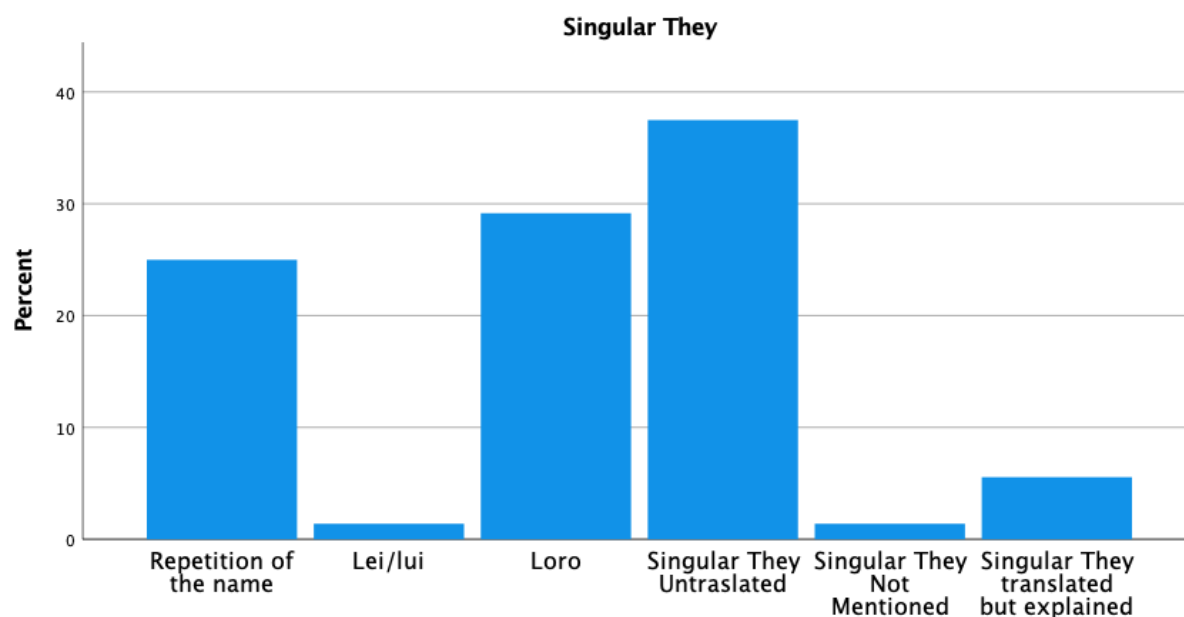
Singular They

Figure 4. Frequency of gender-fair language strategies for singular they in Italian-language texts

As for strategies used for nouns, in German these were, as can be seen in Figure 5, the use of neutral nouns (67.6%), a gender star (*) (16.2%), both masculine and feminine forms (8.1%), a gender colon (:) (2.7%), and a slash (2%). In four texts, no nouns were used to talk about Lovato's coming out. Furthermore, in seven articles mixed strategies were used.
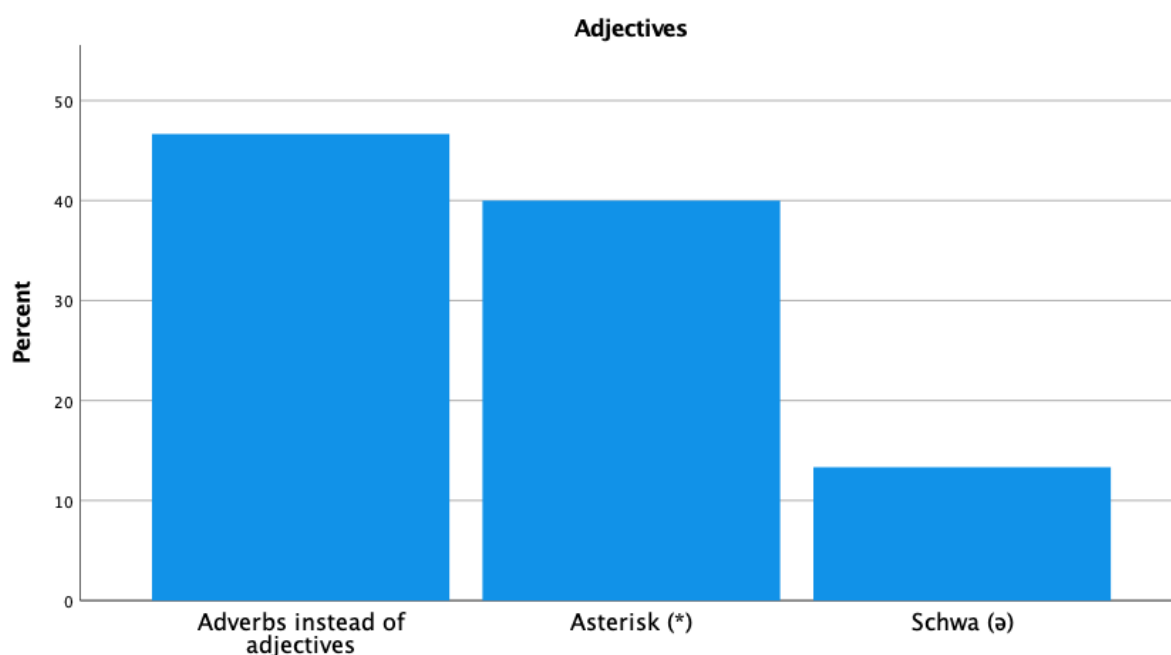
Nouns

Figure 5. Frequency of gender-fair language strategies for nouns in German-language texts

In Italian (see Figure 6), neutral nouns were predominant (34.5%). Other strategies include the use of epicene nouns[3] (37.9%), an asterisk (20.7%), and a *schwa* (6.9%). In this case, too, nouns did not occur in some texts, 18 to be precise. In five texts, mixed strategies were used.
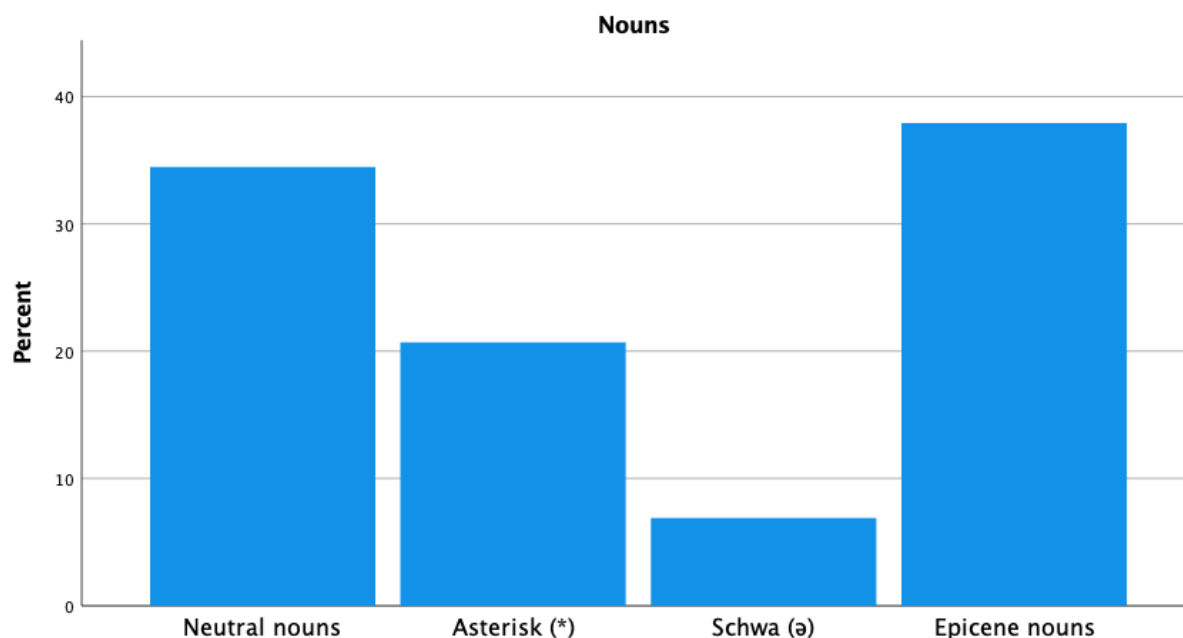
Figure 6. Frequency of gender-fair language strategies for nouns in Italian-language texts

Finally, in 15 Italian-language texts, there was a tentative translation of the adjective *proud* contained in Lovato's tweet (see Figure 7). The authors used a sentence construction that allowed them to use the adverb instead of the adjective (46.7%), an asterisk (40%), or a *schwa* (13.3%).

Adjectives

Figure 7. Frequency of gender-fair language strategies for nouns in German-language texts

8. Discussion

These results show that the correct use of gender-fair language is still challenging in German and Italian. Misgendering could frequently be observed in articles in both languages, with a significantly higher occurrence in Italian. This might partially be attributed to the fact that Italian debates about gender inclusive language still centre on the inclusion of women (Gheno 2021) rather than inclusion of non-binary individuals, with very few exceptions (e.g. Gheno 2022 on *schwa*). German-speaking countries have a longer tradition of gender-fair language policies and strategies (Sczesny *et al*. 2016), which is reflected in the wealth of literature on the topic (AG Feministisch Sprachhandeln 2015; Hornscheidt 2012; Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021; En *et al*. 2021) and the slightly better results. One reason for these results that can be observed across languages is a general lack of awareness and inability to detect gender-fair language, which results in misgendering and translations of singular they as plural. While ignorance is no excuse, undetected gender-fair language is unlikely to result in correct gender-fair translations. Raising awareness of gender-fair language strategies across natural languages is thus an important political, social, linguistic, translation-related, and ethical mission to which we hope to contribute with this article.

In cases where gender-fair language was correctly detected, the utilised strategies to translate and use it in the target language were often very different. One of the most frequent and at the same time the safest strategy to avoid misgendering is to replace all co-referential pronouns with the person's name, a strategy that is among the most common to translate the

singular they in both languages. Especially when creating texts themselves, authors tended to repeat the name, whereas pronouns were used when they translated Lovato's tweet. Some authors opted for using the English they or mistranslated it as plural they in the respective language. In general, few occurrences of gender-inclusive language, such as *xier* in German pronouns or *schwa* in Italian nouns, were found, while gender-inclusive characters, such as colon or asterisk, were more frequently observed. While there is no clearly predominant strategy in each language in this corpus, a tendency towards gender-neutral versions and rewording can be observed.

These results indicate a lack of awareness of the wealth of available gender-fair language strategies and a general assumption that gender-neutral language is the safer bet, which, however, as we have seen in this analysis, still easily results in mistranslation and misgendering. The most central societal and ethical implication of this analysis is that these authors knowingly and willingly reported on a non-binary individual and still, in many cases, did not ensure a non-discriminatory or even just correct language. In our view, Attig's (2022) call for community-informed translation, that is, consultation with the non-binary community on gender-fair language should be extended to community-informed reporting and text creation to correctly address marginalised groups.

Misgendering, mistranslation or constantly alternating the strategy within one and the same text have a strong psychological impact on non-binary individuals who see their identity invalidated or even ridiculed. The issue of gender-fair (mis)translation goes beyond the world of translation. For instance, recently an Italian comedian ridiculed the use of the pronoun they by Lovato, solely based on a mistranslation as plural they. Media should promote the visibility of marginalised groups rather than propagate discrimination. Authors and translators should develop a sensitivity and awareness of different identities, including different gender identities, and seek discrimination-free, community-informed cross-cultural communication.

9. Conclusion

In line with previous research, we find that no predominant strategy for gender-fair language can be found in news articles reporting on events similar to the coming out of a non-binary celebrity. This article presents the multitude of gender-fair language strategies put forward by research and/or non-binary communities for German and Italian that in the empirical analysis of media texts are poorly or even rarely represented. Unfortunately, misgendering still seems to be a common practice. The problem with misgendering in translation is that, even if it is unintentional, it can cause emotional pain and distress to those affected. Moreover, erroneous translations can propagate misconceptions and inhibit social awareness on gender issues.

To further advance this field, future research should be carried out in other language pairs, possibly without English as the source language. Furthermore, insights into the translation process would be needed in order to find out whether the use of gender-fair language impacts translators' speed and productivity and which strategies would be best suited to produce gender-fair texts without negatively affecting their work. In this regard, it is very important to also investigate the translators' perspective and attitude towards this issue. This would also include studies on the strategies' readability and comprehensibility, also considering a wider audience, including people with impairments (e.g. blind individuals who need screen readers), neurodiverse people (e.g. dyslexic individuals), and people with lower language proficiency (e.g. learners with another first language). Finally, post-editing might be worth investigating in this context, since Machine Translation (MT) systems are known to be biased and cannot process gender-neutral forms (Savoldi *et al.* 2021).

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Data Availability Statement

The materials used in this study are available on Zenodo: 10.5281/zenodo.7808577

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Notes

[1]   The   original   tweet   can   be   found   under
https://twitter.com/ddlovato/status/1394913215994155009

[2] It is to be noted that such forms have become quite widespread but are generally not considered as neutral or inclusive anymore as they are associated with maleness (Hornscheidt and Sammla 2021: 49)

[3] Epicene nouns are nouns that have a form only in terms of gender. Gender can usually be inferred through articles.