

## Significance of Gender-Neutrality Concept in Translation: A Study Based on Holy Scripture

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### Abstract

Gender neutrality is the idea that demands that language, and social system shouldn't marginalize human beings according to their sex and gender. Consequently, gender neutrality is an important concept in the translation sphere too. Because most translators knowingly or unknowingly ignore the prominence of gender issues during the translation, and they provide gender-accurate translation styles without acknowledging cultural and gender issues. This study tries to analyse the gender neutrality concept in Bible Translation since the Bible is generally written from the patriarchal perspective. The study is based upon the **The New Revised Standard Version** of the Bible (NRSV). NRSV Bible, to some extent, incorporates the concept of gender neutrality in the translation. The methodology used here is, **Gender liberation theories** because from the linguistic perspective these theories analyzed through the lens of how language reflects, constructs, and potentially liberates/removes gender identities. The article aims to find out the positives and negatives of gender neutrality concept in Bible translation. This study will present the usage of gender neutrality concept in Bible translation and will provide an inclusive approach towards translation irrespective of gender hierarchy.

**Keywords:** Gender Neutrality, Holy Scripture, NRSV Bible, Gender Neutrality in Translation, Translation Accuracy, Gender liberation Theories.

## Introduction

The concept of gender neutrality aims to create a society and environment where gender is not a defining factor in how people are treated, opportunities they receive, or roles they are expected to fulfill. According to Singh. S and Deepanjali (2023), Gender Neutrality is the concept that states that society should not treat people based on their genders but rather on their capabilities, regardless of whether they are male or female. Gender neutrality can also have implications in the field of translation, as it challenges traditional gendered language structures and encourages more inclusive and neutral representations in translated texts.

The current study analyses the usage of gender neutrality concept in the Holy Scripture from the translation perspective. Translating the Holy texts from the source to the target language is complex. Several cultural, linguistic, and social mismatches occur during the translation. Especially from the cultural perspective, the target language reader will miss the original message of the source text if he/she finds any cultural mismatches. Gender issues are a significant concern in translation when we look through the lenses of culture. Bible translations are also not free from these gender issues. Gender issues in Bible translations constitute a significant concern for Bible translators, and women readers of the Bible experience inequalities when they read it. The study focuses on the NRSV Bible which includes the concept of Gender Neutrality in translation. The NRSV Bible is the New Revised Standard version of Bible and is the updated version of RSV Bible. One of its peculiar features is inclusion of Gender Neutrality approach in translation (Bruce Metzger, 2024).

The Gender Liberation Theories are used here for the data analysis because these theories will give significance to the ability of a human being irrespective of their gender. Here the Gender Performativity concept of Judith Butler is used because this theory argues that gender is not an inherent quality, but a performance enacted through language and social interactions. By highlighting the performative nature of gender, it challenges the binary structure of language that often reinforces traditional male/female divisions (Butler. J,1990).

So, this article tries to analyze the usage of the gender neutrality in the NRSV Bible and tries to evaluate how the Translation accuracy occurred here.

## **Gender Neutrality**

Gender neutrality is not based on men and women, but rather on being unbiased towards all genders. The intention is not to be gender specific or sensitive, but rather to treat all genders equally and neutrally (Gender Spectrum, 2024). Equality means that everyone has an equal opportunity. Being gender specific or sensitive is not a good way to promote societal welfare. The welfare of society can only be achieved if everyone has equal access to opportunities. There are certain benefits for gender neutrality concept such as Increased inclusivity, Reduced discrimination, Greater fairness and equality, Personal freedom etc. (Richard J, 1994).

## **Gender Neutrality in Translation**

Gender neutrality can also have implications in the field of translation, as it challenges traditional gendered language structures and encourages more inclusive and neutral representations in translated texts. Here are some considerations related to gender neutrality in translation.

One of the main challenges in gender neutral translation is navigating languages that are inherently gendered, where every noun, pronoun, or adjective is assigned a specific gender. This can make it difficult to find gender-neutral alternatives that convey the same meaning and tone. However, with careful consideration and creativity, it is possible to adapt language to be more inclusive. Gender neutral translation is especially important in professional and academic settings, where assumptions based on gender can have a significant impact on representation and equality. By using inclusive language, we can work towards dismantling stereotypes and creating a more supportive and diverse environment for all individuals.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement towards gender neutral translation in various languages around the world. Many organizations and institutions are adopting guidelines and policies to promote inclusive language practices. While there may be some resistance to change, the benefits of gender-neutral translation are clear in promoting equality and respect for all individuals (The Human Rights Campaign, 2024).

Overall, gender neutral translation is an important step towards creating a more inclusive and diverse society. By rethinking the way, we use language and embracing more inclusive practices, we can contribute to a more equitable world where everyone feels seen and respected, regardless of their gender identity.

Gender-neutral language is a way of using language that avoids gender-specific terms and instead uses terms that are inclusive of all genders. This approach to language is becoming increasingly popular as people seek to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

### **Translation Accuracy**

The term *translation accuracy* is sometimes misunderstood by translators because they believe that word to word translation is the accurate way of translation. But from the target audience's perspective it will lead them to utter confusion. Translating the texts in relation with gender also creates the same issue.

Translation accuracy plays a pivotal role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. In his research, Lawrence Venuti highlights the importance of fidelity to the original text while adapting it for a new audience. A minor error in translation can alter the intended meaning significantly, impacting communication and understanding. This underscores the need for precision in capturing the essence of the source text. With technology advancing rapidly, tools like translation memory software and glossaries aid in maintaining consistency. So, attaining high accuracy in translation demands a meticulous approach, attention to detail, and a deep appreciation for the nuances of both languages (Venuti, 1995). Translation accuracy is crucial for conveying the original message of a text. So, maintaining high accuracy in translation requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, along with continuous refinement of skills.

### **The NRSV Bible**

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible has been a topic of discussion and debate due to its approach to gender-neutral language. The NRSV, published in 1989, sought to update existing translations to reflect more accurately the original Hebrew and Greek texts, while also taking into consideration the cultural and linguistic norms of the present day. One

significant aspect of this revision was the use of gender-neutral language in certain passages, particularly in reference to God and human beings. One of the notable features of the NRSV Bible is its use of gender-neutral language (Bruce Metzger, 2024).

## **Literature Review**

There are a number of studies in relation with the Bible Translation and gender. According to Bruce Metzger, the English language is so biased toward the male gender that it limits and conceals the original language's meaning, which is more gender inclusive than a literal translation (Bruce Metzger, 2024). Wayne Grudem emphasized the matching of the same word meaning in both source and target text rather than the translator's opinion about the source text; this translation style is not an exception in the gender issues in the translation (Wayne Grudem, 1997). Michael Marlowe argues that because the Bible was written from a patriarchal perspective, imposing gender-neutral language on it destroys its meaning (Michael Marlowe, 2005). According to Paul Mankowski, inclusive-language translators favor feminist ideologies by ignoring translation patterns. In contrast, in Marmy Clason, the target text should reflect the adherence to the original meaning (Paul Mankowski, 2007).

## **Methodology**

The proponents of the concept of gender-neutrality argue that using gender-inclusive language can help to challenge these stereotypes and promote gender equality. The same theoretical elements are used in the NRSV Bible translation.

Especially Gender Performativity Theory of Judith is used as the methodology for the present study. Because Judith Butler's gender performativity theory offers a provocative and insightful perspective on the construction of gender within society (Butler J, 2005). By emphasizing the performative nature of gender and the ways in which it is enacted and reproduced through social practices, Butler challenges us to rethink our assumptions about gender and identity. Moving forward, Butler's work encourages us to consider the ways in which gender is constructed, performed, and contested within our everyday lives, opening up new possibilities for understanding and embracing diverse forms of gender expression (Butler J, 2004).

Comparative analytical method is also used here, because here the comparison occurred between the two versions of Bible such as RSV and NRSV Bible. The source texts (Hebrew and Greek) also are compared here along with the two versions of the Bible.

### Comparison between RSV and NRSV Bible Versions

Here the two versions of Bible, NRSV and RSV, are compared along with the Greek and Hebrew Bibles. This table points out different usages of gender terms and how RSV and NRSV Bible handles the issue.

Source Text (Hebrew and Greek word or phrase)	Revised Standard Version	New Revised Standard Version
אָדָם ('aḏam) It's a Hebrew word mentioned in Genesis 1:27 which means mortals, humankind and man.	RSV Bible used the word <i>man</i> .	So, God created <i>humankind</i> in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female, he created them.  (Here the source language Hebrew word 'aḏam' is translated into humankind to retain the gender equality).
אָנוּס (ʔenuṣ) (Psalm 8:4) <i>Human beings/man</i>	Man	What are <i>human beings</i> that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?
Πάντας (John12:32) <i>All</i>	<i>all men</i>	will draw <i>all people</i> to myself" (The Greek text doesn't specify the Word men, and all people is an appropriate usage of Greek pronoun . Changes like this use "gender-neutral" language

		without sacrificing accuracy in translation)
Τις (John14:23) <i>Anyone</i>	<i>a man</i>	<i>Those who</i> love me will keep my Word. (here the phrase <i>those who</i> is not specifying any gender)
ἄνθρωπος (Gal 6:7) <b>man</b>	<i>a man</i>	" <i>You</i> reap whatever <i>you</i> sow."

(Table. 1)

### Findings: Gender-Neutrality Concept in NRSV Bible

Table 1. points out that NRSV Bible vividly use the gender neutrality concept during the translation phase with the help of certain changes in linguistic aspects such as:

#### Usage of Collective Nouns Instead of Common Names

According to the creation narratives, “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen. 1:27). This name ‘man’ is even more explicit in Genesis 5:2. ‘*Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created*’ (RSV). ‘man’ refers to males and females, who make up the human race. The translation “man” is correct because the Hebrew word ‘Adam’ is also used to refer to Adam specifically, and it is sometimes used to distinguish between man and woman (Gen 2:25, ‘the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed’).

The English word ‘man’ most accurately translates as Adam because it is the only Word that has both meanings (the human race and a male human being). We can conclude from this use of Adam that it is not wrong, insensitive, or disrespectful to use the same word to refer to male human beings in particular, as well as to name the human race. God does this in his Word. According to the NRSV, ‘*God created humankind in his image*’ (Gen. 1:27). The word ‘man’ was changed to ‘humankind’ to create an inclusive translation.

In the NRSV Bible, the word ‘man’ is often replaced with ‘human’ or ‘person,’. This approach is intended to be more inclusive and to reflect the reality that men and women are equal in the eyes of God.

### **Usage of Adjectives Instead of Nouns**

The NRSV frequently substitutes the word ‘mortal’ for the word ‘man’ in the RSV and other versions. For example, when Cornelius fell down to worship Peter, Peter lifted him up and said, ‘*Stand up; I, too, am a man*’ (Acts 10:26, RSV). But in the New Revised Standard Version, Peter says, ‘*Stand up; I am only a mortal.*’ Articulation of *mortal* instead of *man* gives an inclusive translation and expression.

### **Depiction of God**

One of the key areas where the NRSV employs gender-neutral language is in its depiction of God. Instead of exclusively using masculine pronouns and imagery to describe the Divine, the NRSV introduces more diverse language that encompasses both masculine and feminine qualities. For example, in passages where God is referred to as a shepherd or a mother, the NRSV maintains the flexibility to use language that captures the full range of God’s attributes.

### **Take out Direct Quotations**

In Psalm 41, David describes how his enemies speak against him: “*My enemies say of me in malice, ‘When will he die, and his name perish?’*” (Ps. 41:5). However, in the NRSV, the words “he” and “his” were removed, and in this case the enemies’ speech is transformed into thoughts in their minds: “*My enemies wonder in malice when I will die, and my name perish*” (NRSV). Through this the translators used gender neutral concept by removing the direct quotations.

### **Usage of Pronoun**

The apt usage of suitable pronouns will create a gender inclusive approach in translation. For example, NRSV Bible translators used the word *all* instead of *all men* in their translation (Table.1).



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible is a popular translation of the Bible that uses gender-neutral concept to be more inclusive of all genders. While some may criticize this approach, others see it as a way of making the Bible more accessible and relevant to modern readers. Ultimately, the use of gender-neutral concept in the NRSV Bible reflects the ongoing effort to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Translators need to stay informed about gender-neutral language practices, evolving terminology, and cultural shifts. They can engage in ongoing research, consult style guides, and participate in discussions within the translation community to enhance their understanding and application of gender-neutral translation principles.

It is important to note that the extent to which gender neutrality is embraced in translation may vary across languages and cultures. Translators play a vital role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps while promoting inclusive language choices that align with the principles of gender neutrality.

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