Gender-Inclusive Language in Media Discourse: A Contrastive Analysis of Gendered Person References in German and Chinese Press Texts

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Linguistic variation in gender representation is a key topic in sociolinguistics and media discourse analysis (Gygax et al. 2008, Hellinger & Bußmann 2002, 2003). While gender-inclusive usage has been widely discussed in languages with grammatical gender, there is little research on languages like Chinese, which do not have any grammatical gender in their system. This study compares references to gendered persons in German and Chinese press texts and examines how translation can affect gender representation.

The German language requires explicit gender marking in person references, such as *der Lehrer* ('male teacher') or *die Lehrerin* ('female teacher') (Braun et al. 1998). In contrast, the equivalent term in Chinese 教师 ('teacher') is inherently gender-neutral, quite similar to the respective expressions in English. If gender needs to be marked, it would be highlighted in Chinese through additional modifiers (男教师 'male teacher', 女教师 'female teacher'), or through pronouns in written context (Packard 2000). Unlike German, Chinese personal pronouns do not encode grammatical gender. However, gender distinction can be introduced through the characters 他 ('he'), 她 ('she') and 它 ('it'), which share the same pronunciation but are visually distinct. These structural differences pose challenges in translation, as they can impact the meaning and tone of the original text. The non-gender marking terms often become explicitly gendered (especially in form of generic masculine) when translating from Chinese to German, and conversely, terms marked with grammatical gender in German may lose their gender distinction in Chinese translations. These shifts can influence how readers interpret the texts in cross-language communication.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data is sourced from the *German Reference Corpus* (DeReKo) and new reports collected from the *People's Daily*, one of the most influential media outlets in China. Additionally, the texts used for the translation analysis are also derived from the German edition of the *People's Daily*. The quantitative analysis identifies referential strategies for gender marking, neutralization, and potential ambiguity in both languages separately. Initial findings show that the expressions in these two languages vary along the lines of the respective language system, cultural context, and cognitive processing – particularly in how gender marking influences reference tracking and comprehension. They also show how language use reflects and reinforces social values. The qualitative analysis focuses on the translation, particularly from Chinese to German, and investigates how both languages describe the same events using gender-relevant references. Early observations show that neutral terms in Chinese tend to be translated

into the generic masculine form in German rather than a balanced gender representation. These patterns suggest that translation can not only transfer meaning but also reconstruct gender discourse according to the conventions of the target language.

By contrasting these two typologically distinct languages, this study contributes to the broader discussion on linguistic gender representation and its implications for translation studies. These findings also indicate the importance of flexible language practices in multilingual media to ensure clear and inclusive communication across languages and cultures.

References

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