



Grammatical and Formal Gender in English Pronominal Gender System: Markedness in Translation

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Abstract

The present contribution deals with markedness in pronominal reference when considering the process of translation in English as semantic language. Personal pronouns reference is constrained by the grammar, due to the norm concerning the gender-specific pronouns of the language, and by the textual pragmatics, in their choice affected by cognitive and social factors (Thomas 1995: 114). In the grammar of English, gender-specific pronouns with regard to the third person encompass the pronominal forms *he/him/his*, *she/her/hers*, *they/them/theirs*. Nevertheless, with respect to sexuality and gender minorities, other forms have been taken into account over time. Gender neutral pronouns, aimed to include gender differences in the sense of “not gendered” individuals, in that “non-binary pronouns” in alternative to the canonical pronouns, have been introduced in public contexts, such as universities. These considerations draw attention to grammatical markedness in referring to personal identity, formally larger in the marked form than the unmarked, of which the marked category is a part, and depends on the context (Givón 1995: 25-28). Interdisciplinary approaches to translation studies are here examined with regard to the ideological dimension of gender in translation, in terms of its maintenance in the overt expression of the distinction of the pronominal marked forms, rather than in their assimilation to unmarked forms. Especially in languages such as English where gender is determined semantically rather than grammatically, a shift of focus aims to raise the awareness of the social differences, as a “pluricentric language” entailing a plurality of norms based on local differences (Romaine 2001: 154).

Keywords: reference, translation studies, markedness, grammatical gender, semantic gender.