

# Gender-inclusive translation for a gender-inclusive sport: strategies and translator perceptions at the International Quadball Association

Joke Daems

Ghent University

joke.daems@ugent.be

International Quadball Association

joke.daems@iqasport.org

## Abstract

Gender-inclusive language is of key importance to the IQA, the international governing body for quadball, a mixed-gender contact sport that explicitly welcomes players of all genders. While relatively straightforward for English, the picture becomes more complicated for most of the other IQA working languages. This paper provides an overview of the strategies currently chosen by translation team leaders for different IQA languages, the factors that influenced this decision and their connection with existing research on inclusive language strategies. It further explores the awareness and attitudes of IQA translators towards those strategies and factors.

## 1 Introduction

Quadball is a mixed-gender, full-contact sport played around the world. A quadball team consists of up to 21 athletes with seven players per team on the field at any one time. The IQA is the international governing body for quadball, representing 19 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) with Full Member status and 19 NGBs with Associate Member status at the time of writing. The IQA organizes international events, offers support to its members, and promotes the sport and its values of gender equity and inclusivity. The sport's rulebook explicitly acknowledges players of all genders: "All quadball athletes have the right to define how they identify and it is this stated gender that is recognized on pitch" (6) and enforces the presence of multiple genders on pitch via the so called 'gender maximum rule': "A team may not have more than four players who identify as the same gender in play at the same time" (11).

Because of the importance of gender inclusivity, all IQA publications (e.g., the rulebook, policies, and

reports) are written using gender-inclusive language. As IQA documents are drafted in English, a natural gender language, this is achieved relatively straightforwardly by avoiding gender-specific nouns and using the pronouns 'they/them' when referring to a person of unknown gender. Increasingly, however, the IQA translation team is trying to provide core content (i.e., the rulebook and referee tests) in languages other than English. At the time of writing, there are translators working into 8 languages: Catalan, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish. Given the unique nature of each language and the fact that the translation teams consist of (an often limited number of) volunteers, gender-inclusive language is implemented to different degrees for each target language.

This paper provides an overview of the different strategies currently in use at the IQA, the factors that influenced those strategies, and a discussion of the strategy compared to existing research on gender-inclusive writing for that language (if available). This is followed by a report on a survey conducted among the IQA translators, exploring their awareness of inclusive language strategies, their attitudes towards them and the factors that influence the choice of strategy. The paper concludes with some key findings and plans for future work.

## 2 Related work

Quite a large body of work has indicated that the use of certain linguistic forms leads to certain mental representations with, for example, the supposedly 'generic' masculine evoking a male bias in readers' minds (Stahlberg et al., 2007). A possible way of countering these biases is by using gender-fair language, which has "the potential to make significant contributions to the reduction of gender stereotyping and discrimination" (Sczesny et al., 2016). However, while women were found to use more gender-fair language after being exposed to a

text containing such language, men needed to be made explicitly aware of this language use before using it themselves (Koeser et al., 2015).

Until relatively recently, most of the work on gender-fair language focused on masculine and feminine genders only, but society and research now increasingly acknowledge the importance of non-binary gender identities. As “[r]epresentation in language can be very important to one’s ability to have their identity understood by others and recognized in everyday speech interactions” (Hord, 2016), the use of gender-inclusive or gender neutral language is on the rise. There are a variety of strategies to include non-binary identities in language. López (2022) divides them into two main groups: Indirect Non-binary Language (INL), where gender markers are avoided altogether, and Direct Non-binary Language (DNL), where linguistic innovation takes place to make non-binary identities explicitly visible. Often, a combination of those strategies is suggested, with Kosnick (2019) acknowledging that “[I]everaging non-binary language [...] in ways that do not deviate from current linguistic norms is one productive strategy” and that it can be combined with neologisms or neopronouns to allow for “linguistic possibilities through which non-binary speakers/writers can more authentically articulate their experiences and, thereby, come to exist in language” (152). However, the use and acceptance of such language greatly depends on the language itself, with natural gender languages being more open to linguistic changes than grammatical gender languages (Hord, 2016).

This imbalance between languages when it comes to gender-inclusivity potentially creates challenges in translation, particularly when translating from a natural gender language like English into heavily grammatically gendered languages like French or Spanish. In a paper discussing audiovisual translation and representation of non-binary characters, López (2022) shows how characters’ gender identity can get lost in translation and argues that it is a translator’s “responsibility to keep non-binary people visible” (232). According to Attig (2022), working on similar data, translators need to have “an awareness of and engagement with the ever-evolving culture of the community one is translating” (14). In the most comprehensive survey on gender-fair (machine) translation to date, Lardelli and Gromann (2023) argue that there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to determining gender-fair language strategy in translation due to its complexity and context-specificity. From these perspectives, the translation department of the IQA offers an ideal use case, as most translators are

active members of the quadball community themselves, and are thus very aware of the context in which their translations will appear.

### 3 Gender-inclusive translation strategies at the IQA

Of the 8 IQA working languages, there is one genderless language (Turkish), requiring no additional strategies for gender inclusivity in translation. The other languages express gender grammatically to different degrees: Dutch is a grammatical gender language that is gradually becoming a natural gender language like English; Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish are masculine-feminine gender languages; and German is a masculine-feminine-neuter gender language. To get an idea of the chosen strategy for each language and the factors that influenced this decision, I contacted all translation team leaders via the official IQA Slack workspace. Some answered my questions via chat, others wrote out a document outlining the strategies and factors in more detail. The following section offers an – inevitably very condensed – overview per language, with the exception of Dutch<sup>1</sup>.

#### 3.1 Strategies and motivation per language

**Catalan:** The Catalan translation team is the smallest (two translators), yet it is very active. A variety of gender-inclusive strategies has been tested by the team over the years, and these have been followed by the Catalan NGB to different degrees, depending on the NGB board at the time:

- Doubling up (‘desdoblament’), using both masculine and feminine endings (e.g., ‘un/a jugador/a’, ‘uns/unes àrbitres’). Pro: also used in media and therefore recognizable, con: makes sentences harder to read.
- Plural feminine (e.g., ‘les jugadores’ instead of ‘els jugadors’). Pro: easier to read, con: seen as presumptuous and disconnected from the community.
- Plural masculine with generic forms where possible (e.g., ‘equip arbitral’ instead of ‘els àrbitres’). Pro: easier to read, con: can be seen to exclude women and non-binary people.

The last strategy is the strategy currently in use. The translation team leader is aware of the suggested use of the vowel ‘i’ as an ending to indicate non-binary people (Duarte, 2022), but argues that this is not actively being used in practice, could lead to misunderstandings of the rules, and that it is not a perfect

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<sup>1</sup> The only Dutch translator currently working for the IQA is also the author of this paper, and it is a bit hard to interview oneself.

strategy for Catalan, given that there are masculine words ending in -i as well (e.g., ‘empresari’). In general, the team leader is clearly aware of the complexities of the Catalan language and sociological background. He explicitly mentions wanting to read the work by Junyent (2021), and states: “I think it is important to be open to new ideas as society and languages change and I do believe that new gender-inclusive language strategies for Catalan could be developed and adopted in the future.”

The book by Junyent (2021) collects opinions from a variety of linguists on the topic of gender-inclusivity in Catalan, inevitably leading to a broad spectrum: some linguists defend the use of the generic masculine by stating that grammatical gender is unrelated to biological sex or gender, others prefer the ‘desdoblament’ strategy to explicitly make women visible in language, and yet others say that this strategy does not work, either because it excludes non-binary people, or because by making the distinction between men and women explicit, we strengthen the idea that they are fundamentally different people and should therefore be treated differently.

**French:** The French translation team consists of approximately five translators. The size of the team is hard to measure accurately, as most translators work for the French NGB and collaborate with the IQA, but are not official IQA volunteers. The strategy currently in use by the French translation team is the use of the interpunct (‘point médian’) between the masculine and feminine endings of a word, and the use of the gender-inclusive pronoun ‘iel’ (instead of the masculine ‘il’ or feminine ‘elle’), e.g., ‘Si le·a joueur·euse entrant·e intéragit avec le jeu [...] iel doit être pénalisé·e’. Unfortunately, the team leader did not reply to my messages on Slack in time to add additional clarifications as to why and how this particular strategy was chosen.

Looking at recent research on gender-inclusive French, it does seem that the interpunct strategy is the dominant strategy. Inclusive writing is strongly opposed or even ridiculed in France, particularly by the conservative Académie française, generally on the grounds of its assumed pointlessness in making women more visible in language (the existence of non-binary people is rarely acknowledged in this discourse), its reduced readability and the idea that the language would become even harder to learn (Académie française, 2021; Manesse, 2022). However, the few studies that have actually looked at readability indicate that inclusive writing strategies are not harder to read than generic masculine (Girard et al., 2021) and that readers rapidly get used to new forms of writing (Liénardy et al., 2023). Compared to ‘generic’ masculine forms, gender-fair forms were also shown

to increase the visibility of women (Liénardy et al., 2023; Tibblin et al., 2023).

**German:** The German team consists of six translators. Gender-inclusive translation strategies are used so that every member of the community can find themselves in the texts. Different team leaders preferred different strategies:

- Gender asterisk (‘Gendersternchen’) to include masculine and feminine forms of words, with the \* indicating non-binary identities (e.g., ‘ein\*e deutschsprachige\*r Spieler\*in’), simplified in the rulebook translations to improve readability (‘eine deutschsprachige Spieler\*in’).
- Gender colon and leaving English terms untranslated, forms written in full depending on the case (e.g., ‘Ein:e rennende:r Chaser’, ‘Der Ball eines:einer Spielers:Spielerin’, ‘Ich gebe den Ball einem:einer Spieler:in’).

The last strategy is the strategy currently in use. There was a discussion with the German-speaking NGBs (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) to determine the strategy. Other symbols like the gender asterisk (\*) and interpunct (·) were discussed as well. Given that Swiss translators already have to copy/paste the ‘ß’ symbol used in standard German, the interpunct was discarded because it is hard to type (and incompatible with the current IQA font). Other core factors in determining the strategy were readability and compatibility, and the fact that the colon is also increasingly being used by the media. The team leader was additionally informed by someone with a background in gender studies, offering access to relevant articles. The decision to no longer translate position names was influenced by readability, as well as the fact that referees use the English terms in practice. The English ‘keeper zone’ then becomes ‘Keeper-Zone’ rather than ‘Hüter:innen-Zone’.

Recent research on the readability of gender-inclusive German strategies indicates that “the use of the gender asterisk tended to have a rather positive effect on subjective comprehensibility, word difficulty, and aesthetic appeal, and did not impair sentence difficulty”, although the opposite was found when a text contained many singular nouns (Friedrich et al., 2021). The colon has been introduced more recently and has not been studied to the same extent yet, although its adoption seems potentially controversial and seems particularly opposed by the visually impaired, as it is less recognisable than the asterisk and can be more easily confused with a letter ‘i’ (bukof, 2022).

**Italian:** The Italian translation team consists of four members. The team leader is aware of different

potential strategies (using a gender asterisk, replacing gendered endings with ‘u’, removing the last letter altogether) and favours the more recent proposition by activist Luca Boschetto and sociolinguist Vera Gheno to replace the last letter with the ‘-ə’ (e.g., ‘lò direttore’ instead of ‘i direttori’). While the translation team already actively uses this strategy for smaller texts and documents, the team leader is reluctant to use the forms in larger documents like the rulebook. The main reason is that there is ongoing debate about the readability of these forms, particularly for people with dyslexia or other specific learning disabilities. As a current solution, the introduction, conclusion and changelog of the rulebook are written in the gender-inclusive language, while the main content chapters of the rulebook are written using alternatively feminine or masculine variants and pronouns. The team leader does believe in the importance of gender-inclusive translations and states that “if new and more functioning Italian neutral-forms will appear in the future I will be 100% happy to implement it”.

Research confirms that a variety of linguistic strategies have been used in Italian, to varying degrees of success, with asterisks and the schwa currently being the most common, and endings like -x and -u being used to a lesser degree (Comandini, 2021). Such strategies are often met with resistance, either because they go against the internal structure of the language (De Santis, 2022) or because they might lead to readability issues, particularly for people with dyslexia (D’Achille, 2022). Some researchers argue that the more neutral endings render women invisible (Robustelli, 2021), or that the generic masculine should simply be seen as ‘neutral’ (D’Achille, 2022). Many of these arguments have been countered by Gheno (2022), stating that from an intersectional point of view it makes no sense to pit different kinds of diversities against each other (e.g. the rights of non-binary people in opposition to those of people with dyslexia), as this implies there is some sort of hierarchy of diversity rights, and it ignores the existence of, for example, non-binary people with dyslexia. On the other hand, Gheno (2022) does acknowledge the potential impact on accessibility, with speech synthesisers not currently handling gender-inclusive characters well, which can cause problems for the blind and visually impaired.

**Portuguese:** The Portuguese translation team consists of six translators, all from Brazil (Portugal is a ‘region of interest’ for the IQA, but has no NGB yet). The team leader wishes to introduce gender-inclusive language in official IQA translations in the future, but has decided against it at the moment. The main reason for taking a cautious approach is the fact that gender-inclusive language is not actively being used in Brazil yet, not even by the LGBTQIA+ community, and that

there is a strong anti-trans agenda in media and politics. The translation team is taking a year to work on a variety of resources for their community and to explore attitudes towards gender-inclusive language and will introduce this gender-inclusive language in IQA translations from next year onwards. The team has developed referee tests specific for their community, using gender-inclusive language, and is conducting a survey asking referees about their impressions, the comprehension and readability of the questions and related rulebook excerpts. They are also developing additional referee resources (videos and rulebook comprehension questions) using gender-inclusive writing. Preliminary findings from their survey seem to indicate that people find the gender-inclusive writing hard to understand at first, but get used to it after a while. However, people with dyslexia or ADHD seem to find it the hardest to use and understand.

Recent research indeed seems to suggest that there is no commonly accepted gender-inclusive strategy for Portuguese, with Pinheiro (2020) arguing that any suggested changes to the morphosyntactic and semantic level of the Portuguese language are met with a lot of resistance in Brazil, although they also claim that society is becoming more aware of the idea of non-binary gender identities. Comparing a variety of suggested strategies (the use of marked feminine, presenting feminine and masculine forms, using new word endings such as -x, -@, or -e), Schwindt (2020) claims that changes to the language are possible, provided they come with a sufficient degree of spontaneity and naturalness (i.e., taking into account the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic restrictions of the language). Of the suggested word endings, the ‘-e’ seems the most likely to succeed, given that it can be pronounced (in contrast with -x and -@, which additionally pose problems for screen readers) and that it already has a morphological role in the language (Schwindt, 2020).

**Spanish:** The size of the Spanish translation team fluctuates greatly. At the time of writing it consisted of four translators. The decision to use inclusive language was driven by the team leader, inspired by the IQA’s values of inclusivity. There was a vote in the translators’ chat (there were more than four translators on the team at the time of the vote), where they unanimously agreed to use this strategy. The NGBs (plural, as Spanish is spoken in European as well as Latin American NGBs) were not consulted, as the team leader feared this would lead to unnecessary debate. The team leader is aware of a variety of suggested strategies for Spanish inclusive writing currently in use in practice:

- Using ‘-x’ to replace gender markings (e.g., ‘lxs árbitrxs’). Pro: seen in Latin-American

texts, con: very uncommon in Spain (particularly Galicia), hard to pronounce.

- **Duplication**, using both masculine and feminine versions of a word if possible (e.g., ‘Los árbitros y las árbitras’). Pro: used in official documents and quite widespread, con: text becomes longer and potentially harder to read, risk of exacerbating genderization of gender neutral words.
- **Avoidance**, by using collective or gender neutral words (e.g., ‘el equipo de árbitros’ instead of ‘los árbitros’). Pro: as unmarked as possible, also used in official documents, con: not always possible, avoiding gendered words can lead to ‘pedantic’ phrasing.
- **Using ‘-e’ to replace gender markings** (e.g., ‘les árbitres’). Pro: easy to use, economic, includes people of all genders, con: actively opposed, particularly by right-wing people.

The last two strategies are the strategies currently in use at the IQA. The collective or gender neutral words strategy is the team leader’s preferred strategy. They consider the ‘-e’ strategy to be the most radical “as it is the productive one, the one that can actually work as one can pronounce it and use it in both conversation and texts”. While the strategy is increasingly being used by leftist minorities, it is often ridiculed or even actively opposed. Arguments against the use of gender-inclusive language are that it is supposedly harder to read, and that the Real Academia Española de la Lengua (a very prescriptivist language organisation) is against it as well. To learn more about the subject, the team leader follows the work by Artemis López<sup>2</sup>, a PhD researcher working on non-binary language in Spanish.

Studying the perception of translators towards gender-inclusive language in Chile, Uriarte Castro (2022) indeed found that translators generally prefer to use less disruptive forms of inclusive language, although there is a difference between older translators (finding adherence to the language’s norms most important, worrying about the readability of a text) and younger translators (finding it important to respect people’s gender identities). Recent research on non-binary language in Spanish suggests that the ‘-x’ and ‘-e’ strategies are not harder to read than generic masculine (-o) variants and that ‘generic’ masculine actually causes male bias, which the non-binary strategies avoid (Stetie & Zunino, 2022). With regards to preference, the ‘-e’ strategy indeed seems to be the most preferred at the moment (Slemp, 2020; Hiers 2022).

### 3.2 Similarities and differences across languages

All translation team leaders seem to agree that gender-inclusive language is important to represent the IQA values of gender-inclusivity, although the degree to which this is already actively implemented varies across languages. While Catalan, French, German, and Spanish translators actively use gender-inclusive language to some degree for all documents, Italian translators avoid it for content chapters of the rulebook, and Portuguese translators are gradually moving towards more gender-inclusive language, giving the community time to get acquainted with the new strategy before officially putting it to use.

The main strategies currently in use are the following:

- Indirect Non-binary Language (avoiding gender by using collective or generic words): Catalan, Spanish
- Direct Non-binary Language:
  - o Using typographical characters to explicitly include non-binary individuals: French, German
  - o Using gender-inclusive morphemes: Italian, Spanish

There are some interesting differences with regards to the role of the NGBs in the decision-making process. While French, German, and Portuguese translation teams closely consulted their NGBs, the Spanish team leader considers the NGBs opinion of secondary importance to the IQA’s values, and the Catalan NGB often followed the lead of the IQA translators.

Particularly striking is the fact that many team leaders explicitly refer to academic research on the subject, or the attitudes towards the language in their communities and countries. Even in situations where gender-inclusive language is not used (yet), this seems to be a very conscious decision.

## 4 Translator awareness and attitude

To get a better understanding of how translators perceive gender-inclusive language at the IQA, I conducted a survey using Google Forms. The survey consisted of three main parts:

- **Personal background**, asking participants about their language, gender, education or professional background, and how important the gender-inclusivity of the sport was for them to join as a player or as a volunteer.
- **Gender-inclusive language strategy**, a more general section asking about participants’

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.queerpreter.com/>

awareness of gender-inclusive language strategies in use for their language, how important it is to them, what they think of the readability, and what the general attitude towards it is in their countries.

- **Gender-inclusive language at the IQA**, asking how important they feel this is, how important potential factors are when deciding which strategy to use, how aware they themselves are of those potentially relevant factors, how they feel about the strategy currently in use in their team.

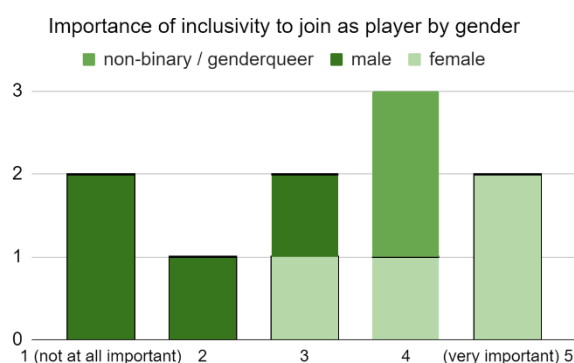
The form was shared with translators via the IQA Slack workspace and e-mail. The total number of translators invited to participate was 27 (19 official IQA translators on Slack and an additional 8 community translators currently working on IQA translation projects). It must be noted that activity fluctuates greatly among translators, as these are unpaid volunteer positions, and many translators also volunteer within their own communities (either for local teams or within their NGBs), making some people less likely to regularly check the IQA Slack or e-mails.

#### 4.1 Personal background

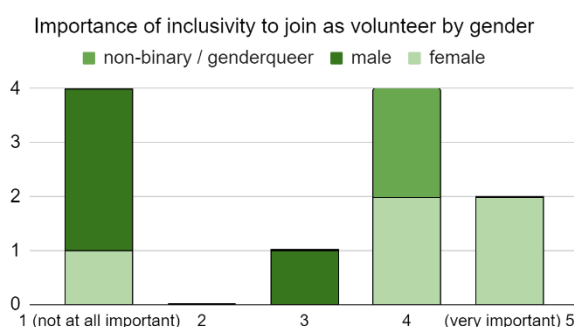
The survey was filled out by 11 translators (1 Catalan, 1 French, 2 Portuguese, 3 Spanish, and 4 German). There were 2 non-binary, 5 female, and 4 male participants.

Only one translator indicated they have a translation background, and three indicated that they have language or linguistics related backgrounds. Two indicated they have a background in gender studies, although two more clarified in the comments that gender does play a significant role in their lives (being trans or having obtained a degree in sociology with a strong gender perspective). Most translators (9) are currently also players, with one translator indicating they used to play but now only volunteer, and one only volunteering and having no intention of playing the sport.

As can be seen in Figures 1 & 2, for at least half of the translators, the gender-inclusive element of the sport was important or very important to join either as a player or a volunteer, with a higher number of participants indicating that it was not at all important for them to join as a volunteer compared to the numbers for joining as a player. For female or non-binary translators, the element of inclusivity seems to be more important in both cases than for male translators.



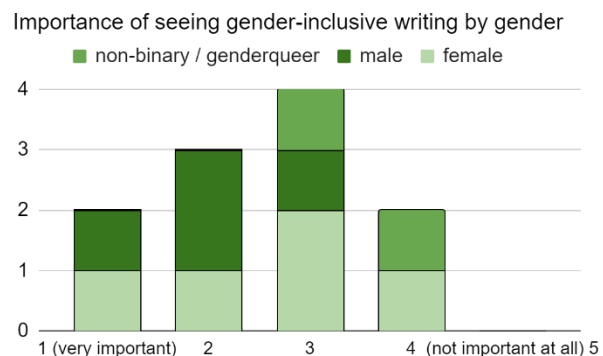
**Figure 1:** Importance of gender-inclusivity to join as a player by gender (1 = ‘Not at all important, I would have joined even if it hadn’t been inclusive’; 5 = ‘Very important, I wouldn’t have joined if it wasn’t inclusive’)



**Figure 2:** Importance of gender-inclusivity to join as a volunteer by gender (1 = ‘Not at all important, I would have joined even if it hadn’t been inclusive’; 5 = ‘Very important, I wouldn’t have joined if it wasn’t inclusive’)

#### 4.2 Gender-inclusive language strategies

Five of the translators find it very important to see gender-inclusive writing in a text, with none of the translators indicating they don’t find it important at all (Figure 3). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the trend in relation to gender seems different from that in Figures 1 & 2, with female and non-binary translators finding it somewhat less important to see gender-inclusive writing than male translators do<sup>3</sup>.

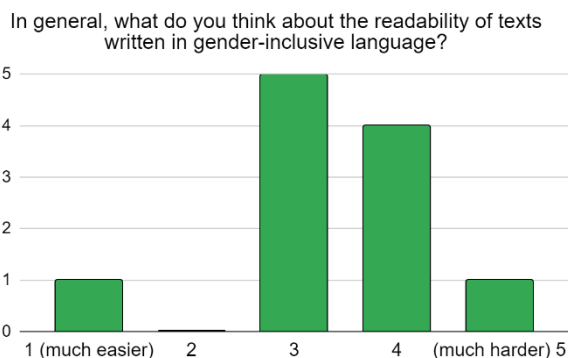


**Figure 3:** Importance of seeing gender-inclusive writing (1 = ‘Very important’; 5 = ‘Not important at all’)

<sup>3</sup> It is of course always possible that respondents misinterpreted the values (in the first two questions, 1 was ‘not at all

important’ and 5 was ‘very important, whereas those labels were flipped for this question).

In the comments, translators clarified that it depends on the context and type of text, and the tradeoff between inclusivity and readability. The next question asked how readable participants found texts written in gender-inclusive language compared to non-inclusive writing. Five of the participants seem to find both equally readable (see Figure 4), whereas most other participants find inclusive writing harder to read. Only one person indicated that they found it much easier to read.



**Figure 4:** Readability (1 = ‘I find gender-inclusive writing much easier to read than non-inclusive writing.’; 5 = ‘I find gender-inclusive writing much harder to read than non-inclusive writing.’)

In the comments, translators clarified that it really depends on the language and the type of gender-inclusive writing. English was seen as very readable compared to German and Portuguese, and generic words (e.g. ‘people’) were seen as easier to read than typographical strategies or new gender-inclusive morphemes. One translator also indicated that it is a matter of getting used to it.

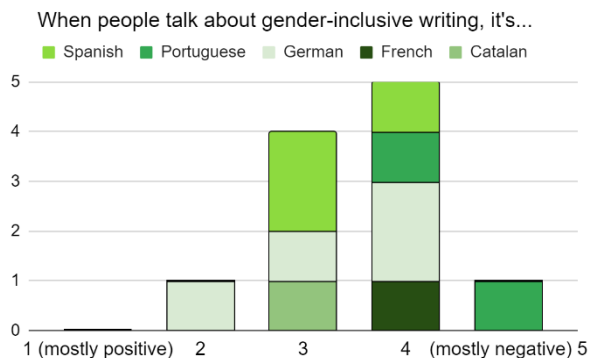
Most translators (8) were already aware about gender-inclusive writing strategies for their language before joining the IQA. Based on the answers in the comments, translators know about the following strategies for their language (number of translators who mention this strategy in brackets):

- Indirect Non-binary Language: avoiding gender by using collective or generic words (7)
- Direct Non-binary Language:
  - o Using typographical characters (5)
  - o Using gender-inclusive morphemes and/or pronouns (4)
- Others:
  - o Alternating between male/female forms (2)
  - o Feminine gender only (1)

When asked about their favorite strategy, six out of seven translators write that they prefer the avoidance

strategy, as it can be used and read relatively easily. Or as one translator explained it: “Sometimes it is important to show that inclusion does not have to be controversial, it can be something VERY natural”. Some translators do remark that this strategy is not always possible, and that it needs to be combined with others.

In general, translators perceive the attitudes towards gender-inclusive writing in their language as somewhat more negative (see Figure 5), with none of the translators going for the ‘mostly positive’ option.



**Figure 5:** In general (not specific to the IQA context), what describes the situation for your language best? (1 = ‘When people talk about gender-inclusive writing, it’s mostly positive’; 5 = ‘When people talk about gender-inclusive writing, it’s mostly negative’)

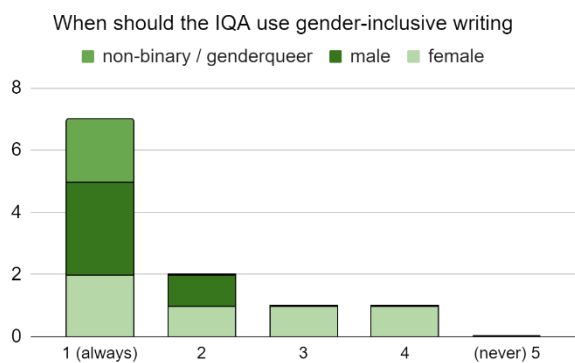
In the comments, translators explain that it depends on the people, with younger people, women, and people from the LGBTQIA+ and/or the quadball community much more likely to be positive towards this kind of language. The ‘average person’ is described as not liking language change, and criticizing any gender-inclusive writing forms that feel too hard to read.

### 4.3 Gender-inclusive translation at the IQA

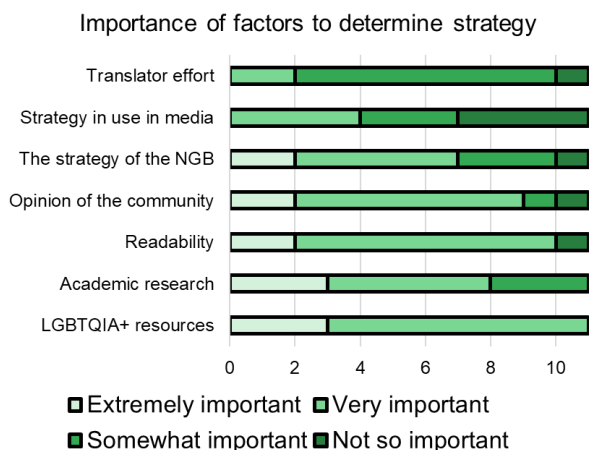
When it comes to the use of gender-inclusive language by the IQA translation team, most translators seem to agree that gender-inclusive language should always (7) or often (2) be used (see Figure 6). There is a fairly even spread among the female translators, whereas the non-binary and male translators mostly go for the ‘always’ option.

The main reasons listed by the translators relate to gender-inclusivity being a core value of the sport, and the IQA needing to be at the forefront of this change. Translators who did not choose ‘always’ clarify that for them it depends on the type of text and the kind of language, and that readability should always be taken into account, particularly for the rulebook and referee tests. When given a list of potential factors that should be taken into account when determining a translation strategy (Figure 7), most translators indeed indicate

that ‘readability’ is very (8) or even extremely (2) important.



**Figure 6:** How do you personally feel about gender-inclusive writing in the context of IQA translations? (1 = ‘The IQA should always use gender-inclusive writing in translation.’; 5 = ‘The IQA should never use gender-inclusive writing in translation.’)



**Figure 7:** Importance of factors to determine gender-inclusive translation strategies (‘Not at all important’ was never chosen by any translator).

Other important factors according to the translators are LGBTQIA+ resources (3 ‘extremely’, 8 ‘very’), academic research (3 ‘extremely’, 5 ‘very’), the opinion of the IQA community (2 ‘extremely’, 7 ‘very’), and the strategy of the NGB to a lesser degree (2 ‘extremely’, 5 ‘very’, but also 3 ‘somewhat’ and 1 ‘not so’). The strategy used by media or in official documentation and the effort for the translator are seen as less important, with more than half of the translators choosing ‘somewhat important’ and ‘not so important’ and none of the translators selecting ‘extremely important’. Translators were also challenged to only choose one factor as ‘the most important’ one, and chose the following (number of translators who chose the option between brackets):

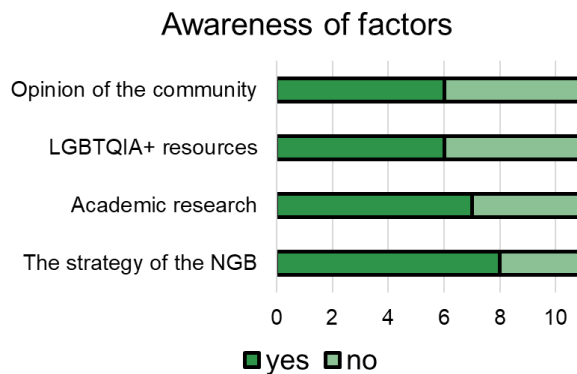
- The readability of the text (3): Those advocating for readability clarify that a text loses its purpose if it cannot be understood. One

participant also explains that readers can be taught to understand gender-inclusive writing, for example by providing guides explaining the choices made in their native language.

- Academic research (2) and LGBTQIA+ resources (1): Presented together as one translator wrote that academic research also takes the LGBTQIA+ perspective into account.
- The opinion of the community (2): Translators explain that the work the IQA does needs to serve the community, and the members of the community are the ones that need to understand the resources the IQA provides.

The other three participants indicated ‘something else’, with two of them also referring to the importance of the community in their clarification, mentioning that the strategy should help the community and that it should include everyone in the community (particularly including non-binary individuals). The third person said it is always a compromise.

When asked about their personal awareness of certain factors (the opinion of the community, LGBTQIA+ resources, academic research, and the strategy of the NGB), the majority (6-8) of respondents seems to be aware of them, with most translators being aware of the strategies currently in use by their NGB (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Translator awareness of factors to determine gender-inclusive translation strategies.

Of the seven people that indicated that they are aware of academic research on gender-inclusive writing for their language, there are four that have a background in either translation, linguistics, or gender studies, and three without such a background. Before joining the IQA, six translators didn’t use gender-inclusive writing in their language, whereas five did.

When asked whether translators are aware of the strategy currently in use in their team, there does seem to be a little confusion. In the German team, there was one translator who thought the asterisk was still being used, and one who indicated that only



female forms were being used. For Spanish, one of the translators indicated they didn't know whether or not gender-inclusive writing was being used.

Of the eight translators in teams that already use gender-inclusive writing strategies (and are aware of them), six are mostly happy about the strategy currently in use, although some add that it is “the best *for now*” [emphasis mine]. There seems to be a tension between readability/inclusivity, with on the one hand a need to make female players more visible (one translator indicated that the ‘-e’ strategy in Spanish feels like it’s making females invisible, another joked that it would be nice to release a text where everyone is gendered female), and on the other to make sure players of all genders are included: “It doesn't really represent all genders now, but the readability has improved a lot.”

When asked how hard it was to translate using gender-inclusive strategies, most translators (6) indicated that it was just as easy/hard to do as using non-inclusive writing for their language, and five indicated that it was harder to do (selecting 4 on a Likert scale from 1-5 with 1 being ‘much easier than using non-inclusive writing for my language, and 5 being ‘much harder than using non-inclusive writing for my language’). Reasons why it is seen as harder is because there is more typing or thinking, it needs more rereading (particularly in grammatically complex sentences), and because a lot of gender-inclusive terms and strategy are new to people. On the other hand, translators in both groups indicate that it does get easier as they get used to it.

## 5 Discussion

The IQA translation teams have a clear understanding of the importance of gender-inclusive language strategies and are very aware of the community they translate for (both the quadball and the broader LGBTQIA+ community), which follows the recommendations of Attig (2022). The fact that strategies change as new research becomes available, or even when the translation team leader changes confirms the findings by Lardelli and Gromann (2023) that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to determining gender-inclusive translation strategies.

At the IQA, the strategies are different for each language, and sometimes even change depending on the context. This can be seen most clearly in some teams’ decision to change their strategy when translating the referee tests. These tests are taken under strict time limits, and there is a concern that gender-inclusive language forms might be harder to read. On the other hand, recent research suggests that this might not be the case in practice (Friedrich et al., 2021; Girard et al., 2021; Liénardy et al., 2023; Stetie & Zunino,

2022). Team leaders explicitly mention the potential negative influence on people with dyslexia, ADHD, or learning disabilities. To the best of my knowledge, this effect has not been tested in practice, making it a potentially fruitful avenue for future research. Another aspect of gender-inclusive writing where the inclusion of one group might happen at the cost of the inclusion of another is in the visibility of women. While there is some evidence that gender-inclusive strategies actually improve the visibility of women compared to the generic masculine (Liénardy et al., 2023; Stetie & Zunino, 2022; Tibblin et al., 2023), this may not be true for all languages or all strategies (e.g. Robustelli, 2021). Going forward, it will be crucial to evaluate the impact of different strategies from an intersectional point of view.

Because of the variability and continuously evolving strategies, translation technology at the IQA is currently limited to the use of translation memories and glossaries within Matecat (Federico et al., 2014) to ensure consistency in projects with more than one translator. Machine translation is not seen as a viable solution at this point as “machine translation cannot adapt to rapidly-evolving non-binary language” (Dev et al., 2021) and “one generally acceptable and widely applicable solution does not and could not exist” (Lardelli & Gromann, 2023). I am aware of some of the recent suggestions in this field (Piergentili et al., 2023) and will continue to follow these evolutions.

## 6 Conclusion & future work

As gender-inclusivity is one of the core values of quadball, this exploratory study set out to determine how gender-inclusivity is currently implemented by the different IQA translation teams, by means of input from translation team leaders and a survey conducted among the IQA translators.

Input from team leaders showed that each language has a different strategy, with languages like Portuguese and Italian taking a more cautious approach but willing to increase the use of gender-inclusive language in the future, Catalan preferring an Indirect Non-binary Language approach, and French, German, and Spanish opting for Direct Non-binary Language approaches. Factors that are taken into account are the gender-inclusive element of the sport, awareness of community needs, input from LGBTQIA+ communities and linguistic research.

Translators agree that gender-inclusive language should be used by the IQA, and seem to find LGBTQIA+ resources, academic research, the opinion of the community and the readability of a text the most important factors to determine a strategy. The argument of ‘readability’ occurs frequently, among team leaders and translators alike, although actual

empirical research on readability, particularly for people with learning disabilities, is currently scarce to nonexistent.

Overall, it is clear from the feedback that the gender-inclusive language strategies are not set in stone, and that team leaders and translators are open to changing the strategy as new information becomes available. Given the fact that gender-inclusive language is constantly evolving and that translators indicate that they get used to reading and writing it as they do it more, my goal is to repeat this survey every (other) year, to eventually get a diachronic overview of the evolution in the respective IQA communities. In a next phase, I hope to expand the present survey with a survey among NGB board members and players, to explore the attitudes in the community at large. Particularly interesting would be a comparison of referee tests using different language strategies, to empirically verify whether or not a gender-inclusive strategy is indeed harder to read (with regards to speed and comprehension).

## Disclaimers

The author is Assistant Professor at Ghent University and volunteers as Translation Manager at the IQA. They speak English and Dutch (and have notions of French and German), which necessarily reduces the body of potentially relevant work they have access to (when it comes to gender-inclusive language strategies, researchers often work in their respective language). Sources in other languages were translated with the help of Google Translate and are presented to the best of the author's ability. At the time of writing, the IQA was undergoing a name change. The new name has been used here, to future-proof the text.

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