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Challenges and (partial) solutions of gender-inclusive translation: Spanish, English, and French in the context of participatory research.¹

Abstract

Both co-authors have been coordinating translation work for the participatory research project The Surviving Memory in Postwar El Salvador including a variety of audiovisual materials (websites, ethics documents, subtitling videos, etc.). This work presents our observations of student translator training based on mutual education as an effort to negotiate across differences (regional, generational, linguistic, etc.) and to model language that is less (gender) exclusionary while also honoring cultural and historical specificities. After presenting the participatory research project and describing the different types of translation tasks, we consider some concrete cases of translations towards Spanish but also in some cases towards English and French, along with theoretical and practical implications. The extracts that we discuss come from the project's Governance Model, followed by some examples of translations from survivor testimonies, Community dissemination reports, ethic protocols and other administrative documents. Throughout the discussion of these examples, we reflect

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about our challenges in translation, mostly linked to learning and teaching how to translate while translating and also about Inclusive Translation as (mutual) education. The discussion includes some thoughts about the challenges of training in our collaborative approach to translation, translating with space limitations, and the use (or not) of nonbinary inclusive language in translation, all of which contribute to our vision of translation as mutual education

Keywords: Inclusive language, inclusive translation, participatory research, El Salvador, Salvadoran civil war

0. Introduction

This article presents our efforts to negotiate the translation process across regional, generational, and linguistic differences while modeling language that is less gender exclusionary and also honoring cultural and historical specificities, along with our observations about student translator training based on mutual education about these issues.

For some years, the two co-authors have been coordinating translation work for a participatory research project (*Surviving Historical Memory in Postwar El Salvador*, n.d. a) in which we are responsible for the translation of texts (e.g., websites, ethics documents, subtitling videos) to and from Spanish, English, and sometimes French. The primary goal of this collaborative research initiative is to document the history of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992) and preventing future violence in Salvadoran society, using decolonial and participatory methodologies. Given the nature of this research initiative, it is not surprising that issues of inclusive language come up regularly in our translation work, and, although at times in different ways, in the communities where the project takes place in El Salvador. Although the project's field work takes place in El Salvador, the transcription and translation teams that we coordinate work primarily in Canada. While we have both at times been language teachers, this translation work is not primarily teaching work, but does involve some instruction to a team of student translators and transcribers with differing levels of experience and training, creation of manuals for internal use, etc. Our translation team includes undergraduate students who may be bilingual by upbringing (i.e. heritage speakers of Spanish) with varying levels of fluency and some formal language training (or none at all), as

well as graduate students from Spanish-speaking countries, whose training occasionally includes language and translation studies.

At the same time, we are in a sort of learning dialogue with the communities and organizations we work with in El Salvador: while we do not presume to teach them about language and gender, we have to learn from them about evolving community norms and attitudes regarding inclusive language in order to offer translations that are inclusive but adapted to the project context.

In this article we consider some concrete cases of inclusive translations in Spanish, English, and French (e.g. *las y los sobrevivientes*; the women and men who survived; *les survivantes et les survivants*, see (3) below for details), along with theoretical and practical implications. We present the participatory research project in Section 1 and describe the different types of translation work we do in Section 2. Section 2.1. examines inclusive strategies used the specific example of the project's Governance Model, followed by some examples of translations from survivor testimonies in 2.2., from Community dissemination reports in 2.3., and from ethics protocols and other administrative documents in 2.4. Section 3 discusses some ongoing challenges of this work: training in collaborative approaches to translation (3.1.), translation as (mutual) education (3.2), texts with space limitations (3.3.), and the use or non-use of nonbinary inclusive language (3.4.). Our conclusions in Section 4 include some discussion of the implications for teaching and some areas that require further research (4.1.).

1. On the participatory research project

Surviving Historical Memory in Postwar El Salvador is an international collaborative initiative of survivors, scholars, artists, architects, and civil society organizations collaborating to document the history of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992) and to prevent future violence in Salvadoran society.² This multi-year international project, funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, is committed to eleven Guiding Principles of Partnership and Collaboration, which includes:

² *Surviving Historical Memory in Postwar El Salvador*, n.d. b.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: We promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in all of our activities and practices, which should be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, education, reading/writing skills or economic status (Surviving Historical Memory in Postwar El Salvador, nd. b.).

We understand this particular principle to govern the language used to express the project's work. This means carefully examining the various types of translations that we do, as described in the next section.

2. Types of translation

Our work on this project includes the following types of texts, to and from the different languages involved:

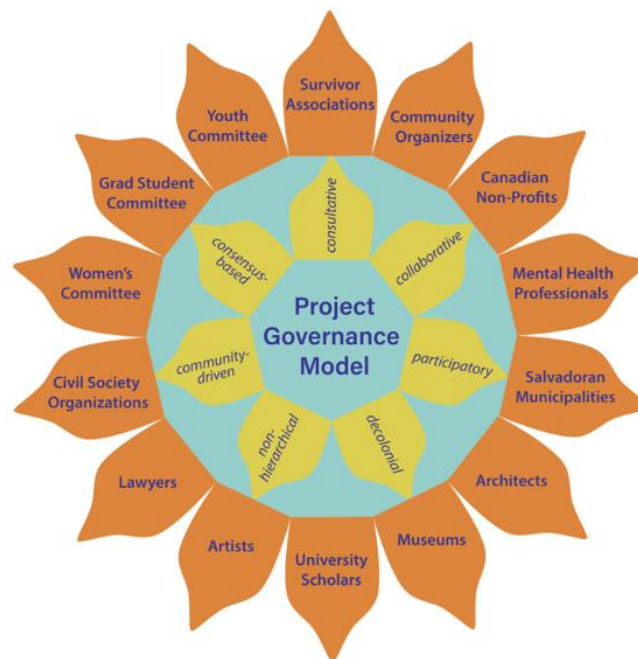
- Testimonies of massacre survivors (Spanish to English, French), which are usually videos requiring subtitles.
- Other videos, including interviews with Salvadoran immigrants in Canada (Spanish, English, French).
- Documents related to ethics protocols (English to Spanish).
- Manuals and interview guides (English to Spanish).
- Reports and works of scholarly dissemination (English, Spanish, French).
- Updates to web pages, including participants' biographical notes (Spanish, English, French), and the project's Governance Model, discussed below.

Our translation practices reflect our attempts to establish a balance between the need to translate coherently and the goal of expressing gender equality in the translated texts, thus respecting the project's guiding principles. As shown by the examples discussed in the following sections, this involves replacing certain traditional usages, particularly the so-called generic masculine, with new usages that express greater gender inclusivity.

2.1. The Project Governance Model: An Example of More Inclusive Alternatives

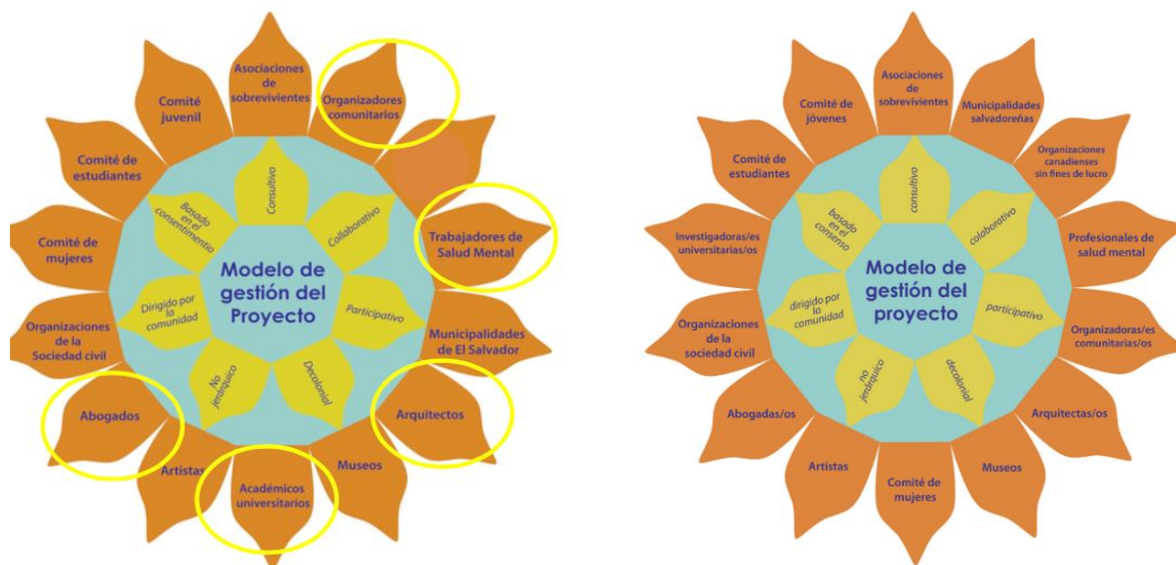
The research project has a governance model which predates our involvement. It is represented on the English website by the flower diagram shown in in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Project Governance Model, Surviving Memory in Postwar El Salvador, English.



This same diagram was also published in Spanish, with translations that illustrate some of the challenges we face with respect to inclusive language, as indicated (circled) in the following diagram.

Figure 2: Project Governance Model: Initial (left) and revised (right) Spanish translations



The initial translations to Spanish (on the left) already present a certain number of challenges with respect to inclusive language, as shown by the yellow circles; our proposed changes on the right reflect more inclusive usage, as shown in (1).

(1)³Initial translation

Organizadores comunitarios
 Trabajadores de Salud Mental
 Arquitectos
 Académicos universitarios
 Abogados

Changed to

Organizadoras/es comunitarias/os
 Profesionales de Salud Mental
 Arquitectas/os
 Investigadoras/os universitarias/os
 Abogadas/os

There is a growing body of research (summarized by Gyga et al., 2019; see also Gyga & Gabriel 2008; Gyga et al., 2021, and Heap 2022, 2024) indicating that what are traditionally called masculine generics in Spanish and French are not in fact consistently interpreted as true generics. Masculine plurals (as in figure 2, right) like *abogados*, *arquitectos* (lawyers, architects MPI)⁴ are at best ambiguous; they may be interpreted as referring to groups of men (the specific reading) or to groups that include men and women (the generic reading). Empirical evidence consistently shows that readers' spontaneous interpretations are strongly biased towards the specifically masculine interpretations, meaning that the mental images evoked tend to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes whereby lawyers and architects are more likely to be men. While grammatical cues cannot completely override traditional social bias, experimental studies have repeatedly shown that replacing the so-called masculine generic forms with other forms that include explicitly feminine forms (as in Figure 2, left) can significantly reduce those biases, and lead to more balanced interpretations. Replacing traditional masculine generics with alternative forms does not necessarily lead to completely balanced interpretations – images of males may still predominate when thinking of architects and lawyers – but it has been shown that interpretations are significantly less biased with these alternative formulations (Brauer & Landy, 2008; Gyga et al., 2021, among others).

There are various ways in which more gender-balanced alternatives can be expressed in such contexts: in one case, a simple lexical substitution allows us to avoid a masculine generic, since *profesionales (de la salud mental)* (mental health professionals) is unmarked for gender, unlike *trabajadoras / trabajadores* (workers FPI / workers MPI). Other types of lexical substitution, such as using abstract collective nouns like *personal docente* (teaching staff)

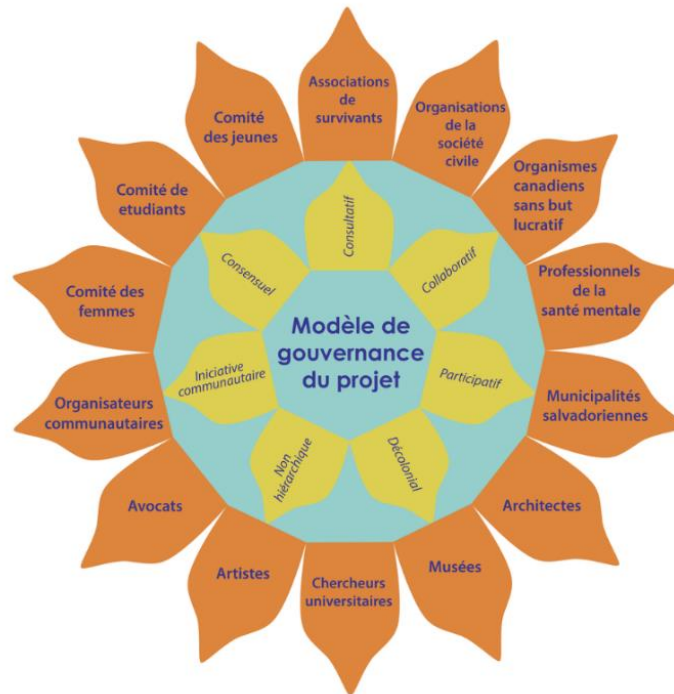
³ All translations to and from Spanish and French in this article are either ours, or by other members of our translation team which have been reviewed by us.

⁴ Where necessary for exposition, we use the following abbreviations as morphological glosses: FPI feminine plural; NPI neutral plural; MPI masculine plural. FSg feminine singular; NSg neutral singular; MSg masculine singular.

instead of *profesoras y profesores* (teachers FPl and teachers MPI). Collective nouns did not seem suitable in this case, since the project includes specific (individual) lawyers, architects, and researchers, rather than the collectives denoted by nouns such as *abogacía*, *arquitectura* or *investigación* (legal advocacy, architecture, or research). Full doublets (*abogadas y abogados*) (lawyers FPl and lawyers MPI) could also be used, but since space is limited in graphics and we want to avoid making text very small, we choose instead to use double inflections or abbreviated doublets. This means that just the gender and plural morphemes are doubled at the end of the nouns in question: *abogadas/os*. Although other typographical alternatives exist, we choose the forward slash (/) to separate the alternative readings, and to order the feminine plurals before the masculine plurals. Such abbreviated doublets are not intended to be read exactly as written (pronouncing a word with “-as/os” is possible in Spanish but seems odd) but are rather widely understood to be expanded as a full doublet (*abogadas y abogados*) if read out loud. We choose this order (feminine before masculine) deliberately; as discussed in Gyga et al. (2019), the order of conjoined elements is always significant, in that the first position in a doublet confers greater salience to the feminine form (see also Hegarty et al., 2016). Following this research, our choice to consistently order feminine forms first (whether in full or abbreviated doublets) is intended to favour interpretations where the representation of women is more salient.

The changes listed in (1), as on the right in Figure 2, were implemented on the Spanish version of the project's pages in 2023. The French translation of this same diagram is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Project Governance Model, Surviving Memory in Postwar El Salvador, initial French translation



This initial French translation also presents a certain number of challenges which are similar or related to the ones listed in (1), leading to the changes proposed in (2):

(2)

Initial translation

Associations de survivants
Professionnels de la santé mentale
Chercheurs universitaires
Avocats
Organisateurs communautaires
Comité de étudiants

Proposed changes

Associations de survivant·es
Professionnel·les de la santé
Chercheuse·eurs universitaires
Avocat·es
Organisatrice·teurs communautaires
Comités des étudiant·es

The changes in (2) follow recommendations from the Canadian government's "Écriture inclusive – Lignes directrices et ressources" (Government of Canada, 2023) with respect to the use of the *point médian* (midpoint) for abbreviated doublets in a context with limited space.⁵

⁵ At the time of publication, these French changes have yet to be implemented on the project's web pages. In addition to the space constraints already mentioned, graphics are harder (slower) to change than plain text.

2.2. Testimonies

As speakers often do in spontaneous public speech, community members frequently use inclusive forms in Spanish when giving their testimonies about what happened during the Salvadoran civil war. For example, in (3)a. we see:

- (3) a. Las y los sobrevivientes de la masacre.
 b. The women and men who survived the massacre.
 c. Les survivantes et les survivants du massacre.

While ‘survivors’ in English has no gender marking, in cases such as (3)a. we often choose to slightly over-translate in the English (3)b.; since in Spanish the two determiners underline the presence of women among survivors, we use two nouns in English for the same reason. To achieve the same effect in French (3)c., where the plural determiner *les* is not marked for gender, we double the noun using the feminine form *survivantes* to emphasize the presence of women amongst survivors. In all cases, the order of elements is significant: the first position in the doubled nouns gives additional visibility to the feminine forms, reflecting the choice in the original Spanish to place the feminine plural determiner first. While there may end up being more words in the translations, we are confident that the English and French in such cases are faithful to the intent of community speakers in the communities in El Salvador where the testimonies originate.

The testimony videos also include short presentations at the beginning that are prepared by the translation team, pointing out the specifics of the massacre described in each testimony. When preparing these texts, we start from inclusive Spanish and try to reflect this inclusivity in the English and French versions, going sometimes beyond the neutral forms in Spanish and French in order to be faithful to the community values and to increase the visibility of women. This is the case of neutral ‘children’ in English and *enfants* in French, in (4).

- (4)a *Initial text*
 [...]las fuerzas del gobierno salvadoreño (Guardia Nacional y ORDEN) asesinaron a 9 niños el 14 de diciembre de 1980.

Changed to
 [...] las fuerzas del gobierno salvadoreño (Guardia Nacional y ORDEN) asesinaron a 9 niñas y niños el 14 de diciembre de 1980.

(4)b *Initial translation*

[...] the Salvadoran government forces (Guardia Nacional and ORDEN paramilitaries) murdered 9 children on December 14, 1980.

Changed to

[...] the Salvadoran government forces (Guardia Nacional and ORDEN paramilitaries) murdered 9 girls and boys on December 14, 1980.

(4)c *Initial translation*

[...] les forces gouvernementales salvadoriennes (Garde nationale et ORDEN) ont assassiné 9 enfants le 14 décembre 1980.

Changed to

[...] les forces gouvernementales salvadoriennes (Garde nationale et ORDEN) ont assassiné 9 filles et garçons le 14 décembre 1980

In example (4) we see a case where using the (falsely) generic masculine 9 *niños* (nine children MPI) would have erased the important reality that the girl victims of this atrocity were singled out for particularly vicious and gendered cruelty. The English and French translations could have remained neutral (children, *enfants*) but instead we explicitly reflect our choice to foreground the presence of girls as victims of this particular massacre. We choose to lose some of the inclusivity potential of the English and French epicene terms, but increase the visibility of girls in this particular context.

2.3. Community dissemination reports

Our translation work also includes reports which we need to translate into Spanish for community purposes, i.e., for members of Spanish-reading communities in Canada. In cases that contain forms like the one in (5)a., the traditional way to render *Salvadorans* (without gender marking in English) would be with a generic masculine (*salvadoreños*, MPI), but for the reasons outlined above, we prefer to avoid such false generics since they are known to bias interpretations. Thus we choose instead another strategy, as shown in (5)b., where the addition of *personas* (*salvadoreñas* FPI) conveys the fact that this group contains both women and men, without being quite so explicit as a full doublet (*salvadoreñas y salvadoreños*).

- (5) a. Salvadorans in the Greater Toronto Area
- b. *Personas salvadoreñas del Área Metropolitana de Toronto*

- (6) a. Refugee Memory Workshops and Photo Exhibitions
- b. *Talleres de Memoria de personas refugiadas y exposiciones fotográficas*

- (7) a. parent-child relationships
b. *relaciones materno-paterno-filiales*
- (8) a. Who are we? Central Americans living in Canada
b. *¿Quiénes somos? Personas centroamericanas residentes en Canadá*
- (9) a. Nevertheless, Latin Americans continue to struggle to develop as a political and economic force in Canada.
b. *No obstante, la comunidad latinoamericana sigue luchando por desarrollarse como una fuerza política y económica en Canadá.*

In all such cases (5)-(9), we take special care to avoid formulations that include the supposedly generic masculine in Spanish. We try to vary the solutions in order to avoid appearing repetitive: sometimes we combine the use of full doublets with the feminine preceding the masculine (*salvadoreñas y salvadoreños*), with the use of neutral nouns (*personas* in (5)b. and (8)b.) and of collective nouns such as *comunidad latinoamericana* (9)b. In (7)b., we use *relaciones materno-paterno-filiales* (parent-child relationships) to avoid the false generic *relaciones padre-hijo*, which also has an exclusively masculine interpretation (father-son relationship). While this solution potentially excludes by implication nonbinary identities (the Spanish neologism *xadres* (parents, NPl) is not well-known in these communities, although it is attested in Spain and Argentina (see for example Cataldi et al., 2020), it does include different types of families (e.g., single mothers or same-sex parents) and thus avoids heteronormativity. These examples work best when varied formulations do not run into limitations on space or numbers of characters (see below, section 3.2.).

It is also possible that the use of the neutral noun *personas*, as in (4)b., (7)b., which happens to be feminine but refers to people in general, (see feminine agreement in (5)b., (6)b., (8)b.) may in fact favour interpretations that include women: while to our knowledge there have been no studies of this type in Spanish, French experimental results (Brauer & Landry, 2008) show that asking about *une personne prototypique* (FSg) is more likely to elicit responses that include more women than the apparently equivalent, also neutral, *un individu prototypique* (MSg). An added benefit of such a solution is that *personas* does not limit interpretations to just binary gender options, as the full doublet (*salvadoreñas y salvadoreños*) does. This choice also leaves the door subtly open to the inclusion of interpretations that go beyond the gender binary. We have begun discussions with community partners in El Salvador about the

reception of nonbinary forms in rural communities there, and we are planning to explore possibilities for being more inclusive of these identities.

2.4. Ethics protocols and other administrative documents

Another category of texts that we translate from English into Spanish are documents related to the research ethics required by institutions. In these cases, the original documents are in English and have been the object of careful vetting by institutional ethics procedures, and we have to render them in Spanish while respecting the intent of the original wording, while crucially avoiding the introduction of possible biases due to falsely “generic” masculine forms, as discussed above.

In cases like (10)a., this goal is easy to achieve by using doubled determiners, as in (10)b., a choice which also reflects common usage in the communities in question.

- (10) a. The participants in this research project.
b. *Las y los participantes en este proyecto de investigación.*

Although the noun *participantes* (participants) does not itself carry gender markings, as soon as we add determiners, a choice is imposed, and our choice in this case is to double the determiners, once again with the feminine plural (*las*) preceding the masculine plural (*los*). In other cases, such as (11)a. which has the same noun, we opt for a neutral form with *personas participantes*, as in (11)b.

- (11) a. Describe how and when the participants will be debriefed
b. *Describe cómo y cuándo serán informadas las personas participantes*

The administrative reports also include forms like those in (12)a., which we translate as in (12)b.

- (12) a. To provide training for graduate students, medical residents, and emerging scholars.
b. *Brindar capacitación para estudiantes de posgrado, personal médico residente, y comunidad académica emergente.*

In this example we use an epicene noun (*estudiantes*, students) which can be masculine or feminine (or neither) without determiners or other elements that would require gender agreement, and collective nouns (*personal*, personnel; *comunidad*, community) which indicate groups of people without giving any indication about the social gender of the people who make up these groups.

We can see how we keep combining strategies of neutralization and visibility in some extracts from the translation of the Initial Application to the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board, in (13)-(15):

- (13) a. They are local leaders and community organizers who often connect to local civil society organizations.
b. *Son lideresas y líderes locales y organizadoras/es comunitarias/os que se conectan frecuentemente con organizaciones locales de la sociedad civil.*
- (14) a. Participants who consent to being identified may be identified by their role as community leaders, through their rank as a combatant, or as significant members of the Salvadoran social movement.
b. *Las personas participantes que consientan ser identificadas pueden serlo por su papel como lideresas o líderes comunitarios, a través de su rango como combatientes, o como integrantes significativas/os del movimiento social salvadoreño.*
- (15) a. We generally work in very small rural communities where community members know one another and the visiting researchers.
b. *Generalmente trabajamos en comunidades rurales muy pequeñas donde las/los integrantes de la comunidad se conocen entre sí y también a las/los investigadoras/es visitantes.*

In (13)b., since the adjective is neutral (local, *locales*), we use full doublets for the noun, *lideresas y líderes locales* (with the feminine first) for ‘local leaders’, to highlight the contributions of women. The choice is different for ‘community organizers’, since the noun and adjective have masculine and feminine forms in Spanish. To avoid excessive doubling, we used abbreviated doublets *organizadoras/es comunitarias/os* (community organizers FPI/MPI). (14)b. also combines different strategies. We used the neutral noun *personas participantes* and the full doublet *lideresas o líderes comunitarios* (community leaders FPI, MPI). Since the noun *integrantes* (members) is also neutral, we only use abbreviated doublets for its adjective *significativas/os* (significant FPI/MPI). In (15)b., we double the determiners (*las/los*) with the neutral noun, and we repeat the same strategy with (*investigadoras/es*) (researchers FPI/MPI). Since the adjective is neutral (*visitante*, visiting), it did not need to be adapted.

To date, we have only translated this type of document from English to Spanish.

3. Ongoing challenges

When this international collaborative project began, the degree of complexity and the level of specialization inherent in these translation tasks were not obvious. Each stage of the project has therefore entailed new challenges. In this section we highlight four of the challenges our translation team faces on a regular basis: ongoing training in our collaborative approach to translation, translation as (mutual) education, translating texts with character limits, and the question of nonbinary inclusive language.

3.1. Ongoing training in our collaborative approach to translation

Given the nature of this project, where many graduate and undergraduate students from different disciplines are assigned to work on transcription and translation tasks, one of the first challenges we face are the common misconceptions about translation. For example, the notions that any bilingual can translate without specific training, that any translator is able to work with any kind of text, or that translation is a solitary task. Despite these erroneous beliefs, we do our best to train all team members to learn how to translate while translating, in other words, to become sensitive translators of different texts by using a collaborative approach. The heterogeneity of the team, accompanied by the complexity and variety of the texts we face, requires constant reflection on the different translation processes, as well as ongoing learning during the process.

Translating texts for this project requires more than a simple replacement of the lexical and grammatical elements of one language with another, it is intrinsically related to the power of words and their role in historical memory. The search for adequate equivalences in this context poses real problems for both beginners and more experienced translators, leading to rich debates among team members. For this reason, we approach all translations collaboratively, so that no member of the team works in isolation. Translated versions are peer reviewed and each text undergoes a minimum of three reviews, with active feedback and discussions at each stage. In addition to these peer reviews, translation tasks include consultations with bilingual Salvadoran people and native monolinguals where needed. We have an ongoing internal glossary of terms found in testimonies, as well as an initial inventory where we record formulations and terms frequently used in official documents. The latter includes inclusive language options for terms of reference in the project, such as the case of

las personas sobrevivientes instead of *los sobrevivientes* (survivors), or *campo de refugio* instead of *campo de refugiados* (refugee camp).

In addition to this, each project member must take a mandatory module on ethics since we handle materials of a sensitive nature. This is followed by training focused on raising awareness and respect for the texts, since they also constitute a linguistic heritage. We all participate in the creation of and discussions about a translation guide: here we record our decisions and frequent stylistic choices, including an important section on inclusive language. All this scaffolding is based on our translation practices, that is, on needs identified by team members. In this way, we are building a methodological apparatus that allows us to have a broader vision of our collaborative approach to translation. It also includes ongoing reflections, not only about second and subsequent languages that we use for translation, but also about avoiding erasure and false generics from our native language(s).

3.2. Translation as (mutual) education

Given the heterogenous nature of our translation teams, as described above, we naturally work with a range of individuals who have varying degrees of awareness about inclusive language practices and their impacts on interpretations, as well as varying attitudes towards the underlying issues. Since we are constantly bringing in new team members, an ongoing task is the creation of manuals for internal team use which explain what we do, how we do it, and why. While there are a range of varying attitudes towards the practices we describe in this article, we are firmly committed to insisting on as much inclusion as possible in our translated texts; just doing things the traditional way (because they have always been done that way) is not an option. We encourage in our team a sense of agentive participation which includes questioning hegemonic and traditional uses, as Knisely proposes with these (rhetorical) questions:

Are we teaching students to understand language as rigidly prescribed, always distinct, and relatively fossilized things to be protected and rotely reproduced within a hegemonic order or are we teaching students to recognize that languaging is an action that involves their agentive participation in porous, connected languaging communities? Are we teaching students that there is one right way to do language or are we teaching them that there are many ways to language together, that ways of languaging are always shifting and evolving to meet our relational and communicative needs, and that meaning is created in and through the languaged exchanges that we have with others? [...] Are we acting as agents of so-called linguistic authorities, teaching linguistic hegemonies to a new generation, or are we experienced co-languagers,

guiding those with less experience through their own agentic relationship to doing language with others? (Knisely, 2023, p. 617).

Approaching our translation tasks following this kind of approach explains why traditional representations of gender in Spanish (in particular, so-called masculine generics) are not an option for us, as well as some of the strategies used to avoid them. At the same time, ongoing discussions and debates, for example regarding nonbinary inclusion as mentioned in Section 3.3., are also part of our team dynamics.

One thing we cannot do is to accept the widespread and baseless critiques of inclusive language, including from self-proclaimed language authorities (such as the Real Academia Española) or media opinion columns. We have searched and not located any scientific literature showing that inclusive language has negative effects on either comprehension or interpretations by people who read such texts. Countering these sorts of baseless arguments is also part of our social mission of translation-as-education, whether in our engagements with Spanish-speaking communities in Canada or in El Salvador. Citing empirical studies that show how inclusive language can reduce interpretative bias in communication helps explain our work – both what we do, and why. Our community partners in El Salvador emphatically agree that feminist inclusive language has an important role to play in their rural communities, where they work to build the visibility of women as social actors.

At the same time, this sort of education is a two-way street: while we learn from community members what is understood as inclusive in the context of their work, we also use other alternatives (such as *personas centroamericanas*, Central Americans, above) which may seem unfamiliar (because they are less common in their experience), but which also leave open the possibility of interpretations that go beyond binary gender. Each person who joins our team becomes familiar with our approach to inclusive language, while also contributing to ongoing dialogues in these areas. To the extent that some of us are also language teachers, these reflections can inform our teaching praxis as well as our own personal language choices in our first and subsequent languages.

Our own usage in our first and subsequent languages is also evolving through this work. While we pass on some of what we have learned, we also learn from our teams: the description of this process as ‘mutual education’. One of the objectives of this research project is

intergenerational education, and in this context, meeting younger diaspora Salvadoran like the ones described below in 3.3. (who may describe themselves as *salvadoreños* NPI) is an opportunity for us to revise our own language practices to reflect theirs, and over time, contribute to making such nonbinary possibilities more available to communities in El Salvador where they are not (yet) commonly used or known.

3.3. Texts with character limits

A considerable portion of our ongoing work involves subtitling videos of survivor testimonies for the official YouTube channel of the project. It includes a range of data that should be included in the channel in all three languages. In the case of YouTube "About" texts, such as in (16) below, the number of characters allowed is limited, a restriction which makes the use of complete doublets rather expensive in terms of space. For example, the text in (16)a. includes a long list of types of people who participate in the project. This sort of list would traditionally be rendered in Spanish using (false) masculine generics in the plural (*abogados*, lawyers; *organizadores*, organizers, etc.) but this case, as with the Project Governance diagrams above, limited space means that we choose abbreviated doublets in some of these cases, as in (16)b.

(16)a. The Surviving Memory in Postwar El Salvador collaborative research initiative is an international partnership of survivors, scholars, artists, lawyers, museums, architects, community organizers, municipal governments, civil society organizations and mental health professionals who are committed to documenting the history of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992) and preventing future violence.

b. La iniciativa de investigación *Memoria sobreviviente en El Salvador de la posguerra*, es una iniciativa colaborativa internacional integrada por sobrevivientes, comunidad académica, artistas, abogadas/os, museos, arquitectas/os, organizadoras/es comunitarios, ingenieras/os, gobiernos municipales, organizaciones de la sociedad civil y profesionales de la salud mental, quienes se han comprometido con la documentación de la historia de la guerra civil salvadoreña (1980-1992), y con la prevención de futuras violencias.

3.4. Nonbinary inclusive language

Our primary focus in translating while respecting the guiding principle of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion has been on increasing the visibility of women in our translated texts, which often involves using either abbreviated or full doublets. With the order feminine-masculine, these doublets have the important function of highlighting the presence of women whose participation might previously have been (partially) erased or ignored due to the use of

traditional masculine generics. As we mentioned before, we choose these alternatives following the usages that we observed in Salvadoran communities, as in Figures (5) and (6) below.

Figure 5: Music school announcement (Morazán, El Salvador, 2023). “Welcome (MPI / FPI) to the concert by students (MPI / FPI) of the ‘Paco Cutumay’ Music School, November 28, 2021” (Photo by David Heap)



Figure 5 shows a school announcement using abbreviated doublets for *bienvenidos/as* (welcome MPI/FPI) and ‘*alumnos/as*’ (students MPI/FPI).

Figure 6: Banner at the Sumpul Massacre Commemoration (Chalatenango, El Salvador, 2022). “Our (FPI) and our (MPI) beloved ones struggle, leaving their traces in this holy land.” (Photo by David Heap)



Figure 6 shows a banner that uses full doublets for the possessive *nuestras y nuestros* (our FPI, MPI) followed by *seres queridos* (loved ones), neutral masculine followed by MPI. Comparing both cases, the use of abbreviated forms for a banner follows the recommendations for inclusive texts with little space.

Reflecting on these uses, one unintended consequence of the use of doublets can be that they may reinforce the implication that the two genders represented are exhaustive, because they do not encode any gender identities that fall outside the gender binary. It is therefore reasonable to say that in this project our translation practice is primarily informed by what can be described as feminist inclusion (Díaz Colmenares, in preparation), a movement which began in the 1970s and 1980s and became widespread by the 1990s and early 2000s, that concentrates on the visibility of women in written and spoken language. Initially informed primarily by research on English usage (rejecting the formerly generic ‘he’, ‘mankind’, etc.), this growing body of scholarship now examines usage which is more inclusive in other languages, including German, Scandinavian languages, French (Díaz & Heap, 2020), and to a certain extent, Spanish (although the state of research on Spanish lags in a number of respects, see Heap 2022, 2024).

We understand, however, that an important aspect to consider is the fact that as López suggests, some forms of inclusive language could also be perceived as exclusion because of misgendering or making invisible both non-binary people and women (2020, p. 308). While the *Surviving Memory* project has not yet formally adopted the more recent move towards explicit nonbinary inclusion (our project's Guiding Principles referred to in Section 1 includes equity in terms of gender and sexual orientation but not explicitly in terms of gender identity), we are very aware of the challenges it presents for translation. We have discussed with some Salvadoran colleagues involved in the project the possibility of nonbinary-inclusive usage which has been emerging over recent years in some other Spanish-speaking countries. One possibility would be, for example, the innovative use of the neutral *-e* morpheme which is becoming more common in current Argentine Inclusive Spanish, as in (17)a., to replace both feminine *-a* and masculine *-o*, as in (17)b.

- (17) a. Unes abogades salvadoreñas. (NPI)
 Some Salvadoran lawyers (NPI, neither M nor F)
 b. Unas abogadas salvadoreñas y unos abogados salvadoreños.
 Some Salvadoran women and men lawyers. (FPI and MPI)

There is as yet no consensus regarding how forms such as those in (17)a. ought to be used and interpreted: should the neutral endings only be used for individuals who are known to identify as nonbinary, or can they be used as truly generic forms that include everyone, regardless of

gender identity? In the former case, we might need to use triplets (*abogades*, *abogadas* y *abogados*) which place in first position the gender identify category that is most in need of increased visibility. The same can be said of forms which use a final *-x* to replace *-a* and *-o*, with the added challenge that this grapheme is difficult to pronounce in this position, according to Spanish phonotactics. The final *-@* grapheme is another alternative to *-a* and *-o*: it is also unpronounceable, but widely used in informal written contexts such as Twitter, also known as X (Díaz Colmenares, 2023), and may or may not be read as encoding binary gender choices.

While such alternatives, including triplets, are attested in Spanish usage (for example on social media) with different ordering options (sometimes the nonbinary *-e* forms are last of the three forms, sometimes the first), they are not attested to our knowledge in the communities where our project works in rural El Salvador. A few people with contacts or experience outside of rural El Salvador may have heard of forms like *salvadoreñe* (NSg) but the local response so far to using them in writing reflects incomprehension rather than rejection. We note that a Human Rights Watch report (González Cabrera, 2022) observes that the national election law has been reformed to make voting more accessible for Salvadoran people with trans or nonbinary identities, but the acceptance of inclusive language that reflects these identities seems uneven, especially outside of major cities like San Salvador. This is related to the fact that the lived experience of community partners may not include being familiar with nonbinary people who are out in rural El Salvador, which leads to a quandary for us. On the one hand, creating space for community members or international project participants to affirm their nonbinary identities will require the use of language which affirms this possibility, but at the same time, the translation team cannot push everyone involved in the project to take that step. We can however observe that among second generation Salvadorans in Canada there are nonbinary individuals who naturally use neutral *-e* forms to refer to themselves (for example, as *une amie salvadoreñe*, a Salvadoran friend NSg) so it may only be a matter of time before such forms become more familiar in the rural Salvadoran context as well.

4. Conclusion

As shown in the examples discussed above, inclusive language usage in our project clearly does not pretend to be a one-size-fits-all prescription which undertakes to show users the prescriptive way to use language inclusively. Our approach is better described as a toolbox from which different strategies and techniques can be selected as needed to suit different contexts at different times. A variety of solutions is also preferable from the stylistic point of view, to avoid repetition, especially since one of the criticisms towards gender inclusive language usage is that it seems repetitive. At the same time, gender-inclusive language usage is far from settled in the various communities of practice that we work in, and it would be unrealistic to propose a single gender-inclusive toolbox. The adaptation we try to achieve, considering the target audience, agrees with the same line of thought proposed by Attig & López when they explain queer translation as specialized translation because “it requires translators to have intimate cultural and linguistic knowledge that is specific to these communities, both in the source and target cultures” (2020, p. 1). In this sense, we use inclusive language within the limits of what the target community indicates as appropriate in its current context, while recognizing that it will likely continue to evolve at its own pace in adopting explicitly non-binary forms, according to the needs of users. We have begun conversations with community members who are knowledgeable about the visibility of LGBTQ identities in the region, and we recognize that this aspect of our work will be an ongoing challenge.

4.1. Future research

While the empirical research (as cited above) shows quite clearly that traditional masculine generic forms are not in fact interpreted generically, and that various types of inclusive language (including doublets) can reduce, although not eliminate, the masculine bias in interpreting forms, there is still not enough experimental data on several key points. For example, does the tool-box approach influence the degree of inclusivity, and how much interpretative bias towards the masculine may be reduced? Do multiple different gender inclusion strategies have the same effect in reducing gender bias, or less or more than a single strategy used consistently? What are the effects, if any, of occasional lapses into traditional

masculine generic agreement? We observe mixed forms like those in (18), where the doublet leads with (only) the FPI determiner but is followed by an adjective which agrees in the MPL.

- (18) a. Las guatemaltecas y guatemaltecos unidos en la diáspora.
b. Guatemalan women and men united (MPL) in the diaspora.

While forms like these seem to us to clearly signal an intent to try to favour gender-inclusive interpretations, as far as we know there is as yet no empirical research that quantifies the effects of different mixed inclusive usages in terms of their measurable impacts on actual interpretations and interpretative biases. Future refining of the toolboxes available to translators – and to language teachers – must be informed by new experimental studies which are needed to better understand the quantifiable effects of different approaches to gender-inclusive language. At the same time, further community research on gender and language forms is also needed to inform our ongoing translation practices.

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