A Brief Survey of the NIV 2011 and the Use of Gender-Neutral Language

I think it goes without saying that the art of translation is a challenging one. Anyone who is fluent in another language – specifically a living language – knows firsthand these challenges. Anyone who has lived overseas or been immersed in a culture and language other than his own can attest to the difficulties of conveying meaning from one language to another. At times, translations can produce comical results. From my time in Brazil, I recall watching American sitcoms with Portuguese subtitles and finding it amusing which English inside jokes or idioms were regularly slaughtered by network translators. Other times, however, the challenge of a language barrier goes far beyond comical and quickly can result in frustration. Important truths become lost in translation. Especially in my first years in Brazil, I could only feel helpless as my words and concepts, so crystal clear in my own mind, were received with a stunning lack of clarity by the Brazilian who was undoubtedly trying to figure out what I was doing to his language.

When it comes to transmitting the Word of God, the same challenges exist, but the responsibility grows immensely. And it is that great responsibility of correctly and accurately conveying the Word of God in English that rightly occupies much of our time. As the WELS wrestles with the pros and cons of the revised and updated NIV (NIV 2011), I see it as a good sign that there is such interest in whether the translation is suitable for use in our church body. As personal study is done and pertinent topics related to the NIV 2011 are discussed, we stand to benefit as a church.

As all of you know, there are multiple aspects to consider when evaluating a translation. The use and/or abuse of “gender-neutral” language is but one of them. And yet, even this single aspect is a massive topic to undertake! It is a topic about which much ink has been spilled, whether by traditional (books and essays) or digital (ah the blessings and curses of the blogosphere!) means. We have already touched on it in previous conferences; it has been discussed at our Synod Convention, and more than a few informal conversations on the subject have taken place throughout the WELS. I suppose in that respect, this offering is a little late to the party. And yet, if this essay continues to offer a chance for a healthy exchange of ideas, concerns, and opinions on a potentially contentious issue, that’s not all bad either!

1 I realize that by using the word “he” I am breaking gender-neutral rules. I imagine that will probably happen somewhat consistently through the paper. That is not to be interpreted as an argument for or against gender neutrality, rather a result of what comes most naturally to me. Feel free to criticize!

2 And continues to be spilled...including in our own circles. Within the last week, two additional papers on the subject of gender-neutral language and the contemporary usage of gender inclusive pronouns have been added to the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee’s website.
Before we continue, permit a disclaimer. It was not within the purpose of this paper to touch directly on translation theory. Translation theory is in a league of its own and worthy of special, specific focus. And yet, translation theory plays a part in the gender-neutral conversation. The question of what constitutes a good translation is necessarily a part of this gender-neutral conversation. And so, try as we might, we cannot entirely divorce the gender-neutral discussion from the overarching topic of translation theory. Individual aspects can be discussed, but inevitably the conversation will return and hinge, at least in part, on a thorough understanding of the relationships between the ST (source text), TL (Target Language) and TR (Target Recipient).

One other note. In the forefront of any conversation directed toward a specific aspect of translation, it is important to have a working understanding of what is, essentially, the Word of God. In his review of the *English Standard Version*, Professor Thomas Nass offers the timely reminder: “In terms of Lutheran doctrinal theology, we believe that God has verbally inspired each and every word of the original texts (the materia). Each word is important and treasured, because it comes from God. However the true essence (the forma) of God’s inspired revelation is the thought or truth or message that is conveyed through the vehicle of the words as they are combined in a context, not the outward words themselves.” These words serve as a helpful reminder as we forge ahead. (By the way, may I be so bold as to humbly suggest that some attention be given to the topic of the *materia* and *forma* of God’s Word and practical applications of this distinction?)

OK, one more note. Brothers, when presented with the task of preparing this essay, I had to make a decision as to format and content. One option would have been to simply compile a list of as many occurrences of gender neutral changes that can be found in the NIV 2011 text. For some, that may have been beneficial. For others, it may have been painful! For those interested in this, there are internet resources readily available. Rather I opted to go with a summary of the current issues involved with gender-neutral language theory and limit the examples to a smaller set. If this in any way does not meet expectations, I apologize for failing you.

**NIV’S METHODOLOGY AND GENDER NEUTRALITY**

When the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) released the updated NIV (NIV 2011), they made a point of also reminding all prospective users of the NIV’s original intent. In their own words,
“The NIV tries to bring its readers as close as possible to the experience of the original audience: providing the best possible blend of transparency to the original documents and comprehension of the original meaning in every verse.” 6 Some have taken exception to the word “experience” in CBT’s philosophy. In one sense, the only “experience” we are interested in is the efficacious Word operating according to the will of the Holy Spirit. And yet, in non-theological terms, the goal of translating Scripture in a way that allows the present-day reader or listener to “experience” (comprehend meaningfully) God’s Word just as the original recipients did, is a good one. With such a claim, the NIV is openly and honestly striving to find an acceptable middle ground between “formal correspondence” and “dynamic equivalence.” 7

In order to keep this comprehension possible on the widest scale, the CBT looks to regularly update the NIV. In their own words: “The chief goal of every revision to the NIV text is to bring the translation into line both with contemporary biblical scholarship and with shifts in English idiom and usage.” 8 One of the ways in which the CBT attempted to quantify these “shifts in English idiom and usage” was to contract the Collins Bank of English, to carry out research specifically in the area of gender language. Douglas Moo, chair of the CBT, states:

“Prior to the update of the New International Version of the Bible (NIV) for 2011, all previous Bible translation efforts have been hampered by the lack of accurate, statistically significant data on the state of spoken and written English at a given time in its history. Beyond appealing to traditional style guides, all that translators and stylists have been able to do is rely on their own experiences and others’ anecdotal evidence, resulting in arguments such as, ‘I never see anybody writing such-and-such,’ or ‘I always hear such-and-such,’ or ‘Sometimes I read one thing but other times something else.’” 9

In order to achieve their goal of adequately surveying the English language, Collins created 5 databases (“corpora”), including one composed of written Evangelical English 10, to form the basis for their study. 11 The results, while published in very detailed way, can be summarized by simply saying there is a substantiated movement in modern English toward the use of words that are gender-neutral over and above those words that had a decidedly male denotation. While Moo

6 Committee on Bible Translation, “Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation,” p. 1.
7 By now, I think most agree that these are not the only two terms or categories that can be used to define translation’s approach to the autographs. They remain useful, however, in reminding all of the wide spectrum in translation theory.
8 Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p. 2.
9 Douglas Moo, Foreword to “The Development and Use of Gender Language in Contemporary English – A Corpus Linguistic Analysis”
10 113 million words from evangelical books, sermons, and internet sites.
openly admits that the results of this research are but one tool at the disposal of translators, it becomes evident that the results of the Collins Bank of English weigh heavily upon the final product of the NIV 2011.

And this brings us to one of the most polemical issues of the NIV translation revision: gender-neutral language. Also referred to as “inclusive,” “gender-inclusive,” and “gender-accurate,” there doesn’t seem to be a standard term for the issue at hand. Call it what you will, the gender-neutral concept generally revolves around the replacement of masculine generic terms with inclusive (non gender-specific) terms. The challenge and debate of course, centers on those moments when the inclusive term is utilized, but the generic nature of the original word is debated.

The gender-neutral debate is not a new one, but it is has amped up to new levels in recent years. A little history is always helpful. With the limited release (only in the UK) of the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) in 1996, the gender-neutral agenda of those translations carrying the NIV name became evident. From D. A. Carson’s perspective, it was the March 29, 1997 cover of the conservative magazine World that depicted a Bible together with the universally recognized sign for the female and the title: “The Stealth Bible: The Popular New International Version Bible is Quietly Going ‘Gender-Neutral’” that was the accelerant causing the proverbial fire to burn increasingly hot. The release of the Today’s New International Version (TNIV) in 2005 did little to quiet those concerns as the gender-inclusive nature became very evident. Having heard those concerns, the CBT took into consideration widespread criticism that the gender-neutral movement had gone too far and promised that “every single change introduced into the committee's last major revision (the TNIV) relating to inclusive language for humanity was reconsidered.”

As a natural result of some of the gender-neutral excesses of past translations, Mark Strauss is right when he says, “The first response among many evangelicals when they hear of a “gender-neutral” Bible is to react with indignation and disgust.” The “gender-neutral” label has now become a buzz word which carries a predominantly, if not exclusively, negative connotation. As an unfortunate result, all translational decisions that relate to gender neutrality, even those that have

---

12 For an interesting timeline on the gender-neutral debate, see pp.127-140 of Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A Grudem’s The TNIV and The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy.
14 Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p.3
been long since incorporated in previous translations, as well as those generally agreed to be wise renderings to all parties\textsuperscript{16}, are being lumped together. As Mark Strauss opines: “Identifying gender-inclusive language \textit{only} with reference to so-called ‘disputed’ examples is imprecise and highly subjective”\textsuperscript{17} (emphasis mine). All of this to say that it is not gender-neutral language, \textit{per se}, that ought to be in the crosshairs, but the overuse and abuse that is of concern.\textsuperscript{18} It boils down to this: Do the changes in a given translation maintain and clarify the meaning of a passage (an “apples to apples” change) or do they alter the meaning (“apples to oranges”) so that a message other than what originally meant is received? And so the battle ensues with regard to gender-neutral language.\textsuperscript{19}

As for the NIV 2011, some have questioned if there is an agenda, specifically a feminist agenda, behind the use of gender-neutral language. In an open letter responding to the Committee on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and their less than glowing review of the NIV 2011, Douglas Moo writes:

\begin{quote}
...we object to the “guilt-by-association” labeling of some of our translations. The review notes some renderings in the updated NIV that are adopted also by “feminist” interpreters. Yet they fail to note that many of these same renderings are also adopted by complementarian interpreters….The fact that egalitarians and complementarians alike adopt many of these translations suggests that, in fact, there is broad scholarly support in favor of these conclusions. It is the scholarship that influenced the decisions of the CBT in these texts – not a modern agenda of any kind.
\end{quote}

Taking the CBT at their word, there is no insidious agenda, but rather a desire to carry out a faithful translation of God’s Word utilizing the methodology and tools that they have made transparent in their rationale. That being said, it is also clear that the CBT as a whole is not united in doctrine\textsuperscript{20}, nor do they have a Confessional Lutheran serving on their committee.\textsuperscript{21} The end result

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Cf. Luke 17:34 - \textit{λέγω υμῖν, τάπτη τῇ γυναίκι ἐσούσαι δόρο ἐπὶ κλίνης μιᾶς, ὅ εἰς παραληφθῆκαι καὶ ὁ ἄτρος ἀφεθῆται}. I can’t imagine too many people are upset that the KJV’s translation of “in that night there shall be two men in one bed” has been upgraded to a more gender neutral “two” or “two people.”


\item[18] Stauss writes: “By defining inclusive language with reference only to “disputed” examples”...some “are attempting to isolate and downplay the many examples of inclusive language which actually enhance or provide more accuracy to a translation. This is a very effective (if not a very fair) way to win an argument.” Current Issues, p. 7.

\item[19] The main public players in this “battle” would appear to be Wayne Grudem and Vern Poythress (speaking against most gender-neutral language) and D.A Carson and Mark Strauss (defending the use of gender-neutral language). Both sides are conservative which makes their repartee interesting. Grudem and Poythress have jointly authored The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words. D.A. Carson’s The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism summarizes well the opposing side.

\item[20] The CBT is “composed of scholars that mirror the spectrum of evangelicalism.” CBT Response, June 9,2011, p.1

\item[21] “Current members belong to Baptist, Presbyterian or Reformed, Anglican, Pentecostal, and independent denominations and churches.” CBT Notes, p.4.
\end{footnotes}
may not reflect an “agenda” but may obviously produce translated portions that are not as “overtly Lutheran” as we might hope for. That, of course, is not a surprise. In that we do not need a “special in-house translation”\(^{22}\) to justify our doctrine, there may even be some benefit to this.

**Summary of Prevalent Gender Neutral Changes in NIV 2011**

So, how does this affect the NIV 2011? My guess is that many of the main areas you are very familiar with. The work of both the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee as well as other efforts in and out of our church body has already highlighted some of both the positive and negative gender neutral changes that result. While much of the NIV 2011 will sound familiar, it will not take long for even the casual reader to notice the diminished amount of “masculine” sounding words. According to a database compiled online by Robert Slowley, among the most removed words from NIV 1984 to the NIV 2011 are: “he” (1131 fewer times), “his” (975 fewer times), “man” (874 fewer times), “men” (752 fewer times), “him” (605 fewer times), “fathers” (268 fewer times), “brothers” (116 fewer times), and “sons” (79 fewer times).\(^{23}\)

In general, there are two main categories in which gender-neutral modifications occur in the NIV2011:

1. **Replacement of “Generic” Masculine Nouns**

At those times when the translators deemed the meaning of the masculine noun to be encompassing more than the primary male definition, they sought a more inclusive alternative. Examples include...

- **a. Father (Ἀδεία, πατήρ):** In Judges 19:2-3 the phrase “father’s house” is changed to “parents’ home”;

- In 1 Samuel 18:2, David is not allowed to return “home to his family” as opposed to not being able to return “to his father’s house”; Proverbs 15:15 speaks of a “parent’s discipline” instead of a “father’s discipline”; and Ezekiel 18:20 instructs us that “the child will not share the guilt of the parent” as opposed to “the son will not share the guilt of the father.”

So also, in the New Testament, the rich man begs that Lazarus be sent to his “family” as opposed to his “father’s house” (Luke 16:27) and Stephen proclaimed that Moses was cared for “by

\(^{22}\) Consider the Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon “translations” of Scripture.

\(^{23}\) [http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/most_added_removed_words.html](http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/most_added_removed_words.html)
his family” instead of “in his father’s house.” (Acts 7:20). Also prevalent in both the Old and New Testaments are numerous changes of “fathers” to “ancestors.”

b. Son ( skype, νεός)\(^\text{25}\): The phrase “son of man,” is regularly rendered “human being” in the NIV 2011 (e.g. Numbers 23:19; Job 25:6;) although, “mortals” in Psalm 144:3. The designation “sons of Israel” changes to “Israelites” (Genesis 50:25). Another common change now translates “son/sons” with the more neutral “child/children” (e.g. Proverbs 17:21; 19:13; 19:18; Isaiah 49:18; Matthew 23:15; Luke 14:5; Galatians 4:7; Hebrews 12:7). At times “descendants” is the translation of choice (e.g. 1 Chronicles 16:3; 24:1). In the New Testament verses where “adoption” is spoken of, the NIV 2011 seems more content to utilize the term “to sonship” as opposed to any stand alone use of the word “son” (Romans 8:23; 9:4; Ephesians 1:5).

c. Brother ( υπερηφάνης, ἀδελφός)\(^\text{26}\): In the NIV 2011 the nation of Israel is instructed not to hate “a fellow Israelite” as opposed to “your brother” (Leviticus 19:17); Isaiah 41:6 swaps out “brother” for “companion”; and Jeremiah 9:4 now reads “clan” instead of “brothers”. In Romans 14:10 and 14:15, “brother” is supplemented by “brother or sister”; in Hebrews 8:11, “his brother” becomes “to one another”; and James 1:9 translates “the brother” as “believers”.

Perhaps special attention ought to be given to the plural ἄδελφοι which frequently occurs in the New Testament. It is with this word, in particular, that the CBT, added the word “sisters” with common frequency\(^\text{26}\). Some of those instances are where ἄδελφοι is found in a list with other family members and so the inclusion of “sisters” seems appropriate (e.g. Luke 14:12; 18:29; 21:16). So also, when ἄδελφοι was used in the context of believers, “brothers and sisters” has become the standard translation (e.g. Acts 11:29; 12:17; 16:40). Interestingly enough, the CBT decided to issue footnotes at the first instance of ἄδελφοι in this collective sense in each book to explain their rationale as well as the additional occurrences within that particular book.\(^\text{27}\) While one might

\(^{24}\) “Ancestors” is found an additional 312 times in the NIV 2011.

\(^{25}\) The situation that involves the translation of “son of man” in Psalm 8 will not be dealt with here because it better fits with the paper on Messianic prophecy.

\(^{26}\) In the NIV 2011, the word “sister” was added 27 times and the word “sisters” an additional 126 times; cf. (http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/all_words.html)

\(^{27}\) The footnote to Galatians 1:2, for example, states: “The Greek word for brothers and sisters (adelphoi) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in vs.11; and in 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18.
disagree with their decision, they openly delineate where the inclusion of “sisters”, at least in the context of “believers” will be found.

The inclusion of “sisters” has produced some glaring problems, however. In Acts 1:16-26 Peter addresses the believers (a group numbering 120) with the purpose of choosing a replacement for Judas. Although addressing the group Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, the NIV2011 chose to translate as “brothers and sisters” giving the impression that women were also involved in this act of authority. So also in Acts 6:3 where the Twelve gathered the disciples together for the calling of the Seven. Here once again, the vocative ἀδελφοί is translated as “brothers and sisters” clearly implying that the women were involved in this authoritative act. 28

**d. Man ((Job, יָעָש, ἄνθρωπος, ἄνήρ):** Of all the male nouns deemed to be used in a generic sense, the words “man” and “men” are the most substituted. Common replacements include “mankind” (e.g. Genesis 9:6; Numbers 16:29; 1 Timothy 2:5), “human” (e.g. Genesis 8:21; Exodus 13:2, 1 Corinthians 1:25), “person” (e.g. Exodus 11:7; 2 Kings 15:20; Galatians 2:16) or any number of indefinite pronouns (e.g. Psalm 1- “Blessed is the one who…”).

Clearly this is not an exhaustive list of all of the gender-neutral changes with regard to “generic” masculine nouns. But it does serve to give a taste for some of the more prevalent changes to the NIV 2011. It is interesting to note that not all changes fall into the category of simply being “inclusive.” At times the CBT, either in their attempt to avoid certain generic masculine nouns, or in their desire to aid in understanding, adds to the thought of a particular word. The thought may be appropriate in context, but is not necessarily found in the word itself. Consider 1 Corinthians 3:21. After encouraging the Corinthians to not get caught up in the wisdom of the world, Paul also encourages them not to boast ἐν ἄνθρωποις. While the NIV 1984 left this translation as “men”, the NIV2011 opted to translate it “human leaders.” While the context of vs. 22 definitely brings specific human leaders into focus, some might feel that by adding the term “leaders”, the CBT is pushing the definition of ἄνθρωποι beyond normal semantic limits.

2. Replacement of “Generic” Masculine Pronouns

A second way in which gender-neutral language is prevalent throughout the NIV 2011 is in the area of pronouns. Because the use of pronouns is so common, the number of gender-neutral changes in

---

28 Some have also expressed concern over Philippians 1:14-15 where “brothers and sisters” have gained confidence in the Lord, due to Paul’s chains, to proclaim the gospel fearlessly. This verse does not specifically refer to public ministry, however.
this area is substantial. Without offering numerous examples, it is sufficient to make note that the masculine pronouns he/him/his, when deemed to be used in a generic sense were replaced in order to not limit the reader’s comprehension of a particular passage. The method of dealing with these pronouns usually involved one of the following three options:

**a. shift to the plural:** “If someone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh...” (NIV 1984) now becomes “If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh...” (NIV 2011). While this feature is frequently used in the NIV 2011, the CBT would remind us that “recognizing the diversity in modern English, a generic “he” was occasionally retained.”

**b. shift to “you”:** “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other...” (NIV 1984) now becomes “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other...” (NIV 2011).

**c. drop the pronoun:** “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer...” (NIV 1984) now becomes “Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer...” (NIV 2011).

Finally, with regard to the gender-neutral changes that are incorporated in the NIV 2011, it is probably important to mention that “nowhere....is there even the remotest hint of any inclusive language for God.” In a society where some religious groups have sought to replace God “the Father” for a female version, this admission is something for which to be thankful. In fact, in the key Christological section of Philippians 2:7-8, the NIV 2011 maintains that Christ was “found in appearance as a man” (vs. 8). This stands in contrast to the ESV, for example, which conveys that Christ was found in “human form.”

**The Gender Neutral Challenge in Translation**

The challenge of incorporating gender-neutral language into the modern English translations is not a new one, nor is it one that is indicative of only the NIV 2011. To say so is to

---

29 Philippians 3:4
30 Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p. 6. The example given is Job 31:29
31 Luke 16:13
32 1 John 3:15
33 Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p.4.
34 Go ahead, type in the phrase “God the Mother” into your search engine...I dare you...and witness just how far some have gone to alter Scripture’s revelation of God.
deny the obvious. Rather the *proper use* of inclusive language is an issue that most current translations are wrestling with, or at least should be. As Mark Strauss succinctly states: “All\textsuperscript{35} agree that gender-accurate (gender-inclusive, gender-neutral) translation is a *good thing*, when the use of such language *accurately represents the meaning of the original text*. In many cases the use of an inclusive term improves the accuracy of the translation.”\textsuperscript{36} Speaking of the English Standard Version, widely used in the LC-MS, Tom Nass notes, “it may be a surprise for ESV readers to realize that the ESV itself has a large amount of gender inclusive language. For example, the ESV has removed the words “man” and “men” from the RSV 671 times.”\textsuperscript{37} He continues to state that, “without any doubt, (the ESV) has more inclusive language than NIV 1984....”\textsuperscript{38} yet, “it is honest to say that the ESV does not have as much gender inclusive language as NIV 2011.”\textsuperscript{39} So also, Mark Strauss lists more than 10 popular translations on the market today which “intentionally use inclusive language – to varying degrees.”\textsuperscript{40} As we evaluate different translations to fill in the gap of NIV 1984, most would agree that there are locations where additional gender neutral language would be a positive change. One such area is in the so-called salvation passages of Scripture.\textsuperscript{41}

But what about the other areas where gender-neutral changes are to be considered? I think it is safe to say that the growing disuse of the generic masculine nouns gives us good reason to revisit translational theory and think through the best way to present God’s Word to a changing world and society.\textsuperscript{42} I think it is also a safe assumption that we agree that it is not always beneficial to try and translate in a wholesale way – with every instance of the Greek or Hebrew word translated with the same English equivalent. What is more, we would also agree that grammatical gender is, by its very definition, different that biological gender. To require that the gender of a word in Hebrew or Greek, when it may represent a grammatical gender alone, correspond directly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} The “all” referred to here specifically include: D.A. Carson, Vern Poythress, Wayne Grudem, and Mark Strauss, however he believes it to be representative of many others’ opinions.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Strauss, “Current Issues in the Gender-Language Debate,” p.4
\item \textsuperscript{37} Tom Nass, Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation, p.15
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p.16. Nass specifically mentions that the ESV never translates the vocative ὀδελφοι as “brothers and sisters,” but prefers to mention in footnotes that the word may refer to both genders.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Strauss, “Current Issues in the Gender-Neutral Language Debate, p.1 (footnote). Among those translations listed are the New Jerusalem Bible (1985), New American Bible (1990), New Revised Standard Version (1990), New English Translation (1996), the Holman Christian Standard Bible (2000) and the ESV (2001). He mentions that because the HCSB and the ESV arose “in the context of opposition to the NIVI”, they are “more reserved...in their use of inclusive language.”
\item \textsuperscript{41} For example: 1 Timothy 2:4, Romans 3:28, Titus 2:11, Acts 4:12
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ken Cherney succinctly points out: “There are really two questions involved in the matter of generic masculine nouns: first, which nouns in the source text of Scripture can be considered generic masculines; and second, the extent to which the target language...still uses the nouns this way.” Gender-Neutral Language, with Special Reference to NIV 2011, p.4
\end{itemize}
to the biological equivalent in English may not best convey the meaning of Scripture. All of these factors ought to be considered as we wrestle with the use and/or abuse of gender-neutral language in general.

And so, as we wrestle with the issue, perhaps a translation “check-list” (simple, I grant you!) is in order to better identify if gender-neutral usage is appropriate:

1. **Linguistic possibility:** Is it recognized that a particular word has an inherent semantic range and that no single English word correctly captures it? Are there potential limitations of the receptor/target language substitute?

2. **Immediate Context:** Does the immediate context preclude the possibility of a particular English translation?

3. **Wide/Scriptural Context:** Does the wider view of Scripture preclude the possibility of a particular English translation? Does the accumulated use of a particular translation give the impression that Scripture is not applying faithfully the male/female relational roles?

Maybe it is time to take a look at how the NIV 2011 translates some of the key sections of Scripture traditionally used to establish the head/helper principal and how that plays out in the divinely-given roles of man and woman.

**SEDES DOCTRINAES FOR THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN**

While much more could be written on the subject, here is a brief evaluation of how the NIV 2011 treats four of the “sedes” on the roles of men and women:

**Genesis 1:26-27; 2:20** – There are two notable changes in the NIV 2011 from the NIV 1984. One is the use of the word “mankind” instead of “man” in the phrase: “Let us make *mankind* in our image.” The male-nuanced word is superior to the “human beings” translation of the TNIV. The other change is the change from “him” to “them” in the translation of וֹאֹת֑ in vs.27. Nathan Pope explains why that is an unfortunate change when he writes:

> The text Moses recorded goes from *man* to *him*, then to *male and female*, and finally to *them*. Reverse this. We humans (them) come in two types, *male and female*, though everyone traces himself or herself to one *him*. From that kind of *man* (in more feminist terms: human), God created *mankind* (again, in nongender-specific terms: humankind).

---

43 For your own reference, a text comparison of the original language, NIV84, NIV11, HCSB, and AAT for these sections is provided at the end of this essay.
Moses did not read any feminist literature, but he anticipated some of it rhetoric. He wrote *man* and included two genders: male and female.\(^{44}\)

In this sense, the NIV 2011 stands alone from the HCSB and the AAT which also reflect the singular translation.

**1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-10** – There is little change in the written text between NIV 1984 and the revised NIV 2011. What is noteworthy in both the NIV 2011 and the HCSB is the placement of a footnote that “man” and “woman” could also refer to “husband” and “wife.” While we are happy these comments are footnotes (unfortunately the ESV has it as the text), it may cause some to think the text is limited in scope only to the marital relationship.

**1 Corinthians 14:33-35, 39** – Although the NIV 2011’s footnote on vs. 34 gives the option of understanding that the principle of authority is to be carried out in all churches, the written text gives the appearance that only the women in Corinthian churches were to remain silent. Also of note here is that the NIV 2011 translates ἄνθρωποι as “brothers and sisters” who are to be eager to prophesy. Would the prophesying referred to in these verses have included authority? It would seem odd to have Paul insist on women remaining silent in vs. 34 only to encourage them to be eager to prophecy in vs. 39.

**1 Timothy 2:11-13** – It is perhaps here that the decisions of the CBT are most disappointing in the arena of the roles of men and women. There are two issues involved in this section. The first is that the NIV 2011 once again includes a footnote that allows for the translation of “wife” and “husband.” Such a narrow translation seems to ignore the wide scope presented in vs. 13.

The other issue involves the translation of the word ἀναθεναίνειν. The NIV 2011’s “assume authority” seems to revert back to the KJV version “usurp authority.” In defense of their decision, the CBT writes: “The exercise of authority that Paul was forbidding was one that women inappropriately assumed, but whether that referred to all forms of authority over men in the church or only certain forms in certain contexts is up to the individual reader”\(^{45}\). While we can readily admit that linguistically there are considerations to be given to the word ἀναθεναίνειν, I believe it to


\(^{45}\) Committee on Bible Translation, “Notes,” p. 7.
be commonly agreed in our circles that “to have authority’ or ‘to exercise authority’ is the more justifiable (translation) exegetically.”

GENDER NEUTRALITY AND THE TRANSLATION DECISION MATRIX

So, where do we go from here? Is the NIV 2011 a worthwhile option for usage in the WELS? Some have and will inevitably continue to ask the question: Is the NIV2011 an accurate and faithful translation? It is timely to ask: “What is a faithful translation?” Some would say that a translation must be “literal” in order to be faithful and accurate. And yet, what does literal mean? I dare say that there is no such thing as a literal translation. If there were, it wouldn’t be a translation, but the original! Even those translation that claim to be “formally equivalent” to the original language must admit that some meaning in the original text will necessarily be left behind. No single translation will be able to “literally” transmit word order, form, literary structure, idiom, etc. in a perfectly accurate way. Rather, “translators must make hard choices on a case-by-case basis, examining a wide range of factors arising from both the source language and the receptor language, the original author and the contemporary readers.” As a result, translators will have to make decisions constantly weighing the desire for formality to the original text and communication of meaning to the target reader. Is a loss of any meaning at any level a distortion that will render a translation inaccurate and, therefore, unfaithful to God’s inspired Word? I would say “no.”

The use of gender neutrality is one aspect of the whole translation discussion. The challenges of conveying gender systems from one language to another are real. For example, when in Brazil, it was quite common for someone to ask me, “Quantos filhos tem?” A formally equivalent, gender-specific translation of this question would be: “How many sons do you have?” And yet, I can still picture the faces of confusion when I answered, “Nenhum” (none) – especially if my wife was next to me carrying what was very evidently one of our daughters! Why the confusion? Because the Portuguese word ”filho” while masculine in gender and usually used to refer to a “son” also means “child” in many concepts. This is common knowledge. Even to the point of being faced with the follow up question, “Bem, e quantos filhos-homens tem?” (Oh, and how many “sons-men”

---

46 Paul O. Wendland, “Evaluating the NIV11’s Translation of αὐτῆς τῆς οἰκουμένης in 1 Timothy 2:12,” p.4. I would encourage the reading of this essay for additional insights into the subject.
47 We still often speak of “literal” translations, usually referring to those that are more “formally equivalent/correspondent” in nature.
49 In his “The Debate Over Gender-Inclusive Language” D.A. Carson presents Daniel Wallace’s interesting recap of the challenges of translating the famed phrase“fishers of men” p. 4.
50 I now see that Ken Cherney, in his most recent paper on gender-neutrality posted for the Translation Evaluation Committee, cites a similar example, only in Spanish.
do you have?) Needless to say, that when translating the initial Portuguese question into English, I would opt for the gender-neutral, “How many children do you have?” Is it literal? No. Is it accurate? Yes.

And for that reason, all translations will be based, to a certain degree, on a predetermined decision matrix. Gender-neutral translations that are accurately inclusive may be one of the factors to be considered, but it certainly is not the only one. Take, for example, the NIV2011’s translation for 1 Timothy 2:3-6, a section that most agree is best translated in a gender-inclusive way:

3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

In this section, the Greek word “ἄνθρωπος” is used three times (first two times it is plural, the last time, singular) and it is translated in three different ways: “people” (vs. 4), “mankind” and “man” (vs. 5). In Greek there is a significant thought at the repetition of the same word throughout the sequence. Christ in his substitutionary work comes out with beautiful accuracy. Yet to translate using only “men” and “man,” while perhaps better conveying that meaning, runs the risk of missing the mark entirely if a non-male doesn’t feel the text is speaking to them. A translation decision had to be made.

Or consider the translation of Galatians 3:26-4:7. One of the thoughts in this particular text is that we (men, women, children) are, indeed, children of God and part of his family. But there is more. We, both men and women, are also “sons” of God and therefore have the right to be the legitimate heir frequently spoken of throughout Scriptures. If the female reader of this section, however, will not see herself as included (which she is!) in the word “son,” than the perceived greater meaning of both men and women being a part of God’s family runs the risk of being lost in translation. Undoubtedly, that was a concern as the NIV2011 opts to translate υἱός/υἱοί as “child/children” three times. And yet, to try to convey the additional idea, υἱοί, still referring to both genders in vs. 6, is translated as “sons.” Many other examples could be given. In the end, however, it is sufficient to say that a decision with regard to gender-neutral language had to be made. The translator ultimately emphasized one truth over another.

51 The word “people” in vs.6 is a translation of “πάντων”.
52 Most likely because of the close proximity to the “adoption of sonship” in vs. 5
53 Romans 5:12ff and 8:14-17 come to mind.
And while translation decisions are made in individual verses, ultimately a decision matrix of a larger scale will be necessary as we wrestle with whether or not to recommend the NIV 2011 as useable translation for the WELS and our Northwestern Publishing House. What will be the priorities of such a decision matrix? How will the use and/or abuse of gender neutral language rank in comparison to other pertinent topics such as the translation of justification passages, the rendering of Messianic Psalms, the overall readability of the text, and the stable lasting power of a translation? On that decision matrix, which factors are more important? God grant us wisdom!

**Concluding Thoughts**

Finally, my brothers, allow me to finish with a couple of final thoughts. These thoughts are to be taken for what they are worth...even if it isn’t much!

1. I will openly admit that I have my concerns about the gender-neutral/inclusive language of the NIV 2011. I can see that there are good uses of it throughout the text and I am grateful for those. In my opinion, however, the gender-neutral usage is too prevalent. I understand the rationale, but on my decision matrix, I would have opted for a more limited use of inclusiveness and maintained the “generic” masculine with more frequency. And yet I recognize that the gender-neutral issue is but one piece of the translational jig-saw puzzle. I don’t believe, however, that by adopting the 2011 we have opened the door to feminism in the WELS, nor do I believe the heavier use of inclusive language to necessarily be a “Trojan horse” by which role distinctions will continue to be blurred.

   I continue, however, to wrestle with a couple of questions: Does society’s ever increasing lack of gender-specific language justify the need to shift our translation...or give us all the more reason to maintain it? By adopting such a translation are we *adapting* to our culture that more might be saved...or are we *catering* to a culture that is falling increasingly out of touch with God’s divine plan?

2. As this entire gender-neutral debate carries on, am I wrong in thinking it is pertinent for a WELS Pastor to ask: “Which battles do we want to fight as we conduct ministry in today’s society?” The question could be posed: Would you rather maintain more of the inherent “maleness” of Scripture at the expense of potentially making less clear that there is no gender bias in God’s plan of salvation? Or would you rather emphasize the all-inclusiveness of God’s plan of salvation and potentially sacrifice some of the “pervasiveness” of God’s ordained role-relationships throughout the pages of Scripture? In my pastoral experience, circumstantial as it is, I don’t regularly deal with
women or children who have a hard time seeing themselves in God’s plan of salvation, regardless of the “generic masculines.” I have and continue to have, however, challenges with both men and women who are struggling with their God-given roles.

3. It has been said before, but I will say it again: There is not and cannot be any substitute for a clergy that is expected to have the necessary tools and training to work in original languages. Scripture is a deep well of God’s will. Translations will do their part in conveying the depth of God’s will. But there are limitations. May we always continue to hone our linguistic skills to better lead our flocks!

4. Let us be guarded in our words. At times when there is heated discussion about translation – whether in general, or with regard to specific aspects, the collateral damage among the laity can be heavy. It is unfortunate indeed if we leave members questioning if any translation can be the Word.

David F. Bivens
2011 Fall Pastoral Study Conference
Risen Savior Lutheran Church, Austin, TX
October 17-18, 2011
### Genesis 1:26-27; 2:20

| BHS | Then God said, “Let us make אֲדָם man in our image, according to Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” 27 So God created אֲדָם man in His own image; He created him male and female. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them; 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds in the sky and every wild animal; but for the man [a] no suitable helper was found. Footnote: “or for Adam” |
| NIV 84 | Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam [b] no suitable helper was found. Footnote: “or the man” |
| NIV 11 | Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam [c] no suitable helper was found. Footnote: “or the man” |
| HCSB | Then God said, ”Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” 27 So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female. 20 The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man [d] no helper was found who was like him. Footnote: “or for Adam” |
| AAT | Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, like Ourselves, that they might rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, and the cattle, over all the earth and everything that moves on the earth.” 27 And God created man in His image, in God’s image He created him; He created them male and female. 20 And so the man gave a name to all the cattle, the birds in the air, and every wild animal. But no helper such as he needed was found for the man. |
1 Corinthians 11:3,8-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UBS</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐὰν κέφαλή ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστιν, κέφαλή δὲ γυναικός ὁ ἄνηρ, κέφαλή δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἄνηρ ἐκ γυναικὸς ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός; 9 καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἄνηρ διὰ τὴν γυναίκα, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα. 10 διὰ τούτῳ ὁφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἐχεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς κέφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NIV 84</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NIV 11</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HCSB</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man; 9 and man was not created for woman, but woman for man. 10 This is why a woman should have [a symbol of] authority on her head: because of the angels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AAT</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>The man wasn’t made from the woman but the woman from the man, 9 and the man wasn’t made for the woman but the woman for the man. 10 That’s why a woman should wear something on her head to show she is under authority, out of respect for the angels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UBS:</th>
<th>33 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀκαταστασίας ὁ θεός ἀλλὰ εἰρήνης. Ὡς ἐν πᾶσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἄγιων 34 αἱ γυναίκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις συγάτωσαν οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποτασσέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει. 35 εἰ δὲ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἷς τούς ἱδίους ἀνδρὰς ἐπερωτάτωσαν· αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἐστιν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ. 39 ὥστε, ἀδελφοί [μου], ζηλοῦτε τὸ προφητεύειν καὶ τὸ λαλεῖν μὴ κωλύστε γλῶσσας:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| NIV 84 | 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.  
As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. |
| NIV 11 | 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.  
34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. |
| HCSB | 33 since God is not a God of disorder but of peace.  
As in all the churches of the saints, the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but should be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church meeting. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in [other] languages. |
| AAT | 34 You see. God is not a God of disorder but of peace.  
As in all the churches of the holy people, the women should be silent in church because they are not allowed to speak. They should submit, as the Law says. 35 If there is something they want to know, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgrace for a woman to speak in church. 39 So, my fellow Christians, be eager to speak God’s Word, and don’t try to keep anyone from speaking in other languages. |
### 1 Timothy 2:11-13

**UBS**

11 γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μαθαίνει ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ. 12 διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὔτε αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. 13 Ἄδαμ γὰρ πρώτος ἐπλάσθη, εἶτα Εὕα.

**NIV 84**

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

**NIV 11**

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Footnote a: Or wife; also in verse 12

Footnote b: Or over her husband

**HCSB**

11 A woman should learn in silence with full submission. 12 I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to be silent. 13 For Adam was created first, then Eve.

**AAT**

11 A woman should learn in silence, completely submitting herself. 12 I don’t allow a woman to teach nor to have authority over a man; she should keep silent. 13 The reason is that Adam was formed first, then Eve.
Select Bibliography

The many valuable resources created and/or compiled by our own Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC) can be found at:


Braun, John, “Gender Inclusive Pronouns and Contemporary Usage” (TEC)


Cherney, Kenneth A., “On Bible Translation and Choosing a Bible” (TEC)


Carson, D.A., “The Debate over Gender-Inclusive Language” (an excerpt from The Challenge of Bible Translation. Communicating God’s Word to the World.)


Nass, Thomas P., “Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation” (TEC)

Panning, Armin J., “Authentein – A Word Study,” WLS Essay File


Wendland, Paul O., “Evaluating the NIV11’s Translation of αὐθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12” (TEC)