

From gender star to schwa: inclusive language use in a German novel and its French translation*

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of non-binary inclusive language in a recent German novel, as well as in a French translation of this novel. While inclusive language in the German novel mainly targets nominal forms using the gender star, as well as the indefinite pronoun, in the French translation, inclusive language forms are more widespread and also present through agreement on adjectives, determiners, and a wider range of pronouns.

1 Introduction

In many languages, inclusive language forms have emerged to enable equal representation of all individuals, including those who do not identify within the traditional binary conception of gender. Yet, languages differ in terms of the linguistic elements that are affected by inclusive language. Often, pronouns present the primary target, especially in natural gender languages, as shown by the discussions for English on singular *they* (cf. Bradley 2020), or for Swedish, where the new gender neutral pronoun *hen* was introduced (cf. Gustafsson-Sendén/Bäck/Lindqvist 2015). Yet, other languages present additional challenges (cf. Hord 2016). For instance, German and French, two examples of grammatical gender languages, display gender marking on nouns and nominal modifiers (cf. Schnitzer 2021), leading to the emergence of strategies such as the German gender star (e. g. *Dozent*innen* ‘teachers’) to create new inclusive noun forms.

Several studies investigated inclusive language in German and French from a variety of perspectives, including mental representations elicited by inclusive language forms (cf. Zacharski/Ferstl 2023, on German; Liénardy et al. 2023, on French), language policies (cf. Elmiger/Tunger/Schaeffer-Lacroix 2017; or, specifically for German, Kolek 2019), the use of inclusive forms by transgender individuals (cf. Knisely 2020, on French), in newspapers (cf. Link 2024, on German; Simon/Vanhal 2022, on French), in scientific texts (cf. Ivanov/Lange/Tiemeyer 2018, on German; Loison/Samuel/Théron 2022, on French), in public administration (cf. Müller-Spitzer/Ochs 2023, on German), or on Twitter (cf. Díaz/Heap 2020, on French). Overall, their results witness considerable variation, asking for further research in different domains.

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The present study aims at investigating the use of inclusive language in one such domain, literary texts, largely ignored until now, with – to the best of my knowledge – only a very limited number of studies on French (cf. Kosnick 2019; Le Tallec-Lloret 2020), as well as some work on the translation of inclusive language (cf. Sofó 2019, on French-Italian). Yet, more and more novels seem to feature inclusive language forms, as discussions in society on the topic continue. This contribution sets out to analyse the adaptation of inclusive language forms from the recent German novel *Blutbuch* (de l’Horizon 2022) in the novel’s French translation by Labourie (2023), *Hêtre pourpre*. As such, the results will shed light on the use of inclusive language forms in literary texts in German and French, as well as, from a comparative perspective, on potential differences between both languages.

Section 2 briefly discusses the German and French gender systems, as well as the most widespread inclusive language strategies, while the main findings of existing work on the use of these strategies in written language, including literature, are summarised in section 3. Section 4 introduces the novel *Blutbuch* and its French translation *Hêtre pourpre*, motivates the research questions, and details the adopted methodology. Section 5 provides a contrastive presentation of the German inclusive language forms present in the novel and their translation into French. Section 6 further discusses the findings and presents some concluding remarks.

2 Gender and inclusive language in French and German

In both French and German, all nouns are marked for grammatical gender. While French distinguishes two genders, feminine and masculine, German distinguishes three genders, feminine, masculine, and neuter. For animate nouns, grammatical gender assignment is usually based on the referent’s gender, with some exceptions.¹

In both languages, determiners and attributive adjectives show gender agreement with the noun they modify (1), but German, unlike French, does not show gender agreement differences in the plural (2), and lacks agreement on past participles and predicative adjectives (3) (cf. Schnitzer 2021).

(1) a.	<i>un</i>	<i>petit</i>	<i>homme</i>	<i>un-e</i>	<i>petit-e</i>	<i>femme</i>
	a.M	small.M	man(M)	a-F	small-F	woman(F)
b.	<i>ein</i>	<i>klein-er</i>	<i>Mann</i>	<i>ein-e</i>	<i>klein-e</i>	<i>Frau</i>
	a.M	small-M	man(M)	a-F	small-F	woman(F)
(2) a.	<i>les</i>	<i>petit-s</i>	<i>homme-s</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>petit-e-s</i>	<i>femme-s</i>
	the.PL	small.M-PL	men(M)-PL	the.PL	small-F-PL	women(F)-PL
b.	<i>die</i>	<i>klein-en</i>	<i>Männer</i>	<i>die</i>	<i>klein-en</i>	<i>Frau-en</i>
	the.PL	small-PL	men(M).PL	the.PL	small-PL	women(F)-PL
(3) a.	<i>l’</i>	<i>homme</i>	<i>est petit</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>femme</i>	<i>est petit-e</i>
	the.M	man(M)	is small.M	the.F	woman(F)	is small-F
b.	<i>der</i>	<i>Mann</i>	<i>ist klein</i>	<i>die</i>	<i>Frau</i>	<i>ist klein</i>
	the.M	man(M)	is small	the.F	woman(F)	is small

¹ For inanimate nouns, gender assignment is said to be arbitrary, but in both languages, grammatical gender can be predicted – at least to some extent – based on either phonological/morphological or semantic criteria (cf. Lyster 2006, for French; Köpcke/Zubin 1996, for German).

In addition, both languages differ considering third person pronouns, with only French distinguishing between masculine and feminine forms in the plural, as illustrated in Table 1.

	French		German		
	masculine	feminine	masculine	feminine	neuter
singular	<i>il</i>	<i>elle</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>es</i>
plural	<i>ils</i>	<i>elles</i>	<i>sie</i>		

Table 1: French and German third person subject pronouns

When referring to a group of unknown gender, or a mixed group – irrespective of the number of women and men – the masculine plural pronoun *ils* should be used in French according to normative grammars, such as *Le bon usage* (cf. Grevisse 1980), while for German, there exists only one form, *sie*.

In turn, with noun forms when referring to a referent of unknown gender, or a mixed group, both languages traditionally use the masculine. For instance, a group of teachers is traditionally referred to as *les enseignants/die Lehrer* ‘the.PL teachers.M.PL’. These are examples of the generic masculine, which is used for reference to mixed or unspecified groups. Yet, several psycholinguistic studies have shown that the generic masculine is not generic, but gives rise to a male bias (cf. Stahlberg/Sczesny 2001, for German; and Brauer/Landry 2008, for French).

To avoid such bias and – in a first step – to make women more visible in language, several strategies of binary inclusive writing have been proposed, such as full double forms (4a), or abbreviated double forms using typographical solutions (4b) (cf. Hergenhan 2015).

- (4) a. *les enseignantes et enseignants* ‘the teachers’
die Lehrerinnen und Lehrer
 b. *les étudiant-es, les étudiant(e)s, les étudiant-es* ‘the students’
die SchülerInnen ‘the pupils’

Yet, many of these forms caused debates in society, in particular the use of typographical solutions (4b), such as the German *Binnen-I* (e. g. *SchülerInnen*, cf. Scott 2006), or the *point médian* in French (e. g. *étudiant-es*, cf. Simon 2020; Viennot 2022).

Apart from double forms, other strategies are used that attempt to neutralise gender distinctions, for instance by means of collective nouns (5a), noun forms that are invariably used with both feminine and masculine gender (5b), or nouns with a fixed gender that can refer to both females and males (5c).²

- (5) a. *le corps enseignant* ‘the teaching corps’
die Lehrkräfte
 b. *les élèves* ‘the pupils/students’
die Studierenden ‘the students’
 c. *la personne* ‘the person’
die Person

² The term *epicene* is sometimes used for the examples in (5b). Yet, the term *epicene* is also commonly used for nouns with a fixed gender that can nevertheless refer to persons of any gender, as in (5c). To avoid confusion, this paper uses “fixed gender form” for the latter cases (5c), while the former (5b) are termed “invariable form”.

More recently, societal discussion moved on to include non-binary persons. While the neutralisation strategies mentioned in (5) can also be used for non-binary reference, additional strategies have been proposed too, such as the gender gap, gender star, or colon in German (6).³

(6) *die Dozent_innen, die Dozent*innen, die Dozent:innen* ‘the students’

In French, forms involving the point median (*les étudiant-es* in 4b) are sometimes used for non-binary reference. Yet, new morphological forms are proposed as well, both for nouns (7a) and pronouns (7b) (cf. Alpheratz 2018, 2021).

(7) a. *les lecteurs* ‘the readers’, *l’étudianx* ‘the student’, *les étudiantz* ‘the students’
b. *iel/iels, ille/illes, al/als*

In both languages, inclusive language forms give rise to discussions in society and no consensus exists, leading to a large variety of proposal, often context- and community-dependent (cf. Hergenhan 2015; Kolek 2019; Burnett/Pozniak 2021). For instance, the integration of the French neopronoun *iel* in the *Petit Robert* dictionary caused heated debates (cf. Carrier/Chicoine 2022).

3 The use of inclusive language in written texts

The use of inclusive language forms has mainly been analysed for written language. Different text genres were taken into account, such as newspapers (cf. Sökefeld 2021; Link 2024; Waldendorf 2024, for German; Kamblé-Bagal/Tatossian 2022; Simon/Vanhal 2022, for French), academic texts (cf. Ivanov/Lange/Tiemeyer 2018; Tiemeyer/Ptok 2018, for German; Loison/Samuel/Théron 2022, for French), or written university communication (cf. Acke 2019; Ivanov/Lieboldt 2023, for German; Burnett/Pozniak 2021, for French). The main findings of these studies will be briefly discussed before turning to the use of inclusive language in literary texts.

For German newspapers, Waldendorf (2024) observes that, predominantly, binary inclusive strategies are used, while non-binary forms, such as the asterisk or the colon, are largely limited to left-wing newspapers. Link (2024) observes no differences between left- and right-wing newspapers, but observes a difference between countries, in that Austrian newspapers turn out to use most non-binary forms, while German and Swiss newspapers predominantly stick to the use of binary forms. For French, Simon/Vanhal (2022) investigate the use of inclusive forms in French-language newspapers (and political texts) in Belgium. Their results show that inclusive strategies represent the majority of cases, combining all different strategies. Yet, generic masculine forms still represent one third of the cases. Inclusive strategies predominantly involve invariable forms and collectives, whereas the use of double forms (both full and abbreviated, including the *point médian*) is limited. According to Simon/Vanhal (2022), such forms represent a form of militancy.

For academic texts, results show variation as well. On the basis of an analysis of German conference abstracts, Ivanov/Lange/Tiemeyer (2018) show that, while several inclusive language forms are used, the generic masculine also surfaces, often even in combination with inclusive forms. Furthermore, the use of specific strategies seems context dependent, as more inclusive forms are used in abstracts for a conference specifically focussed on language and gender, than

³ Although being typographical, these forms are shown to be used in spoken language too. Speakers produce a glottal stop to mark them (cf. Slavik/Cronenberg/Draxler 2018).

in those for a conference on phoniatics. Loison/Samuel/Théron (2022) look into French inclusive language in academic journals from the social sciences and humanities. Although they do not investigate the use of specific strategies, they note that most journals investigated do not provide explicit guidelines for contributors. While most journals accept inclusive language use, the number of articles using it, despite showing an increase in more recent years, is still rather low and there exists considerable variation among topics and disciplines.

Finally, for written university production in German, Acke (2019) observes that, while most universities in Berlin have some sort of guidelines for inclusive language, both guidelines and actual use are largely limited to the binary inclusive domain. Ivanov/Lieboldt (2023) show that, Germany-wide, not all universities have guidelines, and that considerable variation exists in the use of inclusive forms, which are, again, largely limited to the binary female-male distinction. For French, Burnett/Pozniak (2021) investigate the different forms used for *étudiant* ‘student’ in undergraduate brochures from Parisian universities. They observe that a variety of strategies are adopted, depending on several factors, such as the specific discipline, the female/male ratio within a discipline, or the university’s prestige. In particular, they note that specific forms carry different meanings, such as the *point médian*, associated with a certain degree of militancy (cf. Simon/Vanhal 2022, on newspapers).

Although these studies exemplify that inclusive forms are used in several genres of written texts, literary works represent a different text genre, which will probably impact the use of inclusive forms, a point that, to present date, has not received a lot of attention in the field.⁴ Only for French, some studies have looked into it. Kosnick (2019) investigates language use in the 1986 novel *Sphinx* (by Anne Garréta), showing that the predominant strategy to avoid the generic masculine involves circumlocution, that is, the avoidance of gendered forms, for instance, by using epicene nouns and adjectives, or by replacing pronouns by initials to refer to the protagonists. Le Tallec-Lloret (2020) presents a small case-study of the 2015 novel *Requiem* (by Alpheratz), as part of a study on the emergence of inclusive language in French. Inclusive language in *Requiem* specifically targets the pronominal system by introducing new pronoun forms, such as the subject pronouns *al/als* (replacing *il/elle* 3SG.M/3SG.F and *ils/elles* 3PL.M/3PL.F), or the demonstrative *çaux* (replacing *ceux/celles* DEM.M.PL/DEM.F.PL).

4 The present study

Given the limited attention so far for the use of inclusive language in literary texts, it is interesting to investigate this from a comparative perspective by analysing the German novel *Blutbuch* (de l’Horizon 2022) and its French translation *Hêtre Pourpre. Blutbuch*, written by the Swiss-German author Kim de l’Horizon, identifying as non-binary, was awarded the *Deutsche Buchpreis* in 2022, one of the most famous German literary awards, as well as the *Schweizer Buchpreis*. Since its publication, the novel has been translated into several languages, including French.

Blutbuch tells the story of Kim, the non-binary protagonist, who reflects on their childhood memories and their family history. However, the novel also discusses the protagonist’s

⁴ The novel *Blutbuch* has been analysed from a literary perspective by a couple of studies (e. g. Jiang 2023; Wimmer 2023), but these studies do not provide a systematic analysis of language use in the novel.

struggles related to their life as non-binary individual in the Swiss society, as well as the challenges that arise when attempting to speak about oneself in the German language with its traditionally rigid gender system.

The novel has been translated into French by Rose Labourie, who received the *Prix de Traduction 2024 du PEN Club français* for her translation (PEN Club français 2024). In a preface to the novel, she explains the challenges she encountered – already starting with the translation of the novel’s title (cf. Labourie 2023: 11) – and the choices she made during the translation process. In particular, she mentions her choice for adopting new morphemes, -ə (schwa) and -æ, instead of the point médian, as well as the new pronoun forms *ille/illes*, in an attempt to preserve the special treatment of language of the German original within the French translation.

Taking into account the fact that the original German novel has been written by an author identifying as non-binary, and that the translator explicitly mentions the efforts taken to translate the German inclusive language forms into French, a comparative analysis of *Blutbuch* and *Hêtre pourpre* presents an interesting case study to shed more light on the use of inclusive language in written German and French. In a first step, the study asks which forms of inclusive language are present in the original German novel. Based on the literature, it is expected to find primarily forms in the nominal domain, involving, for instance, the gender star (cf. Hergenhan 2015; Schnitzer 2021).

In a next step, the analysis looks into how the inclusive forms from the German novel are adapted in the French translation. Invariable, fixed gender, and collective nouns may be less complex to translate, given that both languages use these strategies. Following Kosnick (2019) and Le Tallec-Lloret (2020), cases of circumlocution and/or new pronominal forms may also be found, in addition to the forms explicitly mentioned by the translator in her preface.

Finally, any further differences in inclusive language use between the German original and its French translation are taken into account. Following Schnitzer (2021), if inclusive forms are used in French, a greater presence of these forms than in German can be expected because of the differences in terms of grammatical marking of gender, with French presenting more cases of gender agreement than German (i. e., on predicative adjectives and past participles).

To answer these questions, a qualitative approach is adopted. In a first step, the German novel is manually searched for examples of inclusive language use.⁵ These examples are then categorised based on the inclusive strategy applied. Second, it is checked how the German examples of inclusive language are translated in the French version, again paying attention to the strategies adopted. Finally, the French translation is manually searched for other examples of inclusive language.

5 Translating inclusive language

In what follows, the results of the analysis of the novel and its translation are presented, taking the different German inclusive language strategies as a starting point. Differences between the

⁵ The last part of the novel consists of a letter written in English, and a German translation of it, which, according to the author, was made using online translation software. Since it is unclear whether the author made any changes to this translation, I will not take it into account here. The same applies to the French adaptation, where the letter also has been translated by means of online translation software.

German original and its French translation will be highlighted. For a more detailed analysis of the German novel, the reader is referred to Westveer (2025). Some global translation patterns for the German non-binary inclusive forms can be observed, as summarised in Table 2.

German	French
non-binary inclusive form	non-binary inclusive form
non-binary inclusive form	binary inclusive form
non-binary inclusive form	non-inclusive forms

Table 2: Overview of translation patterns for German non-binary inclusive forms

5.1 German inclusive forms and their French translation

Starting from the inclusive language forms used in the German original, we observe that these fall into two categories: the nominal domain (nouns and their modifiers, e. g., articles, adjectives) and pronominal forms. Concerning the nominal domain, the predominant strategy in German is the use of the gender star, in particular with nouns, and this both in the singular and in the plural. Gender star forms are translated in several ways in French. Apart from more traditional invariable forms (11) and collective nouns (9), the novel features the use of the neo-morpheme *-ə* (the schwa) to derive new non-binary forms (8, 10).⁶

- | | |
|--|--|
| (8) a. verstorbener Patient*innen [G11]
b. patientəs mortəs [F20]
‘deceased patients’ | (9) a. die Kund*innen [G39]
b. la clientèle [F54]
‘the clients’ |
| (10) a. kein*e Sprachpurist*in [G229]
b. pas unə puriste de la langue [F283]
‘not a language purist’ | (11) a. die Velofahrer*innen [G48]
b. les cyclistes [F65]
‘the cyclists’ |

As shown by the determiner *kein*e* in (10a), the gender star is also used on other elements than nouns, translated here by the negative particle *pas* and the indefinite article *unə*, containing the French neo-morpheme. Example (8) illustrates a crucial difference between the two languages, as in French, the attributive adjective needs to take a neo-morpheme, while in German, such adjectives never bear gender marking in the plural.

In example (12), the gender star form is not directly translated in French; the syntactic structure of the sentence is changed to avoid the use of the noun *Anglaisəs*.

- (12) a. wie die Engländer*innen sagen [G12]
 b. comme on dit en Angleterre [F21]
 ‘as the English say’

The gender star is also present in some compound forms in German. While the compound adjective in (13) is translated by means of an invariable form, the compound noun in (14) is translated by means of a binary full double form, thus losing the non-binary aspect in French.

⁶ For all examples taken from the novels, the page numbers are indicated between square brackets (G = German *Blutbuch*; F = French *Hêtre pourpre*).

- | | |
|--|--|
| (13) a. weltbürger*innenlichen [G139]
b. cosmopolite [F173]
‘cosmopolitan’ | (14) a. guten Lackierer*innenton [G22]
b. le bon goût des vernisseuses et vernisseurs [F34]
‘the varnishers’ good taste’ |
|--|--|

Next, the German novel features some cases of invariable forms, especially in the plural. Although the use of such forms is very frequent in French, not all German cases are translated by French equivalents, as is shown by the contrast between (15) and (16).

- | | |
|---|--|
| (15) a. alle Erwachsenen [G17]
b. toutes les adultes [F27]
‘all adults’ | (16) a. die Dementen [G209]
b. les déments [F260]
‘the demented persons’ |
|---|--|

In (15), while the noun *adultes* is invariable in French, this is not the case for the quantifier *tous/toutes*, for which the novel form *toustes* is used. In (16), the German invariable form is translated by the masculine plural form *déments*, causing a loss of inclusivity. In a similar vein, the French full double form in (17) is only binary inclusive.

- | |
|---|
| (17) a. wie die Englischen sagen [G129]
b. comme disent les Anglaises et les Anglais [F161]
‘as the English use to say’ |
|---|

The example in (18) is of particular interest, not only because the German invariable form is translated by a relative clause, a case of circumlocution, but also because of the change from plural to singular.

- | |
|--|
| (18) a. die Abwesenheit der Schreibenden [G247]
b. celui qui écrit est absentə [F304]
‘the absence of the persons writing’ |
|--|

While singular use in German would have necessitated the use of either the feminine (*der*) or the masculine genitive article (*des*), this gender opposition is neutralised in the plural. In French, instead, both the singular and the plural traditionally require the choice between masculine and feminine forms, hence the use of the neoform *celui* for the demonstrative (traditionally *celui/celle*) and the neomorpheme on *absentə*.

Finally, the German novel contains some cases of collective nouns, which can be translated by equivalent forms if those exist in French (19). In other cases, a circumlocution strategy is used, as shown in (20), involving the fixed gender noun *personne*.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (19) a. das Pflegepersonal [G187]
b. le personnel soignant [F234]
‘the caretakers’ | (20) a. Putzkräfte [G148]
b. personnes en train de faire le ménage [F185]
‘more cleaners’ |
|--|---|

When we turn to pronouns, we observe that the German novel does not include new pronoun forms, apart from the use of *mensch* (literally ‘human’) as an alternative to the indefinite pronoun *man* ‘one’, which is derived from and formally similar to the noun *der Mann* ‘the man’ (21). In French, *mensch* is often translated with the French equivalent indefinite *on*.

- | |
|--|
| (21) a. während mensch schon eine Vorahnung von Frühling riecht [G11]
b. alors qu’on sent déjà le printemps [F20]
‘while one already smells the first taste of spring’ |
|--|

Although historically, French *on* is also derived from the noun for ‘man’, *homme* (cf. Grevisse 1980: 644), just as German *man*, this historical link seems less problematic for speakers of French (cf. Schnitzer 2021).

Alternatively, circumlocution strategies are used, for instance in (22), which in German involves the form *jemensch* ‘someone/anyone’, a derivate of *mensch*. In French, *jemensch* is translated by *quelqu’unə* involving the neo morpheme *-ə* to avoid the choice between masculine *quelqu’un* and feminine *quelqu’une*.

- (22) a. ob mir die jemensch erzählt hat [G29]
 b. s’ils m’ont été racontés par quelqu’unə [F43]
 ‘whether anyone has told me about them’

Circumlocution strategies are also adopted for other pronouns, such as possessives, as in (23).

- (23) a. ich wollte nicht dein*e Nachkomm*in sein [G62]
 b. je ne voulais pas descendre de toi [F82]
 ‘I did not want to be your descendant’

In turn, relative pronouns can be literally translated, as they generally do not mark gender in French, *qui/que* (subject vs. direct object forms) being invariable.

5.2 Additional inclusive forms in French

So far, we saw that the German novel features several strategies of inclusive language, which are not always translated by means of equivalent strategies in French. A closer look on the French version reveals that inclusive forms are also present in situations where German does not present a gender conflict. In particular, this concerns agreement on past participles (24–25) and predicative adjectives (25).

- (24) a. hast du [...] mich angeschaut [G11]
 b. tu m’as regardə [F20]
 ‘you looked at me’
- (25) a. wir fanden uns so masslos geistreich und nervig hyperreflektiert [G122]
 b. on s’est trouvəs démesurément spiritueləs et insupportablement cérébraləs [F152]
 ‘we considered ourselves immensely imaginative and insupportably intellectual’

As the past participles in (24–25) show, the French translation involves a second neo morpheme next to *-ə*, *-æ*, for words ending in *-é*. The use of the ending *-æ* is also proposed by Alpheratz in their *Grammaire du français inclusif* (2018), and appears in one of the neopronouns that have been proposed as alternative to *iel*, namely *ael*.

Finally, the French translation includes more neopronoun forms than the German original. Partly, this has to do with the fact that the German third person plural subject pronoun *sie* is unmarked for gender, whereas French requires the choice between masculine *ils* and feminine *elles*. To avoid this, the neopronoun *illes* is used (26).⁷

⁷ The form *die Meer* in is a Swiss-German dialectal variant for ‘mother’ (*die Mutter* in Standard German), resembling the German neuter noun *das Meer* ‘the sea’. This homonymy is translated into French by adopting the form *la mer* (literally ‘the sea’) instead of homophone *la mère* ‘the mother’ (cf. Jiang 2023).

- (26) a. Die Meer badet das Kind. Sie singen zusammen. [G97]
 b. La mer donne le bain à l'enfant. Illes chantent ensemble. [F121]
 'the mother baths the child. They sing together.'

In a similar vein, the French translation in (27) involves the singular neopronoun *ille*. Furthermore, this example contains the neuter diminutive *Stadtstudentchen* in German, translated with *petitə étudiantə*, involving the schwa to avoid the choice for either the masculine or the feminine in French.

- (27) a. Bin ich dieses Stadtstudentchen, das [...] in einer anderen Sphäre lebt? [G60]
 b. Suis-je unə petitə étudiantə des villes [...] depuis le microcosme dans lequel ille vit ? [F78]
 'Am I this little city student who lives in a different crowd?'

In sum, inclusive forms are more present in the French translation than in the German original, which is due to the fact that gender marking in French affects more different types of elements and syntactic constellations, such as agreement on predicative adjectives, past participles, and plural pronouns and determiners.

6 Final discussion

This study aimed at shedding more light on the use of inclusive language in literary texts in German and French by analysing the German novel *Blutbuch* and its French translation *Hêtre pourpre*. The following research questions guided the analysis:

- (i) Which forms of inclusive language are present in the original German novel?
- (ii) How are these inclusive language forms translated into French?
- (iii) Are there any further differences in inclusive language use between the German original and its French translation?

In the German novel, we observe the use of the gender star, mainly to derive new noun forms, but also for some adjectives and determiners, as well as in some compound forms (cf. Acke 2019). Concerning the use of the gender star, the novel seems more militant than other sources of writing. Studies on newspapers in German (cf. Link 2024; Waldendorf 2024) show that the majority of inclusive forms involve more 'traditional' binary inclusive ones, whereas strategies such as the gender star or the colon are used less frequently. Apart from the use of the form *mensch* as an alternative to the indefinite pronoun *man* 'one' (including derivatives), the German novel does not contain uses of new pronoun forms, which corresponds to what we know from the literature: at present, there does not seem to be a new pronoun form that has reached somewhat wider consensus.

When we turn to the French translation of the novel, we observe that in most cases, the translator attempted to transfer the inclusive and sometimes militant language use of the German original into French. For instance, the new morphemes *-ə* and *-æ* are used as alternatives to feminine or masculine endings on nouns, adjectives, determiners, and pronoun forms. As noted by the translator in her preface to the novel, it was a deliberate choice from the translator, in agreement with her editorial team, to use these new morphemes instead of adopting attested strategies, such as the *point médian*. However, the use of the *point médian* is highly controversial as well (cf. Simon 2020; Viennot 2022). Furthermore, it is not clear whether forms involving the *point médian* could be considered non-binary inclusive, an issue that merits attention in future work.

Interestingly, although neither one of the new morphemes (-ə and -æ) seems to be attested in French yet, the schwa is one of the strategies proposed for Italian (cf. Sofò 2019; Gheno 2024).

Besides these new morphemes, the translator uses invariable forms, collective nouns, as well as circumlocution, a strategy also adopted in Anne Garréta's 1986 novel *Sphinx* to avoid gender marking (cf. Kosnick 2019). Still, in some cases, the choices made by the translator result in a loss of either the non-binary aspect, for instance, when a gender star form is translated with a full double form, or, occasionally, the complete loss of inclusivity when a generic masculine is used. Yet, in contrast to, for instance, Simon/Vanhal's (2022) observations concerning newspapers, where one third of the forms involved the generic masculine, the translator clearly attempted to avoid its use.

Crucially, there is no one-to-one mapping in terms of strategies between the original and its translation. For instance, German gender star forms are not always translated with forms involving one of the new morphemes, and German collective nouns are not always translated with French collective nouns. The choice of strategy depends on the specific mechanisms available in each language (cf. Schnitzer 2021). While German has the advantage of not marking gender differences in the plural, French, in turn, presents a relatively high number of invariable nouns and adjectives that do not require substantial changes to be inclusive (e. g. German *die Minister/Ministerinnen* 'the.PL minister(M).PL/minister(F).PL' versus French *les ministres* 'the.PL minister.PL').

Overall, in the French translation strategies for inclusive language are more visible, which is caused by the characteristics of the language's gender system. Apart from the aforementioned difference concerning gender marking in the plural, French features gender agreement on predicative adjectives and past participles. This results in a frequent use of the new morphemes -ə and -æ in the French translation, where the German original would not contain any particular inclusive language form.

Finally, French differs from German in terms of pronoun use. New pronoun forms in the German novel are restricted to *mensch* (and its derivatives, such as *jemensch*) – often translated with the French indefinite pronoun *on*, which does not appear to be subject to the same male connotation as its German counterpart *man* (cf. Schnitzer 2021). The French translation also contains new pronoun forms where German uses the third person plural pronoun *sie* 'they'. The translator chose to use the forms *ille/illes* as an alternative to the traditional pronouns *il/elle* '3SG.M/3SG.F' and *ils/elles* '3PL.M/3PL.F'. Thus, she did not opt for the pronoun *iel(s)*, which is included in the *Petit Robert* dictionary since 2021 (cf. Carrier/Chicoine 2022), nor for the pronoun *al(s)*, adopted in Alpheratz' novel *Requiem* (cf. Le Tallec-Lloret 2020). Again, the translator's preface indicates that this was a deliberate choice.

The variation in the selection of strategies for translation corresponds to the current state of affairs regarding inclusive language, where the use of forms depends on the specific context and, in particular for more innovative forms, such as the German gender star, or French neopronouns, no consensus seems to exist yet. Future work should continue investigating the use of inclusive language forms in literary texts, and, if possible, their translation into other languages. In addition, attention could be paid to the perceived readability of literary works that feature

inclusive language forms (cf. Liénardy et al. 2023), a topic often brought into discussion by its opponents (cf. Viennot 2022).

To conclude, the analysis of inclusive language forms in the German novel *Blutbuch* and the translation of these forms in the French adaptation *Hêtre pourpre* showed that German and French, while both belonging to the group of grammatical gender languages, nevertheless differ in terms of the impact of inclusive language forms on the language system, as opposed to natural gender languages, where inclusive language primarily targets the pronoun system. As such, this study contributes to our knowledge of the challenges of inclusive language, in particular from the perspective of literature and translation.

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