English Translations of *Mencius* from Three Different Centuries:
A progression to More Gender-neutral Language

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ABSTRACT

Mencius' teachings, deeply entrenched in the male-dominated discourse of ancient China, have historically been interpreted from a masculine viewpoint. However, the rise of the feminist movement and advancements in global communication have significantly expanded the audience for Mencius' philosophy. Concurrently, the English language, influenced by feminist perspectives, has been evolving towards a more gender-neutral style. Against this backdrop, this study explores how translators from three different centuries interpret the unmarked gender language in Mencius. The research adopts a socio-cognitive approach to examine how the linguistic representations link to the cognitive schemas in translation studies with the aid of corpus. The parallel corpus comprises one ST and three TTs (Bloom, 2009; Legge, 1895; Zhao et al., 1999). The research finds that Zhao et al. and Legge prefer generic masculine words. In contrast, Bloom opts for gender-neutral words to interpret the gender-unspecific words in Mencius. This change from an androcentric to a gender-neutral language style reflects the evolving social norms and the translator's subjectivity in challenging or reinforcing prevailing gender stereotypes. The entrenched principle of "MALE-As Norm" deeply influences the stereotypes and cultural schemas that affect how translators behave. This can trigger automatic cognitive schemas, which, in turn, affect the translational choices in selecting generic masculine words. This research underscores the potential of corpus analysis to enrich the study of translation style from a socio-cognitive perspective. The socio-cognitive approach provides a robust theoretical framework, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complexities of translation style through the interdisciplinary lens of cognition and translation.

Keywords: translation style; generic masculine; gender-neutral language; cognitive schema; Mencius

INTRODUCTION

Gender and language are inextricably intertwined, reflecting and perpetuating social norms and expectations. The way we use language can mirror our perceptions of gender roles and identities, and it plays a significant role in how we communicate and relate to one another (Bußmann & Hellinger, 2003). This interplay is particularly evident in the context of Chinese culture and its historical development.

Throughout ancient to contemporary China, political power and culture were predominantly associated with masculinity, with *Mencius*, one of the Four Books selected by Zhu Xi in 1190, illustrating the core values and beliefs of Confucianism (Lau, 2003). Classical Confucianism, focused on proper conduct, revolved around the thoughts, concepts, writings, and actions of elite men, largely excluding women. The invisibility of women in philosophical texts and the increasing restrictions on women's social conditions from the Song Dynasty onwards highlight the gender disparities within Confucianism (Birdwhistell, 2007). The interpretation of *Mencius*, a text rooted in a male perspective, has evolved over time, reflecting changing cultural contexts. However, it is essential to maintain historical context when reinterpreting *Mencius* for contemporary relevance. Understanding the gender-specific nature of Mencian ideas and exploring language complexities can deepen our understanding of the interplay between gender, interpretation, and translation. While previous studies often overlooked gender, Birdwhistell (2007) challenges the notion that Mencian teachings exclusively targeted privileged men, emphasising the importance of gender analysis in comprehending Confucian thought. Furthermore, the absence of gender markers in the classical Chinese language adds another layer of complexity to analysing gender in Mencian ideas and their translation. Unlike many Indo-European languages, classical Chinese lacks gendered pronouns or adjectives. Words are not inherently masculine or feminine, and their interpretation is heavily influenced by social and cultural norms. For instance, concepts like "仁人(rén rén, benevolent person)", "民(mín, people)", and "贤者(xián zhě, virtuous person)" are meant to be universal, but in a male-dominated society, the default understanding might lean towards male perspectives historically (Bailey et al., 2019).

Most interpretations of *Mencius* are made on the traditional stereotype that women are subordinate to men. Previous translation studies on *Mencius* seldom touch the gender theme and Birdwhistell (2007) claims that *Mencius* is especially appropriate to analyse from a gender perspective in a historical and changing period. Therefore, exploring grammatical gender markers in target texts (TTs) presents a compelling avenue for examining the link between translation style and cognition.

Adopting the socio-cognitive approach to translation studies, this study aims to investigate how gender-neutral language in the source text (ST) has been interpreted and represented in the TTs and uncover the cognitive schemas underlying the use of generic masculine gender. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1) How do translators represent gender at the grammatical and lexical level in their translations?
2) What are the cognitive schemas underlying the use of generic masculine gender and gender-neutral language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Personal nouns and pronouns are central to gender and language debates due to their social and cultural implications beyond mere functional language elements. They are fundamental to individual identity, reflecting awareness of gender in our self and others' perceptions (Bußmann & Hellinger, 2003). The understanding of self and others includes the awareness of being male or female, and this awareness is often reflected in the language we use. By interpreting linguistic realisations of gender as the discursive result of "doing gender" in a specific socio-cultural context (Bußmann & Hellinger, 2003, p. 3), the interpretation of gender contributes to exploring how identity and power are constructed. Translation is a socially situated activity (Hatim & Mason, 2014). This perspective underscores the central role of identity and power dynamics in the process of translation. Therefore, it is important to investigate how gender in the source text is interpreted in the TT.

Bußmann and Hellinger (2003) provided a comprehensive overview of four linguistic categories that contribute to the representation of male and female in different languages. These categories include grammatical gender, lexical gender, referential gender, and social gender. Grammatical gender pertains to the expression of gender through grammatical elements such as articles, adjectives, or gender-specific endings on nouns. Lexical gender refers to words that inherently carry gender connotations, even though they may not explicitly indicate gender through their form. Words like "sister", "mother", and "uncle" possess semantic features that convey femininity or masculinity, aligning with extra-linguistic gender attributes. Referential gender involves the use of language to make references to specific genders or to remain gender-indefinite. In some cases, male nouns can function as "generic masculine"," encompassing both genders. These linguistic categories demonstrate that many languages, regardless of the presence of grammatical gender, tend to exhibit a bias towards male-oriented language usage. The influence of social gender roles and assumptions can contribute to the perpetuation of gender biases within language patterns (Bußmann & Hellinger, 2003, pp. 7–11).

Unlike other Indo-European languages, English does not have a grammatical gender. However, it does possess a limited set of personal nouns that carry lexical gender, meaning its semantic specification includes a specific property denoting male, female, or neutral. According to Samuel et al. (2019), the concept of gender in English primarily functions as a semantic category that holds significant social implications. Traditionally, the generic use of "he" has been employed in English to refer to high-status occupational terms in unspecified contexts. Furthermore, in neutral contexts, the use of "he" is prescribed not only for general human nouns but also for indefinite pronouns such as "somebody", "anyone", "no one", and so on. However, the use of generic masculine language such as personal pronouns "he/his/him" and nouns "man/men" to refer both to male and female has been challenged by the feminists and scholars of gender and language (Simon, 1996). Bußmann and Hellinger (2003, p.10) argue that the "asymmetries involved here, that is the choice of masculine/male expressions as the normal or 'unmarked' case with the resulting invisibility of feminine/female expressions are reflections of an underlying gender belief system, which in turn creates expectations about appropriate female and male behaviour". Supported by Moindjie and Rahamatullah (2024), women are less visible either in cognitive or lexical representations when masculine generics "man/men" (including female) or "he/him/his" are used.

Similarly, the Chinese language lacks grammatical gender markers (Farris, 1988), so the marking of gender is less obvious. Nevertheless, the lexical gender is observed in Chinese. For example, words such as 女(nǔ, daughter)，妇(fù, women)，妻(qī, wife), 妾(qiè, concubine) carry the semantic property of femaleness. The patriarchal stereotype in the Chinese cultural and social system favourably supports males. Consequently, the notion that men are superior to women has been deeply rooted (Birdwhistell, 2007). This social gender bias places women in a disadvantaged position in society and perpetuates gender inequality, making women's lower status invisible. However, the Mencian teachings do not justify the subordination of women to men but rather a functional distinction assigning men to the outer public and political duties and women to the domestic duties (Chan, 2000).

COGNITION AND GENDER

Researchers propose that language influences the construction of social gender and perpetuates gender inequality through its cognitive function, shaping how speakers interpret and conceptualise experiences. Specifically, the use of masculine forms to represent both males and females can lead to ambiguity, as it is unclear whether these forms are meant exclusively for males or are intended to be inclusive. Psychological studies, particularly those examining languages with grammatical gender, have offered compelling evidence that language indeed influences cognitive processes related to gender perception (Aikhenvald, 2016; Alvanoudi, 2014, 2020; Garnham et al., 2016; Redl et al., 2021, 2022). The cognitive effect and social gender perception in the contrastive linguistic analysis have been examined mainly in the Indo-European languages, such as English-Dutch (Redl et al., 2021,2022), English-Germany (Schütze, 2020), English-French (Gygax et al., 2021) using eye-tracking experiments. These empirical experiments suggest that the ambiguity of generic masculine pronouns and nouns affects the readers' comprehension and representation of gender inference in cognitive processing and that readers make gender inferences based on the gender stereotype favouring males in the shared belief and ideology (Pyykkönen et al., 2010).

However, cognition and gender in translation studies are seldom explicitly addressed. Despite that, there are various studies on the cognitive effect of grammatical gender in contrastive linguistic analysis. However, there is a dearth of studies on gender and translation except for Meng (2020) and Olalere (2023), which fail to provide an account of the cognitive aspects of how the linguistic manifestations of gendered language are linked to the social gender and explore the cognitive effect and mechanisms underlying the use of masculine generics. In other words, these previous studies often overlook the process perspective of translation as a cognitive activity (Albir & Alves, 2009), lacking explanations from cognitive sciences to account for the translator's behaviour.

In bridging these two gaps, the research adopts a socio-cognitive approach to explore the connection between the linguistic expression of gender and social gender constructs, as well as to examine the cognitive schemata underlying the use of generic masculine pronouns in three English translations of *Mencius*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the social and cognitive approaches that account for the factors that influence the translation style. In other words, it aims to delve into how the internal cognitive schemas interact with the external social norms underpin the use of gendered language in the translation process. While the sociology approach to translation emphasises the product-oriented study, the cognitive approach highlights the process-oriented study. Toury claims that these different orientations of "functions, processes and products" translation studies are inseparable and interdependent (Toury, 2012, p. 5). The socio-cognitive perspective on translation integrates the influence of social dynamics with the study of cognitive processes since the social approach takes account of the individual within the social dimensions, and the cognition approach expands the focus from the individual to the social dimensions (Risku & Rogl, 2022). These two converging perspectives interface how 'internal' cognitive processes are influenced by 'external' social factors.
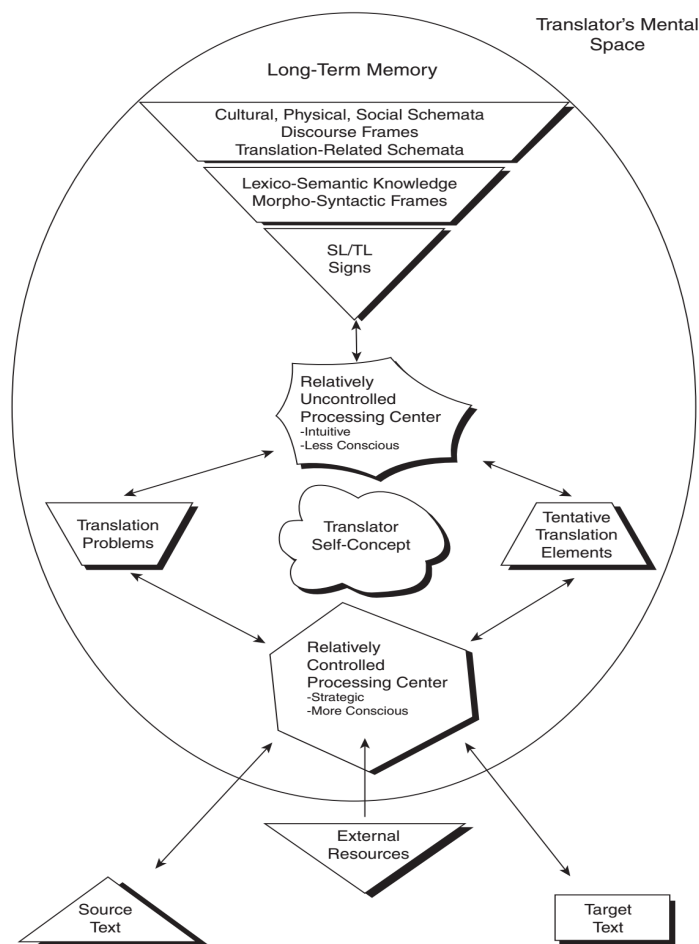

FIGURE 1. Kiraly's socio-psycholinguistic model on translation process (Kiraly, 2014, p.1)

Kiraly (2014) views translation as a social and cognitive activity, integrating the social and psycholinguistic models in the translation process (Figure 1). In this model, the translator is an active participant in mediating three situational contexts: the source context of the situation, the target context of the situation, and the translation context of the situation, also referred to as the translator's self-concept, serving as the interface between the translator's social and psychological worlds. The major components of this model include the information sources, the relatively uncontrolled processing centres, and the relatively controlled ones. Three major information sources are available to translators: knowledge stored in long-term memory, source text input and external resources (Kiraly, 2014). Long-term memory encompasses a range of knowledge, including cultural, physical, and social schemata, discourse frames, and knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures, as well as translation-related schemata, among others.

Building on this foundation, the way translators process and integrate this information is crucial for effective translation. A schema is a mental framework that helps individuals organise and interpret information from their environment. Schemata enable individuals to make sense of the world by filtering and categorising information in a way that is consistent with their existing knowledge and understanding (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977). The relatively uncontrolled and the relatively controlled processing centres synthesise information from long-term memory, ST input and external resources, involving language comprehension and production. During the comprehension process, the interplay between cognitive processes and world knowledge is essential for a profound understanding of any discourse. Stereotypical knowledge, as an integral part of general world knowledge, significantly influences this inferential process. Bodenhausen and Wyer (1985) have emphasised that such knowledge is frequently accessed automatically, serving as a foundation for judgment and inference. These inferential processes are triggered automatically and subconsciously, relying on long-term "world knowledge" that has been accumulated through life experiences and social interactions (Kintsch, 1988).

This concept of automatic and subconscious inference aligns with the role of translators as they engage with the ST, highlighting the active nature of their cognitive engagement. Translators, in their role as readers, rely on their knowledge of ST lexis and syntax as well as extra-linguistic knowledge to understand the ST. They actively construct mental representations by extracting explicit information from the text and generating inferences to fill gaps, thereby forming a coherent interpretation of the material (Kintsch, 1988). This perspective views readers as active processors of information, leveraging their pre-existing knowledge to interpret and understand the text. Readers often infer gender referents from gender-stereotypical cues and linguistic features, such as grammatical gender, with these inferences being unconsciously activated (Oakhill et al., 2005).

In the translation process study, translators, as implied readers of the ST, have the subjectivity to interpret the discourse based on individual beliefs and schemata. Translators construct mental representations of the gender information, encompassing both explicit and implicit elements, through inference making. Inference-making entails deducing and generating implicit elements to achieve coherence and satisfy the search for meaning. In conclusion, the socio-cognitive approach highlights the social factors interplaying with the cognitive schemata in translational choices. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing translation style integration in the process study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

DATA

Mencius, which records the words and deeds of Mencius (551–479 BCE) and his disciples, as well as his rivals, is one of the canonical works of the Confucian culture in the feudal society in ancient China. Since its first English translation by David Collie in 1828, the retranslation of *Mencius* continues to arouse the interest of scholars globally. This study contains a parallel corpus of three English translations of *Mencius* translated by Irene Bloom (2009), Zhao Zhentao, Zhou Dingzhi, and Zhang Wenting (hereafter Zhao et al.) (1999), and James Legge (1895). The ST *Mencius* in this corpus, annotated by Yang (1960) with the Classical Chinese and Modern Chinese, has 32,058 tokens. *Mencius* is passed down from Zhao Qi (112? -201), dividing this text into seven parts (books). The subsequent commentators (Zhu Xi, Jiao Xun, Dai Zhen, Yang Bojun) all follow Zhao's division but interpret it slightly due to the new archaeological findings. Zhu Xi (1130-1200) was a Neo-Confucianist in the Song Dynasty. Zhu was influential in the development of Neo-Confucianism. Both Dai Zhen (1724-1777) and Jiao Xun (1763-1820) were mid-Qing Confucian scholars. Yang Bojun (1909-1992) also commented *on Mencius* and translated Classical Chinese into Vernacular Chinese. The differences among these scholars lie in their understanding and interpretation of particular words. Bloom and Zhao et al. base their interpretations on Yang's annotation, whereas Legge's interpretation draws from multiple annotations, such as those of Zhao Qi, Zhu Xi, and Dai Zhen. Although different translators relied on various commentaries, they are part of the same scholarly lineage (Ding, 2020). Regarding the overall translation style, the minor discrepancies can be considered negligible.

For the parallel alignment, the ST is used in classical Chinese without the annotations and notes. The Chinese-English parallel corpus (Figure 2) is created with three sets of parallel alignments at the sentence level.
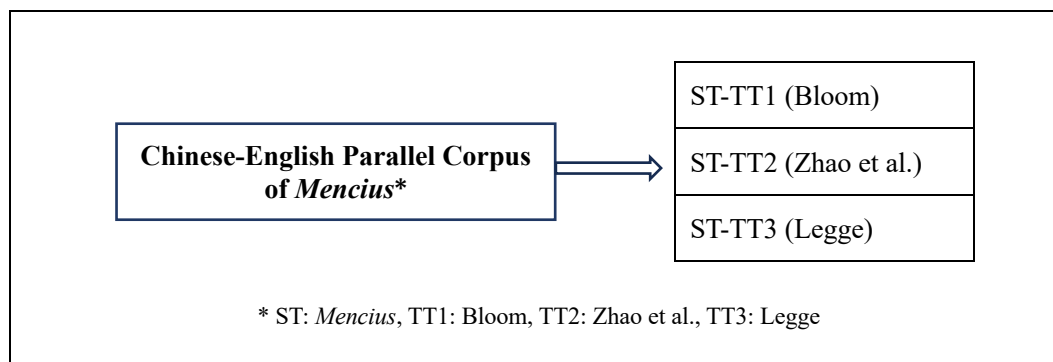

FIGURE 2. Corpus of *Mencius*

PROCEDURE

This study adopts a socio-cognitive approach with the aid of corpus to investigate the gendered language markers and the cognitive schemas that underpin the use of masculine generics in the three English translations of *Mencius*. The research methodology integrates both product-and process-oriented study to examine the interplay of translator's linguistic choices and the translational behaviour.

The study is descriptive-explanatory research combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Corpus analysis offers a useful and reliable way to quantify the stylistic differences in translation studies, favoured by scholars such as Saldanha (2011), Mahlberg and McIntyre (2011), and D. Li (2017). The corpus analysis serves as a starting point for qualitative analysis (Mahlberg & McIntyre, 2011), selecting a high concentration of stylistic features (Boase-Beier, 2011). The highly concentrated stylistic features offer insights into the text's themes and recurring patterns, the points at which the comparison of ST and TT can be conducted.

WordSmith is employed to assist quantitative and qualitative analysis for its two related functions, identifying the highly concentrated stylistic features. WordList Function offers a quantitative overview of the corpus by generating a list of the words with the frequency statistics. This helps identify the most common words and patterns in a corpus. The Concord Function is used to examine the contexts in which specific words or phrases appear within a corpus, identifying the recurring patterns and collocations for qualitative analysis. The bilingual retrieval tool utilised in this research is CUC_ParaConc, developed by the Communication University of China. This software is a multilingual parallel concordance tool that specialises in retrieving parallel texts, with a particular emphasis on enhanced compatibility with the Chinese language. It empowers users to conduct detailed comparisons and alignments of texts across different languages at the sentence level, making it an invaluable resource for bilingual concordance and analysis. Therefore, this research integrates a corpus and qualitative analysis as supported by D. Li (2017), claiming that the crux of corpus-assisted translation research is the interpretation of the statistical data (qualitative analysis). Once the wordlist is generated, all the generic masculine words (he/his/him/man/men) and gender-neutral words (one/ones/one's/people/ person/human/someone/everyone/anyone) are cross-tabulated, and the raw frequency are then normalised per every 10,000 tokens to ensure an accurate comparison across different texts, regardless of their length. With the initial analysis complete, a more rigorous statistical evaluation is used to validate our findings. A significance test system[1] developed by Paul Rayson, is applied. This system assesses the statistical significance of raw frequencies and the magnitude of differences between them, thereby enhancing the objectivity of the analysis. The significance test is crucial for determining whether the observed frequencies are statistically significant and the extent of their significance.

The research is further enhanced by qualitative analysis, which aims to explore how translators connect the linguistic forms of gender in the TTs with social gender constructs. It seeks to understand the cognitive schemas that underlie the use of masculine generics and gender-neutral language in translation, thus providing a deeper understanding of the translator's decision-making process.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS AT THE GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL LEVELS

Table 1 presents the outcomes of the raw frequency of the translations of gender-neutral words from ST at grammatical and lexical levels. Both Zhao et al.'s and Legge's translations exhibit a distinct inclination towards generic masculine grammatical and lexical words, compared with Bloom's translation, which demonstrates a preference for gender-neutral words. The findings suggest that there is an evolving shift from the androcentric to gender-inclusive language style.

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[1] https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html

TABLE 1. Frequency for lexical choices in the same domain

Domain	Words	TT1 Normalized Freq.	TT2 Normalized Freq.	TT3 Normalized Freq.
Generic	man/men	29	77	84
Masculine	he/his/him	299	315	332
	Sum	328	392	416
Gender-neutral	people	72	74	51
	person	29	4	3
	human	14	8	1
	one/someone/ everyone/anyone	122	69	50
	one's	18	15	6
	Sum	256	169	110

It is evident that these three translations differ in the representation of gender-neutral language. However, few studies attempt to examine whether the difference is statistically significant and the extent of its significance. Therefore, a significance test is conducted between the female translator Bloom and the male translators (Zhao et al. and Legge), respectively; the results are shown in Tables 2a and 2b. The significance of differences between two frequency scores is determined by the Log-Likelihood (hereafter LL) value, with higher values indicating greater significance (Rayson & Garside, 2000).

In the case of generic masculine language, the LL value between Bloom's and Zhao et al.'s translations (LL = 13.98) and LL value between Bloom's and Legge's translations (LL = 35.58) is higher than the benchmark in this study ($p<0.05$, LL>3.84), indicating that the disparities in the representation of generic masculine language between female and male translators are statistically significant in a whole. However, no statistical significance was found between Zhao et al.'s and Legge's translations using generic masculine pronouns and nouns. This may indicate a subconscious male preference for generic masculine terms, reflecting shared beliefs in male bias during comprehension and mental representation influenced by social-cultural norms. Historically, it is evident that the masculine form in many languages has not always been officially associated with a generic meaning or considered the default representation (Bodine, 1975; Gygax et al., 2021). It can be reasonably asserted that male translators are influenced by the prevailing social norm and reflective of a widely held belief within the long-established androcentric and patriarchal society (Alasfour, 2021). This practice of employing gender-specific language, which seemingly subsumed women under the male category, was deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric and social structures of the translator's beliefs and ideology when making gender inferencing. As such, language also reflects the socio-cultural background. The use of such linguistic conventions reinforced and perpetuated the prevailing gender hierarchy, wherein male dominance and superiority were deeply entrenched. Thus, Legge's and Zhao et al.'s adherence to this linguistic convention can be understood as a reflection of the prevailing social norms and shared beliefs that characterised the androcentric and patriarchal society.

As for the gender-neutral aspect, the LL value analysis reveals interesting findings. Among the translations examined, the overall statistics show that there is a statistically significant difference between Bloom's translation and Zhao et al.'s (LL=108.23) in using the gender-neutral lexical words except for words such as "one's" (LL=2.40) and "people" (LL=0.19). On the contrary, the difference in gender-neutral language between Bloom's and Legge's translations exceeds that between Bloom's and Zhao et al.'s. According to a personal correspondence with the Editor, Professor Philip Ivanhoe (March 17, 2024), Bloom's advocacy for the use of gender-neutral

language was primarily influenced by the feminist movement. This influential movement, seeking to challenge and dismantle gender inequalities, played a significant role in shaping her perspectives on language and its impact on social dynamics. As a leading figure in the human rights movement at Barnard College, Columbia University, Bloom actively championed the principles of equality, justice, and inclusivity.[2] Bloom's comprehension of the text and her mental representations of language style were profoundly affected by both the social-cultural system and her personal beliefs.

TABLE 2a. Significance test result for Bloom's and Zhao et al.'s translations

Semantic domain		observed frequencies		normalized frequencies		Log Likelihood (LL)*
		TT1	TT2	TT1	TT2	
Generic	he	814	782	0.0161	0.0149	2.67**
	his	475	595	0.0094	0.0113	8.95
	him	297	277	0.0059	0.0053	1.78**
	man	114	309	0.0023	0.0059	85.44
	men	41	93	0.0008	0.0018	18.61
	Sum	1741	2050	0.0346	0.0390	13.98
Gender-neutral	one	595	337	0.0118	0.0064	83.53
	one's	98	81	0.0019	0.0015	2.40**
	people	382	386	0.0076	0.0074	0.19**
	person	154	22	0.0030	0.0004	116.95
	human	75	40	0.0015	0.0008	12.33
	Sum	1304	866	0.0259	0.0165	108.23

*The interpretation of Log Likelihood is based on Rayson and Garside (2000).
For these tables, an LL of 3.84 or higher is significant at the level of $p < 0.05$, an LL of 6.63 or higher is significant at $p < 0.01$, an LL of 10.83 or higher is significant at $p<0.001$, and an LL of 15.13 or higher is significant at $p<0.0001$. In this study, the p-value is set at $p < 0.05$ to establish a significant level of statistical significance.
**Based on the LL value, it signifies no statistical significance.

TABLE 2b Significance test result for Bloom's and Legge's translations

Semantic domain		observed frequencies		normalized frequencies		Log Likelihood
		TT1	TT3	TT1	TT3	
Generic	he	814	871	0.0161	0.0146	4.35
	his	475	671	0.0094	0.0113	8.69
	him	297	439	0.0059	0.0073	8.78
	man	114	296	0.0023	0.0049	55.78
	men	41	206	0.0008	0.0034	94.19
	Sum	1741	2483	0.0346	0.0416	35.58
Gender-neutral	one	595	296	0.0118	0.0050	159.36
	one's	98	35	0.0019	0.0006	42.70
	people	382	304	0.0076	0.0051	27.02
	person	154	17	0.0030	0.0003	150.76
	human	75	6	0.0015	0.0001	81.79
	Sum	1304	658	0.0259	0.0110	340.25

[2] https://digitalcollections.barnard.edu/do/7cc12aa8-41bb-4ccc-ae5aefded7094b77#page/24/mode/2up/search/Irene+Bloom

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AT THE GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL LEVELS

Apart from the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis in this section explores how these three translators comprehend and represent the gender-neutral language in the ST. One of the recurring examples of gender-biased language in English is the use of generic masculine language. The nouns man/men and personal pronouns "he/his/him" are categorised as generic, referring to both men and women. However, as Moulton et al. (1978) and Hyde (1984) have pointed out, this practice can diminish the visibility of women and often triggers associations that default to males.

Unlike English, Chinese lacks generic nouns equivalent to the English counterparts of man/men. However, the Chinese counterparts of English man and men are "男人(nán rén, male)" and "男人们(nán rén men, males)" respectively, having the only male referents. The Chinese words "人(rén)", "民(mín)", and "…者(…zhě, suffix)" are semantic near equivalents to the English "people/person/human/individual" and include both genders. However, when the Chinese words are used with some specific references, there is the possibility, in translation, of evoking the sexist use of the English "man/men" and "he/his/him" because of the translator's subconscious linguistic habit, which is registered mostly subliminally usually without the conscious control of the language users.

The occurrences of "人(rén)", "民(mín)", and "…者(…zhě, suffix)" in the corpus denoting both genders are checked in their correspondence in both translations. Examples are shown to explore how the three translations represent gender. The terms "人(rén)" and "…者(…zhě, suffix)", while not inherently gender-specific, are often embedded within a framework that reflects masculine ideologies and political thought. This is particularly evident in the interpretation of Mencian philosophy, where key concepts like "rén (仁)", "yì (义)", and " xián (贤)" are commonly discussed in a manner that overlooks the female experience, resulting in a predominantly male-shaped understanding of these ideas.

In Example 1, the discussion of "rén (仁)" and "yì(义)" reflects the social conventions and implicit meanings that were prevalent from Mencius's era through Imperial China. These concepts were largely articulated within a male-dominated discourse, which shaped the societal expectations and norms of that period. Studies have found that the morphology of gender representations has an immediate impact on the processing of language (Garnham et al., 2012). Both the translations of Zhao et al. and Legge interpret the context only from the male perspective, using "man" and "his" to construct and represent the male discourse, while Bloom uses the gender-unspecific pronoun "one" and the generic masculine pronoun "his" to reconstruct a more gender inclusive discourse. Even though Bloom uses "one" in the subject, her subconscious linguistic habit is influenced by the male perspective, which uses "his" as the anaphoric pronoun due to the linguistic norms that only the generic masculine can include both males and females. The understanding of Bloom with the unspecifying gender shows her gender inclusivity and thus promotes gender equality.

Example 1:
> ST: 未 有 仁 而 遗 其 亲**者** 也， 未 有 义 而 后 其 君**者** 也。
> wèi yǒu rén ér yí qí qīn zhě yě, wèi yǒu yì ér hòu qí jūn zhě yě.
> LT: One who abandons one's parents lacks benevolence, and one who disrespects one's ruler lacks righteousness.
> TT1: It has never happened that **one** given to humaneness abandons **his** parents, nor that **one** given to rightness subordinates the interests of **his** lord.
> TT2: No benevolent **man** ever neglects his parents, and no righteous **man** ever looks down upon **his** sovereign.
> TT3: There never has been a benevolent **man** who neglected his parents. There has never been a righteous **man** who made **his** sovereign an afterconsideration.

Additionally, Bloom adopts this linguistic pattern: "the+ adjective", referring to a group of persons having the traits described by the adjective without specifying the gender (Example 2). On the contrary, Zhao et al. translate "xián zhě (贤者)" as "a virtuous man", and Legge uses "men of talents and worth". The use of generic masculine words is predominantly associated with males (Hamilton, 1991). In other words, the male translators would construct the male-dominated discourse, while Bloom represents a more inclusive discourse.

Example 2:

> ST: 王　曰　：“**贤 者**　亦　有　此　乐 乎?"
> Wáng　yuē:　"xián zhě　yì　yǒu　cǐ　lè hū?"
> LT: King said, "Do the virtuous also experience this joy?"
> TT1: The king asked, "Do such pleasures belong also to **the worthy**?
> TT2 and asked, "Does **a virtuous man** also enjoy such a thing as this palace?
> TT3 and said to him, 'Do **men of talents and worth** likewise find pleasure in these things?

The above two examples are male discourse in social conventions, explicitly or implicitly understood as male in the ST. Bloom prefers a gender-inclusive language in the interpretation of the male-biased discourse, compared with the other two translations. The following examples are gender-inclusive discourse in the ST, differences are observed among these three translations.

In contrast to Examples 1 and 2, the "人(rén)" in Examples 3 and 4 are gender-unspecific in the ST despite the fact that Yingong Zhita, Yao, and Shun are historical figures and that exemplary individuals are predominantly male. Zhao et al. and Legge both employ the generic nouns "man/men" and pronoun "his" to refer to the subject or object, which in this case are the historical figures Yingong Zhita and Yao and Shun explicitly emphasise the male identity of these characters, aligning with a traditional androcentric perspective. The usage of generic nouns and pronouns in these translations not only reflects the traditional notion that historical figures and exemplary individuals are predominantly male but also mirrors the translator's ideology and the socio-historical milieus. The Chinese tradition and system favoured and supported the elite men, which was prevalent in *Mencius*. So, translating it otherwise is a gender-inclusive advocacy.

Example 3:

> ST: 夫 尹公之他，　端 **人**　也　，　其　取 友　必 端　矣。
> fū yǐn gōng zhī tā,　duān rén　yě,　qí　qǔ yǒu　bì duān　yǐ.
> LT: (夫)Particle Yingong Zhi Ta is a dignified man, and he chooses friends of great dignity also (矣)particle.
> TT1: Yingong To is a principled **person**, and the friends **he** chooses must be principled as well.
> TT2: Now Yingong Zhi Ta is an upright **man**, and will surely make friends with upright men!
> TT3: Now, Yin-kung T'o is an upright **man**, and the friends of **his** selection must be upright also.

On the other hand, Bloom employs gender-inclusive language, which challenges the gendered assumptions inherent in the traditional notion and the ST. This approach reflects the translator's conscious or subconscious effort to promote gender inclusivity and to highlight the possibility of anyone, regardless of gender, embodying the virtues and qualities associated with Yao and Shun. Viewed and interpreted historically, the text has undergone a continuous process of reinterpretation as different thinkers have applied their own specific perspectives and cultural contexts to derive varied meanings from it. Bloom's interpretation of gender is based on her particular way of understanding and appropriate for her target audience that "at least half of the readers are women and thus and include them in the insights of the things I translate" (personal communication of the editor).

Example 4:

ST: 曹交问 曰 ：“**人** 皆 可 以 为 尧 舜 ， 有 诸？”
Cáo Jiāo wèn yuē: "rén jiē kě yǐ wéi Yáo Shùn, yǒu zhū? "
LT: Cao Jiao asked: "Can everyone become like Yao and Shun? Is it possible?"
TT1: Cao Jiao asked, "Is it true that all **human beings** are capable of becoming a Yao or a Shun?"
TT2: Cao Jiao asked, "It is said that all **men** may become Yaos and Shuns."
TT3: Chiâo of Tsâo asked Mencius, saying, 'It is said, "All **men** may be Yâos and Shuns;"—is it so?'

In Example 5, the "民 (mín)" in this context are referred to as all human begins, including women. Bloom uses "human" to construct the gender-neutral discourse; on the contrary, Zhao et al. and Legge interpret it as the generic masculine using "man/men". Bloom's choice to use "human" highlights the importance of gender neutrality and inclusiveness in language, promoting a more equitable representation of all individuals from philosophical and feminist perspectives. The contrasting interpretations presented by Zhao et al. and Legge may inadvertently perpetuate gender bias or reinforce traditional gender roles due to the social ontology rendering women largely invisible in philosophical texts (Birdwhistell, 2007).

Example 5:

ST: 曰 ：“否。自 有 生 **民** 以 来，未 有 孔子 也。”
yuē: "Fǒu. Zì yǒu shēng mín yǐ lái, wèi yǒu Kǒng zǐ yě."
LT: Said: "No, since the beginning of living humans, it did not have Confucius particle(也)."
TT1: "No. Since the beginning of **human** life, there has never been another Confucius."
TT2: "No. Since **man** came into being, there has never been anyone comparable to Confucius."
TT3: Mencius replied, 'No. Since there were living **men** until now, there never was another Confucius.'

Additionally, classical Chinese exhibits a high degree of subject ellipsis, with subject pronouns frequently being omitted in sentences (C. N. Li & Thompson, 1989). This ellipsis contributes to the brevity and conciseness of classical Chinese texts. In line with the classical Chinese writing style, the subject ellipsis is prevalent in *Mencius*. However, it also poses challenges in determining the exact subject of a sentence, leading to a degree of ambiguity and indeterminacy in interpretation. The omission of subject pronouns in classical Chinese can lead to multiple plausible interpretations, requiring translators as readers to actively engage with the text and fill in the implied subjects based on contextual cues, which in turn allows for multiple possible interpretations. The process of filling in the ellipsis reflects the translator's cognitive perception and understanding, which is influenced by their consciousness or subconsciousness (Saldanha, 2011). This process is further shaped by the socio-cognitive context in which the translation situates as translators navigate the interplay between entrenched linguistic patterns and social norms (Halverson, 2013).

For instance, in Example 6, the sentence "如耻之，莫如为仁" (rú chǐ zhī, mò rú wèi rén) demonstrates subject ellipsis, where the subject pronoun is omitted between the conjunction word "如(rú)" and the verb "耻(chǐ)". Bloom's interpretation of the subject as a gender-neutral "one" aligns with a more inclusive and egalitarian perspective. By employing a gender-neutral pronoun, Bloom emphasises the universal applicability of Mencius' teachings to all audiences despite the fact that the social conventions in Mencius' time were addressed only to elite men. This interpretation highlights the philosophical and moral insights that Mencius aimed to convey rather than focusing on gender-specific implications, especially since the late 20ᵗʰ century, when the feminist movement was influenced. On the other hand, Zhao et al. and Legge employing the generic noun "man" and pronouns "he" and "his" reflects a more androcentric approach other than for consistency. The use of gender-specific language to supplement the subject implies that the

translation choices are probably influenced by the translator's androcentric worldview, where the "MALE-As-Norm" (Braun, 1997)" is deeply entrenched in the cognitive schema.

Example 6:

> ST: 如 耻 之 ， 莫 如 为 仁。
> Rú chǐ zhī， mò rú wèi rén.
> LT: If [subject ellipsis] humiliates it, nothing is better than being humane.
> TT1: If **one** is ashamed of this, there is nothing better than to be humane.
> TT2: If a **man** is ashamed of his doings, **his** best course of action is to practice benevolence.
> TT3: If **he** is ashamed of his case, **his** best course is to practice benevolence.

In a similar vein, there is subject ellipsis in the ST, automatically activating translator's stereotypical information to default the subject. The subject is supplemented in different ways in the three translations.

Example 7:

> ST: 不 仁、 不 智、 无 礼、 无 义， 人 役 也。
> Bù rén， bù zhì， wú lǐ， wú yì， rén yì yě.
> LT: Not humane, not wise, no propriety, no rightness, people are servants [particle].
> TT1: **One** who is neither humane nor wise, who is devoid of ritual propriety and rightness, will be the servant of others.
> TT2: **He** who is neither benevolent nor wise and lacks decorum and righteousness is menial.
> TT3: From the want of benevolence and the want of wisdom will ensure the entire absence of propriety and righteousness；—**he** who is in such a case must be the servant of other men.

Bloom's translation strategy in Example 7 uses a gender-neutral "one", reflecting an inclusive and egalitarian perspective. Bloom's approach underscores the philosophical and moral essence of Mencius's philosophy, aligning with contemporary values influenced by the feminist movement. In contrast, Zhao et al. and Legge's use of the masculine pronouns "he" and "his" reflects an androcentric interpretation. This choice situates the subject within a male-centric framework.

It is important to acknowledge that the androcentric nature observed in the translations of Zhao et al. and Legge reflects the historical and cultural context in which Mencius lived and wrote. During that era, patriarchal norms often prevailed, and social roles were predominantly defined in terms of male experiences and perspectives. Consequently, this androcentric bias can be seen as a reflection of the broader social context in which Mencius' philosophical ideas were developed and transmitted.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that there is an evolving trend from androcentric to gender-neutral in the English translations of *Mencius* handling the gender-unspecific words in the ST, revealing a nuanced representation of gender and the cognitive schemas in the translational behaviour. In other words, the cognitive schemas of both Zhao et al. and Legge align with "MALE-As-Norm", while Bloom's cognitive schema intends to challenge and subvert the entrenched principle of "MALE-As Norm", promoting a more egalitarian linguistic and cultural schemas.

The principle that "MALE-As-Norm" dominates our lives and thinking that people hardly realise its existence and effects, which is strongly ingrained in our social norms and cognitive schemas, with the masculine gender being treated as a generic referent for humanity, encompassing

both men and women. However, this principle leads to a male bias perception excluding women, which is empirically confirmed in Indo-European languages and Chinese (Gygax et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2018). The cognitive schemas of these translators were inevitably influenced by this social norm, leading to the perpetuation of generic masculine language in their translations. Traditional Chinese culture and society were male-centric and male-discursive (Birdwhistell, 2007), and the cultural context significantly influenced the interpretation of masculine terms as generic (Farris, 1988). The patriarchal and hierarchical structure of Chinese social ontology historically rendered women nearly invisible in history and culture, which reinforced the "MALE-As-Norm" principle and entrenched in the schemas. However, this norm was challenged by the feminist movements, which brought attention to the role of language in shaping gender identities and advocating for social equality (Simon, 1996).

Both Legge and Zhao et al. were deeply ingrained by the stereotypical information and social norm that "MALE-As-Norm", thus influencing their mental representations of the gender unspecific words. Legge lived in Victorian times, which were characterised by strong androcentrism, with men being seen as superior and women subordinated. Similarly, Zhao et al. were greatly influenced by the long historical and cultural tradition that "man is superior" in China for more than two millennia, even though the status of women has greatly improved compared with the old China in 1949 (the Founding of People's Republic of China). The long-entrenched notion was automatically activated in the translator's cognition of the gender representations. This historical and cultural context may have influenced Legge's and Zhao et al.'s translational choices, potentially leading to interpretations that align with traditional gender norms.

Conversely, the use of gender-neutral language by Bloom can be seen as a deliberate attempt to challenge and subvert the entrenched principle of "MALE-As Norm" in linguistic and cultural schemas. Feminist critics argue against the use of generic masculine terms, contending that these words are not genuinely gender-neutral but instead convey a male bias. Bloom's translation choices have been influenced by the second wave of feminism, a movement that promotes gender equality and inclusivity (1960s-1980s). Bloom's cognitive schema, therefore, can be explicitly described as one driven by the principles of gender equality and the subversion of traditional gender roles. This schema is likely shaped by a desire to promote gender equality and challenge the androcentric bias of the past. Bloom's translation embraces gender-neutral language, aiming to bring the female audience into the play and represented in the translation. By opting for gender-unspecific terms, Bloom not only breaks away from this tradition but also contributes to the reformation of gender stereotypes in the interpretation of classical texts.

The socio-cognitive approach to translation offers a framework for understanding how social norms and cognitive processes interact to influence translational choices and style. The study on bilingualism could complement translation on gender, shedding new light on different ways of conceptualising gender across languages and cultures (Di Sabato & Perri, 2020). These insights contribute significantly to the field of corpus-based translation studies by filling the gap between product-oriented and process-oriented approaches. By combining quantitative statistics from corpus analysis with the investigation of cognitive processes, researchers can provide comprehensive explanations for the translation activity. This integrated approach enhances our understanding of translation as a complex cognitive process and allows for a more nuanced analysis of translation style. It also highlights the benefits of in-depth process studies for TS and recommends avenues for further research.

CONCLUSION

The study has explored how gender-neutral language in the ST has been interpreted and represented in the TTs and uncovered the cognitive schemas of generic masculine gender, offering valuable insights into the interface of social norms, cultural beliefs, and cognitive processes in shaping translational choices in decision-making. The findings reveal that both Zhao et al.'s and Legge's translations prefer the generic masculine words to represent the gender-neutral lexicons in the ST, while Bloom inclines the gender-neutral words. It is found that the translator's lexical choices of generic masculine words are constrained by the social-cultural norms and stereotypical information "MALE-As Norm" in the translation process, which supports the previous findings by empirical experiments. The study's impact is threefold: it challenges androcentric norms to foster inclusivity, enriches Translation Studies with cognitive insights and corpus methodologies, and advances our understanding of language evolution in relation to social norms. This research contributes to the corpus-based translation style studies from socio-cognitive perspectives, which offers a coherent framework for the analysis of translation product-process oriented study. This study informs that the corpora can be effectively employed in process-oriented research as a research methodology, providing lexical choices to infer mental representations. Additionally, this study underscores the necessity of exploring process-oriented research in literary translation with the aid of corpora; the observed data in the corpora can be linked to the translator's behaviour directly or indirectly during the translation process. The study provides new research methodologies for cognitive processing in translation, the corpus-based study on translation universals, suggesting broad avenues for corpus-assisted research in cognitive translation studies. However, the limitation of corpora data is post-hoc, as the product is merely the final outcome of the processes that generated it. Considering this limitation, future research can supplement the corpora data with experimental data for triangulation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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