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***TRANSLATING SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE:
BEYOND RESEMIOTIZATION***

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***TRANSLATING SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE:
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Volume 18, 2025

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Navigating between Gender Neutrality and Resistance in the Italian Translation of *Pageboy*

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Abstract

The representation of non-binary identities in languages with grammatical gender poses specific linguistic and cultural challenges. Pageboy, Elliot Page's 2023 memoir, was translated into Italian with explicit attention paid to gender-neutral and identity-affirming language, when not overtly indicated by the author. Unlike English, which largely relies on lexical solutions and pronominal adjustment, Italian encodes gender across articles, adjectives, pronouns, and past participles, often rendering direct lexical equivalence unattainable. This study investigates the translation strategies adopted in the Italian edition of Pageboy, combining corpus linguistics and qualitative textual analysis, complemented by interviews with the translation team. The aim is to describe how gender markers are reduced, neutralised, or reframed in the target text while maintaining narrative cohesion and emotional tone. Using quantitative analysis to identify patterns in pronominal choices, adjective variation, and past participle agreement, the study highlights a systematic tendency towards gender-invariant forms and syntactic restructuring. Qualitative examination reveals that neutralisation is primarily achieved through rephrasing, the selection of epicene lexical items, and the reorganisation of verbal constructions that avoid obligatory gender agreement. The findings show that the Italian translation does not create new inclusive forms (such as schwa or asterisk-based endings) but works within the structural affordances of Italian to reduce gender marking. This approach suggests a model of translation-driven linguistic accommodation that prioritises intelligibility, accessibility, and identity representation, without departing from standard Italian norms.

Keywords: Gender neutrality; translation studies; corpus linguistics; identity representation.

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and gender has long been a focus of sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and discourse-oriented research. In recent years, the debates surrounding gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language have intensified, particularly in contexts where linguistic structure intersects with evolving cultural perceptions of gender identity. While English permits relatively flexible strategies to avoid gender marking, such as the adoption of the singular *they*, other European languages with pervasive grammatical gender present more complex challenges. Italian, like other Romance languages, encodes gender across multiple levels of morphology and syntax, making the expression of non-binary identities particularly difficult (Baiocco et al., 2023; Robustelli et al., 2012; Sabatini, 1987).

In this context, the Italian translation of Elliot Page's memoir *Pageboy* (Page, 2023a, 2023b) offers a relevant site for investigation. The author's explicitly articulated preference for gender-neutral language whenever gender was not specified required the translation team to engage with identity representation not only as a lexical or stylistic matter, but also as a structural and pragmatic problem. The translation thus becomes a linguistic negotiation between source-text identity construction and target-language constraints.

The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic, data-driven description of the strategies adopted in the Italian translation of *Pageboy*, analysing how gender is marked, neutralised, or avoided across different grammatical domains. Specifically, the study examines pronominal references, possessive forms, adjectives, and past participles, alongside a qualitative consideration of register, tone, and narrative voice.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical background on gendered language in English and Italian. Section 3 outlines the corpus-based methodology and interview framework. Section 4 presents the analysis and findings. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for translation practice and language use, offering concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Language, Gender, and Representation

The promotion of gender equality is one of the central objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (Goal 5). In this context, recent years have seen a significant increase in the adoption of inclusive language strategies aimed at reducing the asymmetries and forms of exclusion implicit in everyday communication practices (APA, 2020; Ashwell et al., 2023; Savoldi et al., 2025). The aim is not to eliminate gender from language, but to avoid it being attributed automatically or stereotypically, thus making communication more representative of different contemporary gender identities. The idea behind these inclusive linguistic strategies is that language plays an active role in shaping social representations and, consequently, in contributing to or counteracting stereotypes and inequalities. Research in linguistic gender representation has indeed demonstrated how grammatical and lexical structures may reflect, reinforce, or challenge cultural gender ideologies (Gabriel et al., 2018; Gygax et al., 2019). One of the main ways in which these strategies are applied is with gender-neutral linguistic solutions designed to avoid the use of gender-marked terms when gender is not semantically relevant. These solutions are based on the use of unmarked or epicene lexical forms that can refer to people irrespective of their gender, as in the shift from chairman to chair in English (Gygax et al., 2019; Höglund & Flinkfeldt, 2024; Savoldi et al., 2025). However, as language is neither a neutral medium nor a mere symbolic system, it actively participates in the construction and interpretation of social categories, including gender. This perspective foregrounds the idea that translation is a site of ideological negotiation, rather than a process of simple equivalence.

The issue becomes more complex in languages characterised by a marked grammatical structuring of gender, such as German, Italian, or Spanish (Guastalla, 2020; Müller-Spitzer et al., 2024; Papadopoulos, 2022). In these languages, gender is not limited to role names, but is grammaticalised in articles, adjectives, pronouns, and participles. Consequently, any attempt at neutralisation must contend with widespread binary male/female marking in forms referring to human beings. For example, while in English *the professors* does not require a gender distinction, Spanish distinguishes between *los profesores* (masculine) and *las profesoras* (feminine), and Italian uses *il professore* and *la professoressa* (Gabriel et al., 2018; Gygax et al., 2019). In highly marked linguistic contexts, therefore, the adoption of inclusive strategies requires not only terminological interventions, but also morphological and syntactic ones, accompanied by a conscious reflection on the relationship between language, identity, and

social representation. Linguistic neutrality, in these cases, is less immediate and requires negotiation between grammatical rules, actual usage, and emerging representation needs.

2.1.1 Gender Neutrality in English and in Italian

In English, nouns are not inflected for grammatical gender, unlike in many other languages. Gender distinctions are generally expressed through pronouns such as *he* and *she*, or through role-specific pairs like *man/woman* and morphologically derived feminine forms such as *prince/princess* (Quirk et al., 1985).

Processes of gender neutralisation in English have primarily relied on lexical strategies. Gender-marked occupational nouns such as *policeman* or *chairman* have been replaced by gender-neutral alternatives like *police officer* or by the productive use of the suffix *-person* (*chairperson*, *salesperson*). At the margins, new forms known as *neopronouns* (e.g. *ze/zir*) have been proposed to offer inclusive alternatives beyond the traditional binary system (Barnes, 2023). Since adjectives and past participles in English are not gender-inflected, morphosyntactic change has taken place almost exclusively within the pronominal system.

The rise of the singular *they* represents one of the most significant developments in this respect. Early feminist critiques in the 1970s challenged the so-called *generic he* and criticised gendered occupational nouns such as *chairman* or *fireman* for perpetuating male-centric linguistic norms (Cameron, 2003, 2024; Mills, 2008, 2008; Sczesny et al., 2016). The works of Bodine (1975) and Miller (1988) were instrumental in launching broader debates about gender-neutral language, highlighting how grammatical conventions shape social hierarchies and representations.

From a diachronic perspective, Baron's (1986) historical overview demonstrated that English has long possessed gender-neutral options, including the use of *they* for epicene reference. Curzan's (2003) corpus-based research further documented a steady increase in the use of singular *they* from Early Modern English to the present day. Baker (2010, 2023) has since expanded on these insights, illustrating how corpus linguistics can be employed to map the changing linguistic representation of gender and to uncover underlying ideological patterns.

Acceptance of singular *they* has accelerated markedly since the 2010s. Both the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA,

2020) and the *Chicago Manual of Style* (CM24, 2024) now recommend *they* for referring to unknown or non-binary individuals. Experimental research corroborates this shift: Foertsch and Gernsbacher (1997) showed that singular *they* does not impose greater cognitive processing costs than *he* or *she*, while more recent studies confirm increasingly positive attitudes among students and educators (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Tarrayo, 2024). Moreover, classroom-based interventions indicate that explicit instruction helps to normalize the use of *they* in academic writing (Copland, 2025). In addition, media discourse analyses suggest that singular *they* now appears more frequently than *he* or *she* in certain public communication genres (Baron, 2021).

Recent scholarship in queer and trans linguistics has broadened the scope of this debate, framing pronominal choice as an act of linguistic self-determination and identity expression (Barrett, 2017; Zimman & Brown, 2024). This perspective situates singular *they* within a broader movement toward inclusivity, recognising language as both a reflection of and a tool for social change. As Barrett (2017) and Zimman and Brown (2024) observe, pronoun use increasingly functions as an act of linguistic self-determination — a means through which speakers assert both gender and ideological belonging. Singular *they* thus exemplifies how language change can simultaneously reflect and reshape social hierarchies, ideologies, and identities.

Nevertheless, linguistic acceptance remains socially and ideologically uneven. Resistance to singular *they* is less about grammar and more about cultural values, identity, and ideology. Objections often arise from concerns over perceived threats to established gender roles and traditional language norms. Empirical evidence shows that the acceptance of singular *they* correlates positively with left-leaning or progressive political orientations, while resistance is more prevalent among conservative or right-leaning groups (Renström & Klysing, 2025). In this sense, language debates mirror broader ideological divides, turning grammatical choices into markers of identity and political stance.

In contrast to English, Italian poses unique challenges to gender inclusivity, as grammatical gender is deeply embedded in its morphology. Articles, adjectives, and past participles are all gender-marked, and this pervasiveness makes neutralisation particularly complex.

A landmark contribution to the debate was Sabatini's (1987) government-commissioned report *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*, which offered the first systematic guidelines for non-sexist Italian. The report

called for the feminisation of professional titles—for instance, *ministra* and *sindaca* instead of *ministro* and *sindaco*—and urged avoidance of the default masculine in cases of mixed or unspecified gender.

Subsequent research has documented both progress and resistance. Institutional style guides have adopted feminised job titles as the official norm in many public administrations (Robustelli et al., 2012). Acceptance is notably higher among younger speakers, though usage varies regionally and continues to face backlash from conservative media outlets (Formato, 2025).

Because the binary morphology of Italian prevents any easy creation of gender-neutral forms, speakers have turned to orthographic innovation. Various graphic strategies have emerged to signal inclusivity, such as the use of the slash (*caro/a*), the asterisk (*car**), and, more recently, the schwa symbol –ə (Baiooco et al., 2023; Gheno, 2020). Since 2019, the schwa has gained traction in activist and digital contexts as a visual marker of non-binary inclusivity. These innovations, however, have sparked intense debate among linguists, educators, and the public. Critics argue that such forms reduce readability and accessibility (especially for screen readers or language learners), while proponents emphasise their symbolic role in representing non-binary and gender-fluid identities. Abbondanza et al. (2025) found that while experimental exposure to *maestrə* (vs *maestra/o*) reduces male-default bias in role nouns, its acceptance, however, remains lower among older speakers. The authors also note that the schwa phoneme does not belong to standard Italian phonology (although it is present in some southern dialects), meaning that most speakers do not perceive it as distinctively neutral.

Public attitudes mirror this generational divide. A large-scale survey of nearly 2,000 respondents revealed that while 64% of Gen Z Italians express support for inclusive linguistic reforms, only 14% actively use the schwa in everyday writing (Scotto di Carlo, 2024). Resistance also takes institutional form: in March 2025, Italy’s Ministry of Education officially banned the use of the schwa and asterisk in school documents, deeming them “ungrammatical”.

The broader sociolinguistic literature confirms that gender stereotypes and biases permeate Italian language use. Studies have long demonstrated that linguistic asymmetries mirror and reinforce social hierarchies (Alexander, 1992; Beeghly, 2021; Boffa et al., 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2025; Morris, 1989). These findings align with international reports (Council of Europe, 2018; Doughman et al., 2021) that show that linguistic

bias can lead to direct and indirect discrimination. As Boffa et al. (2023) and Mohammadi et al. (2025) argue, language is not merely a reflection but also a shaper of societal norms, and translators play a key role in preventing the amplification of gendered stereotypes in discourse.

2.2 Translation, Gender, and Translator Agency

Translation is not a neutral transfer of meaning but a situated act that operates within cultural, ideological, and linguistic constraints (Katan & Taibi, 2021). The translator inevitably interprets, evaluates, and prioritises elements of the source text according to available linguistic resources and contextual expectations. For instance, interpreting practices offer a window onto the real-time negotiation of gender neutrality: even interpreters with strong awareness of inclusivity tend to avoid explicit gender marking under time pressure (Loureiro-Porto & Ariza-Fernández, 2025). They frequently resort to lexical neutralisation (*persona*, *gente*, *partner*) or impersonal constructions using *si*. Interestingly, even self-identified LGBT-friendly interpreters default to these strategies, revealing how structural and cognitive constraints interact with ideological awareness in real communicative settings. In this sense, translation is shaped by translator agency, understood not as subjective opinion but as the capacity to make deliberate, contextually motivated choices from among available linguistic options (Buzelin, 2008; Wolf & Fukari, 2007).

In the case of *Pageboy*, the translators faced the challenge of conveying a narrative voice explicitly tied to the author's self-identification as a non-binary individual, while working within a target language that encodes gender grammatically. Translator agency here does not manifest as the introduction of new inclusive forms, nor as ideological positioning, but as the selection of structurally possible alternatives that minimise unnecessary gender marking. This involves the careful choice of epicene nouns, the use of invariable adjectives, and syntactic restructuring to avoid obligatory gender agreement in past participles.

Therefore, the role of the translator in this context is best understood as adaptive mediation: a decision-making process guided by the principles of fidelity to the author's self-representation, grammatical well-formedness in the target language, and accessibility for the intended readership (Katan & Taibi, 2021). This perspective supports a descriptive rather than a

prescriptive approach, emphasising how translations can negotiate representation without departing from linguistic normativity.

2.3 Aims and Scope

Elliot Page's autobiography *Pageboy* presents a particularly compelling challenge for translators. The author explicitly requested that the Italian translation employ a form of inclusive, gender-neutral language (except when gender was explicitly indicated), a choice that foregrounds the structural tension between non-binary self-expression and the grammatical constraints of Italian. In this language, virtually every nominal, adjectival, and participial form is marked for gender, forcing translators to navigate a system that offers few, if any, ready-made neutral options.

The aim of this talk is therefore to explore the linguistic and ideological tensions that arise when translating a non-binary voice into a highly gendered linguistic system. This involves analysing the balance between authorial intent—that is, Page's desire for an explicitly non-binary self-representation—and the formal limitations imposed by Italian grammar, as well as the creative strategies adopted by the translators to mediate between fidelity and feasibility.

More specifically, the analysis focuses on four linguistic domains where gender marking in Italian is most salient:

1. Orthographic innovations, such as the use of graphic neutralisers (the asterisk, slash, or schwa) and their reception within the publishing industry.
2. Personal pronouns, particularly the lack of a neutral equivalent for English *they* and the resulting compensatory strategies (e.g. lexical reformulation or omission).
3. Possessive pronouns and adjectives, where gender agreement must be negotiated both grammatically and pragmatically.
4. Past participles and adjectives in predicative position, which force the translator to make overt gender choices, as in:
 - *Sono contenta* ("I'm happy" – feminine)
 - *Sono contento* ("I'm happy" – masculine)
 - *Sono felice* ("I'm happy" – morphologically unmarked).

Through these examples, the study seeks to highlight how translators act as mediators of identity in contexts where grammatical gender becomes a site of ideological negotiation. The Italian rendering of *Pageboy* thus provides a valuable lens for examining how language, identity, and translation intersect within broader discourses on gender inclusivity and linguistic change (Cameron, 2024). Ultimately, this analysis uses *Pageboy* as a “jumping pad” for a wider reflection on how grammatical systems can both constrain and enable self-representation, and on the evolving strategies translators adopt to challenge binary linguistic norms, while remaining intelligible and faithful to the author’s voice.

3. Methodological Approach

The study adopts a quanti-qualitative approach, combining Corpus Linguistics (CL) with sentiment analysis, followed by qualitative interpretation of the findings.

The analysis draws on two primary sources: *Pageboy* by Elliot Page in its original English edition (Page, 2023a) and its Italian translation (Page, 2023b), published by Mondadori in the same year. Both versions were examined in their official print editions, ensuring that the comparison was based on the final, publicly available texts. No preliminary drafts, editorial proofs, or later revised editions were considered for this study.

To carry out the quantitative analysis, a bilingual parallel corpus was compiled, including the complete English and Italian versions of *Pageboy* (see Table 1, below).

	Tokens	Types
Pageboy_ITA	78,938	12,923
Pageboy_ENG	78,364	9,269

Table 1. Parallel corpora breakdown

Before proceeding with the analysis, several preprocessing steps were undertaken. All non-narrative sections—such as the front matter, paratexts, and acknowledgements—were removed to focus exclusively on the main body of the memoir.

A corpus linguistic approach was employed to identify linguistic patterns and translation strategies used in the Italian version of *Pageboy*,

focusing on adaptations for gender neutrality (McEnery & Hardie, 2011). Sentence segmentation was performed using the built-in routines of #LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2020), followed by tokenisation and part-of-speech tagging, applying the default models for English and Italian, respectively. Finally, all misalignments between the two versions were manually reviewed and corrected, resulting in 42 adjusted cases.

Sentiment analysis was then applied to evaluate the emotional tone and resonance of the translated text, particularly in passages where non-binary identities are discussed (Hardmeier, 2020). Sentiment analysis was carried out with *CORPUS SENSE* (<https://corpus-sense.uma.es/>), an open access online tool developed by Antonio Moreno-Ortiz (University of Malaga), which has advanced capabilities, such as graph-based keyword extraction, semantic search, topic modelling, and LLM-based insights (Moreno-Ortiz, 2024).

Quantitative analysis was followed by qualitative data interpretation. Interpretative findings about translation challenges were also checked with the Italian translator team we interviewed.

This dual methodology provides a nuanced understanding of how language choices impact on both the accuracy of representation and the emotional engagement of the target audience.

4. Data Analysis

No orthographic strategies such “ə” or “*”, as described in Section 2.2.1, were found. Their absence is not accidental: the decision to avoid these symbols stems from the need to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Indeed, orthographic marks like *schwa* or the asterisk may create difficulties for some readers, particularly elderly people or those with dyslexia, thus limiting text readability (Arcangeli, 2024). This approach was endorsed by the translators involved in the project.

The analysis, therefore, addresses four linguistic domains where Italian typically enforces gender marking, namely:

- Singular *They/Them*
- Third person pronouns and possessives;
- Adjectives;
- Past participles.

These domains pose some challenges when translated from English into Italian, as summarised in Table 2, below.

Domain	English	Italian Challenge
Personal pronouns	<i>They</i>	Lack of neuter equivalent
Possessive determiners	Unmarked	Agreement with the possessed
Adjectives	Uninflected	Masc./Fem. agreement required
Past participles	No agreement with subject	Agreement required

Table 2. Summary of Italian translation challenges

4.1 Singular *They/Them*

In the English version, 182 instances of singular *they* were found, 164 were gender-related. In contrast, the Italian translation relies on a different set of strategies, since Italian lacks an equivalent gender-neutral pronoun. The most frequent solutions include pro-drop subjects and impersonal constructions, which allow translators to avoid explicit gender marking. Only 25 occurrences of singular *they* required such adaptation.

For example, the English subject “They” in (1a) has been strategically omitted in the Italian translation, whose target text is “senza indizi”: the absence of a subject in Italian naturally removes the need for gender specification (our emphasis here and there).

(1a) *Someone had been visiting my house in the night, laying roses along the gate. **They** were leaving notes with quotes from some of my favorite writers and musicians but offered no indication of their own identity.*

(1b) *Qualcuno veniva nottetempo a casa mia e lasciava rose accanto al cancello, accompagnate da frasi dei miei scrittori o musicisti preferiti, ma **senza indizi** circa la sua identità.*

Similarly, in (2a), the complement “close friend” is referred to as “They” in the adjacent sentence. In Italia, the sentence starting with “they” is rendered with a relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun “che”:

(2a) *Do you think I'm trans? I'd asked a **close friend**. **They** answered hesitantly*

(2b) *Credi che io sia trans? chiesi a **una persona**... **che** mi rispose esitante...*

Here, the translator opted for a neutral noun phrase (“una persona”) and a pro-drop construction, thus maintaining inclusiveness without forcing the language.

In (3a) the generic *they* is rendered with the impersonal construction “ci fu” in the Italian translation (3b):

(3a) *At the end of the permaculture course **they** had a little graduation party with a talent show*

(3b) *Al termine del corso di permacultura **ci fu** una piccola festa di consegna dei diplomi*

This impersonal construction effectively neutralises the subject, offering a gender-inclusive alternative that sounds fully idiomatic in Italian.

Overall, in *Pageboy*, singular *they* is used both when Page refers to herself/himself historically and when referring to individuals whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. The Italian system lacks a direct equivalent, and as the translation consistently avoids the introduction of neologisms or graphic innovations, the predominant strategies observed in the Italian translation are:

- the use of *persona* or *individuo* as referential anchors;
- impersonal constructions with *si*;
- omission of pronominal reference when recoverable via context.

As for *them*, 104 instances were identified in the English version, 74 of which were gender-related. However, no cases of singular *them* were found. Consequently, there was no need to apply any specific translation strategy, as all occurrences referred to plural antecedents and were rendered naturally in Italian.

4.2 Third Person Pronouns and Possessives

The study explored the use of inclusive strategies in personal pronouns and in possessive adjectives and pronouns. The analysis shows a clear prevalence of feminine forms over masculine ones. In total, *she* occurs 430 times, compared to 342 instances of *he*. A similar trend can be observed in the oblique and possessive forms: *her* appears 182 times as an object pronoun and 386 times as a possessive adjective, while *him* and *his* occur 96 and 186 times, respectively. Possessive pronouns are rare overall (*his* = 3; *hers* = 10). A breakdown of the use of third person pronouns and possessive can be seen in Table 3

Pers. pron.s		Oblique pers. pron.s		Poss. adj.s		Poss. pronouns	
He	She	Him	Her	His	Her	His	Hers
342	430	96	182	186	386	3	10

Table 3. Breakdown of third person pronouns and possessives

This distribution suggests a slightly higher visibility of female referents within the corpus, which may reflect both authorial choices and the gender balance of the narratives represented. A manual check of all the occurrences revealed that in the English version the author applies gender agreement in line with the gender identity of the people in his life, while resorting to singular *they* when the gender identity of the referent is unknown.

In the Italian translation, the translators follow the same principle, using gender agreement only when it appears in the source text. As for possessive adjectives and pronouns, Italian grammar requires agreement with the noun that is possessed, rather than with the possessor (Robustelli et al., 2012). As such, possessive determiners do not inherently encode the gender of the referent. This means that no explicit neutralisation strategy is required beyond maintaining standard agreement patterns.

4.3 Adjectives

Adjectives in the corpus are worth discussing for their role in gender agreement and lexical variation. In English, adjectives are invariable, while Italian translation often requires gender marking or lexical choices that convey similar nuances without compromising inclusivity.

The English corpus contains 1,162 adjective types (8,352 tokens), whereas the Italian version includes 2,047 types (12,479 tokens).¹ The higher number in Italian reflects the language's requirement for gender and number agreement in adjectives (Robustelli et al., 2012). In general, translators reproduce the gender agreement used by the author, without introducing additional gendered marking. Interestingly, 519 adjectives in the Italian corpus are invariable, thus avoiding gender specification altogether (Table 4).

Item	#	Item	#
Queer	37	Blu [blue]	14
Gay	27	Enorme [huge]	14
Grande [big]	34	Semplice [simple]	13
Possibile [possible]	32	Divertente [funny]	13
Auto [self]	3	Adolescente [teenager]	3
Presente [present]	22	Futuro [future]	1
Difficile [difficult]	25	Immobile [immobile]	11
Forte [strong]	22	Breve [brief, short]	11
Facile [easy]	21	Comune [common]	11
Destra [right]	4	Particolare [particular]	11
Gran [big]	16	Verde [green]	11
Migliore [better]	16	Bianca [white]	11
Impossibile [impossible]	16	Posteriore [posterior]	11
Simile [similar]	15	Locale [local]	11
Felice [happy]	15	Naturale [natural]	11
Continuo [ongoing]	15	Vecchia	10

Table 4. List of adjectives

The translators opted for using invariable adjectives 194 times, where, in principle, a gender-variable synonym could have been chosen. Among the most frequent invariable adjectives are *queer* (37 hits), *gay* (27 hits), *grande* (34 hits), *possibile* (32 hits), *felice* (15 hits), and *simile* (15 hits). For instance, although *happy* may be rendered as *contento* (masculine) or *contenta* (feminine), the translators opted for the invariable form *felice* [happy], offering a natural gender-neutral option:

- (4) Capivo che era **felice**, e questo rendeva felice anche me.
 [I could tell she was **happy**, and that made me happy too]

¹ No minimum frequency threshold was applied (see Brookes & McEnery, 2019).

Similarly, *difficult* is translated as *difficile* (26 occurrences), which could have been rendered with gender agreement as *arduo* (masculine). In this way, the adjective is morphologically neutral, requiring no gender adaptation:

(5) *Irrealistico, troppo **difficile**, impossibile.*
 [*unrealistic, too **difficult**, impossible*]

In contrast, adjectives such as *forte* [strong] (23) could, in theory, vary by gender (as in *vigoroso*, masculine, or *vigorosa*, feminine) but remain invariable in common usage, further supporting an inclusive reading

(6) *sensuale e **forte***
 [*sensual and **strong***]

The adjective *queer* (50 occurrences) retains its English form, reflecting both semantic precision and identity-sensitive usage, while *cool* (2 occurrences) keeps its colloquial register. When consulted (Trecani.it), the equivalent Italian forms of. Respectively, *queer* as *strano/strana* and *cool* as *fico/fica* would have introduced unwanted gender marking or stylistic shifts, so the translators opted for lexical invariance.

Overall, these examples show that Italian offers a range of invariable adjectives and borrowings that facilitate inclusivity through morphological neutrality rather than explicit gender marking.

This pattern suggests that the Italian translation naturally balances grammatical gender marking and inclusivity, partly thanks to the widespread presence of invariable or morphologically neutral adjectives.

4.4 Past Participles

In the English corpus, 1,193 past participle types were identified (5,101 tokens), while in the Italian translation the count drops to 542 types (1,198 tokens). This difference reflects the morphological nature of Italian, where participles inflect for gender and number when used with *essere* or in adjectival positions, but not when combined with *avere*.

A total of 1,163 participles were analysed in the Italian corpus. Among them, 250 show feminine agreement (ending in *-a* or *-e*), 899 show masculine agreement (ending in *-o* or *-i*), and 14 remain invariable, referring to human subjects or objects despite being formally masculine singular.

This suggests that while gender agreement is grammatically required in Italian, translators tend to maintain it consistently without manipulating it for inclusivity purposes. The few invariable forms²—participles kept in the masculine singular form even when referring to people—suggest that morphological economy sometimes overrides gender marking, particularly in the case of participles governed by *avere*.

A closer look at the Italian translation reveals several syntactic and lexical strategies used to neutralise gender marking in past participles. These strategies are particularly effective in cases where the English source text employs gender-neutral passive forms.

Four main strategies were identified:

1. **Conversion of the passive perfect into an intransitive construction**, often with the *passato remoto*, as in *I had been thrust into the spotlight overnight rendered as Finii sotto i riflettori in men che non si dica*. This avoids the translation of *thrown* to forms such as *lanciato/lanciata*, thus removing the need for gender agreement altogether.
2. **Replacement of a passive clause with an infinitive reflexive construction**, e.g. *being physically forced into the boys' bathroom translated as costringermi fisicamente a entrare nel bagno dei maschi*, where the infinitive *costringermi* [force me] is invariable and thus gender-neutral.
3. **Shift from passive to active voice**, with *avere* as auxiliary, as in *I'd already been called a dyke many times realised in Italian as Mi avevano già dato l'appellativo dyke*, where the participle *dato* [give] remains invariable, as Italian participles with *avere* [to have] do not agree with the subject.
4. **Lexical recasting**, through a change of verb that naturally takes *avere*, for instance in the sentence *Shame had been drilled into my bones translated as Mi avevano inculcato la vergogna nelle ossa: inculcato* stays morphologically neutral.

All four strategies either suppress the participle entirely (1–2) or prevent gender agreement by forcing an *avere*-based structure (3–4). In every case,

² In Italian, past participles are invariable in the following cases: with intransitive verbs with *avere* (e.g. *ha parlato* [he spoke]); with transitive verbs with *avere*, if the object follows the verb; in impersonal or impersonal pronominal constructions. See Accademia della Crusca, 2002.

the translator preserves the meaning and tone of the original text while eliminating unnecessary gender marking, an efficient way to convey the narrator's trans identity without resorting to artificial reformulations.

4.5 Sentiment Analysis

The sentiment analysis shows that the Italian translation of *Pageboy* does not seek to construct a new neutral grammatical paradigm but instead works within the affordances of Italian to minimise unnecessary gender marking. This approach is distinct from more interventionist proposals promoting novel orthographic markers such as the *schwa* (ə) or the asterisk (Gheno 2020; Baiocco et al. 2023) and reflects a preference for accessibility, readability, and stylistic coherence.

The quantitative analysis aligns with studies indicating that Italian's morphosyntactic system constrains the representation of non-binary identities more strictly than English (Müller-Spitzer et al., 2024; Robustelli et al., 2012; Sabatini, 1987). However, the sentiment analysis demonstrates that in the Italian translation of *Pageboy* neutralisation is possible without recourse to non-standard forms. Strategies such as pronominal omission, existential or impersonal constructions, and the selection of invariable adjectives, show that the translator can reduce gender encoding without violating grammatical norms. This supports a view in which grammatical gender is not an absolute limit, but rather a field of conditional flexibility shaped by the syntactic environment and pragmatic recoverability.

The results also illustrate the translator's mediating role in shaping how identity is represented. Following Buzelin (2008) and Wolf & Fukari (2007), agency here should not be understood as ideological intervention, but as context-sensitive linguistic decision-making guided by textual coherence and authorial intent. The translators' choices reveal a consistent principle: Gender is marked only where narratively meaningful. This stands in contrast to both:

- compulsory neutralisation (language sanitisation)
- compulsory gendering (normative grammaticality)

Thus, translator agency manifests as calibrated negotiation, not departure from linguistic normativity.

The sentiment analysis shows that the preservation of voice and emotional register is prioritised over structural symmetry. Where gender

marking is retained, it expresses self-historicisation, i.e. the narrator recounting earlier phases of identity from distinct embodied positions. This reinforces research in narrative identity studies suggesting that gender is not static but temporally situated (cf. (Federici & Santaemilia, 2022; Santaemilia, 2005). The translation therefore reflects gender as narrated experience, not as categorical label.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study has examined the strategies adopted in the Italian translation of Elliot Page's *Pageboy*, focusing on how gender marking is negotiated in a language with pervasive grammatical gender. By combining corpus linguistics with text-based qualitative analysis and translator interviews, the study identifies a coherent pattern of minimal, context-sensitive neutralisation.

The case of *Pageboy* suggests that gender-neutral translation in Italian is achievable without introducing new grammatical forms. The strategies adopted here can be summarised as:

1. Neutral where possible (pronominal omission; impersonal forms)
2. Marked where semantically relevant (self-identification; reported interaction)
3. Lexically adaptive (invariable adjectives; rephrasing)
4. Syntactically flexible (avoidance of past participle agreement)

This model scales to:

- literary translation,
- first-person life writing,
- media localisation,
- and interpreting contexts (cf. Loureiro-Porto and Ariza-Fernández 2024).

It is cognitively readable, culturally interpretable, and does not require explicit metalinguistic explanation for the reader.

Rather than introducing non-standard inclusive forms, the translation employs existing grammatical resources to reduce gender marking where it is pragmatically unnecessary, while preserving it where it indexes identity

narrative. This approach maintains both readability and authorial self-representation, highlighting the translator's role as a mediator of identity across linguistic systems.

As emerged from the interview we carried out with the Italian translation team, including Mondadori editors, they all worked closely with Elliot Page to honour his preference for the use of the most neutral language possible. This involved multiple levels of editorial review with experts focused on inclusivity and gender issues. As the book's diary-like tone and mixture of low and lyrical language posed certain difficulties, especially with gendered elements like past participles, the translator team used creative linguistic solutions to avoid gender-specific terms while preserving emotional depth and narrative style. In doing so, the translation highlighted broader cultural questions about inclusivity in Italy, where public understanding and acceptance of gender-neutral language are still evolving. Feedback from readers and trans activists was positive, though public awareness of the book remains limited.

These findings suggest that translation can contribute to expanding linguistic repertoires in Italian not by challenging grammatical structure directly, but by demonstrating how neutralisation can operate within it. Future research could extend this analysis to:

- additional memoirs and autobiographical genres,
- other Romance languages with similar gender marking,
- and reception studies assessing how readers interpret neutralising strategies.

The translation of *Pageboy* thus offers a model of pragmatic inclusivity, grounded in structural awareness rather than orthographic innovation.

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