

Non-binary inclusivity in English to French translation

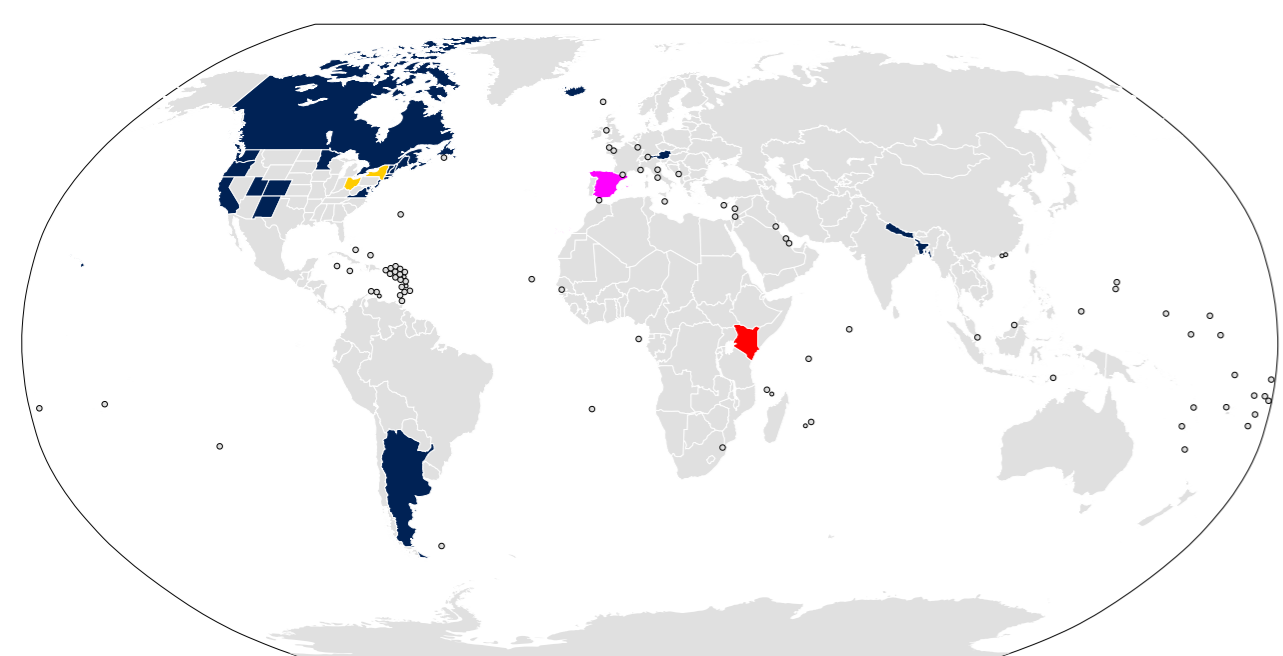
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Introduction



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English (en): World map showing legal recognition of nonbinary / third gender by country.


- Dark blue: Nonbinary / third gender option available as voluntary opt-in. At least one district.
- Pink: Opt-in for foreign-born nationals if recognized in country of origin.
- Yellow: Opt-in for intersex people only
- Orange: Standard for third gender
- Red: Standard for intersex
- Grey: Nonbinary / third gender option not legally recognized / no data

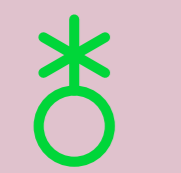
In French, the masculine grammatical gender is generally accepted to be a “neutral” gender. Though, this “neutrality” historically comes from a perceived “superiority” of men over women (Labrosse 1996). This has led to feminists calling for the use of other forms of neutrality (commonly referred to as «écriture inclusive»)– but which are **not non-binary inclusive**. While there are non-binary inclusive forms being developed, those are largely not academically studied– thus, translators seem to lack proper guidance to use them in practice (Lardelli 2024).

This lack of representation means that non-binary inclusivity that was present in an English source text is likely to be lost in translation to French.

From feminism to broader gender representation

Several academics have brought up the (need for a) distinction between binary and non-binary inclusivity. **Alpheratz** (2018a, 2021) has notably written extensively about gender inclusivity in French, with a particular focus on documenting non-binary inclusive forms that are currently in use.

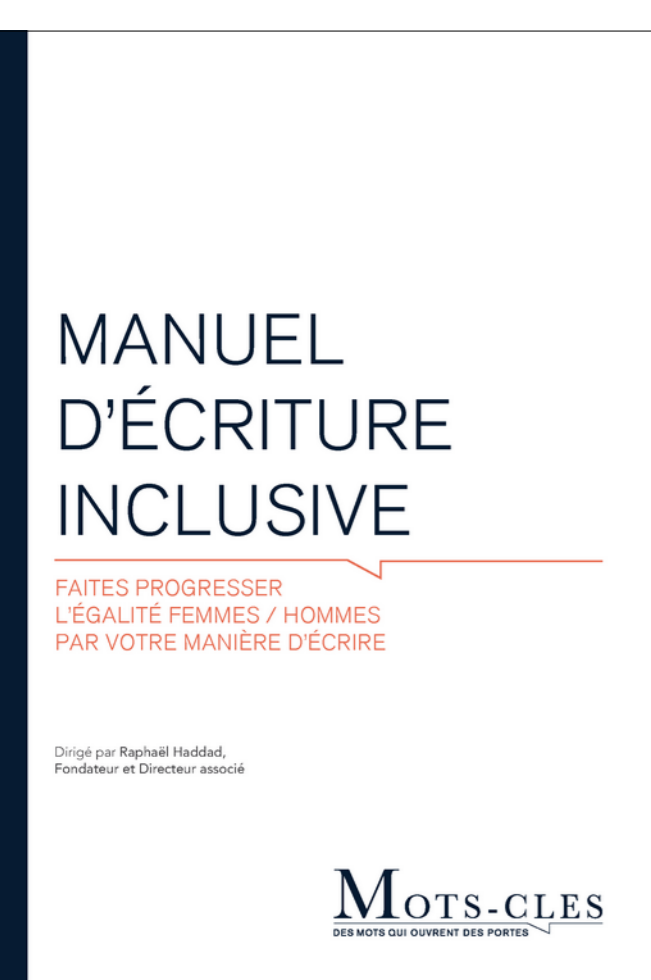
 **Binary inclusivity**
Only considers feminine and masculine genders.

 **Non-binary inclusivity**
Considers all genders, and non-gendered identities.

Masculine as “neutral” gender	Binary inclusivity	Non-binary inclusivity
Les citoyens sont invités à voter	Les citoyen·es sont invité·es à voter	Les citoyen·z sont invité·z à voter
Masculine word endings	Combination of masculine and feminine forms with <i>point médiant</i>	Neutral neoform

In the literature

The *Manuel d'Écriture Inclusive* (Haddad and Baric 2016) is often considered to have sparked public debate on inclusive forms in French. It encouraged writers to make use of a handful of strategy to **avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes**. Though this is not the first work of its kind, and notably points to earlier work by the French government, it heavily popularised these ideas, and seems to be what formalised the use of the *point médiant* (“middle dot”) as a compact way of representing both feminine and masculine genders.



Ensuring non-binary representation in translation

The main challenge seems to be a **lack of widely available documentation** on these forms of language (Lardelli 2024). Few academics document these practices, and the **terminology is inconsistent**

Terms used to describe non-binary inclusive forms of language:

- Gender-fair language
- Non-binary language
- Inclusive language
- (Gender-)neutral language

While Alpheratz has done significant work theorising classifications for systems of inclusive language and documenting existing forms of non-binary inclusivity in French, these forms are still **non-standard**, and multiple incompatible systems are in use at all time (Alpheratz 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2025).

There are no guides or toolkits specifically made for translators to apply these strategies in French.

In the literature

Grammaire du français inclusif (Alpheratz 2018b) details what Alpheratz considers to be a “dialectal variety of French” (Alpheratz 2018a) (that is, **a variety used for ethical reasons**). It documents various systems of neutrality in use by French speakers, and tries to give a cohesive guide to them. While it does not target translator, it can be a good resource for anyone trying to get a hang of inclusive French.



When to translate in a non-binary inclusive style?

From an activist standpoint, **non-binary inclusivity should be used everywhere there are non-binary people**. This includes groups of people whose gender is not known, or groups where people may not openly disclose their non-binary identity. But, in practice, even **non-binary people do not always use non-binary inclusive forms of language**. Cipolla (2026) for instance, studied the case of an Italian non-binary writer advocating for the use of non-binary inclusive neopronouns on social media, while reverting to using masculine as a “neutral” gender in their book. Interestingly, in the English translation, some of these occurrences were translated using they/them pronouns. Knisely (2020) also showed that French non-binary speakers were likely to **use more standard forms of language to avoid being misunderstood by peers**.

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