

From English to Tok Pisin: A Sociolinguistic Inquiry of Gender Preference in the New Testament Bible Translation

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Abstract

Sexist language in religious texts can be meaningfully explored through the combined perspectives of sociolinguistics and translation studies. Sociolinguistics helps uncover how gendered language reflects and reinforces social norms and power dynamics, while translation studies examine how these patterns are maintained, altered, or challenged when texts are translated into other languages. Together, these approaches offer a deeper understanding of how gender bias is embedded and transmitted through sacred texts. This study examines how gendered terms from the New English Translation (NET) Bible are rendered in the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel (TPBB), focusing on the representation, translation techniques, and shifts in gendered language. In Papua New Guinea (PNG), where Tok Pisin serves as a lingua franca, biblical translations significantly influence cultural perceptions of gender. Despite widespread discussions on gender bias in major languages, limited attention has been given to Tok Pisin Bible translations. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzed 629 gendered language instances from the Four Gospels of the NET Bible and their Tok Pisin equivalents. Findings of this study revealed that 35.77% of the linguistic data in the form of overt sexism were gender-neutral, 32.75% masculine, and 31.48% feminine. However, 57.52% of originally neutral terms shifted to masculine in Tok Pisin, revealing a gender bias. Masculine terms were preserved in 71.84% of cases, while 87.88% of feminine terms were retained. Translation techniques favored Established Equivalence, while Particularization was common in neutral terms. Quality assessments indicated high readability and acceptability, though accuracy was lower for neutral terms (average score: 2.23). Overall, this study underscores a prevailing tendency toward male-centric translation patterns commonly referred to as the patriarchal standard in the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel, despite efforts at inclusivity. These findings highlight the sociolinguistic impact of translation choices on gender representation in religious texts.

Keywords: sexist language, overt sexism, translation techniques, translation shift, translation quality

1. Introduction

Sexist language in religious texts constitutes a critical concern at the confluence of sociolinguistics, gender studies, and translation theory. Sacred scriptures, particularly the Holy Bible, function not only as spiritual texts but also as societal devices that develop and maintain gender beliefs. Thus, they frequently utilize androcentric terminology that favors male representations while sidelining female identities (Lakoff, 2003). The translation of this literature into other languages, particularly in postcolonial and multilingual contexts, can either perpetuate or contest existing gender hierarchies. Translation consequently serves as a locus for ideological debate.

This research expands on feminist linguistic theory and critical translation studies to examine the perpetuation or modification of gender bias in Bible translation. Cameron (1992) suggested that language both mirrors and shapes gendered reality, but Spender (1980) argued that language is inherently male-dominated, being "man-made" by nature. In translation studies, Venuti (2017) and Baker (2018) asserted that translation is inherently ideologically biased, influenced by the translator's positionality, the socio-political setting, and the interpretive decisions involved in processes like domestication and foreignization. Theoretical frameworks are amplified by Nida (1969), Kim's (2015) dynamic equivalence, Molina & Albir's (2002) classification of translation procedures, and the functionalist model, all emphasizing the significance of audience expectations and cultural context in influencing translation results.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) offers a unique sociolinguistic environment for this study. Tok Pisin, also known as Melanesian Pidgin, serves as a national lingua franca among approximately 800 indigenous languages and is widely used in religious discourse (Kulick, 1992). The Tok Pisin Buk Baibel (TPBB) serves as a significant document for Christian education and cultural development throughout the nation. However, scholarly attention to gender representation in Tok Pisin Bible translation is constrained within the arena of research. Albeit prior research (i.e., Foley, 2010; Zhang, 2018; and Noreewec et al., 2024) has explored overarching themes of language and cultural identity, and gender limited studies have rigorously analyzed the translation of gendered terminology from English Bible versions into Tok Pisin or assessed the extent to which translation methodologies disseminate patriarchal norms.

This research examines the gender preferences and translation aspects in the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel (TPBB), utilizing the New English Translation (NET Bible) as the source document to address this disparity. The research analyzes sexist language units and investigates their translation aspects in terms of techniques, shift, and quality assessment. Consequently, the objective of this investigation was to address four research questions. They are as follows:

1. What explicit sexist language elements are found in the NET Bible and TPBB?
2. What translation methods are utilized to address these expressions?
3. How do these units undergo semantic and referential shifts in translation?
4. How do these alterations influence the translation's quality regarding accuracy, acceptance, and readability?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sexist Language

Sexist language refers to linguistic expressions that discriminate against individuals based on gender, typically privileging the male norm while marginalizing female or non-binary identities (Mills, 2008). Spender (1980) famously argued that language is “man-made,” historically shaped by patriarchal norms that render women linguistically invisible. Lakoff (2003) further contended that women’s speech patterns are often viewed as subordinate or less authoritative within male-dominated communicative contexts. In the realm of Sociolinguistics, Mills (2008) distinguishes between overt sexism (explicitly gendered language, such as the generic “man”) and covert or subtle sexism (such as presuppositions and pragmatic choices that reinforce gender roles).

In religious discourse, particularly in sacred texts, sexist language is often standardized. These texts function not only as spiritual authorities but also as cultural repositories that reproduce specific worldviews, including gender hierarchies. The presence of gendered pronouns, generic masculine terms, and gender-exclusive roles in scripture has prompted feminist scholars to call for more inclusive language practices (Cameron (1992) and Beavis (2016). Yet, challenges remain in recognizing and addressing embedded bias, especially when religious tradition and linguistic change are in tension.

2.2 Bible Translation

Bible translation has long been shaped by the interplay of theology, linguistics, and ideology. Traditional approaches prioritized formal or dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1969), focusing on either word-for-word or thought-for-thought fidelity. However, feminist and critical translation theorists argue that such models often ignore the cultural and gendered implications of lexical choices (Simon, 1996; von Flotow, 1997). As Venuti (2017) emphasizes, translation is never neutral; it involves interpretation, selection, and ideology.

In translation, gender representation becomes particularly significant due to the Bible's doctrinal influence. Grudem (2000) and others resist gender-inclusive translations, fearing they may distort theological meaning. Conversely, Cameron (2006) and Baker (2018) maintained that translation practices must confront systemic bias, especially in patriarchal religious traditions. Feminist strategies such as relexicalization, compensation, and annotation are advocated to foreground the translator’s agency in resisting sexist norms.

2.3 NET Versus Tok Pisin Bible Translation

The New English Translation (NET) is a contemporary English Bible developed with the objective of balancing scholarly rigor, translational transparency, and readability. One of its most distinctive features is the inclusion of extensive translators’ notes, which elucidate lexical choices, cultural references, and theological nuances, thereby promoting interpretive clarity for both academic and general audiences (Rogerson & Lieu, 2006). In addressing gender representation, the NET Bible adopts a gender-accurate rather than gender-inclusive approach. Gender-inclusive language is employed selectively, only in instances where the original text intends a reference to both men and women. For example, the Greek term *anthrōpoi*, often translated generically as “people,” is rendered as such in the NET when the context supports an inclusive interpretation (Carson, 2003). However, the NET maintains gender-specific renderings where the source text distinctly denotes male or female subjects, reflecting a commitment to both textual fidelity and theological conservatism, (Beal, 2022).

In contrast, the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel (TPBB), the primary Bible translation in Tok Pisin, Papua New Guinea’s national lingua franca, employs a more dynamic equivalent translation strategy. While Tok Pisin, as a creole language, lacks overt grammatical gender, which may suggest an inherently neutral linguistic environment, the TPBB frequently translates gender-neutral or inclusive source terms using masculine forms, reflecting what scholars have identified as a patriarchal translation norm (Zhang, 2018; Foley, 2010). This pattern appears to be informed not only by linguistic considerations but also by deeply embedded cultural ideologies that uphold male-dominant social structures in PNG. For instance, generic references such as *anthrōpoi* (“people”) and *adelphoi* (“brothers/believers”) are often translated as *ol man* (“men”), even in passages referring to mixed-gender groups. According to Noreewec et al. (2024), such translation choices indicate a cultural domestication of the biblical text, whereby local gender norms override the inclusive intent of the original language.

The sociolinguistic implications of these conflicting translation strategies are significant. While the NET Bible fosters interpretive engagement through its detailed annotations and efforts toward gender clarity, the TPBB, despite its high readability and widespread use, offers limited paratextual guidance. This absence may obscure important textual nuances, particularly those related to gender, for the average reader. Although the TPBB is widely accepted and accessible among Tok Pisin-speaking communities, it exhibits lower levels of accuracy in rendering gendered expressions, especially when translating originally neutral or inclusive terms (Noreewec et al., 2024). This

contrast highlights the broader importance of aligning translation methods with not only linguistic structure and audience comprehension but also ethical and ideological considerations regarding gender representation. Ultimately, the comparison between the NET and TPBB highlights the critical need to interrogate how translation decisions reflect and reproduce sociocultural values, particularly in postcolonial and multilingual contexts such as Papua New Guinea.

2.4 Translation Techniques

Translation techniques play a vital role in shaping how gendered meaning is conveyed in translated texts. Molina and Albir (2002) delineated eighteen (18) translation techniques that translators may use: *adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque, compensation, description, discursive creation, established equivalence, generalization, linguistic amplification, linguistic compression, literal translation, modulation, particularization, reduction, substitution, transposition, and variation*. Each of these techniques can influence whether gendered meanings from the source text are preserved, altered, or reinterpreted in the target language. For example, particularization may specify gender where the original was neutral, while generalization may neutralize specific gender references. Literal translation may reproduce androcentric phrasing without cultural sensitivity, whereas modulation or transposition might allow for more inclusive renderings.

Feminist translation theory further expands these strategies by introducing techniques explicitly aimed at countering gender bias. Flotow & Farahzad (2016) and Simon (1996) propose methods such as hijacking (deliberately altering meaning to foreground women's voices), supplementing (adding commentary or explanatory notes to restore or highlight female presence), and resemanticization (replacing male-dominant terms with gender-neutral or female-affirming alternatives). These strategies reflect a critical stance that views translation as a political and ideological act, especially when dealing with texts that reinforce patriarchal norms.

In Bible translation, such choices are not merely linguistic but deeply ideological, Baker (2018). For instance, decisions regarding how to translate terms such as *anthrōpos* ("man") as "human" or *adelphoi* ("brothers") as "brothers and sisters" carry significant implications for gender representation and inclusivity. In the context of Tok Pisin Bible translation, Zhang (2018) observes that gender-neutral terms from the Greek New Testament are frequently rendered using masculine forms in Tok Pisin, even when the source context implies a mixed-gender audience. For example, the inclusive Greek reference to a community of believers is often translated as *ol man* ("men"), reinforcing gendered readings that privilege male representation. While such renderings may align with sociolinguistic norms and enhance acceptability among local audiences, they simultaneously risk reinforcing patriarchal interpretations. Therefore, analysing the translation techniques employed by both conventional and feminist offers critical insights into the translator's agency, the ideological framing of the text, and the broader sociocultural dynamics in which the translation is embedded.

2.5 Translation Shift

Translation shift is the variations that unfold in the conveyance of meaning from a source language to a target language across multiple linguistic dimensions—lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic. Catford (1965) initially described shift as a deviation from formal correspondence, highlighting fundamental disparities between languages. Recent scholars contend that translation alterations are not merely unavoidable but also endowed with ideological relevance, since they include interpretive choices influenced by cultural and geopolitical contexts Venuti (2017), and Hatim & Munday (2019). In the context of gender, such adjustments can either reduce or enhance the prominence of sexist language, contingent upon the linguistic attributes of the target language and the translator's stance on gender portrayal. Zhang (2018) notes that in the Tok Pisin Bible translation, gender-neutral English phrases are often translated into masculine equivalents, a change that has considerable theological and societal implications. Terms such as "people" or "believers" that are inclusive in the original text are frequently rendered as *'ol man* ("men"), especially in settings about mixed-gender groupings. This change does not arise from grammatical constraints in Tok Pisin, which possesses the gender-neutral term *'manmeri*, but rather from cultural norms and translation practices that emphasize male portrayal. Cameron (2012) observes that these adjustments frequently signify underlying ideological frameworks, wherein language and translation perpetuate patriarchal norms instead of contesting them. These examples highlight the necessity of critically scrutinizing translation shifts, especially in religious literature, where linguistic decisions hold significant theological and cultural implications.

2.6 Translation Quality

Evaluating the quality of a translation extends beyond conventional linguistic equivalency or lexical faithfulness. It involves a comprehensive assessment of the translation's effectiveness in conveying the desired message within the target language and culture. Nababan et al. (2012) present a well-established three-dimensional framework for assessing translation quality: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Accuracy denotes the extent to which the meaning of the original text is faithfully represented, ensuring the preservation of essential semantic content. Acceptability evaluates the extent to which the translation adheres to the grammatical, lexical, and stylistic conventions of the target language, ensuring a sense of naturalness and fluency. Readability evaluates the ease with which the intended audience can understand the material. These dimensions enable scholars and practitioners to evaluate not just the accuracy of a translation but also its cultural appropriateness and accessibility for the intended audience.

In the discipline of theological translation, particularly concerning the Bible, this holistic approach becomes increasingly relevant. Religious texts serve as both language artifacts and authoritative theological documents with significant cultural influence. Any compromise in precision may distort theological significance, while insufficient acceptability could estrange readers by rendering the translation unfamiliar or contrived. Likewise, diminished readability may obstruct understanding, particularly in bilingual or low-literacy environments.

Consequently, translators must maintain a careful balance among theological accuracy, language depth, and audience involvement. Translations such as the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel stress great readability and acceptability to enhance accessibility among many PNG populations. Nonetheless, this occasionally compromises semantic precision, especially when gendered statements are either simplified or altered. Consequently, employing Nababan et al.'s model enables researchers to evaluate not just the language functionality of a translation but also its ideological and cultural effectiveness within its contextual use.

3. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research approach to investigate the presence and patterns of overt sexist language in the New NET Bible and its corresponding Tok Pisin version, the TPBB. In other words, this research aimed to identify the various forms of overt sexism, whether neutral, masculine, or feminine, from the NET Bible and further evaluate their appearance in TPBB through the process of translation to understand the position of the translators in dealing with gender preferences in the translation. Purposive sampling was employed to extract relevant data from the Four Gospels, targeting linguistic features commonly associated with overt sexism, such as generic masculine terms. A total of 629 textual instances were identified in the NET Bible and matched with their corresponding translations in the TPBB. These were categorized into three primary classifications: Masculine, Feminine, and Neutral language units, to assess the extent and nature of gender representation in the translation process. The overall data was identified through the document analysis process according to Grbich (2012) and Santosa (2021). Hence, the document analysis was done through the following procedures: (1) Read the four Gospels of the New Testament Bible, (2). Identify the translation techniques, Shifts, and Quality Assessment (3). Record the findings, and (4) Code each data classification according to its themes based on its relevant domains. To ensure the validity and contextual accuracy of the data, the extracted examples were subjected to expert validation through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) according to (Krueger & Casey, 2015). These FGDs involved two qualified translators and sociolinguists and a Tok Pisin interpreter, who collaboratively evaluated whether the translations accurately reflected the intended gender reference and how they aligned with socio-cultural norms in Papua New Guinea. This methodological step ensured that interpretations were not only linguistically sound but also culturally grounded.

4. Results

4.1 Types of Sexist Language

The results of this research reveal that the New English Translation (NET) Bible's Four Gospels contain 225 instances of gender-neutral terms, 206 instances of masculine terms, and 198 instances of feminine terms. This distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation across gendered language categories. However, the use of masculine terms in contexts where the original Greek may have intended a broader audience raises concerns about potential gender bias in translation. Table 1 below provides a comprehensive summary of the types of sexist language identified in this research, categorizing instances from the New English Translation (NET) Bible according to their linguistic characteristics and gender implications. The table distinguishes between gendered terms and gender-neutral terms, further detailing subcategories such as gender-neutral adaptations, generic masculine terms, feminine terms, and. Each category is accompanied by examples and explanations drawn primarily from the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) of the NET New Testament Bible, highlighting how these linguistic features manifest in the text. This structured presentation offers a clear overview of the patterns and variations in sexist language portrayed in the NET Bible.

Table 1. Types of Sexist Language Identified in the NET Bible

No	Types of Overt Sexism	Total Number	Percentage
1	Gender Neutral terms	225	35.77
2	Generic Masculine Terms	206	32.75
3	Generic Feminine terms	198	31.48
		629	100 %

Neutral-Gendered Terms

As is commonly known, gender-neutral or inclusive terms refer to language usage that intentionally avoids bias towards a particular sex or gender. In biblical translation, these terms aim to reflect inclusivity by avoiding the patriarchal linguistic conventions prevalent in older Bible versions. Traditionally, English Bible translations (e.g., King James Version) predominantly employed masculine pronouns such as "he," "him," and terms like "man" generically to refer to all individuals, unintentionally perpetuating gender exclusion and reinforcing patriarchal perspectives. The New English Translation (NET) Bible consciously employs gender-neutral language to reflect modern linguistic standards and promote inclusivity. By doing so, it attempts to represent the original intent of scripture more accurately, particularly in instances where the original languages (Hebrew, Greek) used gender-inclusive terms. For example, Greek terms like "Anthropos," traditionally translated as "man," are more accurately rendered as "person" or "humanity," thereby including all genders as cited in Poythress & Grudem (2000). The shift towards gender-neutral terms in modern translations like the NET Bible is driven by scholarly recognition of the socio-linguistic impact of language. According to Porter & Carson (1997) Linguistic choices significantly affect readers' perceptions and theological understanding. Gender-neutral translations mitigate unintended patriarchal connotations and present a more inclusive, accurate interpretation that aligns with contemporary sensibilities.

Furthermore, Fee & Strauss (2009) maintain that the primary goal of translation is to convey the original meaning clearly and accurately. They assert that retaining gender-exclusive terms in contexts intended inclusively by biblical authors misrepresents scripture's inclusive

nature. The examples of the neutral gendered terms sourced from the research data are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Examples of Neutral-Gender or Inclusive Terms Appearing in NET Bible

Data No	Reference Source	Neutral terms
N003	Matthew 20:27	"And <i>whoever</i> wants to be the first among you must be your slave."
N004	Matthew 5:6	"Blessed are <i>those</i> who are hungry and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."
N005	Matthew 18:4	"Whoever humbles himself like this little <i>child</i> is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
N045	Mark 12:31	"...Love your <i>neighbor</i> as yourself."
N071	Mark 4:20	"But these are <i>the ones</i> sown on good soil...."
N165	Mark 1:17	"Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you <i>fishers</i> of people'"
N149	Luke 13:34	"...your <i>children</i> together as a hen gathers her chicks..."
N139	Luke 5:13	And immediately <i>the leprosy</i> left him."
N148	Luke 13:14	"... But <i>the president</i> of the synagogue..."
N162	John 16:21	"...that a <i>human being</i> has been born..."
N173	John 4:23	"... when the true <i>worshipers</i> will worship..."
N222	John 13:23	"One of his <i>disciples</i> ..."

Masculine Terms

As displayed in Table 1, despite the presence of gender-neutral terms, the NET Bible frequently utilizes generic masculine terms in several instances in contexts where the original Greek may have intended a broader audience. For instance, in Matthew 16:24, Jesus says, "If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." The use of masculine pronouns "he" and "himself" may suggest exclusivity to male followers, although the Greek term "τις" (tis) is an indefinite pronoun that can refer to any person (LaScotte, 2016). Such translation choices can inadvertently perpetuate male-centric interpretations. According to Tervanotko (2015), translation choices can influence the construction of gender in biblical texts. The masculine terms sourced from the research can be seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Examples of Generic Masculine Terms Obtained from the Data

Data No.	Reference Source	Masculine Data
M001	Matthew 11:8	...Home of <i>Kings</i> .
M003	Matthew 11:9	...Yes, I tell you, and more than a <i>Prophet</i> ?
M009	Matthew 1:19	...The <i>righteous man</i> ...
M166	Mark 1:44	...Saw yourself to a <i>priest</i> "
M171	Mark 4:4	...And as <i>he</i> sowed..."
M168	Mark 4:23	If anyone has ears, <i>he</i> had better listen."
M115	Luke 8:35	...when the <i>herdsmen</i> saw what happened..."
M150	Luke 9:49	... <i>Master</i> ...we saw someone..."
M203	Luke 7:16	...a great <i>prophet</i> ..."
M200	John 1:6	"...a <i>man</i> came..."
M196	John 1:4	...the light of <i>mankind</i> ..."
M183	John 14:21	... and I will love <i>him</i> ..."

Feminine Terms

The NET Bible also contains passages where feminine terms are used, reflecting the cultural and historical context of the time. In John 2:4, Jesus addresses his mother as "Woman" (γύναι, gynai), saying, "Woman, what have I to do with you?" While the term "γύναι" is a polite form of address in Greek, its direct translation to "Woman" in English can appear abrupt or disrespectful. This highlights the challenges in conveying cultural nuances across languages. As noted by Tervanotko (2015), translation choices can influence the construction of gender in biblical texts.

Table 3. Examples of Generic Feminine Terms Obtained from the Data

Data No.	Source Reference	Feminine Data
F002	Matthew 9:22	"...have courage, <i>daughter</i> ..."
F015	Matthew 8:14	"...he saw his <i>mother-in-law</i> lying down
F040	Matthew 15:28	.. <i>Woman</i> , your faith is great!
F0138	Mark 3:31	"Then Jesus' <i>mother</i> and his brothers came
F062	Mark 5:41	'Little <i>girl</i> , I say to you, get up."
F051	Mark 12:42	And a poor <i>widow</i> came and put in two small copper coins."
F083	Luke 18:5	A <i>widow</i> keeps bothering me..."
F0200	Luke 2: 36	"There was also a <i>prophetess</i>
F089	Luke 10:39	She had a <i>sister</i> .
F094	John 8:3	The <i>woman</i> caught in adultery
F0202	John 8:5	...to death such <i>women</i> ..."
F190	John 3:29	...who has the <i>bride</i> ...

3.2 Translation Techniques in Rendering Sexist Language from the NET Bible to the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel

The translation choices in the NET Bible's Four Gospels reflect a broader discourse on gender representation in biblical translations. Using

masculine terms as generics has been a longstanding convention; however, contemporary linguistic sensitivity advocates for more inclusive language to accurately reflect the intended audience. Gender-exclusive translations can have significant implications, such as reinforcing patriarchal structures and excluding women from specific roles within religious communities. As noted by Smit (2017) and Diko (2024) The dominant patriarchal framework influences biblical interpretation and translation, often undermining gender-neutral or gender-sensitive approaches. Conversely, some argue that altering traditional language may compromise the perceived integrity of the scriptures. For instance, Grudem (1997) contends that gender-neutral translations can lead to a loss of specificity and clarity in the text.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Translation Techniques Used in Neutral Terms

Translation Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
Particularization	130	57.78
Establish Equivalence	92	40.89
Generalization	2	0.89
Deletion	1	0.44
Modulation	1	0.44
	226	100

Table 4 illustrates the frequency distribution of translation techniques employed in rendering neutral terms from the New English Translation Bible into Tok Pisin. The data indicates a marked preference for Particularization, accounting for 57.78% of all instances, suggesting that translators frequently opted for more specific or contextually rich expressions in the target language. Establish Equivalence follows closely at 40.89%, highlighting a considerable effort to preserve meaning through semantically corresponding terms. In contrast, Generalization (0.89%) and Deletion (0.44%) appear infrequently, implying that translators were generally cautious about abstracting or omitting content that could compromise the clarity or integrity of the source text. This distribution reveals a translation strategy that prioritizes accuracy and contextual relevance, reflecting the translators' intention to make the text both accessible and meaningful to Tok Pisin readers without diluting its theological or narrative substance. Below are examples of the data displaying each of the translation techniques:

a. Particularization

Data N004 Matthew 5:6

ST: Those who are hungry.

TT: Man i hangre.

This is a case of particularization because the general source phrase "those who are hungry" is translated into the more specific Tok Pisin expression "man i hangre," narrowing the reference from a general group to a particular individual.

b. Establish Equivalence

Data N001 (John 3:16)

ST: everyone who believes in Him...

TT: Olgeta manmeri i bilp long em...

This is a case of established equivalence because the phrase "everyone who believes in Him" is translated into Tok Pisin as "olgeta manmeri i bilip long em," which conveys the same meaning using a naturally accepted and commonly used equivalent expression in the target language.

c. Generalization

Data N190 (Luke 2:2)

ST: Governor of Syria

TT: Gavmman bilong Syria

This is a case of generalization because the specific title "Governor of Syria" is translated as "gavman bilong Syria" (government of Syria), which generalizes the individual political role into a broader term referring to the governing body or authority, thereby reducing the specificity of the original expression.

d. Deletion

Data N157 (John 19:9)

ST: and he went back into the **governor's residence**...

TT: em i go insait long haus bilong gavman...

This is a case of deletion because the specific reference to "the governor's residence" in the source text is omitted in the Tok Pisin translation, which generalizes it to "haus bilong gavman" (government's house), thereby removing the explicit mention of the governor.

e. Modulation

Data N204 (2Thes 2:3)

ST: Son of Destruction

TT: Man bilong bagarap long hel

The translation of "Son of Destruction" as "Man bilong bagarap long hel" is an example of modulation because it shifts the figurative expression from a metaphor of kinship to a clearer, culturally accessible description of destiny while preserving the original meaning.

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Translation Techniques Used in Masculine Terms

Translation Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
Established Equivalence	147	71.36
Generalization	34	16.50
Particularization	20	9.71
Descriptive	4	1.94
Modulation	1	0.49
	206	100

Table 5 presents the frequency distribution of translation techniques applied to masculine terms in the Tok Pisin translation of the New Testament, revealing a distinct preference for Established Equivalence, which accounts for 71.36% of the total occurrences. This high frequency suggests that translators largely favored using direct or near-direct semantic counterparts to preserve the original meaning of masculine terms in the target language. Generalization (16.50%) and Particularization (9.71%) were used to a lesser extent, indicating some flexibility in adjusting the level of specificity based on contextual demands. The relatively minimal use of Descriptive (1.94%) and Modulation (0.49%) techniques suggests that translators rarely altered the point of view or provided additional explanatory detail, preferring instead to adhere closely to the source text. Overall, this distribution reflects a translation approach that emphasizes fidelity and consistency in rendering masculine terms, likely to maintain theological clarity and textual coherence in the Tok Pisin version.

Examples of Masculine Data

a. Established Equivalence

Data M061 (Luke 6:24)

ST: Richmen

TT: *Ol maniman*

This is a case of established equivalence because the term "rich men" is accurately and naturally rendered as "ol maniman" in Tok Pisin, a commonly accepted equivalent that conveys the same meaning in the target language.

b. Generalization

Data M184 (John 2:12)

ST: Son of the living God

TT: *Pikinini bilong God i stap laif*

This is a case of generalization because the specific theological phrase "Son of the living God" is translated more broadly as "Pikinini bilong God i stap laif" (Child of God who is alive), which retains the core meaning but generalizes the unique title by not emphasizing the specific divine attribute "living" as a descriptor of God.

c. Particularization

Data M205 (Matthew 15:25)

ST: Before him

TT: *Jisas*

This is a case of particularization because the general phrase "before him" is translated more specifically as "Jisas" in Tok Pisin, explicitly naming the person referred to, thereby narrowing the reference from a general pronoun to a specific individual.

d. Description

Data M201 (Mark 1:16)

ST: Fishermen

TT: *Ol man bilong tromoi umben*

This is a case of description because the single term "fishermen" is translated into the more detailed Tok Pisin phrase "ol man bilong tromoi umben" (men who throw nets), which describes the activity rather than using a direct equivalent, thus conveying the meaning through explanation.

e. Modulation

Data M201 (2Thes 2:3)

ST: Son of Destruction

TT: *Man bilong bagarap long hel.*

This is a case of modulation because the figurative expression "Son of Destruction" is translated as "Man bilong bagarap long hel," shifting from a metaphor of kinship to a more explicit description of outcome or destiny while preserving the intended meaning.

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Translation Techniques Used in Feminine Terms

Translation Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
Established Equivalence	188	94.94
Generalization	4	2.02
Deletion	3	1.52
Descriptive	2	1.01
Particularization	1	0.51
	198	100

Table 6 presents the frequency distribution of translation techniques applied to feminine terms in the Tok Pisin translation of the New Testament. The overwhelming use of Established Equivalence (94.94%) indicates a strong commitment by translators to preserve the original semantic content of feminine references with minimal alteration. This dominant technique suggests a deliberate effort to ensure consistency and accuracy in the representation of female figures or concepts. In contrast, techniques such as Generalization (2.02%), Deletion (1.52%), Descriptive (1.01%), and Particularization (0.51%) were rarely employed, implying limited deviation from the source text. The low frequency of these alternative techniques suggests that feminine terms were generally translated with less interpretative flexibility, possibly reflecting a more rigid or conservative approach. Overall, the data points to a translation strategy heavily grounded in formal equivalence, with minimal intervention, potentially to safeguard the theological and textual integrity of feminine representations in the Tok Pisin version.

Examples of Data:

a. Established Equivalence

Data F033 (Matthew 15:22)

ST: her daughter

TT: *pikinini meri*

This is a case of established equivalence because the phrase "her daughter" is naturally and accurately translated into Tok Pisin as "pikinini meri," a widely accepted and commonly used equivalent that conveys the same meaning in the target language.

b. Generalization

Data F141 (Mark 14:66)

ST: Slave girl

TT: *Wokmeri*

This is a case of generalization because the specific term "slave girl," which denotes both age and social status, is translated as "wokmeri" (female worker or servant), a broader term that generalizes the role by omitting the specific reference to slavery and youth.

c. Deletion**Data F195 (Luke 1:36)****ST:** Barren**TT:** *Lapun meri*

This is a case of deletion because the specific term "barren," which refers to a woman's inability to have children, is omitted in the Tok Pisin translation and replaced with the more general term "lapun meri" (old woman), thereby removing the explicit reference to infertility.

d. Description**Data F181 (John 8:3)****ST:** Adulteress**TT:** *Meri i mekim pasin pamuk*

This is a case of description because the single term "adulteress" is translated into the more explanatory Tok Pisin phrase "meri i mekim pasin pamuk" (woman who commits sexual sin), which describes the action rather than using a direct equivalent, making the meaning clearer through elaboration.

e. Particularization**Data F123 (Matthew 9:21)****ST:** She replied...**TT:** *Meri i tok...*

This is a case of particularization because the general pronoun "she" in the source text is translated as "meri" (woman) in Tok Pisin, specifying the gender and role more explicitly, thereby narrowing the reference from a general subject to a particular identity.

3.3 Translation Shift

Cameron (1992) explains that referential gender shift occurs when language choices reflect and reproduce societal gender biases, often favoring masculine forms over neutral or inclusive ones. To explore this in the Tok Pisin Bible, the data is grouped into Neutral, Masculine, and Feminine categories to trace patterns of gender preference in translation. These shifts are illustrated in Tables 7, 8, and 9.

3.3.1 Neutral Data

Table 7. Referential Translation Shift in Neutral Data

Referential Gender Shift Category	Data Label	Instances	Percentage
Neutral to Neutral	NN	96	42.48
Neutral to Masculine	NM	130	57.52
		226	100

Based on the data on referential gender shift displayed in Table 7, out of 226 instances, 57.52% involved a shift from neutral to masculine terms, while 42.48% maintained neutrality. This indicates a clear preference for masculine language in translation, with over half of the originally neutral references being rendered in masculine form. See the examples of the data of the referential Gender Shift from the source text (ST) and Target Text (TT):

Example of Neutral-to-Neutral Category (Data N005)**ST:** The deaf**TT:** *Ol yaupas*

In this example, the NET Bible uses the term "*the deaf*", which is a **gender-neutral** expression referring to individuals with hearing impairments. The Tok Pisin translation "*ol yaupas*" also retains a **gender-neutral** reference, referring inclusively to all people who are deaf, regardless of gender. This indicates a **neutral-to-neutral translation with no referential shift**, preserving the original inclusive intent of the source text.

Example of Neutral-to-Masculine Category (Data N054)**ST:** warden**TT:** *man bilong putim man long jas*

In the NET Bible, the term "*warden*" is gender-neutral, implying a role without reference to sex. However, in the Tok Pisin translation (*man bilong putim man long jas*), the role is explicitly gendered through the repeated use of *man*, a masculine term. This demonstrates a

shift from a gender-neutral term to a masculine-specific expression, reflecting a masculine preference in the target language.

3.3.2 Translation Shift in Masculine Data

Table 8. Referential Translation Shift in Masculine Data

Referential Gender Shift Category	Data Label	Instances	Percentage
Masculine to Masculine	MM	148	71.84
Masculine to Neutral	MN	58	28.16
		206	100

The data in Table 8 reveals that 71.84% of masculine references in the source text were retained as masculine in the Tok Pisin translation, while only 28.16% were shifted to neutral forms. This suggests a strong tendency to preserve masculine language, reinforcing male-centered representation in the translated text. Below are examples of the data of referential gender shift in the masculine category:

Example Masculine to Masculine Category (Data M201)

ST: Fishermen

TT: Ol man bilong tromoi umben

The term "*fishermen*" in the NET Bible is a masculine-specific term, referring to male individuals who fish. The Tok Pisin translation "*ol man bilong tromoi umben*" also uses a masculine reference, with *man* explicitly denoting male individuals. This shows a masculine-to-masculine translation, indicating no referential shift, as the gender preference of the source text is preserved in the target text.

Example Masculine to Neutral Category (Data M199)

ST: Son of God

TT: Pikinini bilong God

In contrast to the previous data, the term "*Son of God*" is a **masculine-specific** expression, highlighting the male identity of Jesus to God. However, the Tok Pisin translation "*pikinini bilong God*" uses *pikinini*, a **gender-neutral** term meaning "child." This results in a **masculine-to-neutral shift**, indicating an alteration in gender preference where the masculine specificity of the source text is generalized in the target text.

3.3.3 Feminine Data

Table 9. Referential Gender Shift in Feminine Data

Referential Gender Shift Category	Data Label	Instances	Percentage
Feminine to Feminine	FF	174	87.88
Feminine to Neutral	FN	22	11.11
Feminine to Male	FM	2	1.01
		198	100

Table 9 shows that 87.88% of feminine references were consistently translated as feminine, while 11.11% shifted to neutral terms, and only 1.01% were rendered as masculine. This indicates a strong tendency to maintain feminine representation in translation, with minimal shifts to other gender categories. See the examples of the data for each referential gender Shift below:

Example of Feminine-to-Feminine Category (Data 197)

ST: Widow

TT: Meri man bilong em i dai

According to data 197, the Source Text (ST), the term "**widow**" refers specifically to a **woman whose husband has died**, a gendered term denoting a **female subject**. The Tok Pisin Target Text (TT) renders this as "*meri man bilong em i dai*", which means "**a woman whose man (husband) has died.**" This translation **preserves the gender identity** of the original term.

Example of Female to Neutral Category (Data F198)

ST: Daughter

TT: Pikinini

The English term "*daughter*" is **explicitly gendered**, denoting a **female child**. However, the Tok Pisin equivalent "*pikinini*" is **gender-neutral**, referring broadly to a **child**, regardless of whether the child is male or female.

Example of Female to Male Category (Data F198)

ST: Brothers and *Sisters* (Data F076)

TT: Ol brata

The term "*brothers and sisters*" in the NET Bible is used inclusively to reflect both male and female group members. However, in the Tok Pisin translation (TT: *ol brata*), the female referent "*sister*" is omitted. This represents a **referential shift from female to male**, as the

target text generalizes the inclusive term into a masculine-only form.

3.4 Translation Quality Assessment

To evaluate the quality of translation between the Source Text (ST) and the Target Text (TT), this study adopts the Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) framework proposed by Nababan et al. (2012). This model assesses translations using three key parameters: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Each parameter is rated on a scale from 1 to 3, where:

3 = High quality (accurate, acceptable, or readable)

2 = Medium quality (less accurate, less acceptable, or less readable)

1 = Low quality (inaccurate, unacceptable, or unreadable)

Each parameter is rated on a scale from 1 to 3, and the average score of the data is calculated using a weighted formula based on the number of data points per category. The formula for the average score is given below:

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{(N3 \times 3) + (N2 \times 2) + (N1 \times 1)}{N\Sigma}$$

Where;

N3 Number of data rated 3

N2 = Number of data rate 2

N1 = Number of data rated 1

$N\Sigma = N3 + N2 + N1$

Using the above rating formula, the rating system provides a structured and quantifiable approach to assess how well the translation preserves meaning, adheres to target language norms, and ensures clarity for the reader. The following data is evaluated using this model to analyze both general translation quality and specific phenomena such as referential gender shifts between the NET Bible and the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel. The translation Quality Assessment is provided in Tables 10, 11, and 12 below:

Table 10. Translation Quality Rating for Neutral Data

	Parameters	Rating Scale	Quantity of Data	Percentage	Average Score
1	Accuracy	Accurate	92	40.71	2.23
		Less Accurate	133	58.85	
		Not Accurate	1	0.44	
3	Acceptability	Acceptable	225	99.56	3.00
		Likely Acceptable	0	0.00	
		Unacceptable	1	0.44	
3	Readability	Highly Readable	225	99.56	3.00
		Less Readable	0	0.00	
		Unreadable	1	0.44	
Overall Quality Rating					2.62

Table 10 above demonstrates that the translation quality of neutral data is notably high in terms of acceptability and readability, with both parameters achieving a 99.56% rating in the highest category and an average score of 3.00. These results suggest that the translations are generally well-structured and easily comprehensible to readers. However, the accuracy parameter reflects lower performance, with only 40.71% of the data rated as accurate, while the majority, 58.85%, was considered less accurate, yielding an average accuracy score of 2.23. The overall quality rating of 2.62 indicates that, although the translations are largely acceptable and readable, there remains a significant need for improvement in ensuring fidelity to the source text.

Table 11. Translation Quality Rating for Masculine

No.	Parameters	Rating Scale	Quantity of Data	Percentage	Average Score
1	Accuracy	Accurate	145	70.39	2.71
		Less Accurate	61	29.61	
		Not Accurate	0	0.00	
3	Acceptability	Acceptable	205	99.51	2.99
		Likely Acceptable	1	0.49	
		Unacceptable	0	0.00	
3	Readability	Highly Readable	205	99.51	2.99
		Less Readable	1	0.49	
		Unreadable	0	0.00	
Overall Quality Rating					2.85

Table 11 reflects a generally high standard of translation quality for the assessed data. Accuracy shows strong results, with 70.39% of the data rated as accurate and no instances of inaccuracy, resulting in a solid average score of 2.71. Acceptability and readability also

demonstrate consistently high performance, with 99.51% of the data considered acceptable and highly readable, respectively, each receiving an average score of 2.99. Only minimal instances (0.49%) fell into the “likely acceptable” and “less readable” categories, with no data deemed unacceptable or unreadable. The overall quality rating of 2.85 indicates a commendable level of translation quality, with minor areas for refinement primarily in the accuracy domain.

Table 12. Translation Quality Rating for Feminine Data

No.	Parameters	Rating Scale	Quantity of Data	Percentage	Average Score
1	Accuracy	Accurate	171		2.85
		Less Accurate	24		
		Not Accurate	3		
3	Acceptability	Acceptable	195		2.97
		Likely Acceptable	0		
		Unacceptable	3		
3	Readability	Highly Readable	195		2.97
		Less Readable	0		
		Unreadable	3		
Overall Quality Rating					2.85

Table 12 presents the translation quality ratings for feminine data, revealing a generally high level of performance across all parameters. In terms of accuracy, 171 entries were rated as accurate, contributing to a strong average score of 2.85, despite a small number of less accurate (24) and accurate (3) entries. Acceptability and readability both reflect consistently high results, with 195 entries deemed acceptable and highly readable, respectively, each yielding an average score of 2.97. Only three entries were considered unacceptable or unreadable, with no instances rated as “likely acceptable” or “less readable.” The overall quality rating of 2.85 suggests that the translation of feminine data is both effective and reliable, with only minimal issues in accuracy and acceptability.

5. Discussion

This study reveals the intricate ways in which gendered language is handled in the translation of the New Testament from the NET Bible into Tok Pisin. While the NET Bible intentionally uses inclusive and gender-neutral terms to reflect modern linguistic awareness, the Tok Pisin translation often shifts these neutral references into masculine forms. More than half (57.52%) of the originally neutral terms were translated with masculine references (see Table 7). This supports Cameron's (1992) argument that language choices in translation often mirror and reinforce existing societal gender biases. Even when the source text does not favor a particular gender, the translated version may unconsciously introduce such preferences, especially in languages or cultures where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded.

Masculine terms, unsurprisingly, remained largely unchanged in the translation process, with 71.84% preserved as masculine in the Tok Pisin Bible (Table 8). This indicates a strong tendency to maintain male-centered representations, which aligns with broader patterns in religious and historical texts. However, it is worth noting that some masculine expressions—such as *Son of God*—were rendered using gender-neutral Tok Pisin terms like *pikinini bilong God*, showing that translators did make efforts in certain cases to avoid gender exclusivity. On the other hand, feminine references were mostly retained, with 87.88% remaining explicitly feminine in the translation (Table 9). This suggests a careful approach to preserving references to women, though a small number were either neutralized or even shifted to masculine, which could risk diluting the representation of female identities in some contexts.

Looking at translation quality, the application of Nababan & Nuraeni's (2012) The assessment model offers a clearer picture. Neutral terms scored relatively low in accuracy (2.23) compared to masculine (2.71) and feminine data (2.85), which indicates that the translation of gender-neutral expressions posed greater challenges (Tables 10–12). In contrast, the acceptability and readability of translations across all categories scored consistently high, averaging close to 3.00. This suggests that, while some semantic nuance may be lost, especially with neutral terms, the translations are generally fluent, culturally appropriate, and easily understood by Tok Pisin speakers. These findings align with Nord's (2005) view that translations often prioritize naturalness and audience reception, sometimes at the expense of linguistic precision.

The techniques employed by translators further reinforce these patterns. Techniques like Established Equivalence and Particularization were dominant across all categories, reflecting a focus on preserving meaning and adapting to the cultural context (see Tables 4–6). Less frequently used strategies such as Generalization, Deletion, or Descriptive Translation indicate a cautious and deliberate approach to translation, aimed at minimizing loss of meaning or theological ambiguity. As Fee & Strauss (2009) claimed, Bible translations must not only be understandable but also faithful to the intended message, especially in religious contexts where doctrinal integrity matters deeply.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the analysis focused primarily on the Four Gospels of the New Testament, which, while significant, do not represent the entire scope of the Bible. Broader inclusion of other biblical books might yield different patterns of gender representation. Second, the study centered on overt lexical items and referential gender shifts, leaving out more subtle forms of sexism such as syntactic structures, metaphorical language, or narrative framing. Additionally, the evaluation relied on qualitative content analysis supported by expert focus group discussions, which, while rigorous, may still carry subjective interpretations influenced by the participants' theological, linguistic, or cultural backgrounds. Finally, Tok Pisin, as a dynamic Creole language, continues to evolve, and the interpretation of gendered language in translation may vary across regions and generations within Papua New Guinea. These limitations suggest the need for further research that includes a wider biblical corpus, broader linguistic variables, and more diverse

participant perspectives.

Overall, this study sheds light on the subtle yet significant ways in which gender is constructed and communicated through translation. The Tok Pisin Bible, while readable and acceptable, tends to favor masculine terms even when the source text is neutral, an outcome that reflects broader societal patterns and linguistic norms. This underscores Cameron's (1992) opinion that translation is not a neutral act; it can shape and even reinforce cultural ideologies. For future translation work in Papua New Guinea and similar multilingual societies, there is a growing need to consider both linguistic accuracy and social inclusivity. Thoughtful, gender-aware translation practices can contribute not only to better texts but also to more equitable representations within religious discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how gendered language from the New English Translation (NET) Bible is translated into Tok Pisin in the *Buk Baibel*, with a specific focus on referential gender shifts and overall translation quality. The findings reveal a consistent trend where gender-neutral terms are often shifted into masculine forms in the Tok Pisin version, despite the inclusive intent of the original text. Masculine references were largely preserved, while feminine ones were mostly maintained, though not without some shifts to neutral or, in rare cases, masculine terms. While the Tok Pisin translations scored highly in terms of acceptability and readability, the accuracy, particularly in translating neutral expressions, showed room for improvement. These patterns suggest that translation choices may unintentionally reinforce existing gender norms within a religious and cultural context.

What this study ultimately highlights is the power of language in shaping how people think about gender, especially in texts as influential as the Bible. In a multilingual and culturally diverse society like Papua New Guinea, where Tok Pisin plays a central communicative role, the way gender is expressed in translation matters deeply. Translators are not just transferring words from one language to another—they are also making choices that can either uphold or challenge social norms. By drawing attention to these shifts and encouraging more inclusive translation practices, this research offers valuable insights for linguists, theologians, and translators working at the intersection of language, faith, and society. As future Bible translation efforts continue, it is essential to strike a careful balance between theological accuracy and gender sensitivity to ensure that the message of the scriptures remains both faithful and inclusive.

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Authors' Contributions

Andreas Noreewec (Ph.D. Candidate) was primarily responsible for the study's conceptual design, data collection, and correspondence with the journal. Prof. Drs. Mangatur R. Nababan, M.Ed., M.A., Ph.D., and Prof. Djatmika, M.A., Ph.D., contributed to the drafting, critical revision, and refinement of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript. The authors contributed equally to the development and completion of this research.

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