



Activities Firefox ESR Mon 10:01 en

read-the-feminist-manual x 86ce7920-6593-4254-905f- x GNU gettext utilities x +

https://www.gnu.org/software/gettext/manual/gettext.html#Why

1 Introduction

This chapter explains the goals sought in the creation of GNU gettext, the free Translation Project. Then, it explains a few broad concepts: Native Language Support, and positions message translation with other aspects of national and cultural variance, as they apply. It also surveys those files used to convey the translations. It explains how the various tools interact in the initial generation of the manual and later, how the maintenance cycle should usually operate.

In this manual, we use **they** when speaking of the programmer or translator, **they** when speaking of the translator, and *they* when speaking of installers or end users of the translated program. This is only a convenience for clarifying the documentation. It is *absolutely* not implied that some roles are more appropriate to males or females. As you might guess, GNU gettext is meant to be useful for people using computers, whatever their sex, race, religion or nationality!

Please submit suggestions and corrections

- either in the bug tracker at <https://savannah.gnu.org/projects/gettext>
- or by email to bug-gettext@gnu.org.

Please include the manual's edition number and update date in your messages.

Read The Feminist Manual

This extension filters all occurrences of *she/he* and *her/his* pronouns and replaces them with the gender inclusive *they/their*. At the top of the page, we can see how many substitutions happened.

Add one or more hosts, separated by comma with no spaces, click the button below, refresh the page(s).

Filter URL

Read The Feminist Manual

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Read The Feminist Manual is a re-appropriation of RTFM (Read The Fucking Manual) and addresses gender discrimination in the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) communities and the lack of support in accommodating marginalized voices. The output of the research is an experimental Firefox addon which replaces gendered pronouns *he* and *she* with the neutral pronoun *they*, intended for use with online technical documentation pages, where the programmer is assumed to be a male (he). The project is accompanied by a zine, in which the readers can find information about the inspiration of the project, about the Firefox addon and screenshots of the addon's implementation in the browser. Along with the project's documentation, the zine introduces the significant role of feminist servers in shaping a queer community of sysadmins to nurture gender diversity. *Read The Feminist Manual* research was realized during the author's fellowship at the Media Enterprise Design Lab of Boulder University of Colorado.

Keywords Online governance,
feminist internet, FOSS,
tech, manuals, communities,
gender discrimination

RTFM: Read The Feminist Manual Context and Inspiration

Free and Open-Source Software (aka FOSS) development happens with code contributions within communities. This code is most often technical, but sometimes is about code of conduct, meaning how members shall engage with the community, and code documentation, meaning how other developers and users can interact with the code. The writing of these manuals often assumes the programmer/engineer is a *he*. The idea for a feminist tech manual as a re-appropriation to RTFM (Read the Fucking Manual)¹ came up when I was looking at an online documentation of a free software I was installing. I read this from gettext docs:

1. Read The Fucking Manual:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RTFM>

In this manual, we use *he* when speaking of the programmer or maintainer, *she* when speaking of the translator, and *they* when speaking of the installers or end users of the translated program. (Gettext Manual, 2020)

When I posted about this gender stereotype re-enforcement on mastodon (a decentralised social media platform), someone pointed me to a patch that was submitted last September by a contributor in the GNU community, who wished to correct this issue by substituting *he*, *she*, *his*, *her* with *they/their*. Incredibly but true, this patch was not accepted by the community. Here are some excerpts of the responses to the patch contributor on GNU mailing list (public and accessible) about the gender usage:

The GNU Kind Communication Guidelines don't mandate gender-neutral speak in documentation. [they] are about communication between people, not about documentation. Therefore there is no need for gender-neutral speak in the GNU gettext documentation. (Gettext lists.gnu.org, first responder, 2020)

The patch you suggested requires reader to accept "singular they" which is not commonly used anywhere and is considered an error by many, especially in formal writing. (Gettext lists.gnu.org, third responder, 2020)

- 1) In a specific document or documentation, do we want gender-neutral speak?
- 2) If we want gender-neutral speak, what is the English grammar element that works best?

Here, it's futile to discuss the second question, since the answer to the first question is already "no". (Gettext lists.gnu.org, first responder, 2020)

This last quote was the end of the debate. So, the question about introducing gender-neutral speak was finally raised by one of the main contributors, only

to reject it with the above reasoning. Just for the records here, one response in favor of the change pointed out:

It (they) is very much on the uprise. So much that it's been chosen as the 'Word of The Year' in 2019 by Merriam Webster, and 'Word of the Decade' by The American Dialect Society. (Gettext lists.gnu.org, second responder, 2020)

If we dig further, Richard Stallman, one of the founders of the Free Software movement, refuses to use people's preferred pronouns, to the point of dismissing the pronoun they as grammatically wrong and coming up with his own random rules for new pronouns. (Stallman, 2019)

When we cannot have a say in the decision-making of these communities with regards to language etiquette, gender inclusivity and other forms of discrimination, we can at least circumvent them on another level. A browser addon can do that for the readers without waiting for the gender emancipation of the GNU project and the FOSS in general. But more about this later.

This gender inclusivity issue and how it was backed with arguments of language correctness reminds me of another incident in a Greek hacker space's mailing list two years ago. What happened in a nutshell; me and a peer organized a presentation about our autonomous feminist servers, and in the event's promotion we wrote a blurb, where we referred to the server with a female pronoun, while in Greek it is called with a male pronoun. The warriors of the Greek language got furious, and a long trolling unfolded.

In both incidents, it is clear that the language correctness is a pretext for refusing to waiver the privilege of the male programmer/hacker. The result though has further implications; these communities tend to be biased and changes of social inclusion are (mostly) not happening.

Feminist Servers

What is a feminist server?

Because all online resources are hosted on servers, they constitute a base for the internet as we know it. All servers are ruled by different terms of service, governance models and national legislation in relation to privacy and access to data by third actor parties (or "trackers") and are dependent on a variety of business models. This somewhat technical definition can obscure the possibilities for understanding the political aspect behind the setting up and management of a server. (Toupin and Hache 2015)

From the experience of women, trans, and queer identified peers running autonomous server infrastructures, the following junctures are part of a feminist

pedagogy: extensive documentation, be able to ask any question without being judged by competitive colleagues, and work without having to deal with a sexist discourse. These attitudes inspire solidarity and participation from diverse identities, and challenges the dominant FOSS monoculture.

A List of Feminist Servers

1 Alive projects

- 1.1 Anarchaserver
- 1.2 La Bekka
- 1.3 Cl4ndestina
- 1.4 CódigoSur
- 1.5 Fuxico + Feminist Pirate Box
- 1.6 MaadiX
- 1.7 Matriar.cat
- 1.8 Systemserver
- 1.9 Vedetas
- 1.10 1984
- 1.11 Diebin

2 Closed projects

- 2.1 Kefir.red

For more info about each server please visit our online index.²

2. You can check some of their services in this section: https://alexandria.anarchaserver.org/index.php/You_can_check_some_of_their_services_in_this_section

Support/Resources

Although cyberfeminists have done a lot to put forward their priorities as a movement to funders, it can be argued that internet freedom funders remain unconvinced of the centrality of gender issues and only see it as an add-on or a subset of the sector. (Mejia 2019)

Feminist internet infrastructures need more support and funding to grow their networks of solidarity. Working together with other feminist sysadmins for systemserver and anarchaserver we have seen the need from artists and activists to host their content on trusted platforms, which respect privacy concerns, for example independently produced post-porn videos, but also content that aligns with feminist and queer identity politics. Alas, resources and financial support for building such digital infrastructures when coming from civic bodies, often have strings attached, such as detailed reporting with risks of privacy leaks, or co-opting of feminist tech by Big Tech. And when support is coming from the arts, funders expect visual interfaces and design deliverance besides the development of online platforms, which requires a lot more labor vis-a-vis the granted budget. Tech/cyber feminists, who often come from anti-capitalist and anarchist

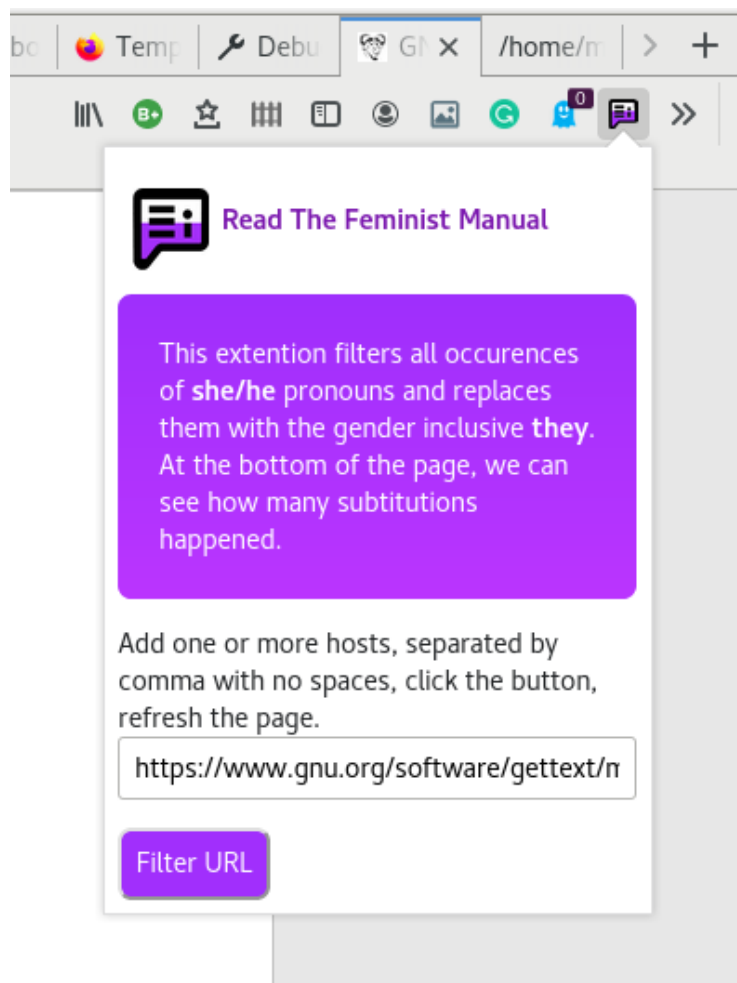
backgrounds prefer not to navigate through such barriers and rather get involved in existing, but highly cis-male centered hack initiatives.

RTFM add-on

A Firefox add-on that replaces *she* and *he* pronouns with the neutral counterpart *they*, by filtering web-page content, is under development and released as an experimental extension. It can be installed from the Mozilla addons gallery.³

3. Read-the-feminist-manual add-on can be installed from <https://addons.mozilla.org/addon/read-the-feminist-manual/>

Fig. 1. read-the-feminist-manual add-on.



Read the Feminist Manual version 1.0 provides the following features:

- × A user input to enter one or more URL for filtering. User can click the add-on's icon to add hosts and press the filter button.
- × Replacement of he/she with they in bold.
- × A counting of all he/she occurrences found in the HTML text is added at the top of the page.

4. GNU TLS documentation
<https://www.gnutls.org/manual/gnutls.html>

5. Mail utils documentation
<https://mailutils.org/manual/>

6. Gettext documentation
<https://www.gnu.org/software/gettext/manual/gettext.html>

7. Tar documentation <https://www.gnu.org/software/tar/manual/tar.html>

8. Emacs documentation
https://www.gnu.org/software/emacs/manual/html_mono/emacs.html

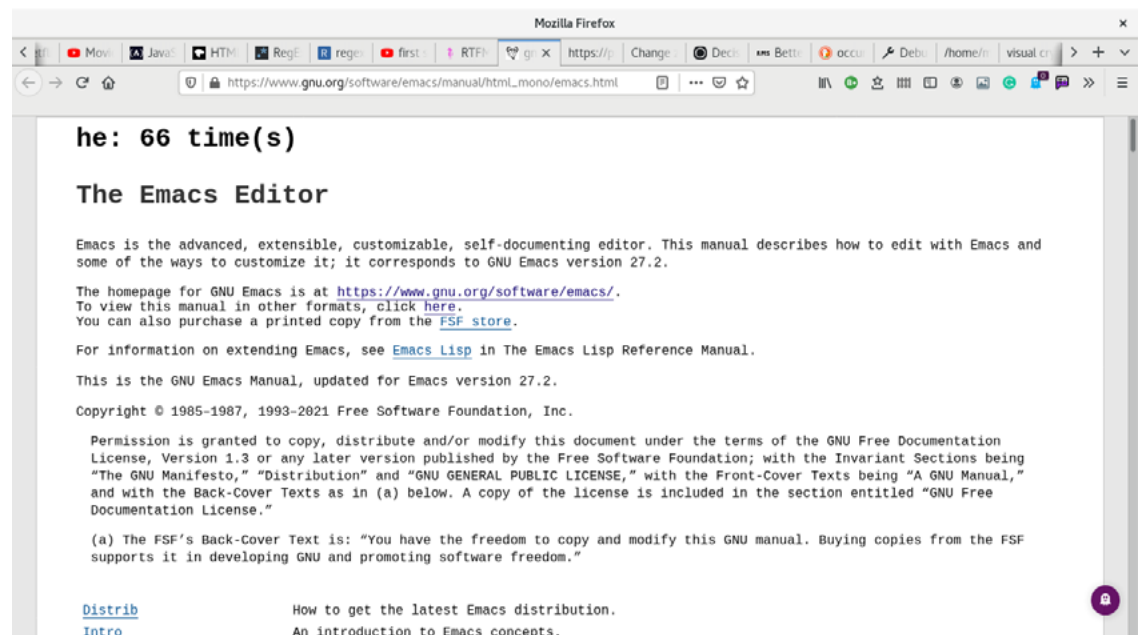
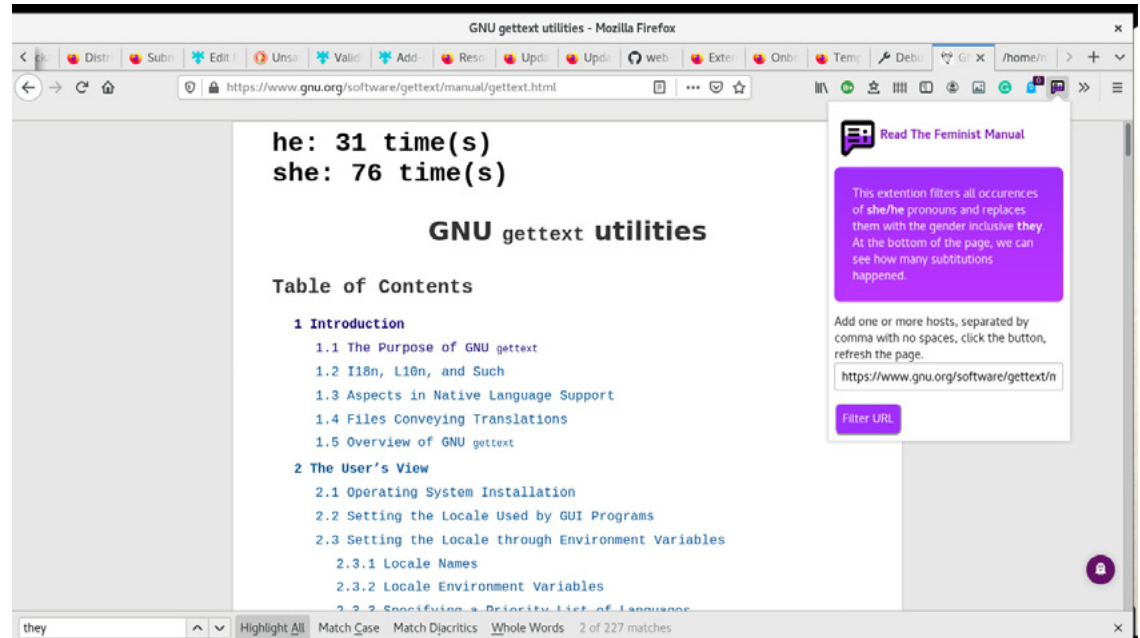
9. Wget documentation <https://www.gnu.org/software/wget/manual/wget.html>

Fig. 2. Gettext documentation with the filtering on. *he* was used for the programmer, *she* for the translator and got replaced by *they*.

Fig. 3. Emacs documentation with the filtering on. Only *he* pronouns were used in the original documentation.

10. Read The Feminist Manual zine can be downloaded here:
https://psaroskalazines.gr/pdf/rtfm_zine_screen.pdf

So far, the addon has been tested with the following GNU manuals: gnutls,⁴ mailutils,⁵ gettext,⁶ tar,⁷ emacs,⁸ wget⁹



Future versions will include filtering of *him/hers* to be replaced by *them*, and users' options on how to display the pronouns. Also, an option to save the generated new content into a PDF for printing would be also added in a future release.

The documentation of the project can be found in a zine format made by the author and available to download.¹⁰ It includes screenshots of the content gender filtering implementation with the read-the-feminist-manual addon.

Fig. 4. Read The Feminist Manual zine.



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Web page of the project <https://psaroskalazines.gr/zines/RTFM/>

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