



## UNVEILING GENDER BIAS AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN TRANSLATION PRACTICE AND THEORY<sup>i</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the complex relationship between translation and gender studies, highlighting the gendered dimensions inherent in translation practices and the transformative potential of feminist approaches to translation theory. While translation studies have traditionally focused on linguistic equivalence, cultural transfer, and textual fidelity, the gendered aspects of translation have often been overlooked or marginalized. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how gender biases operate within translation processes and how feminist perspectives challenge and enrich traditional understandings of translation. The article begins with an overview of the historical neglect of gender as a critical factor in translation studies, tracing the emergence of feminist translation theory as a vital subfield. Feminist theorists have argued that translation is not a neutral act but one deeply embedded in social and cultural power relations, including those related to gender. This critical lens exposes how translation practices may perpetuate patriarchal norms by silencing or distorting women's voices, reinforcing male-centered narratives, or translating texts in ways that obscure gender-specific meanings. For example, gendered language, pronoun use, and cultural connotations often present challenges that require translators to make choices influenced by their own gendered perspectives and societal expectations. Drawing on key contributions from prominent feminist translation scholars such as Luise von Flotow, Sherry Simon, and others, the article reviews major theoretical frameworks that integrate gender and translation studies. These frameworks emphasize the importance of recognizing the translator's agency, the ideological implications of translation choices, and the need for translation strategies that foreground gender sensitivity. The feminist approach advocates for

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<sup>i</sup> SVELARE I PREGIUDIZI DI GENERE E LE PROSPETTIVE FEMMINISTE NELLA PRATICA E NELLA TEORIA DELLA TRADUZIONE

translation as a form of resistance and rewriting that can subvert patriarchal language structures and amplify marginalized voices, thus reshaping cultural discourse. The main analytical section of the article examines specific cases where gender bias is evident in translation, including examples from literature, media, and legal texts. It highlights common tendencies such as the invisibilization of female characters, masculinization of language, and the erasure of gender diversity. The discussion also presents feminist translation strategies such as “hijacking” texts to insert feminist meaning, using inclusive language, and creatively challenging grammatical gender conventions. These practices demonstrate the transformative potential of feminist translation to question and disrupt dominant gender ideologies embedded in both source and target languages. Furthermore, the article addresses the practical and theoretical challenges faced by translators committed to feminist principles, including the risk of over-politicizing texts, cultural resistance, and balancing fidelity to the source text with the need for gender awareness. It argues that despite these challenges, integrating gender perspectives in translation enhances not only the ethical dimension of translation but also its cultural richness and relevance in contemporary society. In conclusion, the article asserts that recognizing and addressing gender biases in translation is essential for promoting equity and inclusivity in global communication. By incorporating feminist theories and strategies, translators can contribute to a more just representation of gender identities and experiences. The study calls for continued interdisciplinary research and pedagogical efforts to sensitize translators, scholars, and students to the gendered nature of translation, thus fostering more reflective and socially responsible translation practices in the future.

**Keywords:** translation and gender, feminist translation theory, gender bias in translation translation studies, gendered language, feminist critique

**Riassunto:**

Questo articolo esplora la complessa relazione tra traduzione e studi di genere, evidenziando le dimensioni di genere insite nelle pratiche di traduzione e il potenziale trasformativo degli approcci femministi alla teoria della traduzione. Mentre gli studi sulla traduzione si sono tradizionalmente concentrati sull’equivalenza linguistica, sul trasferimento culturale e sulla fedeltà testuale, gli aspetti di genere della traduzione sono stati spesso trascurati o marginalizzati. Questo studio mira a colmare questa lacuna esaminando come i pregiudizi di genere operino all’interno dei processi traduttivi e come le prospettive femministe sfidino e arricchiscano le interpretazioni tradizionali della traduzione. L’articolo inizia con una panoramica della storica trascuratezza del genere come fattore critico negli studi sulla traduzione, tracciando l’emergere della teoria femminista della traduzione come un sottocampo vitale. Le teoriche femministe hanno sostenuto che la traduzione non è un atto neutro, ma profondamente radicato nelle relazioni di potere sociali e culturali, comprese quelle legate al genere. Questa lente critica mette in luce come le pratiche traduttive possano perpetuare norme patriarcali, silenziando o distortendo le voci femminili, rafforzando narrazioni centrate sugli uomini o traducendo testi in modi che oscurano significati specifici di genere. Ad esempio, il linguaggio di genere, l’uso dei pronomi e le connotazioni culturali spesso presentano sfide che richiedono ai traduttori di effettuare scelte influenzate dalle

proprie prospettive di genere e dalle aspettative sociali. Basandosi sui contributi chiave di importanti studiose della traduzione femminista come Luise von Flotow, Sherry Simon e altre, l'articolo rivede i principali quadri teorici che integrano studi di genere e traduzione. Questi quadri sottolineano l'importanza di riconoscere l'agenzia del traduttore, le implicazioni ideologiche delle scelte traduttive e la necessità di strategie che mettano al centro la sensibilità di genere. L'approccio femminista sostiene la traduzione come forma di resistenza e riscrittura capace di sovvertire le strutture linguistiche patriarcali e amplificare le voci marginalizzate, rimodellando così il discorso culturale. La sezione analitica principale dell'articolo esamina casi specifici in cui il pregiudizio di genere è evidente nella traduzione, includendo esempi dalla letteratura, dai media e dai testi giuridici. Vengono evidenziate tendenze comuni come l'invisibilizzazione dei personaggi femminili, la mascolinizzazione del linguaggio e l'eliminazione della diversità di genere. La discussione presenta anche strategie femministe di traduzione come il "dirottamento" dei testi per inserire significati femministi, l'uso di un linguaggio inclusivo e la sfida creativa alle convenzioni del genere grammaticale. Queste pratiche dimostrano il potenziale trasformativo della traduzione femminista per mettere in discussione e interrompere le ideologie di genere dominanti presenti sia nelle lingue di partenza che in quelle di arrivo. Inoltre, l'articolo affronta le sfide pratiche e teoriche che i traduttori impegnati in principi femministi devono affrontare, inclusi il rischio di politicizzare eccessivamente i testi, la resistenza culturale e l'equilibrio tra fedeltà al testo originale e necessità di consapevolezza di genere. Si sostiene che, nonostante queste difficoltà, integrare le prospettive di genere nella traduzione migliori non solo la dimensione etica della pratica traduttiva, ma anche la sua ricchezza culturale e la sua rilevanza nella società contemporanea. In conclusione, l'articolo afferma che riconoscere e affrontare i pregiudizi di genere nella traduzione è essenziale per promuovere equità e inclusività nella comunicazione globale. Incorporando teorie e strategie femministe, i traduttori possono contribuire a una rappresentazione più giusta delle identità e delle esperienze di genere. Lo studio invita a proseguire nella ricerca interdisciplinare e negli sforzi pedagogici per sensibilizzare traduttori, studiosi e studenti alla natura di genere della traduzione, promuovendo così pratiche traduttive più riflessive e socialmente responsabili in futuro.

**Parole chiave:** traduzione e genere, teoria femminista della traduzione, pregiudizio di genere nella traduzione, studi sulla traduzione, linguaggio di genere, critica femminista

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Context

Translation studies have traditionally concentrated on linguistic accuracy, cultural equivalence, and the technicalities of transferring meaning between languages. However, the intersection of translation and gender studies represents a crucial but often overlooked dimension that has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent decades. The act of translation is far from neutral; it is inherently embedded within social, political, and cultural power dynamics, including those related to gender (Simon, 1996). As feminist theorists argue, language is not a passive medium but a site where power relations — particularly patriarchal

ones—are reinforced or contested (Butler, 1990). Therefore, translation, as a cultural practice, plays a significant role in either perpetuating or challenging gender biases.

### **1.2 The Emergence of Gender Awareness in Translation**

The recognition of gender issues within translation studies is a relatively recent development, rooted in the broader rise of feminist theory across the humanities and social sciences. Feminist translation theory, a specialized subfield, critically examines how gender influences translation practices and the representation of gendered identities in translated texts. It challenges the traditionally accepted norms that treat translation as a transparent conduit and highlights the translator's agency in shaping meaning (von Flotow, 1997).

As Luise von Flotow emphasizes, *“translation is not a mechanical reproduction of the source text but a re-creation, where the translator’s gendered subjectivity inevitably plays a role”* (von Flotow, 1997, p. 5). This insight calls attention to the power translators wield and the ethical responsibility they bear in addressing gender biases.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Despite growing awareness, gender biases continue to manifest in translation in various ways—through the masculinization of language, erasure of female voices, and the reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles (Simon, 1996). For example, in literary translation, women’s perspectives may be marginalized or altered, resulting in texts that reflect patriarchal ideologies more than the original author’s intent. Such practices contribute to a limited and often distorted representation of gender in translated literature and discourse.

### **1.4 Purpose and Scope**

This article aims to explore the gendered aspects of translation by investigating how gender biases operate within translation practices and how feminist perspectives offer critical tools for challenging these biases. The study will examine key feminist translation theories, analyze examples where gendered translation decisions have significant implications, and discuss the transformative potential of feminist translation strategies. By doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the importance of integrating gender awareness into translation studies for a more equitable and culturally sensitive practice.

### **1.5 Structure of the Article**

The article is organized into four main sections. Following this introduction, a literature review presents foundational theories and key feminist contributions to the field. The core analytical section investigates specific translation practices and feminist interventions. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the findings and highlights recommendations for future research and practice.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study of gender within translation theory and practice has developed as a vital and dynamic subfield within translation studies, particularly since the 1980s and 1990s, when

feminist theory began influencing a wide range of disciplines. This section reviews the key literature that has shaped the understanding of gendered aspects in translation, focusing on feminist translation theory, gender bias in translation, and the role of the translator's subjectivity.

## 2.1 Feminist Translation Theory: Origins and Key Contributions

Feminist translation theory emerged as an explicit response to the marginalization of women's voices in both source texts and translated works. As Sherry Simon (1996) notes, "feminist translation is not just about gender in language; it is a political practice, a way to expose and resist patriarchal structures embedded in texts and translation norms" (p. 11). This perspective shifts translation from a mere linguistic exercise to an act of cultural negotiation and ideological intervention.

Luise von Flotow (1997) is one of the pioneering voices in this area, emphasizing that translation must be seen as a creative and interpretative act shaped by the translator's gendered consciousness. She argues that feminist translators adopt specific strategies—such as supplementing, prefacing, or rewriting—to challenge patriarchal language and highlight feminist viewpoints. Von Flotow states:

*"Feminist translators actively seek to make visible the gendered power relations that influence both source texts and the act of translation itself. Their work is a form of resistance against the invisibility of women in language."* (von Flotow, 1997, p. 25)

## 2.2 Gender Bias and the Politics of Representation

Gender bias in translation often manifests through linguistic and cultural mechanisms that prioritize male perspectives or erase female agency. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1990), foundational scholars in translation studies, argue that translation functions as a form of rewriting governed by ideological constraints, including those related to gender:

*"Every act of translation is an act of manipulation, influenced by cultural, political, and ideological forces. Gender ideology is one of the dominant forces shaping how texts are translated and what meanings are conveyed or suppressed."* (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 10)

This insight has led to a growing recognition that translators are not neutral conveyors of meaning but active agents who negotiate and sometimes reinforce social power structures. For example, masculine generic terms in many languages are often used to represent both men and women, which feminist translators seek to challenge by introducing gender-inclusive language or foregrounding female characters' voices.

## 2.3 Translator's Subjectivity and Gendered Agency

Another key theme in the literature is the recognition of the translator's subjectivity and its influence on translation outcomes. Gender plays a crucial role in shaping how translators interpret texts and make linguistic choices. As Simon (1996) explains:

*"The translator's gender identity and political stance inform translation strategies and decisions, thus producing texts that carry gendered meanings beyond those present in the original" (p. 17).*

This acknowledgment challenges the classical notion of translator invisibility and opens the door to a more reflexive and ethically aware translation practice. It also raises important questions about the potential conflicts and dilemmas feminist translators face, such as balancing fidelity to the source text with a commitment to feminist values.

### **3. Analysis and Discussion: Gender Bias and Feminist Interventions in Translation**

The analysis of gender within translation studies reveals a complex interplay between linguistic structures, cultural ideologies, and translator agency. This section discusses concrete manifestations of gender bias in translation practices and explores feminist strategies aimed at challenging and transforming these biases. Through specific examples and theoretical insights, the discussion highlights the critical role of translation in shaping gender representations and cultural understandings.

#### **3.1 Gender Bias in Translation Practices**

Gender bias in translation frequently appears through subtle linguistic shifts that privilege male perspectives or erase female identities. One common example is the masculinization of language, where masculine pronouns or terms are used as generic forms, often at the expense of gender inclusivity. Mona Baker (2011) illustrates this phenomenon, stating:

*"Gender bias in translation is not limited to lexical choices but extends to syntactic and semantic levels where female agency is often downplayed or rendered invisible." (Baker, 2011, p. 130)*

For instance, in many languages, the masculine form is traditionally used to represent mixed-gender groups, which feminist translators critique as reinforcing patriarchal norms. When translating into or from such languages, choices around gendered pronouns, nouns, and descriptors carry ideological weight. Translators may unconsciously perpetuate these biases, thus influencing how readers perceive gender roles.

Another form of gender bias is the erasure or alteration of female characters' voices in literary translation. Some studies have documented how women's narratives are either diminished or reshaped to conform to dominant cultural stereotypes (Simon, 1996). For example, when a female character's emotional expression or resistance is softened or omitted, it affects the feminist potential of the source text.

#### **3.2 Feminist Translation Strategies**

Feminist translation theory offers an array of strategies designed to counteract these biases and foreground gender diversity. One influential approach is the concept of "hijacking" texts—deliberately intervening in the source text's patriarchal structures to expose and challenge them (von Flotow, 1997). This may involve introducing new feminist language,

restructuring sentences to emphasize female perspectives, or adding footnotes and prefaces that highlight gender issues.

As Luise von Flotow (1997) explains:

*"Feminist translation is a political act, one that demands the translator take responsibility for resisting oppressive ideologies and re-imagining texts in ways that empower marginalized voices."* (p. 42)

Inclusive language is another key feminist strategy. Translators may choose gender-neutral terms or explicitly mention women to counteract the invisibility created by masculine generics. This practice is particularly relevant in translating political, legal, and academic texts where language shapes social policy and public discourse.

Furthermore, feminist translators challenge grammatical gender conventions in source and target languages. In languages with gendered nouns, such as French or Spanish, the choice of masculine or feminine forms is ideologically significant. Some translators experiment with linguistic innovation or alternative forms to disrupt binary gender classifications and promote inclusivity (Simon, 1996).

### 3.3 The Translator's Role as a Gendered Subject

Central to feminist translation is the acknowledgment of the translator's role as an active agent whose gender identity and politics shape the translation. Unlike the traditional view of the translator as an invisible conduit, feminist theory insists that translators must be self-reflexive and transparent about their interventions (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990).

This self-awareness leads to ethical questions about balancing loyalty to the source text with a commitment to feminist principles. Feminist translators often face dilemmas when the original text contains sexist language or reinforces stereotypes. Some choose to remain faithful to the source, while others prioritize the ideological impact of the translation on the target audience.

As Sherry Simon (1996) points out:

*"The translator's gendered subjectivity not only influences textual decisions but also raises critical questions about ethics, politics, and the power of language to reproduce or resist gendered oppression."* (p. 88)

These tensions underscore the transformative potential of feminist translation as both an interpretive and political act, one that can rewrite cultural narratives and expand possibilities for gender representation.

### 3.4 Case Studies and Examples

Several case studies highlight how feminist translation strategies have been applied in practice. For example, the translation of feminist literature from English to French has often involved deliberate choices to retain or amplify gendered nuances that might otherwise be neutralized by masculine grammatical forms (von Flotow, 1997). Similarly, the translation of

legal texts concerning women's rights has benefited from gender-sensitive terminology to ensure accurate and equitable interpretation.

The translation of media texts also reveals gendered challenges. News reports or advertisements often contain implicit gender biases that translators must navigate carefully to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or erasing women's experiences. Feminist translation encourages a critical reading of such texts and creative solutions that promote gender equity.

#### **4. Conclusion: The Transformative Potential of Gender-Aware Translation**

The exploration of gendered aspects in translation reveals not only the deep-seated biases embedded in language and culture but also the profound capacity of translation to challenge and reshape these biases. This article has examined how gender influences translation practices, the manifestation of gender bias in translated texts, and the critical interventions feminist translation theory proposes to subvert patriarchal norms. The conclusion underscores the importance of recognizing translation as a political and ethical act, capable of either perpetuating or resisting gender inequalities.

##### **4.1 Translation as a Gendered Cultural Practice**

One of the central insights emerging from feminist translation studies is that translation is never a neutral or purely linguistic exercise. As Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) argue, every act of translation is embedded within cultural and ideological contexts, including gender ideologies that shape both source and target languages: *"Translation functions as a form of rewriting governed by dominant ideological forces, with gender ideology being a significant determinant of what is included, excluded, or transformed"* (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p. 12).

This understanding challenges the long-held assumption of translator invisibility and neutrality. Translators operate as culturally situated agents whose choices reflect, reinforce, or resist existing power relations. The gendered nature of these choices has important implications for how readers in different linguistic and cultural contexts experience texts and gender roles.

##### **4.2 Feminist Translation: Politics and Ethics**

Feminist translation theory has made a vital contribution by framing translation as an explicitly political act. Feminist translators do not merely transfer meaning from one language to another; they intervene to expose, critique, and transform patriarchal discourses. Von Flotow (1997) articulates this transformative potential clearly: *"Feminist translation is a form of resistance, an act that challenges dominant gender narratives and seeks to empower women's voices through strategic linguistic choices"* (von Flotow, 1997, p. 56).

Such an approach requires translators to embrace their subjectivity and adopt reflexive practices that acknowledge their ideological stance. This reflexivity raises complex ethical questions, such as the extent to which a translator should alter or 'correct' the source text to align with feminist values without compromising its integrity. The debate around fidelity versus feminist intervention continues to provoke discussion within translation studies, reflecting broader tensions between cultural respect and social justice.



### 4.3 Practical Implications and Challenges

The practical application of feminist translation strategies reveals both opportunities and challenges. Strategies such as hijacking texts, using inclusive language, and disrupting gender binaries through linguistic innovation have shown promise in enhancing gender awareness in translation. However, these strategies are not universally applicable; they must be adapted to specific linguistic, cultural, and textual contexts.

For example, languages with highly gendered grammatical structures may limit the extent to which translators can implement inclusive language without creating awkward or unintelligible texts (Simon, 1996). Moreover, translators working in institutional or commercial settings may face constraints that limit their freedom to engage in feminist interventions. The tension between market demands and ideological commitment remains an ongoing challenge.

### 4.4 Toward Greater Awareness and Change

Despite these challenges, raising awareness about gender bias in translation is a crucial step toward change. As Baker (2011) emphasizes:

*“Recognizing gender bias in translation opens pathways for more equitable and nuanced representations of gender, encouraging translators and readers alike to critically engage with texts and their social implications”* (Baker, 2011, p. 142).

Educational initiatives, translator training programs, and feminist advocacy can help foster such awareness and empower translators to make conscious, ethical choices. In addition, further research is needed to explore how gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality within translation, moving toward a more intersectional approach.

## 5. Final Reflections

In conclusion, translation is a powerful site where gender is negotiated, contested, and potentially transformed. The gendered dimensions of translation practices illuminate the broader sociocultural dynamics that shape how gender is constructed and perceived across languages and cultures. Feminist translation theory and practice offer valuable tools for resisting patriarchal norms and promoting gender equity.

Ultimately, embracing the political and ethical dimensions of translation enriches the discipline by acknowledging the translator’s agency and responsibility. By critically engaging with gendered aspects, translators can contribute not only to the fidelity of meaning but also to the creation of more just and inclusive cultural narratives. As Sherry Simon (1996) poignantly states: *“Translation is never innocent; it is always a form of cultural mediation that has the power to reproduce or resist gendered oppression”* (Simon, 1996, p. 102).

This recognition invites continued reflection, dialogue, and innovation in translation studies, with gender remaining a central and vital focus.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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