

Introduction: Gender, language and translation at the crossroads of disciplines

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Gender is an omni-relevant category in most social practices.
(Lazar 2005:3)

After all, the globalization of culture means that we all live in ‘translated’
worlds.
(Simon 1996:135)

The fact that ‘gender is an omni-relevant category in most social practices’ (Lazar 2005:3) lies at the very core of both feminist linguistics and feminist translation studies. Admittedly, most of the scholarly works produced within these two dynamic fields in the last three decades emphasize the role that language and translation play in the construction of the social world. In particular, much attention has been paid to investigating how gender roles are discursively constructed through language and translation – both understood as social practices *per se* – and how gender definitions are constantly interacting with other similarly constructed parameters such as race, geography, class or sexuality, therefore having consequences at the level of material practice.

Notions such as power and ideology are inextricably linked to the critical study of language and translation. Language is a political act of mediation and communication which either perpetuates or challenges existing power structures within wider social and cultural contexts – and the same can be said of translation. Far from traditional assumptions (which defined translation as merely a linguistic shift from one text to another with the least possible interference, in order to achieve the ‘only perfect translation’ and to remain faithful to the author’s intention or to the source text), translation

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is now considered a process of mediation. Within the framework of the globalisation of culture and the internationalisation of discourses, societies interact through translation, and thus it can be claimed that ‘we all live in “translated” worlds’ (Simon 1996:135) – never before has there been as much translation as there is today.

Language and translation inevitably are tools for legitimizing the *status quo* or for subverting it; tools for gender oppression or liberation. Yet, despite all these commonalities, in today’s globalized world it is still relevant to ask whether a dialogue between academics working in the field of gender and language and in that of gender and translation has yet taken place; and if so, how fertile these interdisciplinary debates have been. Indeed, not all scholarly work done in these two fields stems from a feminist perspective (Mills and Mullany 2011:2). But in the many cases when it does – stressing therefore the potential role of language and translation in contributing to a more equal world – the relationship between linguistics and translation within feminist studies should also be scrutinized: To what extent has feminist linguistics reflected upon all the possibilities opened up when gendered conceptualizations travel across languages and cultures? Similarly, to what degree has it considered the particularities of gender representation in translated texts (as opposed to or in relation to source texts)? Is feminist linguistics aware of the constraints that translation involves and how issues of fidelity or invisibility may hamper a particular feminist intervention in the target text that could otherwise be expected in the realm of the source text? Approached from a different angle, how much impact has research on gender and language in specific languages had on mainstream debates in the field of (feminist) translation studies? Are translation scholars and practitioners aware of linguistic studies conducted on both source and target languages, so that they can make informed decisions when having to translate gendered expressions? Can feminist linguistics help the translator to critically reflect on suitable strategies for different con/texts? Have scholars in the field of gender and translation made use of empirical linguistic studies to justify feminist translation practices?

These interrelated questions are central to a special issue on translation published in a journal eloquently entitled *Gender and Language*. The essays collected in this volume aim to investigate the gender politics of translation across multiple languages, or, in other words, to reflect upon the intersection between gender, language and translation and the multiple crossroads that this conceptual triangle entails. By so doing, they aim ultimately to create an interdisciplinary framework in which to enhance the study of gender and translation using insights gained through analyses carried out within critical linguistics; while, at the same time, enriching

the understanding of the relationship between gender and language when approached from a translation studies perspective.

On the one hand, this call for interdisciplinary research is very much in line with Penelope Eckert and Bonnie McConnell-Ginet's assertion that, if language and gender research is to have any kind of social or political responsibility, language and gender researchers must develop 'an interdisciplinary community of scholarly practice' (1992:88). Undoubtedly, the influence of such calls for interdisciplinary research is undeniable, with the publication of interdisciplinary collections of language and gender covering areas such as anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, journalism or organizational communication among others. It is now time for translation to be also considered. On the other, this special issue must be placed and understood within the dynamic and flourishing context which is the contemporary field of gender and translation. This field is built upon the ground-breaking theoretical debates and practical translational exercises of the 80s and 90s, including, to name just a few, Lori Chamberlain's critique of the metonymic code of double inferiority for women and translation, in relation to men and to the source text (cf. Chamberlain 1988); the birth of the Canadian school of feminist translation in Quebec, leading to feminist linguistic practices into English of experimental, avant-garde literary writings by francophone Quebec authors (cf. von Flotow 1991); or feminist rewritings into English of highly sexist texts – from the non-sexist translations of the Bible (cf. von Flotow 2000), to practices such as the woman-minded rewritings of Susanne Jill Levine (1983) or Carol Maier (1985) when translating the misogynistic work of postmodern Latin American writers.

The publication of two influential monographs by Sherry Simon (1996) and Luise von Flotow (1997) greatly contributed to opening up new avenues of dialogue, at a time when new approaches to translation studies proclaimed a 'cultural turn' (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990:10) shifting the focus of the discussion from a mainly linguistic/textual analysis to a broader cultural/ideological context. This cultural turn gave rise to studies that situated the translated text in its social and historical circumstances and considered its political role, paying attention to ideological values, to cultural, economic and political inequalities, to individual choices and also, most importantly, to the ethics of translation.

Over the last few years, the dyad gender and translation has been gaining critical consistency and experiencing a remarkable growth, with numerous conferences and many publications devoted to exploring the multifaceted nature of translation theory and practice when approached from a gender perspective. Besides edited volumes such as *Translating Women* (von Flotow 2011) and *Translating Gender* (Federici 2011), in Europe there have

been several special issues of Translation Studies journals. One example is the French *Palimpsestes*, which published two special issues on ‘Traduire le genre grammatical: un enjeu linguistique et/ou politique’ (Raguet 2008) and on ‘Traduire le genre: femmes en traduction’ (Sardin 2009). Two Spanish journals followed suit, with the special issue ‘Woman and Translation: Geographies, Voices and Identities’ in the journal *MonTI, Monographs on Translation and Interpreting* (Santaemilia and von Flotow 2011) and a dossier published in *Quaderns, revista de traducció* (Godayol 2012). Such is the cross-pollination and exchange occurring between translation studies and other disciplines that some other journals – primarily devoted to fields such as linguistics, women’s studies or literature – have also recently hosted special issues on the topic. As such, beyond the domain of translation studies, and further to the present volume, the refereed publication *European Journal of Women’s Studies* hosted a special issue on ‘Living and Translation’ (Phoenix and Slavova 2011). And the future looks promising, with a special issue on ‘The Gender and Sexual Politics of Translation’ coming out in *Comparative Literature Studies* (Spurlin, forthcoming). Within this diversity, what most current approaches to gender and translation share is a common interest in scrutinizing how an interdisciplinary understanding of gender conceptualizations can be fostered in relation to translation. This is indeed the case with the current collection of essays, which could be gathered into two groups according to the type of linguistic approaches they adopt.

The first group is composed of the initial four articles presenting thorough considerations about translation as an act of linguistic mediation between texts and cultures, covering languages such as Turkish, Galician, Italian, Romansh, French, German, Spanish and English. Having identified a gap between feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation literature, **Emek Ergün** calls for more cooperation between the two disciplines with a view to enhancing a sociopolitical change and to expanding translators’ (and translation students’) political awareness of gender representation in language. Ergün exemplifies this dialogue by analysing different instances of translations of feminist novels from English into Turkish, including dilemmas confronted by herself as a feminist translator. The author aptly considers the challenges these translations entail due to the asymmetrical position occupied by the two languages, the disparate status of feminist novels in the source and target culture, as well as to the different grammatical structures and resources available to communicate gender in English and Turkish.

Still discussing ‘curious’ examples of literary translations from English into minority languages, **Olga Castro’s** paper explores the particularities of applying linguistic strategies for non-sexist language use to the

writing of target texts. Considering the double (con)textual responsibility that translators have towards the source and the target (con)texts, Castro shows how a more frequent use of so-called ‘inclusive language’ is being increasingly adopted in texts originally written both in English and in Galician, leading to the hypothesis that an inclusive language may also be promoted through translated texts into these languages. Far from this, however, her case study demonstrates that mainstream translations tend to be more conservative than the ‘original’ discourse – ‘original’ referred here both to source texts and also to parallel texts in the target language – which reveals a ‘missing link’ between feminist linguistics and translation studies. Seeking to enable a better understanding of this missing link and to ultimately contribute to an interdisciplinary dialogue between feminist approaches to linguistics and to translation, Castro offers an overview of the most frequent arguments adduced against the use of strategies for inclusive language in (literary) translations.

Shifting the focus from literary to institutional texts, **Daniel Elmiger** undertakes a comparative analysis of the use of (non-)sexist language in a corpus of official quadrilingual documents sent by the Swiss Federal Government to all citizens and written in the four official languages of the country. Framing this study within the new legislation that calls for the use of non-sexist forms and assuming that German is predominantly the language of the source text, the author demonstrates how the tendency towards avoiding the so-called ‘generic masculine’ in German is rendered differently into Romansh, Italian and French, despite all three being Romance languages with similar gender grammatical structures.

Also in the realm of multilingual institutional texts, **José Santaemilia’s** article presents a thought-provoking discussion about the translation of gender-related terminology in the EU, especially bearing in mind that all texts published by the EU in all official languages are to be considered originals. The author compiles a corpus of texts in English and Spanish to analyse how the word ‘gender’ (defined in the article as a culture-specific English term) has fared in Spanish institutional translations. Santaemilia’s contribution has important social implications, as the term ‘género’ (lit. ‘gender’) has repeatedly met with strong opposition from influential bodies such as the *Real Academia Española*, accusing it of being an unnecessary Anglicism opaque in its meaning which should therefore be replaced by ‘sexo’ (lit. ‘sex’), ‘the only one term available in Spanish to denote the biological and cultural dimensions of the sexual self’. However, both feminist scholarship and some governmental institutions in Spain have amply adopted not only the neologism ‘género’, but also expressions such as ‘enfoque de género’ (‘gender approach’) or ‘violencia de género’ (‘gender violence’). Despite this wide use in Spanish, Santaemilia’s study provides

useful data about the strategies used by translators to either contribute to the normalization of the term in Spanish or, more frequently and more recently, to avoid it.

The second grouping collects the two remaining articles, focused not so much on linguistic analysis of translated texts, but on how women and men are represented in discourses related to translation, both as an academic discipline and as a professional practice. **Pilar Godayol's** contribution revolves around the topic of the sexualised metaphors of translation. Building on previous work that has exposed the sexist nature of language used to represent women (and men) in the theoretical discourse about translation throughout the centuries, Godayol offers a vivid account of new empowering metaphors forged in recent times to go beyond these stereotypes, which she categorizes as (a) borderland metaphors and (b) myths in the feminine. Godayol concludes her article by proposing a new liberating rhetoric drawing on the work of the Catalan poet and feminist activist Maria-Mercè Marçal. Finally, **Inger Askehave** and **Karen Korning Zethsen** investigate issues of discourse and identity in translation. Focusing on Danish freelance translators' own perceptions about their professional practice as women or men translators, the authors aim to conclude whether gender is (or is not) a relevant factor in the translators' perceptions of their own occupation. Previous research has shown that in some contexts the prestigious field of literary translation is predominantly taken by men, while women translators are frequently relegated to other translational activities with lower status (cf. Castro 2011). Sticking to the field of non-literary translation, Askehave and Korning Zethsen offer a qualitative analysis of 18 narratives where nine male and nine female freelance translators write about their perceptions of what being a translator is like. Although the results are not necessarily extrapolated to other contexts, they set a precedent for new empirical research to assess to what extent gendered power relations are materialized in such a feminized profession as translation, especially taking into account the traditional consideration of translation as a feminine/reproductive activity (an 'area associated with female virtues', in the authors' terms), in opposition to the masculine/productive activity of writing.

As the title of this introductory chapter anticipates, all the articles collected in this special issue place the discussion on the interactions between gender, language and translation at the crossroads of disciplines. And by so doing, they offer fresh insights into how the intersection of gender and translation from transcultural and transnational perspectives may have broader implications for studies in linguistics, or, in Ergün's words (2010:307), into how scholars' interdisciplinary understandings of gender dynamics expand with regard to language and translation. For, if

gender studies and translation studies are commonly defined as two interdisciplinary fields *per se*, we must not forget that language is essential to both.

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