Investigating the Translation of Genderism from Persian to English: A Case Study of I'll Turn off the Lights

Rezvan Noosh[1] , Seyed Nezamaddin Moeinzadeh[2] , Nadia Ghazanfari Moghadam[3]

[1]Department of TEFL and English Literature, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran, Email: rezvannoush@gmail.com

[2]*Corresponding author,* Associate Professor, Department of English Language Translation, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran, Email: nmoeinzade@yahoo.com

[3]Assistant Professor, Department of English Language Translation, Kerman Institute of Higher Education, Kerman, Iran, Email: nadia.ghazanfari@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study investigated the translation of genderism Persian-English. Genderism is an ideology that shows partiality based on biological sex and separates society into two groups in a way that one sex is subordinate to another sex and it is reflected in languages; thus, there are sexist concepts in each language; the concepts are usually culture-oriented. The main question was: How have the sexist concepts been translated from Persian to English? The corpus of this comparative and qualitative study was Zoya Pirzad's novel (2001) *Cheraghha-ra Man Khamush Mikonam* (L.T. *I'll turn off the lights*) and its translation by Franklin Lewis (2012) *Things We Left Unsaid*. The framework of the evaluation was Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model. The results revealed that translation of genderism is a challenging task, and the sexiest language of the SL was modified during the translation process; hence, the tone of sexist implications of the source text has been changed to more sexist concepts or anti-sexist concepts.

Keywords: ideology, translation of genderism, sexiest language, sexist society

1. Introduction

Genderism[1] is an ideology that shows partiality based on biological sex and separates society into two groups. By the appearance of such partiality, it is clear that one group is regarded as socially inferior. Scholars such as Flotow (1997) believed that genderism usually refers to discrimination against women. Ideology relationship to translation is hardly a new concept. In order to justify the existing ideologies such as genderism, translation studies try to find out about ideological phenomena, and what is more, Pérez (2014) mentions translation as an "operation" that is carried through the use of language. Translation of genderism concerning the translation of sexist concepts which are usually culture-oriented and imply the different statuses of women and men in one society.

The fact of the matter is the relationship between language and ideology. Language is a social and cultural phenomenon; for instance, Kramsch (1998) holds the belief that language is a system of signs that are seen as having a cultural value. Though evoking views of various groups and regions in society, language is not intrinsically sexist, and correspondingly, it reflects genderism. It reflects any attitudes in different situations combined with interactions in society in a negative and/or positive direction. Also, culture influences language, and language manipulates the culture in which it is spoken. By and large, genderism can come up in two types: "sexist language" and "sexist society". Sexist language characterizes women and men unequally, also lower one of the genders and can be used by both females and males depending on who has a superior position (Wareing, 2004). Sexist society is a realm where language is used as a vehicle to settle the sexiest tendencies within the society (Paknahad-Jabarouti, 2002). To the authors' best of knowledge, there is only so much research that examined the extent of translation of genderism; thus, the aim of the current study is to evaluate how genderism is transmitted to another socio-cultural context. In addition, the study explores changes that the translation of genderism undergoes in the transmission of sexist concepts. Particularly, the study intends to address the following question:

RQ1: How have the sexist concepts been translated from Persian to English?

2. Literature Review

Scholars of translation studies brought feminism, gender studies, and women's studies into their research over the 1990s. Gender studies make a significant contribution to investigations of gender as a cultural and social construction. Genderism (hidden) ideology of social inequalities between men and women, can be reflected in many aspects such as language, social role, social behavior, etc. This ideology has been realized variously among nations, and accordingly, sometimes different reflections have been detected. Western communities and Iranian society do not seem to meet precisely on the same page regarding genderism, yet each has its definitions of gender norms,

---

[1] Noticably, in this study the term genderism has been used as a euphemism for the term sexism

confinements, and liberties in individual demeanor and social relations (Ghazanfari-Moghaddam & Sharifi-Moghaddam, 2015). Paknahad-Jabarouti (2002) worked on gender and social class together with the relationship between language, culture, and gender differences in Iran, and then she brought in language genderism. She focused on the deconstructing effects that a sexist culture leaves on the members of society, notably on females.

Alinezhad (2004) carried research on genderism and sexist language by comparing English with Persian. She indeed declared that genderism exists in both cultures, and it is visible in "linguistic elements" and "discourse" of these two languages. Lei (2006) investigated sexist language and genderism in proverbs and words of some languages and he worked on a corpus that contained segregated implications. He believed that languages include segregation and also, and he brought out supplementary instances of discrimination between the woman and men (e.g., (man vs. woman: lawyer vs. lady lawyer (at the word level)) and (a woman is like a lemon; you squeeze her and throw her away (as a proverb)).

Rodrigues (2009) researched Spanish and English lexis, which referred to two sexes, and the investigation compared the lexis used in both languages for women. The findings showed that women are the most belittled in lexis. Ghazanfari-Moghaddam and Sharifi-Moghaddam (2015) investigated the translation of genderism English-Persian in Sidney Sheldon's novel (1995) *The Stars Shine Down*. This novel has deliberately developed sexist concepts with the primary intention of culture change. The findings of their study revealed that TT preserves the target society from possible cultural inconveniences. Furthermore, genderism's expression of the translation and the original work diverged significantly.

Nuraisiah et al. (2018) conducted a study on the translating attitudes toward genderism in *Gone Girl* novel and the Indonesian translation of it. They concluded that translation techniques determine its qualities and the translator became less sexist than the writer; thus, the effect of the translated version differed from the original. Denissova (2020) researched the reproduction of the same effect on the translation of the transgender text by preserving the ambiguity of gender. The results of her study, which were related to applying Vinay and Darbelnet's model, revealed techniques such as transposition, modulation, and equivalence make the aim of this translation possible.

3. Method

Primarily, the current investigation aims to determine the translation of genderism interculturally. For the purpose of this study, *I'll turn off the lights* (2001) by Zoya Pirzad and its English translation by the title of *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012) were selected from which the sexist concepts were extracted and then analyzed. *I'll Turn off the Lights* (2001) explains the routine daily chores of an Armenian woman who is trapped in routines of daily life, and she is in a permanent conflict with herself; thus, gender has played a pivotal role in this novella.

In order to collect necessary data, the sexist concepts were extracted from the source based on a CDA proposed by Ghazanfari-Moghaddam, and Sharifi-Moghaddam (2014). This sexist data detection model is segmented into four main categories: Referential meaning, Connotative meaning, Recognized female verbal and nonverbal behavior codes, and Recognized male verbal and nonverbal behavior codes.

The next step was to evaluate the quality of the translation of genderism and it needs to assess carefully to understand how the message of the SL transfers to TL through a comparative analysis. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model is taken grammatical, lexical, and conceptual elements of the SL into consideration in the translation process; thus, it proved to be a suitable framework for translation evaluation in this study.

3.1. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) Model

The main framework that has been employed in this study is Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model. Moreover, they counted two general strategies of translation as "direct translation" and "oblique translation". The two suggested strategies comprise seven procedures. The justification of the model selection provides below:

3.1.1. Justification of Framework Selection: Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) Model

The translation of genderism needs to assess carefully to understand how the message of the SL transfers to TL. The SL sexist concepts may be possible to transmit element by element into TL (as direct translation), that is what Vinay and Darbelnet mentioned as "parallel categories" (related to structural parallelism) or "parallel concepts" (related to metalinguistic parallelisms). They also pointed out gaps or "lacunae" in the TL, which must be filled by corresponding elements; hence, the final effect of the two messages is the same (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995, cited in Venuti 2004). Insomuch that languages differ metalinguistic or structural from each other, "certain stylistic effects of SL cannot be transposed into the TL without upsetting the syntactic order, or even the lexis" (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 84), so the translator must preserve the messages by applying more complex methods_ here oblique translation. According to what has been explained above, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model takes grammatical, lexical, and conceptual elements of the SL into consideration in the translation process; thus, it proved to be a suitable framework for translation evaluation in this study.

3.1.1.1. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) Model in Detail

I. Direct Translation Strategy: it consists of techniques that are used when conceptual and structural elements of the SL can transpose into the TL. The direct translation covers three procedures:

1. Borrowing: the SL word is transposed directly into the TL.

2. Calque: is a special sort of borrowing where the SL structure or expression transfers in literal translation. The calque is at two levels:

a) "Lexical calque": the Calque which respects the syntactic structure of TL.

b) "structural calque": the Calque which introduces a new construction into a language (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, cited in Venuti, 2004).

3. Literal Translation: "is the direct transfer of an SL text into idiomatically and grammatically appropriate TL text in which the translators' task is limited to observing the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL" (word-for-word translation) (Vinay & Darbelnet,1995, p.86).

II. Oblique Translation Strategy: it consists of techniques that use when the conceptual or structural elements of the SL cannot be directly translated without altering the meaning of the TL. The oblique translation covers four procedures:

4. Transposition: a change of one part of speech for another (e.g., a noun for an adjective) without changing the sense. In translation, there are two distinct types of transposition: *"Obligatory"* and *"Optional".*

5. Modulation: is the change of the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view. "This procedure is justified when, although a transposed, or even literal translation results in grammatically correct utterance, it is accounted awkward, unsuitable, or unidiomatic in the TL" (Munday, 2016, p.90). Modulation can be: *"Obligatory", and "Optional".*

6. Equivalence or Idiomatic Translation: "this term refers to cases where languages describe the same situation by different stylistic or structural means" (Munday, 2016, p.91). Equivalence is practical in translating proverbs and idioms.

7. Adaptation: "changing the cultural reference when a situation in the source culture does not exist in the target culture" (Munday, 2016, p.91).

To address the research question, the results of the study are presented in the following section.

4. Results

The results of the present investigation are divided into two main categories: direct translation strategy and oblique translation strategy. Each strategy consists of some more sub-strategies that are presented below. Extracted sexist concepts from the corpus based on the CDA framework of the study and the translation version are:

Ex.1. Calque Strategy

ST: خوب کردم. تا عنتر خانم هی گرید کوفتی شوهر گوریلش را به رخ مردم نکشد. (ص.۷۶)

TT: It was the right thing to do. Keep that <u>monkey lady</u> from going around and showing off in people's faces about the Grade of her gorilla man. (p.54)

In Persian, "Antar Khamom" is used to insult a woman that the spokeswoman or spokesman absolutely loathes her; by applying the Calque strategy the scornful tone of the ST does not transmit to the TT.

ST: (ص.۲۴۵) . من خرس گنده داشتم زهره ترک می‌شدم و زنم و این انگار نه انگار

TT: Big bear that I am, I lost my courage, but for my wife and for this one, it was like nothing out of the ordinary was going on. (p.191)

"Khers-e Gonde" refers to a man whose actions are the same as a child; Big bear is not a suitable equivalent because the connotative meaning is not the same, and the message of the ST is not transposed to the TT.

Ex.2. Literal Translation

ST: (ص.۱۴) خواهرم پوزخند می‌زد. «پس مردم از کجا بفهمند کلاریس خانم شبیه بقیه‌ی زن‌ها نیست؟»

TT: My sister would have sneered, 'But then how would people know that Miss Clarice is not like every other woman?' (p. 5)

"Khamon" is an epithet which usually is used to respect a woman, but in this context adds to Clarice's name to make a wisecrack by her sister; furthermore, the translator replaced *Khanom* with *Miss* (which denotes virginity), it is not a correct equivalent of *Khanom* because Clarice is a married woman.

ST: (ص.۲۶) «توی جلفا معروف بود به المیرا سرخور.»

TT: She was known in Julfa as Elmira the Jinxer. (p.15)

In Persian, "Sarkhor" is an unlucky person whose family will die because of their presence (usually used for a wife whose husband dies), although the "Jinxer" is a person believed to bring bad luck, the concepts are different.

ST: (ص.۱۲۳) نه فکر نکنئ ویولت عشوه می‌آمد یا کاری می‌کرد ها.

TT: And don't imagine that Violette was flirting or anything like that. (p.106)

As the Persian text explicitly states that "Eshve Amadan" means trying to attract the attention of men, but "flirt" conveys a more negative sense (to behave towards someone in a way that shows you are sexually attracted to them). Thus, the equivalence does not match it.

Ex. 3. Transposition

ST: (ص .۲۷) شوهر که کرد رفت هندوستان و چند سال بعد با پسرش برگشت جلفا.

TT: She went to India with her husband and a few years later came back to Julfa with her son. (p. 15)

In the Persian text, the reader comprehends that she has gone to India after her marriage but the TT does not contain this point.

Ex. 4. Modulation

ST: پدر و مادر خود من که تازه متجدد بودند و تحصیل کرده، پا توی یک کفش کرده بودند که باید با پسر عمویم ازدواج کنم.
...حتماً عقد دخترعمو پسر عمو توی آسمان را شنیدید؟ (ص.۱۹۵)

TT: My own mother and father, who would be considered educated and progressive, tried to move mountains to get me to marry <u>my cousin.</u> I know that's not a custom among Armenians, but for us Muslims, family marriages are not only not frowned on, but they are also a kind of good deed, as the old folks say. You must have heard the saying, "The marriage of <u>paternal cousins</u> is made in heaven"?' (p. 151)

The word "cousin" is the general word because in Persian it has at least eight counterparts. "Pesar Amoo" in Persian is the son of the paternal uncle, and the original message of the ST is to show the traditional belief in the marriage of a boy and a girl whose fathers are brothers but the Paternal cousin is a child of one's father's siblings; thus, the message is not transposed.

ST: شاید روز عزا بختش باز شد. خدا را چه دیدی ها؟ (ص.۱۲۷)

TT: You never know, maybe the Day of Mourning will <u>turn out to be her lucky day!</u> (p. 97)

The message in Persian text is to get married, "Bakht" here means marry to a man, not a lucky day.

ST: چهلم پسر نشده زنِ حاجی خودش را آتش زد و مُرد و حاجی دوماه بعد زن گرفت. (ص. ۱۸۰)

TT: Before the forty days of mourning for the boy were over, Hajji's wife set herself on fire and died. Hajji <u>remarried</u> two months later. (p. 139)

"Zan Gereftan" is another sexist concept in Persian which conveys gender bias and refers to a sexist society, "remarried" is a neutral verb but the whole message of the text is transposed.

ST: «خدا از خانومی کم ت نکنه خدا هرچی بخوای بهت بده، خدا __» (ص.۲۴۲)

TT: '<u>You are a great lady</u>, God keep you, God give you everything you want, God give you...' (p. 188)

"Khoda az Khanomi Kamet Nakone" means that Clarice is benevolent but the TT means she is a good woman.

ST: خواهرم <u>هفت قلم آرایش کرده</u>، در همان نیم ساعت اول گزارش کاملی از محاسن اخلاقی و تحصیلات و موقعیت اجتماعی خودش میداد. (ص.۹۶)

TT: my sister <u>is made up to the nines</u> and in the first half hour gives a complete report of her virtues, her education, and her social position. (p. 73)

In Persian "Haft Ghalam Arayesh" refers to a woman who wears heavy make-up, and the sense in this context is negative. In English "to the nine" is an idiom that means to a high degree (positive meaning).

Ex. 5. Idiomatic Translation
ST:

طفلک ویولت، با آن <u>مادر شوهر عوضی</u>. حتماً خیال کرده تا عروسی کنند <u>کوتوله خانم</u> فی الفور جواهراتش را <u>دو دستی تقدیم می کند.</u> (ص.۲۶۵)

TT: Poor Violette, with that <u>nutty mother-in-law.</u> She probably imagines that the instant they marry<u>, the lady midget is going to hand over all her jewels to her daughter-in-law on a silver platter.</u>' (p. 206)

The example expresses the negative views of in-laws in Persian. The term "Kotole Khanom" describes being a short woman as not acceptable in Persian society. The midget is used to describe an object that is smaller than usual but it is very offensive.

Ex.6. Adaptation

ST: صد بار گفتم نباید برود سراغ این گیس بریده. (ص.۶۹)

TT: 'I've said a hundred times he shouldn't hang around that <u>"brazen hussy."</u> (p.49)

In Persian "Gis Boride" refers to a shameless woman whose hair is cut off but nowadays, this definition is lost and the sense is not too negative (a type of swear word to mock a woman). In this context is used by a woman to satirize a man who has long hair (because having long hair for men is unusual in Persian society). "Brazen hussy" is a woman who wants to attract sexual attention, so the equivalence does not match.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study concerned the transmission of genderism interculturally. The results indicated that the sexist concepts which showed a negative view or a cultural norm were not transmitted appropriately, and the connotative representation of structure and lexis has been changed (in the cases of behavior codes and cultural differences). The sexist structure and sexist lexis of the ST were somewhat different from the TT in context also the sexiest language of the SL was dramatically modified during the translation process. The status of women and men in the narrative, which showed a patriarchal society, did not indicate in the TT. Furthermore, the sexist concepts which reflected the Iranian society's behavior towards one sex could not be adequately transmitted to English in order to the fact that most of these concepts were culture-oriented and they have based on sexist language, which lowered women's status and uplifted men as first sex.

References

Alinejad, B. (2005). Cognitive basis of gender category in Persian. *Journal of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (Kerman)*, *17*(14), 81-104.

Angelelli, C., V. (2014). *The sociological turn in translation and interpreting studies (Benjamins Current Topics)* (UK ed.). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Baker, M., & Saldanha, G. (2020). *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Bertens, H. (2014). Literary theory: The basics (3rd ed). Routledge.

Calzada-Pérez, M. (2014). *Apropos of ideology: Translation studies on ideology-ideologies in translation studies* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Cameron, D. (1992). *Feminism and linguistic theory* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Castro, O. (2013). Introduction: Gender, language and translation at the crossroads of disciplines. *Gender and Language*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.v7i1.5

Denissova, N. (2020). Preserving the ambiguity of gender in a language with grammatical gender.

Fairclough, N. (2014). *Language and power* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Flotow, V. L. (1997). *Translation and gender: Translating in the "Era of Feminism" (Perspectives on Translation)* (1st ed.). University of Ottawa Press.

Ghazanfari-Moghaddam, N., Sharifi-Moghaddam, A., & Sharififar, M. (2014). Source text analysis and translating ideology: Investigating sexism in Sidney Sheldon's The Stares Shine Down. *The Iranian EFL Journal, 10(1), 151-168.*

Ghazanfari-Moghaddam, N., Sharifi-Moghaddam, A. (2015). Translating genderism, a way of manipulating gender norms. *International Journal of Women's Research, 3(2).*

Harding, S. A., & Cortes, O. C. (2018). *The Routledge handbook of translation and culture.* Taylor & Francis.

House, J. (2016). *Translation as communication across languages and cultures.* Routledge.

Kramsch, C., & Widdowson, H. G. (1998). *Language and culture (Oxford Introductions to Language Study)* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lakoff, R. T., & Bucholtz, M. (2004). *Language and woman's place: Text and Commentaries (Studies in Language and Gender)* (Revised ed.). Oxford University Press.

Miletich, M. (2015). Women interpreting masculinity: Two English translations of Don Segundo Sombra. *Perspectives*, *24*(1), 157–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676x.2015.1040035

Mills, S. (2008). *Language and sexism* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Nuraisiah, S., Nababan, M. R., & Santosa, R. (2018). Translating attitudes toward sexism in gone girl novel (An Appraisal Theory Approach). *Lingua Cultura*, *12*(3), 259

Munday, J. (2016). Introducing translation studies: Theories and applications (4th ed.). Routledge.

Pirzad, Z. (2020). I'll turn off the lights (103rd ed.). Markaz Publications. (In Persian)

Pirzad, Z. (2013). *Things we left unsaid* (Reprint ed.). Oneworld Publications.

Schäffner, Ch. (2003). *Third ways and new centres. Ideological Unity or Difference?.* In M. Calzada Pérez (Ed.), *Apropos of ideology. Translation studies on ideology–ideologies in translation studies* (pp. 23-41. St Jerome.

Simon, S. (1996). *Gender in translation (Translation Studies).* Routledge.

Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Peccei, J. S., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J. (2004). *Language, Society and Power* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Trudgill, P. (2001). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society, Fourth Edition* (4th ed.). Penguin Books.

Venuti, L. (2004). The translation studies reader. Routledge.

Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to sociolinguistics, (Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics)* (5th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.