Voiceless polyphony of the feminine voices in "Happiness, Like Water". Strategies to translate subtly feminist texts

Bezgłośna polifonia kobiecych głosów w „Szczęście, Jak woda". Strategie wykorzystywane do subtelnego tłumaczenia feministycznych tekstów

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Keywords

Translation strategy, feminist translation, analytical translation, translation bias, subtle feminist literature, Chinelo Okparanta

Słowa kluczowe

strategie tłumaczeniowe, tłumaczenia feministyczne, tłumaczenia analityczne, stronniczość w tłumaczeniu, subtelna literatura feministyczna, Chinelo Okparanta

Abstract

This paper focuses on the possible strategies a translator may choose to exploit when seeking to convey a feminist message which in the original text is implicit. Taking the example of the translation of *Happiness, Like Water*, a collection of short stories written by Chinelo Okparanta, the article explores means of transposing literary representations of the violence women endure through submission to husbands, superstition, religion and traditions. The notion of translation strategy is discussed at some length, focusing on its necessarily global and conscious nature. Feminist approaches to translating are also discussed.

Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia możliwe strategie translatorskie, które mogą być wykorzystane przy tłumaczeniu tekstów gdzie przekaz feministyczny jest ukryty. Na przykładzie zbiorów opowiadań *Happiness* i *Like Water* autorstwa Chinelo

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Okparanta, pokazano sposoby literackiego transponowania przedstawień przemocy wobec kobiet; przemocy, której kobiety doświadczają z powodu uległości wobec męża, przesądów, religii czy tradycji. Pojęcie strategii translatorskich, zwłaszcza feministycznej, jest tutaj również do pewnego stopnia przedstawione ze szczególnym naciskiem na ich globalną i świadomą naturę.

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Introduction

Feminism[1] takes on various forms both in literature and translation. In literary texts, feminist authors may express their point of view explicitly, for example through the narrator or a character in a work of fiction. However, implicit feminist messages or hints at such messages – which are meant to be perceived by the reader – may lurk behind the dialogues, plot or narrative voice. In translations of literary works, feminist translators may choose between several different strategies in order to reproduce the feminist dimension of a text, or may decide to add a feminist touch to works which are non- or anti-feminist[2].

This paper deals with translating a work with a muted, yet clear feminist impact: *Happiness, Like Water* (2013), a collection of short stories by Chinelo Okparanta about the life and fate of Nigerian women – some of whom are lesbians – both in Nigeria and in the United States. Superstition, religion and tradition pervade the discourses of many of the female characters, who end up conveying and standing for values and perspectives which are detrimental to themselves and other women. Even though each of these short stories features one or more women whose (mostly) dire fates cannot escape the reader's notice, explicit feminist claims are hardly ever made. The general impression is that there is very little feminine discourse in the women's words. I will set out in detail the strategy I applied when translating some of these short stories, explaining how I tried to calibrate each one in accordance both with the original and the expected response of the target-language readers. My aim was to help target-language readers see how social conventions can reduce people to silence by preventing them from speaking through their own voices.

In the first section I will clarify the notion of "translation strategy". The second section will focus on the various strategies a translator might consider

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[1] In the following text, the word *feminism* is taken in its broadest sense, and refers to any attitude inviting people to reflect on or challenge the social, political or economic roles of women, as compared to those of men, with a view to promoting equality of the sexes.

[2] I would like to thank Lance Hewson, who corrected the original version of this article.

applying, including when the feminist dimension is almost totally implicit, relying on the reader's sensitivity to discover the imbalance of powers. The third section will explore how the feminine voice is dealt with in the various short stories of *Happiness, Like Water* and how it can be rendered in translation.

1. Translation strategies

A translator wishing to convey a feminist content might choose among various strategies. Before discussing them, let us clarify what the term translation strategy means[3].

As Yves Gambier explains in the *Handbook of Translation Studies*, "strategy" is quite an ambiguous term in the context of translation studies:

> it is not only used in different ways, but it also seems to be in competition with a dozen other terms (in English): procedures, techniques, operations, changes, shifts, methods, replacements, etc. (Gambier 2010:412)

Gambier stresses the fact that most of these terms are used without having been properly defined. He himself opposes

> [f]irstly what the military call strategy or a planned, explicit, goal-oriented procedure or programme, adopted to achieve a certain objective (with priorities, commands, and anticipations), and secondly tactics, or a sequence of steps, locally implemented. (Gambier 2010:412)

This opposition makes sense: while a strategy is a matter of design and planning, tactics have more to do with implementation.

However, the concept of strategy is even less clear-cut than the above quotation suggests: many authors, when mentioning translation *strategies*, in fact refer to mere translation *choices* (which can be a simpler idea than that of "tactics", mentioned above). There seems to be confusion between procedure and strategy. Now, while a procedure can be applied in the framework of a strategy, it is never a strategy in itself.

The seven lexical, morphosyntactic or semantic procedures defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) in the context of English-French translation[4] are often mistaken for strategies. But the problem is even broader: very often,

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3   This section partly reflects a relevant passage of my thesis, written in French, *Affinités respectives de l'anglais et du français en matière d'argumentation: étude comparative dans la perspective de la traduction* (Fontanet, 2012: 306–310).

4   That is, borrowing, *calque* and literal translation ("direct translation") and transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation ("oblique translation").

the term *strategy* refers improperly to a mere decision, as if translators were applying an independent strategy each time they solve a problem.

To return to Gambier's distinction, I would like to refer to the first documented entry of the word strategy in an English dictionary. The *New and enlarged military dictionary in French and English* by Charles James, is careful to oppose tactic and strategy:

> *Strategy* differs materially from *tactic*; the latter belonging only to the mechanical movement of bodies, set in motion by the former. One is, in fact, the soul, the other, the mere body of military science. (James 1816:864)

Whereas *strategy* is associated with analysis, vision and creative planning, *tactic* is associated with implementation. A strategy indeed implies planning different moves and coordinating stages in order to reach an objective. The *Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary* (1997:778) gives the following definitions of the word *strategy*:

1. the science or art of planning and directing large-scale military movements and operations.
2. the use of or an instance of using this science or art.
3. the use of a stratagem.
4. a plan or method for achieving a specific goal: *a strategy for getting ahead in the world.*

Choosing a strategy implies having defined a goal and identified moves or operations in order to achieve it. Strangely, many authors have a quite limited view of the notion. Wolfgang Lörscher's definition, which is often quoted, could refer to any move enabling a translator to solve a translation problem:

> a translation strategy is a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language into another. (Lörscher 1991:76)

Lörscher sees a translation strategy as a mere – and possibly unconscious – procedure to solve a local problem. He fails to distinguish between a proper strategy, which is necessarily global, and its local implementation through a particular solution.

Lucía Molina and Amparo Hurtado Albir[5] trace back the "conceptual confusion between techniques and translation method" to Vinay and Darbelnet, explaining that they both

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5   In a paper aiming to clarify the notion of translation technique.

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introduced the confusion by dividing the procedures following the tradition-
al methodological dichotomy between literal and free translation. As they
worked with isolated units they did not distinguish between categories that
affect the whole text and categories that refer to small units. […]. [A] distinc-
tion should be made between translation method, that is part of the process,
a global choice that affects the whole translation, and translation techniques
that describe the result and affect smaller sections of the translation. (Molina
and Hurtado 2002:506)

Vinay and Darbelnet did not actually talk about strategies, but their "di-
rect" and "oblique" procedures were considered later as strategies by some
of their followers. The distinction between general and specific problems is
made by Andrew Chesterman. In *Memes of Translation*, he considers that
there are two levels of strategies: global and local ones.

> It therefore seems helpful to distinguish between two levels of strategy […].
> At the more general level, where the problem to be solved is something like
> "how to translate this text or this kind of text", we have "global strategies".
> […] At the more specific level, on the other hand, the problem to be solved is
> something like "how to translate this structure / this idea / this item"; here we
> have "local strategies". (Chesterman 1997:90)

According to the definition I discussed above, only his global strategies
seem to qualify as strategies, because the local ones are merely one-off solu-
tions. And when one examines his examples, it appears that even his global
strategies are nothing more than decisions that affect the whole of the work,
rather than full-blown strategies:

> An obvious example of a global strategy is the translator's initial decision
> about the general nature of the appropriate relation between target and source
> texts, about "how freely" to translate, about what kinds of intertextual resem-
> blance should be given priority. Another example might be the general issue
> of dialect choice: whether (and how) to represent source-text dialects. And
> another might concern decisions about whether an older source text should
> be modernized or historicized in translation […]. (Chesterman 1997:90)

Chesterman seems to admit that a translator deciding on how freely he
or she will translate a text, or how to render a dialect, is defining a global
strategy. Even though these decisions do impact the whole work, they remain
preliminary *decisions* and are only components of a strategy. Chesterman's
definition implies that a translator could apply various strategies while trans-
lating a single text. Indeed, in his example, three different strategies could be
applied to the same text.

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Moreover, Chesterman defines a translation strategy as follows in his paper "Causes, Translations, Effects":

> a standard, well-tried textual solution to a particular kind of translation problem, either one that is specific to a given source-target pair, or one that applies more generally. (Chesterman 1998:214)

Here, he assimilates a strategy to a systematic textual solution. On the one hand, Chesterman thinks any preliminary decision that is consistently applied to the totality of the work is a strategy; and on the other hand, he seems to imply that a strategy may be chosen between given options, *off the peg*. His strategies are nothing more than methods or potential solutions that may or may not be applied.

Regarding *local strategies*, Chesterman first outlines the "mainly syntactic/grammatical strategies": literal translation, loan translation, transposition, unit shift, phrase structure change, clause structure change, sentence structure change, cohesion change, level shift and scheme change (Chesterman 1997:94). He then lists what he calls the "mainly semantic strategies": synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, converses, abstraction change, distribution change, emphasis change, paraphrase and trope change and other semantic changes (*ibid*: 101‑102). Finally, he defines the "mainly pragmatic strategies": cultural filtering, explicitness change, information change, interpersonal change, illocutionary change, coherence change, partial translation, visibility change, transediting and other pragmatic changes (*ibid*: 107‑112). As he himself acknowledges, Chesterman sets up his own classification drawing on the translation processes of Vinay and Darbelnay, Catford, Nida, Malone, Stetting and Leuven-Zwart. His classification is very interesting and complete, but it contains nothing but procedures. It appears thus that his global strategies are translation decisions and that his local strategies are translation procedures or methods.

Gideon Toury gives an implicit definition of translation strategy in his chapter 'Literary Organization and Translation Strategies' (1995:147‑165). As a descriptivist, Toury defines translation strategy on the basis of the observation of practice. He sets about establishing four points:

> a) decisions made by an individual translator while s/he is translating a single text are far from erratic. Rather, even though by no means all-embracing, they tend to be highly patterned;
> b) the observed regularities of behaviour are attributable to some governing principles;
> c) the strongest of these principles originate in the target system, the one where – semiotically speaking – the translation event is initiated and whose needs it is designed to satisfy; and, finally,

d) those principles, and hence the behaviour induced by them, reflect an underlying network of relationships which, in our case, constitute a particular realization of the concept of literature and define translation as part of it; in other words, the claim is that – even though seemingly always possible – any other translational strategy would have been way out of line, and hence much more surprising. (Toury 2012:179)

From his last point (d), it appears that there is no translation without an underlying strategy: each translator applies the strategy dictated by his or her particular socio-cultural context (the "underlying network of relationships" corresponding to "a particular realization of the concept of literature" and, therefore, translation). According to him, the needs and norms of the target system are the key factors of the chosen strategy. Toury does not consider the possibility that a strategy may result from the confrontation of a translator with a text. However, most significantly, he seems to imply that there is always a strategy, and that the latter might be unconscious. What he refers to here is not a strategy, but a pattern governing decisions that are either methodical or spontaneous.

In my opinion, a translation strategy is necessarily a thoroughly conscious process: it cannot be unconscious, spontaneous or haphazard. A translator chooses a strategy after weighing different factors, different options and the potential consequences of the latter. A translation strategy is much more than a norm, a method, a translation procedure, a choice or a decision: it establishes a framework in which the latter can be defined. It might be useful to refer to the French origin of the word *strategy* here. The *Trésor de la langue française* dictionary gives the following definition of the French word *stratégie*:

> A set of coordinated actions, skilful operations or manoeuvres aimed at reaching a precise goal.[6]

A translation strategy is a set of consistent translation choices and relevant coordinated actions, which are defined on a preliminary basis and normally apply to the whole text in order to reach a goal which has been well defined. There can be no such thing as a "local strategy". At the local level, problems are solved and decisions are taken in accordance with the translation strategy.

All translations are not necessarily grounded on a strategy. On the contrary, many translators prefer to go along without having defined a proper strategy or having decided beforehand how they would deal with some of the

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6 „Ensemble d'actions coordonnées, d'opérations habiles, de manœuvres en vue d'atteindre un but précis." (Trésor de la langue française informatisé)

aspects of the text. In his article "Ethics and Choice", Lance Hewson underlines that:

> a strategy finds its expression in a choice, but actual translations are the embodiment of choices that show at best hybrid strategies, and at worst, a lack of any clearly defined strategy. (Hewson 2010:26, note 8)

In his more recent book, *An Approach to Translation Criticism,* Hewson underlines that "many translations are the result not of a translational strategy but are made up by a succession of uncoordinated solutions to the series of problems that arise" (Hewson 2011:258). Indeed, the first point to make is that there is not always a strategy behind a translation. As Hewson writes,

> The ideology lying behind many of the contemporary theoretical approaches to translating is that translators (should) have and implement translational strategies. The translator is normally assumed to be a rational individual who will approach the task of translating with a view to producing the "best" possible result. And the result is usually assumed to be at least relatively consistent – and therefore a series of passages should be reasonably representative of the whole. However, experience shows that some translators are not consistent, that they have "good" and "bad" days. (Hewson 2011:259)

As Hewson explains, it is by observing the various choices that a translator has made that one can infer his or her strategy (if one was applied). An efficient strategy must be consistent and cover the whole work. Indeed, a strategy implies that there is consistent management of different situations or problems throughout the work: the various decisions all aim at the same goal. In some cases, for example for very straightforward translation tasks, the translator can simply rely on specifications given by the client or can make do with a small number of objectives. It may be necessary to define a strategy when there are conflicting objectives or when priorities must be set. Translators may make many decisions about the way they will approach different aspects of the text (such as register, the time-frame, or the need to change intertextual references). There is a strategy if these objectives are coordinated and the translator knows when and where such elements must be considered a priority.

Thus, a strategy will not only comprise a list of decisions that are far-reaching for the whole work, but specify how they are coordinated and linked together. For instance, a translator aiming to produce a new French version of Dickens' *David Copperfield* will make decisions concerning:

- the time setting (will the plot take place precisely at the time it happens in the original or will the time setting be a bit blurred, or transposed into our time?)

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- the locus (will every place be kept as it is in the novel?). Will street names, character names and surnames, or such words as "Mr." and "Mrs" be translated?
- the register of the different characters (how each of them will speak to each other – whether any of them will have an idiolect with its lexical, syntactical and emotional characteristics
- the way the characters develop (seen in the way they express themselves)
- the way *realia* or cultural difficulties are dealt with (use of footnotes, explanations, leeway for adaptation).
- how to manage intertextual references (will they be kept as such / explained / transposed in the target context?)
- the leeway for dealing with formal effects
- the narrative voice
- the ethical stance: a possible change for ethical reasons (will the politically incorrect elements be kept, suppressed or commented on).
- …

All these elements form a strategy when the translator uses them to build a framework. If there is a strategy, the translator will know which factor is to be given first priority when there is a conflict. In other words, the translator knows what he or she will sacrifice.

Once a strategy has been defined, it is easier for translators to be consistent in their choices, but this does not make the process any easier. Each sentence – with all its various difficulties – will have to be dealt with. But it will be dealt with according to the general principle of the road map and all its specifications. And the readers will (hopefully!) not suddenly see changes in the characters, the narrative voice, the setting or the formal structure.

2. Feminist translation strategies or tactics

Can there be such a thing as a feminist translation strategy? In my view, a feminist approach is not in itself a full strategy, but only part of one. It will give the translator a certain number of bearings, but she or he will need to define other principles to rely on when dealing with aspects that are not related to sexes or genres.

2.1. Feminist approaches

Luise von Flotow mentions three feminist translation strategies: supplementing & prefacing, footnoting and "hijacking" (von Flotow 1991:74). Lieve Jooken and Guy Rooryck define *prefacing* as

the major peritextual intervention by the translator. The text is clearly voiced by someone distinct from the author and can therefore be defined as 'allographic'. The writer identifies himself [or herself] as the translator in the final lines of the preface. (Jooken and Rooryck 2011:242)

Footnoting is another traditional choice. It is a frequent mode of intervention, with the advantage that it gives the reader the possibility of interrupting (or not) his or her reading of the text, so that the break remains optional.

Von Flotow explains that *supplementing*

means serious interference with the text. Supplementing […] is one of the most positive aspects of translation. […] It compensates for the differences between languages, or constitutes "voluntarist action" on the text. (Von Flotow 1991:74–75)

Supplementing is thus interference justified by the need to reflect what is in the original.

About *Hijacking*, von Flotow explains that a translator having *hijacked* the text has "appropriated it" and "made it her own to reflect her political intentions" (*ibid*. 79). According to her, in the case of hijacking, "the translator is writing in her own right" (*ibid.* 79–80). Sherry Simon underlines that this approach is more controversial and problematic because it implies that the feminist translator can appropriate a text devoid of feminist intentions (Simon 1996:15).

In my opinion, as hijacking corresponds to an explicit intervention by the translator, it is an activist gesture that goes beyond the realm of translation: it is an act of manipulation and, as such, raises an ethical problem if nothing has been done to inform the target readers that parts of the text may misrepresent the original.

Hijacking is often portrayed as the way in which a translator modifies a text by adding comments or word play. Feminist hijackers may however act on the content level as well. A feminist translator wishing to provide a better balance between men and women could decide to reverse men's and women's roles in a work of fiction, which would imply changing names and pronouns. In some circumstances, this reversal would result in improbable situations, such as scenes where biological functions (like being pregnant for a women or growing a beard for a man) or descriptions of parts of the body would introduce a contradiction. Pushed that far, translation would become an activity aiming to propagate the views of the translator: the original text would be nothing more than a pretext for propaganda.

As an ideological gesture or act of propaganda, hijacking may well be applied by any type of activist. Feminists who advocate such an approach could

not attack a detractor who would totally modify the meaning of their texts using the same principles.

Jean Delisle, who has compared the practices of medieval and feminist translators, points out that both types of translators appropriate the text, claim their legitimacy as translators, write didactic and standardized prefaces, make themselves seen in the language itself and are visible in the translated text[7] (Delisle 1993:205). We could see them as empowered translators in the case of supplementing, prefacing and footnoting and add a tendentious feature in the case of hijackers.

In my opinion, a translator willing to highlight women by using such means is no longer a translator but an activist who exploits texts as an opportunity to spread an ideology. When it comes to hijacking, I would therefore rather use the term "feminist rewriting", as does Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, who gives a full description of what she conceives as "translation as a rewriting in the feminine" (1991 – the book's subtitle). She considers her translations a political activity and plainly explains that she uses language to serve women's interests:

> Translation practice aims to make the feminine visible in language so that women are seen and heard in the world. (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:112)

Describing feminist rewriting as a struggle on the level of language, she mentions *neutralization* and *desexization*:

> Feminist writing and translating are overt political activities aimed at countering the all-male-gendered stance of language, where the referent is presumed to be male until proven…other. There are various ways to make English more inclusive of women: *neutralization* (i.e., replacing 'stewardess' by 'flight attendant') and *desexization* (i.e., using 'he/she' instead of the generic 'he' only) are the main ones. (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:113)

Translation becomes a political act. The use of the word *signature* to refer to the visibility of the feminist translator reveals that she claims authorship of the text.

> When the 'I' translating is feminist, the signature takes on political meaning. As I read it, a feminist translator's name on a translation signals that she is working from a place of commitment to a gynocentric world view and establishes her ethical stance. Translations signed by her will attempt to speak and

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7   In the original French text, Delisle lists the following features: 1. Appropriation du texte de départ. 2. Recherche d'une légitimité. 3. Schéma et didactisme des préfaces. 4. Interventions sur la langue. 5. Visibilité du traducteur ou de la traductrice dans sa traduction.

> write the feminine by means of every possible language strategy suited to the context. Again, I insist on context. The feminist translator must carefully read each text and determine its context in order to adjust her strategies according-ly. (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:152)

Lotbinière-Harwood is aware that a feminist approach cannot be applied in a monolithic way and that it needs to be integrated in the text. This is an important clarification. If the particular choices of the translator are not based on the characteristics of the source text and the cultural and linguistic needs of the target reader, the target text may not work as a translation.

What is obvious in the translation principles described by both von Flo-tow and Lotbinière-Harwood is that they do not aim at preserving the sus-pension of disbelief, which is a key to reaching the readers' emotions in a work of fiction. Reminding the readers of the presence of a translator and showing that the latter somehow manipulates the text is not merely a harmless piece of rewriting. It turns reading into a more intellectual activity and thus has an impact on the literary dimension of the work. Now, I am convinced that a literary text can do more to support the cause of women by clearly showing their situation and arousing the readers' empathy with them, rather than by giving rational arguments that do not involve the readers on the emotional level.

As I argued in the first part, a feminist approach is only part of a strategy and cannot guide the translator in all his or her decisions.

2.2. Non-sexist approaches

In my opinion, translators should always set limits to how far they are prepared to intervene in their translations. These limits are generally based on the differences between the source and target cultures: the more they dif-fer, the more adaptation may deem desirable. If translators wish to adopt an approach that takes them beyond straightforward adjustments aiming at underlining the work's main focus, if they want to teach their own lessons to their readers, they should give up translating and write their own books – why use the writing of others in order to transmit one's own message? It is not as if literary genres do offer enough options, such as essays, parodies and sat-ire, to denounce works that are gender biased and go against feminist values.

2.2.1. Cultural adjustment

If the author has not included women, elderly people or children when alluding to the general public with no intention of excluding them, but only because they are systematically neglected in the source culture, supplement-

ing the text is highly desirable when the target culture is more inclusive. Ethically, this would be acceptable if the modified element is identified as purely incidental and liable to give rise to a misconception of the work (the only reservation being that – if the author cannot be consulted – the translator's decision is based on a hypothesis concerning the author's project).

For example, it was considered normal to mention only the husband's first name on the door of the family home up to the sixties in Switzerland, so a typical nameplate might read "Mr & Mrs Mark Roth". If the nameplate was to be mentioned in passing in a novel, depending on the target culture, one could either omit the information altogether, mention "the Roth Family" or add the first name of the woman as well. Of course, the translator's intervention betrays the vision of the source text's culture. If that element has some significance, any adaptation would be undesirable. To draw a parallel, suppressing derogatory words referring to blacks while translating mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* would misrepresent the book, which is partly about the black's condition, whereas suppressing some disparaging comments about blacks while translating a nice bed-time story for children would seem beneficial, because they belong to contextual elements which are not perceived but may have a bad influence on the readers. If the translators were to reproduce non-problematized contextual element that tended to have an unnoticed racist impact they could feel that they had contributed to the dissemination of racist preconceptions.

Thus, if a particular linguistic form embodying some form of prejudice is considered standard in the source context, many translators will spontaneously suppress the biased form when translating the text into a "more democratic" culture. This is a perfectly reasonable choice, as there is neither intention nor message behind the prejudiced form. The only reason to leave it would be for the readers to grasp this phenomenon as characteristic of the source culture.

2.2.2. Correcting bias

When one of my students, Wendy Savin, was translating a book about physics, she was displeased by the fact that the author had presupposed that his readers would be men. This came to light through his choice of examples:

> Imagine that tomorrow is St Valentine's Day. You and your friend David Beckham go out shopping to buy presents for your respective wives. You enter a store and David chooses for Victoria 30 diamond chokers, 50 emerald bracelets, 60 fur coats plus some other expensive items. […] You pick up a small **bouquet of flowers**, whose price isn't marked. (Giudice 2010:58)

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Not only is the reader a male reader, but he and his friend buy very traditional gifts for their wives. After asking the author if this was done on purpose, and discovering that this was not the case, Wendy decided to rebalance the situation: in the French version she omitted the mention of the "respective wives" and changed the "small bouquet of flowers" into a little box of chocolate[8] so as to enable women not to feel excluded.

In the same book, the author almost systematically takes examples of men, such as the following, for the reader to visualise the theory of physics:

> This can be understood with the help of a simple example. A **man** sitting on a train unfolds his newspaper, reads an article, and then folds it back up. From his point of view the unfolding and folding of the newspaper occurred at the same place (the train seat) but at two different instants in time. However, **another man** standing at the railway station sees the same two events happening at different places, because the train is moving away from him. (Giudice 2010:52)

My student chose decided to translate "man" and "another man" by a more inclusive term[9]. In my opinion, by modifying these terms to avoid sexist writing she was being a fair translator. Being twenty years younger than the author, she did not really produce a feminist translation, but just intervened to readjust a balance that was missing in the original.

2.2.3. Correcting self-bias

Rather than thinking about intervening in the text to give it a feminist turn, translators might be well advised to apply some sort of quality control procedure to check that they are not themselves adding a sexist dimension to the text.

As Norman Fairclough points out, what is said or written spontaneously may be greatly influenced by prejudices that permeate language. According to him, when people speak or listen to each other, they are influenced by social conventions. However conscious and watchful people think they are,

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8   The French translation, which does not exclude a feminine "you", is as follows: "Imaginons que demain soit la Saint-Valentin. Dans cette perspective, vous allez avec votre ami David Beckham acheter des cadeaux. Vous entrez dans un magasin et il choisit pour sa femme 30 colliers en diamants, 50 bracelets en émeraude, 60 manteaux de fourrure et quelques autres articles onéreux. […] De votre côté, vous choisissez une petite boîte de pralinés, dont le prix n'est pas marqué. (Giudice, trans. p. 76)

9   In the French version "une personne" and "une autre personne". (Giudice, trans. p. 68)

they still use language in ways which are subject to social convention. And the ways in which people use language in their most intimate and private encounters are not only socially determined by the social relationships of the family, they also have social effects in the sense of helping to maintain (or indeed, change) those relationships. (Fairclough 1989:23)

Anna Strowe applies the same idea to translation:

any translation has implications for power and ideology, and even a discussion that explicitly excludes power as a framework is making an ideological decision by doing so. (Strowe 2013:134)

Language is never neutral. Rhetorical effects can enable a speaker or an argument to look attractive. In this sense, translators have a great responsibility, because they can make an idea or a person appear more or less convincing. If they are not cautious, they can convey biases. As an illustration of a counterproductive choice, let me refer to an unfortunate translation choice made a few years ago at CERN (the European laboratory for particle physics) by one of my female colleagues. CERN applies – and applied already at the time – an active policy to encourage women to choose scientific careers. This colleague had to translate into French the title of a project called "Draw me a physicist" – a project aimed at schoolchildren and launched to demonstrate to girls that scientific professions were a valuable option for them. Under time pressure, my colleague translated the title of the project as "Dessine-moi un *physicien*"[10] – that is, "Draw me a *male physicist*". It seems quite ironical that a programme that had been designed to fight against the preconception that science was for men only should have such a counterproductive name in French. Habits and representations can be treacherous. Von Flotow stresses that

[…] women located themselves in the role of the individual that is excluded, insulted or trivialized by conventional patriarchal language. From this perspective all of conventional language becomes a danger to women's confidence, self-esteem, psychological development and creativity, precisely because it is controlled and manipulated by 'malestream' institutions. (von Flotow 1997:9)

Another instance of a preconception a translator can be victim of is worth mentioning. A few months ago, I asked my students to translate a few paragraphs from a text about *stress management*:

Be more assertive. Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front

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[10]   See *CERN Bulletin*, Issue: 23/2010 & 24/2010, Mon 7 Jun 2010.

that you only have five minutes to talk. (The Robert Gordon University of Aberdeen[11])

There is no way to translate « roommate » without specifying whether the person is a girl or a boy in the singular if one chooses to use the familiar form here, because the gender is given by the French possessive article: it is either "ta" or "ton" *collocataire*. I told a student who had put the feminine form that she obviously had the prejudiced notion that women talk too much (actually, the choice of the masculine would reveal the opposite bias). This means that translators who do not question themselves enough may use biased forms. Von Flotow is therefore perfectly wise to call for gender awareness in translation:

> Gender awareness in translation practice poses questions about the links between social stereotypes and linguistic forms, about the politics of language and cultural difference, about the ethics of translation, and about reviving inaccessible works for contemporary readers. It highlights the importance of the cultural context in which translation is done. (Von Flotow 1997:14)

Culture is indeed an important factor. In my view, all types of bias that are not part of the specific features of the source text but appear only because they prevail in the source culture (as a default parameter) should normally be cut out in the target text.

Translators generally set out to serve the text and the author (which is, of course, generally a good thing), and therefore they are not neutral in their work: their sense of loyalty is in itself a bias.

I myself recently experienced the power translators can exert through language. Having been asked to translate the report of an assessment interview, I had to deal with all the details a woman gave to explain why she had filed a harassment complaint against her supervisor. As usual, I started translating the text identifying with the author (or rather the main party, because the author was the legal expert who had recorded the meeting). I noticed that the woman did not appear very consistent and was a bit awkward when expressing her grievance. Spontaneously, I improved her style, made her discourse more convincing and used words whose connotation was favourable to her. After having translated a few pages, I started to question her good faith: many details seemed to prove that she had been plotting against the man she was accusing and had tried to set her colleagues against him. Almost unawares, I started changing my translation behaviour. I tried to improve the image of the man whenever his words were reported in direct speech, and stopped improving her style and tuning down her contradictions. Before

11   http://www.rgu.ac.uk/footer/copyright-2016

Feminine voices

revising my translation, I realized the ethical significance of these spontaneous improvements and recalled that there was no way I could know who was wrong – if anyone was. I therefore decided to leave all counteractive connotations, inconsistency and clumsiness I had found in the original document in order not to favour any side. This non-intervention was very unpleasant and unnatural to me – and I had to change many improvements I had made.

2.2.4. Feminist / non-sexist translation of feminist texts

To translate a feminist text, that is a text which aims to denounce a biased gender situation, there is actually no need of an active feminist translation strategy, because the feminist content – implicit or explicit – is already in the original. Prefacing, noting and supplementing may however be useful in the event of differences between the source and target cultures.

In the following passage, Toni Morrison features a young girl who exposes the traditional conception of femininity and the way it is conveyed to a girl irrespective of her own tastes and interests:

> It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked. What was I supposed to do with it? Pretend I was its mother? I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size, and could not generate any enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. Motherhood was old age, and other remote possibilities. I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it. Picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls. (Morrison 1979:13)

In this passage, even though the young narrator does not explicitly express a feminist perspective, the readers feel that she has grown aware of the gender issue. The text undoubtedly contains social criticism, all the more efficiently as readers visualise the scene and draw their own conclusions. The narrator never states a clear-cut opinion, such as "it is a shame that adults should dictate stereotyped behaviour to children", but the readers are led to think so. The message may touch them more deeply, because emotions affect us more profoundly than intellectual elements. Such is the power of literature.

For this reason, I think the hijacking technique is all the weaker because it is perceived as intrusive and is so explicit that readers must react intellectually to it. In a literary context, this is not welcome. My feeling is that, from a literary perspective, the more implicit the feminist message is, the more powerful it will be.

2.2.5. Translation strategies applicable to subtly feminist works

What are the options for the translator when the text problematizes the condition of women, but without any explicit intervention of a narrator or character? One may think that translating the text as it appears is a safe option. What, however, is safer is for the translator to analyse how the text functions. Besides, even if what is implicit in the original obviously needs to be restored on the implicit level in the target language, the latter may have other ways of presenting implicit information. Moreover, defining a strategy can help the translator to deal with complex passages where priorities must be established.

Anne Schjoldager underlines that "[e]very time a translator is given a translation assignment, s/he needs to decide on an overall method for carrying it out" (Schjoldager 2008:67). She is, however, aware that "[e]xperienced and gifted translators probably tend to make such decisions intuitively and as a matter of routine" (*ibid.*). Translators working by instinct may successfully translate without a strategy provided that they remain consistent in the way they deal with the special features of the text and, of course, provided that their intuition is reliable. But if they have to deal with a long text, they run the risk of being influenced by external elements (such as their mood or tiredness) and can lack consistency.

As was explained in the first part of this article, defining a strategy entails having a clear idea of the overall difficulties in the text, and means that the translator sets out aims, works on the links between the various global decisions, and only then concentrates on the microtextual difficulties that occur in the text.

Since translators[12] have a deep understanding of and a good feel for both the source and the target cultures, they will find a way to express the constellation of traits underpinning the source culture in a new configuration, which is aligned with the constellation of the target culture. If they anticipate well the flexibility and receptivity of their readers, they create a new set of landmarks that preserve as many as possible of the implicit contextual source elements. They thus create a new configuration which is not just present "inside" the text they produce. It is an external framework that readers must unconsciously assemble in their minds in order to fully comprehend the target text. This new configuration should be seen as a cultural *extension* for readers, which transposes them as close to the source culture as they are presumed to be able to go. In other words, it is not the cultural context of the original, nor is it that of the target culture – it is a virtual context between

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[12]   I am referring here to the notion of "competent translators", who possess the adequate skills and works in optimal conditions (cf Hewson 2010:21‑30).

the two in which literature can take place. Fiction offers the possibility to create this virtual pluricultural paradigm where the translated text "happens". Besides, it can be an excellent way of bridging the gap between two cultures, because the very fictional nature of the story preserves it somehow against suspicion. The suspension of disbelief which it enacts allows the reader to perceive the characters and the plot more genuinely.

Subtly feminist works may therefore require a specific strategy, depending on the way the implicit meaning is best conveyed in the target culture. The less the work is anchored in the source culture, the less risk there is that some message meant to be universal in the original be misunderstood as applying only to this culture and the less it needs to be processed by the translator.

3. Feminine voices in Happiness, Like Water

Happiness, Like Water features different women of various ages dealing with deeply emotional situations – in Nigeria or in the United States – where they are not recognized for what they are and cannot voice their feelings. This collection of short stories focuses on women, but hardly any of them speak through their own voices. Most of them are permeated by the dominant voices surrounding them, and thus often stand up for values which are detrimental to them. In most of the stories, we see mothers preferring submission to their husbands, religion, superstition or tradition over their love for their own daughters or over their self-preservation. The readers discover, through the tyrannical and violent fathers, unperceptive husbands, blinded mothers and inconsiderate brothers, that social constraints and principles can be stronger than feelings that should be natural and legitimate and should have priority. The narration reveals the inadequacy of the language spoken by the characters, and especially women. The power of the text relies on the fact that the critical dimension is not explicit. The readers must draw their own conclusions and feel the deeply shocking fate of the women in the context described.

In the lesbian book blog, *The Lesbrary*, a reviewer called Casey classifies the collection of short stories as

> an unrepentantly feminist book, dealing with issues such as shadism, beauty standards, domestic violence, gender roles, class, and queer [and straight] sexuality. *Happiness* doesn't feel like an 'issue' book, though, I think because the voices of the women play such a big part in the stories.[13]

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[13]   http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/789755997

I will focus on my own attempts as a translator to recreate the full range and breadth of the violent and destructive discourses of many of the female characters whose way of seeing the world is subject to constraints imposed by violent husbands, traditionally oriented mothers, and dubious norms or social conventions.

The "feminist message" of *Happiness, Like Water* is fully exposed, but never clearly stated. It remains latent and implicit, lurking in the text until the readers unveil it by themselves in order to construe it. As a translator,

I felt that my role was to show women's inabilities to stand for their rights and gain recognition. Contrary to what feminist translation strategies are associated with, my intention was to reproduce what I considered a key aspect of the stories: the fact that readers can discover and analyse the situation by themselves, without being told what they should conclude.

All the short stories portray women ignoring their own and their daughters' needs, ideals and nature. It was clear to me that I had to bring out the violence endured by the main characters through submission to violent husband, superstition, religion, tradition and other social norms.

The different short stories do not function in the same way in terms of narrative voice, perspective and effects. Thus, there are objectives concerning the whole collection and objectives for each story. To define a strategy, I had to reflect on the prioritization of these objectives.

My various objectives were:

- to denounce the situation of women, as does the original,
- to respect the effect of intrusive toxic voices within female speech and thoughts,
- to keep the feminist dimension obvious, but implicit,
- to reproduce the orality and colloquialism of the narrative voice,
- to mirror the stylistic components,
- to give the Nigerian touch to dialogues (which implied not adapting names or food items, creating a parallel sociolect by imitation, and freely translating sayings to restore rhythms and assonances),
- to offer a pleasant reading experience to the target audience (which implied mitigating or softening some effects, such as repetitions and the use of nouns instead of pronouns when the French sentences became overloaded in order to keep the stories readable),
- to maintain the omnipresence of Nigerian traditional clothes and food items as an overt though unspoken expression of the migrants' identity.

I needed to decide which had to take precedence over the others in case of conflict. For example, two conflicting aims I had to handle throughout

the book were the desire to reproduce the very oral, repetitive and rhythmic style and the necessity to offer a pleasant reading experience that was neither tedious nor boring.

Moreover, it appeared to me that I had to decide whether I wanted to focus the critique on

- the unequal situation of Nigerian women,
- the unfair treatment women are prone to receive in any country, or
- the unfair treatment any type of human being in general, irrespective of their sex, can be exposed to.

I did not especially target women readers, because I hoped that men also would read the stories and understand what is at stake here.

One of the difficulties was to balance the critique of Nigerian tradition: there is a strong social critique, but a critique emanating from a Nigerian is to be interpreted differently from one of a non-Nigerian. There is often an obvious tenderness and respect for what is not directly criticised in the context.

Another objective was to avoid any contemptuous interpretation that disparaged Nigerian values, while keeping the true Nigerian context. For instance, the social pressure around women's child-bearing duty (portrayed as social violence) pervades several of the short stories (*Wahala*!, *Story, Story*! and *America*). While translating them, and whenever faced with different ways of conveying the meaning, I generally ruled out derogatory words (for example adjectives with a negative connotation) when describing an oppressive character (in general the main character's mother or husband), but chose words evocative of the full emotional charge to describe the wife's feelings or her difficult situation. I wanted the readers to fully feel the unjust lot of women without restricting the guilt to Nigerian people or their tradition. My aim was to give the readers the opportunity to dissociate the criticism I had found in the text from its "foreign origin" and apply it to their own social context.

Even though it definitely constitutes the background of the stories, I did not want to over-emphasise the Nigerian context (or the American context in some of the stories), because, by making it merely a denunciation of social and cultural inadequacies in Nigeria, I would have encouraged my readers to refrain from questioning themselves more directly. Just like the author, I wanted the stories to suggest to readers that, in certain circumstances and like any group of oppressed people, women may become the very instrument of their own ill-treatment, being totally unaware that they are voiceless or using a voice that does not represent what they feel or are. In this case, as the translator's aim is identical to the author's, the former must counterbalance the foreignizing effect of translation: the readers should not be allowed to feel less challenged by what is denounced because the story takes place in a differ-

ent culture. Whenever the author conveys a social critique that is not strictly limited to the book's setting, the translator must find a way to depict the culture described in the book, while conveying the criticism (be it of a feminist or other nature) beyond the boundaries of the society that is described.

It seemed obvious to me that I had to keep the social critique focused on the women's status, while leaving open a wider interpretation. I wanted to avoid a condescending "post-colonial" attitude. This was reflected in my attempts to maintain the highlights of the original (epiphanies, reversals, self-destruction…) while preserving the credibility of the characters. My idea was to maintain as much as possible the dignity of the various characters so that readers would still feel personally concerned and to prevent them from considering that the situation being denounced belongs to a faraway reality. In my opinion, although the stories are set in Nigerian culture, the author's intention is to further feminist claims. It thus seemed important to consider that women's difficulties were not necessarily limited to the context: readers (both men and women) should be able to interpret the story as challenging social roles wherever they live.

Depending on the stories, my priorities were to denounce social pressure surrounding motherhood (and the banishing of women without children), male supremacy, the diktat of fair skin, religion, superstition and tradition.

Throughout the work however, the power of the text comes from the terrible silence of women. The readers experience a great frustration in front of the female characters, who endure totally unfair fates, and look on their own situation with men's eyes.

A translation strategy must integrate various parameters and define priorities between objectives. It is generally based on different "data", such as the salient aspects of the work which deserve transmitting (from the translator's point of view), the profile of the target reader of the translation (as is explained to or believed by the translator), the constraints linked with the medium, the genre and the foreseeable context in which the target reader is likely to read the translation. Another important parameter is the cultural difference between source and target cultures or, more precisely, the difference in variation between the world of the plot / or of the subject matter and the world of the target reader. For example, German translators dealing with an Italian book will consider their work differently if the book is about Germany (the target culture), about Italy (the source culture), about Canada (a similarly foreign culture for both the source and the target readers) or about Eritrea (a foreign culture to both, but closer to Italy because of its colonial past).

The translator takes into account the status of women in the plot, her status in the source culture and her status in the target culture. Different sce-

narios are possible. My target readers were French-speaking women and men living in different countries, but most probably living in a democracy, a place where women began to fight for their rights several decades ago.

As a Swiss, educated, not religious, female translator over 50, not necessarily wishing to intervene as such in order to stand up for any of these attributes, but certainly unwilling to harm or hurt any of my kin and inevitably influenced by my personal background, I set about translating these short stories in the way I always do, with the aim of producing a text reflecting my perception of the original form and content. I had no intention of applying a feminist strategy while translating the text, but did not exclude explicitation, modifying and/or adding (which corresponds to supplementing), notably when I was faced with:

- a definitely counterproductive weakness of the original (be it formal, structural or linked with content),
- an undesirable derogatory treatment regarding anyone or anything I can sympathize with.

As an example of the first item, I noticed that in the as yet unpublished version of the original I was working on, almost all the clothes mentioned were beige. As this did not seem to be intentional and tended to weaken the credibility of the stories, I decided to change a few colours. I was comforted in my choice later on when I discovered that a similar correction had been made in the published version of the original: different colours had replaced the colour beige throughout the book.

As an example of the second item, I would naturally be reluctant to use a derogatory word to refer to someone I spontaneously identify or sympathize with if the negative connotation had no function in the text. The case did not arise in this book, but, if I were for instance to translate a text about trade barriers with the example of a "compulsive Swiss chocolate eater", I would consider omitting the adjective *compulsive* or *Swiss* so as to mention only a "compulsive chocolate eater" or a "Swiss chocolate eater".

I do not consider that it is necessary to be a feminist to translate a feminist book. Thinking the contrary would challenge the very spirit of translation. On the contrary, having too strong convictions can blind you. Eleanor Marx Aveling may be considered one of the first feminist translators and she certainly did not do a good job when translating Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. As George Steiner has written:

> Eleanor Marx was principally inspired by what she took to be the radical posture of Flaubert's book. Here was a statement of the condition of women under the suffocating reign of bourgeois hypocrisy and mercantile ideas. (Steiner 1975:395)

Eleanor Marx totally missed Flaubert's aim and social critique.

Even Karl Marx, her father, who put so much stress on ideology, was aware that it was better to hire an apt translator to translate well his *L'histoire de la commune,* because the skills of a translator were more important than his political opinions:

> […] you had better look around for a professional translator in Leipzig if you can. Since the text is not only aimed at workers, it would be silly to look for a translator inside the Party, where there is not much literary strength, that is, to consider right away that the translator should absolutely be a member of the Party.[14] (Marx 1876:549-550)

The translator's vocation is to speak for others, whoever they are, whenever and wherever they live or lived. The translator's job is precisely to feel what is in the text, gather information if they feel their own situation imposes limits to their comprehension and render whatever is in the text. The argument that you could only translate what is akin to you, if taken to extremes, would rule out that a young person could translate an old author, that a confident person might translate a shy poet, that a translator might translate a non-translator. I am deeply convinced that human nature is complex enough to contain a little of everything and that all human beings can empathise with and understand people who are very different from themselves. Translators are just a little more gifted than other people in this field. They are fundamentally versatile and flexible, and are willing to leave aside who they are, to disregard their own feelings, beliefs and convictions in order to permeate themselves with what is alien to them and then convey it further afield. There is hardly any limit to what a good translator can understand and express – even though, of course, he or she can have opinions or principles which would make them reluctant to accept some assignments.

4. Presentation of and comments on a number of the short stories

In the following section, I will show how the voiceless polyphony of the feminine voices are presented in five of the short stories: *on Ohweaeto Street*, *Wahala*, *Runs Girl*, *Fairness* and *America*.

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[14]   Original in German: "[…] unterdes täten Sie wohl, wenn möglich, sich nach einem professionellen Übersetzer in Leipzig umzusehen. Da es sich hier nicht nur um eine Schrift für das Arbeiterpublikum handelt, wäre es töricht, den Übersetzer grade innerhalb der Partei, die nicht reich an literarischen Kräften, suchen zu gehen, d.h. von vornherein von dem Grundsatz auszugehen, dass der Übersetzer ein Parteimann sein *muss*." [letter to the publisher Wilhelm Bracke dated 6 November 1876, in *Marx Engels,* Über *Sprache, Stil und* Überserzung, pp. 549-550]

4.1. On Ohweaeto Street

In this first story, the reader discovers that the fate of the main character (Chinwe) is defined by her mother, whose criteria are predominantly materialistic. Chinwe is never listened to by her mother, nor by her husband (Eze) – a man the mother surreptitiously pushed her to marry. However, the mother does seem to be a friendly person: she never explicitly imposes her will on her daughter. Everything happens very subtly, quietly, and the reader only grows more and more uneasy, witnessing how the mother encourages her daughter to marry a man who meets her (the mother's) own criteria, give up her job and live in a chic neighbourhood. In the same way, Chinwe's husband is neither violent nor abusive, but ignores his wife's aspirations, needs and wishes.

At first, the reader may think that the mother genuinely cares for Chinwe and is giving her good advice, rather than imposing her will,

Extract No 1

It was her mama who encouraged them to live there, in Ehoro's estate. The same way she had encouraged Chinwe to marry Eze. (2)	C'est la maman de Chinwe qui les a encouragés à vivre là, dans le lotissement d'Ehoro. Tout comme elle avait encouragé Chinwe à épouser Eze. (6)

The repetition of *encouraged* is the first hint that the mother may have an excessive say in her daughter's personal decisions, but the seemingly innocuous tone of the narrative tends to attenuate the impact of her interference. In the translation, I tried to keep the familiar tone to convey the impression that someone was narrating orally Chinwe's story.

The fact that it is not possible to translate the possessive adjective *her* by a possessive adjective in French with the same extension[15] indicating the gender of the owner obliged me to specify who the latter was, so that more proper nouns appear in the translated sentence than in the original. In spite of my objective to "offer a pleasant reading experience to the target audience", which would theoretically lead me to soften the effect of repetitions, I complied with my first priority, which – except in case of absolute necessity – was by default to enable the reader to receive as much information as the original provides. Besides, I ended up compromising and producing a somewhat heavy sentence, which I felt I could do since I had generally lightened the style in the rest of the story.

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[15]   At this point of the story, the readers might be misled by the ambiguity of the French word *sa*, which does not indicate whether the person the narrator alludes to is the mother of the woman or the man).

The influence of the mother gradually becomes a pattern, and the reader starts to feel more and more uneasy:

Extract No 2

That evening with Eze standing out there, talking about beans and garri and akamu, her mama remarked on the way that Eze's shirt and trousers were always so perfectly ironed. That was the way Chinwe's papa's shirt and trousers also used to be, she said, those days he worked as a grammar school teacher. (5)	Ce soir-là, tandis qu'Eze se tenait là et leur parlait des *niébés* et du *gari* et de *l'akamu*, la maman de Chinwe a relevé que, vraiment, la chemise et les pantalons d'Eze étaient toujours parfaitement repassés. Tout comme l'étaient la chemise et les pantalons du Papa de Chinwe, à l'époque où il travaillait comme maître d'école. (9-10)

The future husband is seen through the eyes of the mother, who judges him by reference to her own life and criteria, while there is not much information about Chinwe's own wishes and feelings. The mother's voice is always mediated by the narrator, who is not identifiable but is understood by the readers to have heard the story told by Chinwe herself, thanks to little clauses such as:

> —at least, so Chinwe tells me (2)
> This last fact, Chinwe told me herself. (6)
> Sometimes, Chinwe tells me (7)

The constant use of the word "mama" instead of "mother" reveals that the narrator adopts Chinwe's own perspective, but narrated by means of the voice of her mother and, to a lesser extent, of her husband. Gradually, the readers realize that Chinwe has never been heard by her relatives and that she does not actually have a voice of her own, because her mother's voice (which stands for values which are not Chinwe's) has completely permeated her.

The influence of the mother is subtly suggested in passages such as the following:

Extract No 3

It was after their wedding that Chinwe's mama encouraged them to live in Ehoro's Estate. By this time, Chinwe had given up her teaching job 'to take on more fully the role of a wife,' as her mama liked to explain it. Eze was the one who insisted on this to begin with (after all, they	C'est après leur mariage que la maman de Chinwe les a encouragés à aller vivre dans le lotissement d'Ehoro. Chinwe avait déjà cessé d'enseigner «pour mieux jouer son rôle de femme», comme sa maman aimait l'expliquer. Eze était celui qui avait insisté là-dessus au départ : après tout,

planned on having children soon and who would take care of the children if Chinwe kept up that job of hers?). Her mama had, of course, agreed. (9)	ils avaient l'intention d'avoir bientôt des enfants, et qui s'occuperait des enfants si Chinwe gardait son travail ? Sa maman était bien sûr du même avis. (14)

My translation of "the role of a wife" by "son rôle de femme" is questionable. In the original, it is clear that the mother is referring to Chinwe's duty towards her husband. The *rôle de femme*, in French, can mean the same (all the more so because the wedding has been mentioned a little earlier), but it could as well be interpreted as "her role as a woman": in this sense, it implies that women's duty to bear and raise children is not only something she owes to her husband, but to herself and society.

As far as I can remember, I rejected the French word épouse[16] (whose meaning is very close to the English *wife*), because it has a legal and literary connotation and did not really seem compatible with truly colloquial discourse. However, by so doing, I introduced an ambiguity there. This choice tends actually to portray an even more revolting vision of women, because it reduces the female role to that of a mother.

One sees as well that there is a kind of bond between the husband (Eze) and the mother: they associate to persuade Chinwe to forsake her professional life. It is said that the husband was the first one to insist on her giving up her job. And the decision seems to be shared between him and his mother-in-law: "Her mama had, of course, agreed." Chinwe has no voice in the matter. She slips unawares into the role that they have decided she should play.

Chinwe even changes religion – a little more reluctantly – in order to please both her husband and her mother.

Extract No 4

By then, Chinwe had been baptized a Jehovah's Witness, but it was a thing she had done out of duty to Eze. He had insisted on it, had even grown cross with her when she appeared to suggest otherwise. After all, he insisted, it had been a condition to the marriage from the beginning. And so Chinwe conceded. Of course, her concession pleased her mama. (12)	À cette époque, Chinwe avait déjà été baptisée témoin de Jéhovah, mais elle l'avait fait par sens du devoir envers Eze. Il avait insisté, s'était même mis en colère lorsqu'elle avait fait mine d'envisager de ne pas le faire. Après tout, avait-il souligné, cela avait été une condition pour le mariage dès le départ. Et Chinwe avait donc consenti. Bien sûr, sa maman s'en était félicitée. (17-18)

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[16]   According to the *Grand Robert de la langue française*, épouse is a legal or literary word, which is however used in current, but not popular language, in order to replace "femme" (whose meaning is close to the English "woman") in case of ambiguity.

Among the various facets I particularly wished to reproduce was the absence of any judgement or accusation. The implicit violence of the mother and the husband is exposed to the readers through the very absence of criticism on Chinwe's part: she only accepts what others have chosen for her. To me, it was important to reproduce the fact that until almost the end of the story, Chinwe is not critical and remains unaware of her total absence of free will. My strategy, which was very easy to apply, consisted in reproducing the same absence of judgement and accusation, so that the readers discover by themselves how Chinwe is being abused by the ones who pretend to love her.

In great contrast to the mother's and the husband's attitude, the narrator faithfully echoes Chinwe's voiceless perspective. Through the narrative voice, the reader discovers what Chinwe has told the narrator. Repetitions, oral effects and abundance of details and interpolated clauses show that, unlike the mother and the husband, the narrator has carefully listened to Chinwe, because the whole text is presented as a perfectly faithful account of her story. As a reader, I inferred that this narrative voice was that of a female friend of Chinwe's. I was convinced that it was a woman's voice and not a man's. Reading the very last sentence, I was extremely moved to discover that the narrative voice, which echoes so well that of Chinwe, was that of her second husband. The moving effect comes from the fact that this husband was able to acknowledge Chinwe's voice.

Extract No 5

It is an even longer time before we meet each other by chance on Ohaeto Street; and it is a bit more time before Chinwe decides – without her mother's influence – that she will try her hand at marriage again, this time by becoming my wife. (19)	Il faudra attendre encore plus de temps pour que nous nous rencontrions sur Ohaeto Street ; et encore un peu plus de temps avant que Chinwe ne décide – sans l'influence de sa mère – qu'elle va de nouveau s'essayer au mariage – cette fois en devenant *ma* femme. (17-18)

As a translator, I was set on reproducing the effect the text had produced on me as a reader. This implied not revealing who the narrator was until the very last sentence of the story.

4.2. Wahala!

This story stresses the social violence surrounding the child-bearing role of women.

Ezinne, the main character, has not got pregnant yet, even though she has been married for some time. She knows that a man generally repudiates his wife if she does not bear him a child, but seems to consider this attitude

legitimate. Early on in the short story, the reader has direct access to parts of her reflections concerning a woman (only named "Mbachus' wife" in the text) who had been unable to get pregnant for a long time, and then had a miscarriage:

Extract No 6

But then, just as unexpectedly, it was announced that she had lost the child. This loss reignited the rumours, which then persisted well beyond the day that Mbachu cast her off, beyond the day that Mbachu took another wife, even beyond the day, years later, that this new wife bore him a son. (22)	Et puis, tout aussi inopinément, on a annoncé qu'elle avait perdu l'enfant. Cette perte a ranimé les rumeurs, qui ont persisté bien au-delà du jour où Mbachu l'a répudiée, au-delà du jour où Mbachu a pris une autre femme, même au-delà du jour où, des années plus tard, cette nouvelle femme lui a donné un fils. (28)

Ezinne feels week and worried. Her mother has insisted on her going to see a healer and then cooking for all her neighbours to buy their benevolence in order to get rid of a supposed curse. Even though she never acts against the will of her mother or her husband, she seems to harbour critical thoughts:

Extract No 7

[The dinner] had been mentally exhausting too, because all the while her mind had been heavy with the knowledge that she was the subject of the dinner, that some imperfection in her was the reason for all that *wahala*, all that trouble. And what if the imperfection was not really even in her? What if it was in *him*? It was a thought that she could not dare voice. It was generally understood that such things were the fault of the woman. (23)	[Le dîner] a aussi été épuisant moralement, parce qu'il était lourd, tout du long, de savoir e savoir que le repas était organisé à cause d'elle, qu'une imperfection de sa part avait motivé tout ce *wahala*, toutes ces complications. Et si l'imperfection n'était en fait même pas en elle ? Si elle était en lui ? Cette pensée, elle n'oserait pas l'exprimer. De l'avis général, ces choses-là sont toujours la faute de la femme. (30)

Sexual intercourse is painful and stressful to Ezinne. Her husband, who talks gently to her, is influenced by his mother-in-law and systematically ends up agreeing to her plans concerning what would be best for his wife. Exhausted by the preparation of the meal, scared by the medicine woman's tales, humiliated in front of the numerous guests who all knew why they were invited, she has not got the strength, at the end of the story, to avoid sexual intercourse with her husband, who is sure that he will be able to become a father. The reader can hear Ezinne, but is provided with the husband's perspective, showing that he totally misunderstands her pain:

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Extract No 8

He thrusts. He thinks of the dibia, her cleansing of Ezinne. He thinks of the dinner, the way the guests ate gratefully, the well-wishes they gave as they left. He feels elated, optimistic. It is dark in the room, but for him there is light. 'Please,' she says again. He hears her moaning, her cries, but he hears it softer than it has been in the past – softer in the midst of all that radiance. Please. (33)	Il va et vient comme un piston. Il pense à la *dibia*, au nettoyage d'Ezinne. Il pense au dîner, aux invités, qui ont mangé, avec gratitude, aux bons vœux qu'ils leur ont adressés en partant. Il est dans l'extase, optimiste. Il fait sombre dans la pièce, mais pour lui, elle est lumineuse. – S'il te plaît, dit-elle encore. Il entend ses gémissements, ses cris, mais il les entend plus doucement que par le passé – plus doucement au milieu de cette clarté. *S'il te plaît.* (40–41)

The husband is not described as a bad person, but it is obvious that he puts tradition and social status above his wife's feelings and reputation. His desire to comply with social obligations and his faith in superstition and tradition are so strong that he simply does not perceive his wife's feelings.

Ezinne's mother (Nneka) spies on the scene from behind the door, and both husband and mother mistake the moaning caused by pain for moaning due to pleasure.

Extract No 9

Ezinne's moaning continues. It grows louder. Nneka takes in the moaning, takes in the increasing loudness of it. She nods, approvingly, happiness overwhelming. She smiles widely, because, unsurprisingly, she hears it the same way that Chibuzo does: sounds of pleasure, rather than sounds of pain. (34)	Le gémissement d'Ezinne se poursuit. Il devient plus fort. Nneka le perçoit, perçoit comme il prend de l'ampleur. Elle hoche la tête, approuvant, inondée de bonheur, avec un grand sourire. Parce que, bien naturellement, elle l'entend comme Chibuzo l'entend : exprimant du plaisir et non de la douleur (42)

The mother and the husband are both victims and propagators of harmful social conventions. For the reader, the most shocking element is that a mother's values could lead her to adopt the perspective of her son-in-law rather than that of her own daughter.

I did not want the readers to limit their potential analysis to thinking that the story revealed how African tradition is primitive and detrimental to women. My aim was to show that human beings can blind themselves to the impact that social conventions can have on them and that one is able to hurt the people one loves by projecting one's own wishes on them, to the point of

not hearing the words they say or the signs they give. This may involve broadening the message, and never choosing a word that would add a connotation incriminating the characters in order to let them appear as pawns of the social context. I paid attention to the choice of adjectives and verbs referring to the husband and the mother in order to show that they are not malevolent themselves, but are caught by cruel and powerful social beliefs and values which blind them to the needs and feelings of their most intimate loved ones.

4.3. Runs Girl

This story describes how a widow, the mother of the main character, becomes ill. She is intoxicated by superstition and religion, prays compulsively and relies on traditional beliefs to cure herself. The public medical system is totally inefficient, and private, better healthcare is too expensive for her. Her loving daughter, with whom she hardly communicates and who is motivated by love and generosity, ends up accepting to work as an escort girl one evening to pay for an operation. When she discovers this, her mother forsakes her and stops eating. The daughter does not even try to justify herself.

The trouble appears to start with a lack of communication between mother and daughter. Stressful modern activities fill poor people's time and religion fills up the social space.

Extract No 10

| I should have consoled her more. I should have told her I loved her. But how? Aside from prayers and practical exchanges, we rarely even talked those days just before she fell ill. I was busy with my studies, and she was busy with the market. (69) | J'aurais dû la consoler davantage. J'aurais dû lui dire que je l'aimais. Mais comment ? En dehors des prières et des questions pratiques, il nous arrivait rarement de parler, à cette époque, juste avant qu'elle ne tombe malade. J'étais absorbée par mes études ; elle était absorbée par le marché. (86) |

The girl tries desperately to get money to help her mother be healed, but the mother is so intoxicated with religious and superstitious beliefs that she remains out of reach.

The I-narrator never criticises her mother, whose total stubbornness and obscurantism frustrate the reader. What I needed to convey here was the total good will of the daughter and her unjust rejection by the mother whom she nonetheless pities from the bottom of her heart. The neutrality of the narrative voice, which emphasizes how human relationships are spoiled by irrational beliefs, and the portrayal of a corrupt society are the key to the

feminist message here. Again, the safest way to reproduce it was to keep the neutrality of tone and let the facts speak for themselves.

At the end, the I-narrator voices her rather submissive revolt in the form of a conclusion.

Extract No 11

And sometimes I think that if I were to be placed in a valley full of bones, I would create a new Eve, create her from a new set of bones. And I would lay sinews upon her dry bones, and flesh upon the sinews. And I would cause there to be a noise, a clicking noise, and everything would fall in place. And I would cause breath to enter in, and this new Eve would live. And this new Eve would walk amongst the trees of the garden. And she would drink from the waters of the river of the garden. And again, she would eat the forbidden fruit. But she would not be cast away from the garden, because she would be given the opportunity, just once, to ask for forgiveness. And she would be forgiven. (82-83)	Parfois je me dis que, si je devais me trouver dans une vallée remplie d'ossements, je créerais une nouvelle Ève. Je la créerais à partir d'un nouveau jeu d'os. Et je mettrais des nerfs sur ces os secs et je ferais venir de la chair sur ces nerfs. Et je ferais en sorte qu'il y ait un bruit, un cliquetis, et que chaque chose se mette à sa place. Et je mettrais en elle le souffle, et cette nouvelle Ève vivrait. Et cette nouvelle Ève se promènerait parmi les arbres du jardin. Et elle boirait de l'eau de la rivière du jardin. Et, de nouveau, elle mangerait le fruit défendu. Mais elle ne serait pas bannie du jardin, parce qu'elle aurait la possibilité, juste une fois, de demander pardon. Et elle recevrait ce pardon. (101-102)

The strength of this passage is that even though the narrator seems to ask for a very natural and little change, it appears that if this change were granted, women's position would be totally different.

To translate this passage and its intertextuality, I needed to refer to the Bible[17] and use words from the French version, even though their meaning may differ from that of the English version, because the reference to the Bible is the key element here.

4.4. Fairness

In this story, a young girl is aware that her mother is totally influenced by the American conception of good looks. The mother dislikes her own daughter's dark colour and favours the servant girl, who has a lighter skin. She has

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[17] Ezechiel 37:6 "Et je mettrai sur vous des nerfs, et je ferai venir sur vous de la chair, et je vous recouvrirai de peau; et je mettrai en vous le souffle, et vous vivrez; et vous saurez que je suis l'Éternel", translated by John Nelson Darby.

tried, in vain, to tone down her daughter's dark complexion by using all sorts of cosmetics.

Extract No 12

Papa clears his throat. 'They're both good girls,' he says. He nods at me, smiles, a weak smile. In that brief moment I wonder what he knows. Whether he knows, like I do, that it's only bias, the way Mama feels about Ekaite. Whether he knows, like I do, that the reason for the bias is that Ekaite's face reminds her of the faces she sees on her magazines from abroad. Because, of course, Ekaite's complexion is light and her nose is not as wide and her lips not as thick as mine or Eno's. I look at him and I wonder if he knows, like I do, that Mama doesn't go as far as saying these last bits because, of course, she'd feel a little shame in saying it. (42)	Papa réagit : « Elles sont toutes les deux bien, dit-il. Il me fait un petit signe de la tête, me sourit, d'un sourire ébauché. À ce bref instant, je me demande ce qu'il sait. S'il sait, comme moi, que maman a simplement un a priori pour Ekaité. S'il sait, comme moi, que son a priori repose sur le fait que le visage d'Ekaité lui rappelle les visages qu'elle voit dans ses magazines de l'étranger. Parce que, bien sûr, il est d'un ton clair et qu'elle a un nez moins épaté et des lèvres moins charnues qu'Eno et moi. Je le regarde et je me demande s'il sait, comme moi, que maman n'ose pas aller jusqu'à dire ça, bien sûr, parce qu'elle se sentirait un peu honteuse de le dire. (52)

In this short story, social criticism is voiced by a child, while the mother, like most of the other mothers in the book, is totally unaware of her biases and of the suffering she causes. Unfortunately, the daughter tries to conform to her mother's ideal all the same. The girl (the I-narrator) will end up using bleach to help the little servant's complexion to become lighter and will totally burn her face.

In this passage, I tried to keep the repetitions, the prosaic style and the simple vocabulary. I changed one detail, because of my intention to suppress all "definitely counterproductive weakness of the original (be it formal, structural or linked with content)". In the various stories, there are 12 instances of characters clearing their throats, just like there are 5 musty scents and (in the first version) 7 beige clothes. This becomes a problem when no other smell is described and no other colour is mentioned. Considering it was her first book, I decided that the father, instead of clearing his throat as so many other characters do, would just react, because I feared that these stereotypical details might undermine the credibility of the book.

The main difficulty was to translate the pun present in the title[18]. The word *fairness,* that the reader first understands as referring to a moral value, actually refers to the obsessive and dangerous wish to comply with Western

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18   I chose "Le bon ton" in French.

fashion (the lightness of the skin), which, of course, is destructive to African women's identity.

4.5. America

America describes the difficult progress of a Nigerian woman in love with another woman who has left for America. Her father is sympathetic and her mother is a loving mother, but she is very unhappy at the idea that her daughter might not bear her grand-children and that she might become an outcast.

One evening, the mother discovers her daughter with her lover, Gloria, and reacts angrily:

Extract No 13

'A woman and a woman cannot bear children,' Mama says to me. 'That's not the way it works.' As she stomps out of the room, she says again, 'The wind has blown and the bottom of the fowl has been exposed.' (90)	– Une femme et une femme ne peuvent pas avoir d'enfant, me dit maman. Ça n'est pas comme ça que ça marche. Tandis qu'elle quitte la pièce en tapant des pieds, elle répète : – Le vent a soufflé ; le croupion du caneton s'est dévoilé. (109)

The mother's arguments are pragmatic and she quotes what seems to be a Nigerian saying. The latter is not very clear in English. According to my wish to keep the Nigerian touch in the dialogues, I tried to compose a "plausible saying" consistent with other sayings I had created for the text.

In an interesting passage, the daughter reacts to the language her mother uses to refer to her relationship with her lover:

Extract No 14

Mama still reminds me every once in a while that there are penalties in Nigeria for that sort of thing. And of course, she's right. I've read of them in the newspapers and have heard of them on the news. Still, sometimes I want to ask her to explain to me what she means by 'that sort of thing', as if it is something so terrible that it does not deserve a name, as if it is so unclean that it cannot be termed 'love'. (89)	Maman continue de me rappeler de temps en temps qu'il y a des sanctions au Nigeria pour ce genre de choses. Et, bien sûr, elle a raison. Je l'ai lu dans les journaux et je l'ai entendu aux nouvelles. Tout de même, j'ai parfois envie de lui demander de m'expliquer ce qu'elle veut dire par «ce genre de choses», comme si la chose était trop terrible pour mériter d'avoir un nom, comme si elle était trop impure pour pouvoir être appelée «amour». (101-102)

Language itself mirrors the values of society. There is no name for what is condemned and considered unworthy of a human being. As a translator, I did not meet with any difficulties when it came to conveying the feminist content, because it was voiced by the I-narrator. Besides, even though the mother refers to the Nigerian legal system, the daughter's comments may be understood from a general point of view. This was compatible with my aim to denounce the unfair treatment women are prone to receive in any country

As a piece of implicit feminist writing, *Happiness, Like Water* was not too challenging to translate. However, it was very helpful to have defined a global strategy for the whole book and specific strategies for each short story when I had to prioritize between the incompatible effects that I would have wished to reproduce in the translation.

Conclusion

Before deciding on a translation strategy, the translator must define his or her goals, prioritise them, and consider the best means to reach them. Prioritising goals is important, because a translation requires constant sacrifices: it is never possible to render the full meaning, the connotations and other formal effects while respecting the pragmatic aspects of the text. Translation is a matter of choosing the least regretful or damaging loss or change.

Once the goals have been set, the definition of a strategy results from thinking through the various possibilities and potential consequences of the choices that can be considered.

In general the strategy a translator adopts can be seen to derive from an overall aim, which can itself be broken down into different constituents: 1) the desire to provide something corresponding to the socio-political notion of what translation should normally be (as expressed in Chesterman's "expectancy" norm[19]), 2) the desire to reproduce the appeal of the original, 3) the need to find a way to reproduce as far as is possible what he or she loves, feels or finds in the original.

In my opinion, there is no need for feminist strategies when it comes to translation, because translators feel what is at stake in the text and deal with its message – ideological or not – in an adequate manner.

In my view, literature's great power stems from the emotion it can generate in its readers. Therefore, enabling readers to identify with a powerless, benevolent woman may have a much greater impact than writing an essay on the condition of women. While translating a feminist work, the approach I would consider the most appropriate would be to present the characters as they appear in the original (in the case of *Happiness, Like Water,* this means

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[19]   See Chesterman 1997, especially Chap. 3: "From memes to norms", 51–86.

presenting women in their candour, with their strength or fragility, according to context, so as to underline how much they are trapped). A certain leeway must be applied in order to take cultural differences and target readers' receptivity into account.

In conclusion, I would stress that all types of intervention that create a distance from the characters or that appeal to the intellectual response of the readers lessen the effect of the work and may simply be counterproductive.

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