

## *Translating Feminist Literary Theory into Arabic*

### *Tłumacząc feministyczną teorię literacką na arabski*

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#### **Keywords**

feminist translation; strategies; feminisation; visibility; voice; authority; simpatico

#### **Słowa kluczowe**

tłumaczenie feministyczne, strategie, feminizacja, widoczność, głos, zrozumienie

#### **Abstract**

This paper is informed by feminist translation as theory and practice, in the sense of feminist translation as an extension of feminist writing. It is based on the assumption that the translator's feminist position (or lack of it) influences the translation of a feminist text; and it attempts to answer several questions: What identifies a feminist discourse? What are the intersections between feminist theory and translation studies? Which translation strategies help preserve the feminism of a text? What are the feminist translation strategies that can be adopted in the translation of feminist texts into Arabic? What makes feminist translation a political act? This paper is, therefore, divided into three main parts. The first part discusses the issues related to the translation of feminist discourses and feminist translation strategies. In the second part, the paper addresses various issues related to feminist translation praxis, with particular reference to the intersections between feminist theory and translation studies, as manifested in the notions of visibility, foreignisation and *simpatico/simpatika* translation. The third part is based on a case study; namely the translation of feminist thought into the Arabic language. The example used here is that of a Reader in Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism published in Arabic, consisting of a selection of

articles published in English on various aspects of feminist literary studies. The paper explores the strategies used in translating these articles into Arabic. The paper ends with concluding remarks on feminist translation praxis as knowledge-production and reflects on feminist translation as a political act, with particular reference to the Egyptian/Arab context.

### **Abstrakt**

Niniejszy artykuł odnosi się do teorii i praktyki tłumaczenia feministycznego, a traktując tłumaczenie jako formę wypowiedzi feministycznej opiera się na tezie, iż feministyczne stanowisko (lub jego brak) tłumacza/tłumaczki ma wpływ na tłumaczenie tekstów feministycznych. Wobec tego artykuł próbuje odpowiedzieć na następujące pytania: czym wyróżnia się dyskurs feministyczny? Gdzie dochodzi do zetknięcia teorii feministycznej z translatoryką? Jakie strategie tłumaczeniowe pomagają zachować feministyczne cele tekstu? Jakie feministyczne strategie tłumaczeniowe można stosować przy tłumaczeniu feministycznych tekstów na język arabski? Jak tłumaczenie feministyczne staje się aktem politycznym?

Artykuł podzielony jest na trzy główne części. Część pierwszą stanowi dyskusja dotycząca tłumaczenia dyskursów feministycznych oraz strategii feministycznego tłumaczenia. Druga omawia wiele kwestii związanych z praktyką tłumaczenia feministycznego, gdzie dochodzi do styku teorii feministycznej z translatoryką i dlatego odnosi się na przykład do koncepcji 'wizualności' (visibility), 'obcości' (foreignisation), oraz tłumacza/tłumaczki 'sympatycznego/sympatycznej' (simpatico/simpatica). Trzecia część artykułu to studium przypadku jakim jest tłumaczenie myśli feministycznej na język arabski. Analizie został poddany, przetłumaczony na język arabski a pierwotnie wydany w języku angielskim, zbiór esejów z zakresu feministycznych badań literackich. Artykuł zajmuje się więc analizą strategii używanych przy tłumaczeniu tychże tekstów feministycznych na język arabski. W podsumowaniu, praca usiłuje podkreślić fakt, że tłumaczenie tekstu feministycznego niejako rozpowszechnia myśl feministyczną w języku arabskim, oraz sugeruje iż takie tłumaczenie jest niemal aktem politycznym zwłaszcza w kontekście egipsko-arabskim.

## Translating Feminist Literary Theory into Arabic

### Introduction

In an inspiring lecture recently delivered at a conference on Women in Translation, Luise von Flotow traced the development of feminism in translation, moving from feminist praxis into gender approaches reaching transnational feminist studies – a process parallel to the development of feminism itself.<sup>1</sup> Women's presence in translation, however, does not only manifest itself within several historical phases, but extends women's centrality across five areas of feminist translation inquiry, which Flotow identified in the following terms: women as translators, women's texts in translation, feminist discourses and metaphors of translation, women in the history of translation, and feminism and theories of translation. While touching on various aspects of Flotow's paradigm of feminist translation, this paper seeks to address some theoretical issues around the intersection of feminist theory with translation studies, with particular reference to the author's experience as translator of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism into the Arabic language.

The paper is, therefore, divided into three main parts. In the first part I am concerned with the feminist discourse and its translation. Relying on feminist translation theory, the paper addresses here the specificity of translating feminist discourse, and the feminist translation strategies developed and theorized by the pioneer feminist translators/theoreticians Barbara Godard and Luise von Flotow. The second part stops at the intersections between key concepts in translation studies and feminist theory. I particularly consider Venuti's notions of visibility, foreignisation, and *simpativo* from a feminist perspective, towards an understanding of the development of feminist translation strategies, that lead to the emergence of a feminist translation praxis grounded in both feminist and translation theories. In the third part of the paper, I reflect on my own translation practice using one concrete case study; namely, my translation of a selection of foundational articles and essays in English in the field of feminist literary criticism. I also refer to my attempts at feminizing the Arabic language of the target text in lieu with the source text; without disrupting Arabic grammatical conventions. The challenge here is

<sup>1</sup> Luise von Flotow, "Translating Women, Transnationally: the Challenges of International Women's Studies", Plenary Lecture, Second International Translation Conference: Women in Translation, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland, 14 October 2015.

to adopt foreignisation and feminisation without alienating the reader. The paper concludes with an assertion of the activist dimension in feminist translation, viewing it as an expression of feminist agency and a political act.

## 1. Translating feminist discourse

### 1.1. Feminist discourse

A feminist critical reflection on the translation of either feminist or non-feminist texts requires an informed understanding of feminist discourse in terms of the relationship between feminism and language – ideology and representation. In her groundbreaking “Theorizing Feminist Discourse/ Translation”, Barbara Godard identifies various features of feminist discourse that can be listed as follows. First, she states that “[w]omen’s discourse is double; it is the echo of the self and other”, and adds that this dialogic dimension reflects itself in the feminist discourse which “works to subvert the monologism of the dominant discourse” (Godard 88). In other words, feminist discourse carries multiple voices: the voice of women’s perspective and experience on the one hand and that reflecting the mainstream patriarchal norms and values on the other. Second, the feminist discourse highlights the “muted discourse” and tends to displace “the dominant discourse” (Godard 90). In this sense, the feminist discourse involves a conscious process of questioning the constructions of language and meaning. Third, the translation of the feminist discourse “is production, not reproduction”, and the act of translation is one of re/writing and transformation rather than equivalence (Godard 90, 91).

The feminist notion of “difference” lies at the centre of feminist translation praxis, where the concomitant values of multiplicity, variation and individuation replace the traditional translation conventions of equivalence, mimesis and transparency. Godard refers to feminist translation in terms of “womanhandling” which she explains as follows:

The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning, who advances a conditional analysis. ... The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes – even in a preface. (Godard 94)

Godard’s notion of translation as re/writing was a groundbreaking contribution to the emergence of theorizing about feminist translation praxis.

Godard's notion of 'womanhandling' is defined in terms of self-assertion and visibility in the texts – notions that forcefully collided with the traditional conventions of translation practice based on the ideas of invisibility and equivalence. Godard's experience as both feminist and translator helped her develop her theoretically informed approach to translation, thus laying the foundations towards the further development and establishment of feminist translation theory and practice.

## 1.2. Feminist translation strategies

Building on the work of early feminist translation theorists and practitioners of the 1980s, Luise von Flotow develops the notion of feminist translation and lays out the feminist translation strategies that emerge from the feminist praxis manifested in the translations and commentaries of Barbara Godard and Nicole Brossard, among others. Flotow defined feminist translation in terms of "the method of translating the focus on and critique of 'patriarchal language' by feminist writers in Quebec" (Flotow 1991, 72). This raises two main points: feminist translation is an extension of feminist writing in the first place, and feminist translation is a method that includes various strategies. Having offered a historical overview of the emerging avant-garde feminist literary voices, which led to the concomitant emergence of feminist translation in the bi-lingual Canadian context, Flotow proceeds to identify and explain three feminist translation strategies: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and 'hijacking'.

Flotow gives examples of supplementing from translation from French into English. One such example is the case of Howard Scott's translation<sup>2</sup> when he resorts to supplementation in English to produce the following phrase 'The guilty one must be punished, whether she is a man or a woman'. The anomaly embedded in the phrase seeks to question the patriarchal tendency towards punishing women for abortion, instead of the more egalitarian gender-sensitive perspective that involves both men and women (Flotow 1991, 75-76). Feminist translators also assert their visibility in the translations by including prefaces and footnotes. Prefaces are used as spaces for their reflection on their translation challenges, options, choices, and strategies; while footnotes are used for particular detailed explanations of incidents of gender-oriented supplementation, explanation or other instances requiring gendered decision-making in the translation process (Flotow 1991, 76-78). Flotow further appropriates the notion of 'hijacking' which was used by a critic of feminist translation, accusing the translator of having hijacked

<sup>2</sup> Flotow brings to our attention the fact that Howard Scott is the only male translator who described himself as a feminist translator (Flotow 1991, 71).

the text instead of rendering it in another language. Flotow, however, considers the act of ‘hijacking’ a text a form of feminist intervention via the feminisation of language in the process of translation to produce a text in which not only the translator, but women are visible, and reflecting the translator’s feminist stance and “political intentions” (Flotow 1991, 79).

Flotow further develops her theory of feminist translation in her book *Translation and Gender* (1997), which addresses translation in relation to feminist history and theory, using gender as her category of analysis.<sup>3</sup> She defines her endeavor in the following terms: “By describing some of the links and inter-connections between gender issues and translation studies, I hope to inform, stimulate discussion and encourage further research into the intersections of these two fields” (Flotow 1997, 2). Despite her emphasis on gender studies, it is in this book, however, that feminist translation is articulated as a theory, not merely a methodology, and as praxis where translation practice is directed by feminist thought. Feminist translation, thus, becomes a space for feminist inquiry, experimentation, revision, re/writing and intervention.

## 2. Intersections: feminist translation praxis

In this part, I will be reflecting on the intersections of feminist theory and translation studies. Particular consideration is given here to several established notions in translation studies, thinking about them from a feminist perspective. For example, Venuti’s notions of visibility, foreignisation and *simpatico* translation from a feminist perspective are of great significance in this context. My choice of Venuti is based on his socio-cultural approach to translation, and his critique of traditional translation conventions and practices. I will be focusing in the following sections on the intersections between translation concepts and feminist values as manifested in the strategies of visibility, foreignisation and affinity.

### 2.1. Visibility, voice and authority

In his study of the interrelatedness between invisibility and transparency in translation, Lawrence Venuti offers a critique of the invisibility of translators in translated texts, in the name of transparency, and states that transparency is conventionally seen as “the authoritative discourse for translating,

<sup>3</sup> The mid-1990s witnessed a shift from feminist approaches to gender analysis. This was reflected in Translation Studies as well, as around the same time when Flotow published her book *Translation and Gender* (1997), Sherry Simon published her book *Gender in Translation* (Routledge 1996).

whether the foreign text was literary or scientific/technical” (Venuti 1995, 6). This is especially the case in the light of the prevalence of traditional notions of authorship which view the text as a product of an individual entity and authentic representation of the author’s intention, and tends therefore to view the translator as an imitator and the translated text as a derivation (Venuti 1995, 7). This in itself creates a tension between the realization of the role of translator as imitator and the need to totally dismiss him/her to maintain the author’s authority. The translator’s invisibility is described in terms of “self-annihilation” enforced by the marginalization of translation in Anglo-American culture (Venuti 1995, 8). Feminist theory and practice, on the other hand, uphold women’s visibility and voice. The feminist theorist, Maggie Humm, for instance, states that “the representation of the voice in literature by women writers is a textual strategy used by writers to deconstruct images of women inherited from male literature” (Humm 232). Feminist ideology is based on retrieving women from the margins and bringing them center-stage, while feminist practice involves the acknowledgement of women’s experiences and asserting their presence and voice.

A feminist translator, reflecting on the notions of transparency from a feminist perspective is bound –methodologically, if not ideologically- to adopt the notions of visibility in her translation practice. Since feminism upholds the values of visibility and self-assertion, and attempts to highlight the role of those traditionally and conventionally relegated to the margins, by giving them voice, then it would be only logical for feminist translation praxis to offer the translator an equal degree of exposure and self-representation as that granted to the author. Furthermore, translation itself is an interpretive process influenced by the translator’s personal and ideological stances that cannot produce a transparent translation (Tymoczko 24). The translator, in feminist practice, would be seen as a co-constructor of meaning; while the translator’s imposed “shadowy existence” -in Venuti’s terms (Venuti 1995, 8)- would present an act of exclusion if not violation in feminist ideology, which would perceive the mechanisms of the relationship between author and translator in the light of gender bias and gender discrimination. Feminist translation praxis, i.e. the translation practice informed by feminist theory, therefore, rejects transparency as a fallacy, and highlights the translator’s visibility and voice as a translation strategy.

## 2.2. Foreignisation

In his critique of domestication as a translation strategy, Venuti describes traditional translation conventions in the following way:

The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly selfconscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, political. (Venuti 1995, 18-19)

Venuti explains domestication as a translation act which involves “appropriation”, forcing the translator to fit the original text within “domestic agendas”. It is furthermore an act of “violence” against the original text and its linguistic and cultural contexts, whereby it has to submit to the linguistic conventions and socio-cultural context of the target text (Venuti 1995, 19). Venuti is building here on Schleiermacher’s paradigm, and adopts Schleiermacher’s pro-foreignisation stance as “a strategic cultural intervention” and “a form of resistance” against Anglo-American “ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism” (Venuti 1995, 20).

If one replaces Venuti’s cultural/imperialist hierarchical structure with a gender-oriented one, then domestication as a hegemonic domineering practice represents patriarchy. Foreignisation as a translation strategy gives voice to the source text when transporting it into the target language/culture. In this sense, as foreignisation gives visibility to the translator as mediator, and voice to the original text, instead of muting it in favour of the domineering language/culture into which it is translated/domesticated, it follows that feminist translation would tend towards foreignisation, which in my opinion is a translation strategy that reflects and methodologically coincides with feminist ethics. When used in translating feminist texts, foreignisation would give space for the stylistic specificities of women’s writing, would respect feminist jargon and terminology, in addition to allowing for the representation of feminist concepts and values expressed in feminist language.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.3. Affinity and specialization: *simpatica* translator

In the chapter entitled “Simpatico”, Lawrence Venuti discusses the notion of the “simpatico” translator which he had adopted in his translation practice, whereby he believed that “the translator should not merely get along with the author not merely find him [sic] likeable; there should also be an identity between them” (Venuti 1995, 273). Venuti, however, soon abandoned this idea in the light of his concern with the translator’s visibility, as this ‘simpatico’ strategy could, in his opinion, lead to illusionary transparency and fidelity in

<sup>4</sup> For more on the issues related to gendered language, see for example: Thorne, B., Kramarae, C., and Henley, N. (ed.), (1983) *Language, Gender and Society*, Boston: Heinle & Heinle; and Eckert, P., and McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003) *Language and Gender*, Cambridge University Press.

the translation process, as the translator's voice could easily become totally subsumed in the author's. Thinking about the notion of the 'simpatico', or perhaps what I would call the *simpatica* translator, from a feminist perspective, I would suggest that the implied affinity between author and translator is an advantage. Feminist translation in both theory and practice assumes that for a translation to be feminist, both author and translator should be feminist in the first place, since as pointed out above, feminist translation is an extension of feminist writing. Moreover, in the light of translation studies' theorizing about the influence of the translator's position on the translated text, it becomes clear that the translator's ideology is reflected in the translation process.<sup>5</sup>

The main challenge facing feminist translation is to maintain affinity without undermining the *simpatica* translator's visibility. A methodological solution can be found in the concept of specialization in translation as articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in his chapter on the problems faced by translators in the social sciences, as he stresses the idea of specialization. He recommends that the translator be "familiar with the literature of the subfield over a long period of time, and preferably someone with a direct interest in the material under discussion in the text" (Wallerstein 89). Having laid out seven rules of translating concepts in the social sciences, Wallerstein concludes his article with the following statement:

The translator first must be an informed, indeed a very well-informed, reader of the author. In my view, the translator cannot become so informed merely by reading some books at the time of the translation in order to facilitate that particular translation. Being well-informed is a process of slow and long-term prior acquisition of substantive knowledge. Translators of social sciences must be specialized social scientists as well as translators. (Wallerstein 97)

I would like to suggest that the same idea applies to the translation of feminist work, where the translator of feminist texts should have specialized knowledge of feminist theory and terminology, in addition to linguistic and stylistic ability. Feminism has its own discourse, which in many cases relies on newly coined terms, as well as subverted one. It is only possible for a translator proficient in feminist theory and terminology to be able to translate it into another language. This becomes particularly required in the light of feminist translation strategies, which involve in addition to word-coinage and terminology translation the inclusion of 'well-informed' 'footnoting, supple-

<sup>5</sup> For more on this point, see for example: Hermans, T. 'The translator's voice in translated narrative'; and Tymoczko, M. 'Ideology and the position of the translator: in what sense is a translator "in-between"?'; in Baker, M. (ed.) *Critical readings in translation studies*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 193–212 and pp. 213–228.

menting and prefacing'. Finally, a *simpatico/simpatico* stance, here, protects the feminist text from the possibility of being 'hijacked' by a non-feminist if not anti-feminist interpretation and hence translation.

### 3. Case study: translating feminist literary criticism into Arabic

This section will present a case study of feminist translation into Arabic. I will focus here on my personal experience in translating into Arabic a selection of foundational Anglo-American essays and articles in feminist literary theory and criticism. I will begin by discussing the theoretical framework within which this translation was conducted; then I wish to highlight some of the key issues that emerged during the translation process, which include translating gender terminology, feminizing language and asserting the feminist voices of authors and translator.

#### 3.1. "Feminist Translation" Series

The idea of translating a selection of articles on feminist literary theory and criticism marks a very personal journey. It emerged out of my own academic specialization in feminist criticism at the Department of English, Cairo University and membership in the Women and Memory Forum (WMF), an independent feminist research centre in Cairo.<sup>6</sup> As a feminist academic, I have been long aware of the lack of academic writings in the area of feminist literary criticism in Egypt and the Arab world, and I could attribute this mostly to the fact that most of the knowledge produced in that area, along with most of the critical schools that have followed modernism, has not been available in Arabic. Very few books have appeared translated into Arabic, and even fewer authored in Arabic. It was my assumption that feminist approaches to literary work, and particularly feminist writings, will not develop without young Egyptian feminists', critics' and writers' access to the body of theory and criticism already produced in other languages – particularly the Anglo-American feminist theory. I was also of the opinion that a better appreciation of the Arab women's history of feminist writing can be further revived and revised in the light of feminist critical theory.

At the time when I was considering working on the translation of such a selection of writings, Hoda Elsadda, the WMF founder and director, developed the idea of this one volume into a series of volumes (Readers) in feminist approaches across the disciplines. The series was, thus, conceptualized and entitled "Feminist Translations", targeting young Egyptian and Arab

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Department of English, Cairo University, visit: <http://edcu.edu.eg/>; and for more on the Women and Memory Forum, visit: <http://www.wmf.org.eg/en/>.

scholars whose limited access to Anglo-American, and generally Western, feminist scholarship places them at a disadvantage in the context of Western academic domination over knowledge production. It includes the following volumes: *Reader in Gender and Political Science* (2010), *Feminism and Religious Studies* (2010), *Feminism and Historical Studies* (2015), *Gender and the Social Sciences* (2015), *Feminist Literary Criticism* (2015), *Women and Psychoanalysis* (2016), and *Feminism and Sexuality* (2016).

### 3.2. Theoretical framework

As a translator of feminist texts and academic specialized in feminist literary theory and criticism, I have consciously combined my feminist ideology with translation practice. The selection of the texts for the “Reader” was made in a way that would offer an introduction to feminist literary criticism in its historical as well as topical variety. I have, therefore, included thirteen pieces of feminist writing, which I classified under three parts: methodologies, concepts and genres.<sup>7</sup> Being both editor and translator enabled me to set very clear article-selection criteria and translation strategies. While the process of selecting the articles was governed by my awareness of the most relevant material needed for an introduction to feminist literary criticism, my translation itself was informed by feminist translation theory and methodology as developed by the feminist translators/theoreticians discussed in the earlier sections of this paper. I also included my own reflections on the process and explained my understanding of feminist translation praxis in the context of translation into Arabic.

### 3.3. Terminology: translating *gender*

The issue of translating feminist and gender terminology has been a major concern for translators and scholars writing about gender issue in Ara-

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<sup>7</sup> The Reader includes the following pieces translated into Arabic: Annette Kolodny, ‘Dancing through the minefield: some observations on the theory, practice, and politics of a feminist literary criticism’ (1979); Elaine Showalter, ‘Towards a feminist poetics’ (1979); Barbara Smith, ‘Toward a black feminist criticism’ (1977); Barbara Castillo, ‘Figuring feminism in Latin American contexts’ (1997); Toril Moi, ‘Feminist, female, feminine’ (1986); Susan Lanser, ‘Toward a feminist narratology’ (1986); Barbara Harlowe, ‘From the women’s prison: third world women’s narratives of prison’ (1986); Inderpal Grewal & Caren Kaplan, ‘Postcolonial studies and transnational feminist practices’ (2000); and Jean Said Makdisi, ‘Writing Arab women’s lives’ (2005/2006).

bic.<sup>8</sup> The term “gender” in particular has its own history – not only that of its translation but of its inception in the first place. I will, however, limit the scope of this discussion to an explanation of my choice of translating the term “gender” in English into “*al-jender*” in Arabic. It is worth noting at the outset that the term “gender” developed in the areas of feminist and gender studies within the context of Western feminist thought; and is, hence, as a term, charged with all the history involved in its inception and stabilization. The term was introduced into the Arab world, and consequently the Arabic language, through the United Nations documents, development projects and the social science. Thus, the earliest commonly used translation of “gender” took the form of an explanatory translation *al-naw’ al-ijtima’i* – the literal meaning of which is “social kind”. In the context of cultural studies, the social emphasis in the translation of the term was replaced by another explanatory translation which literally means “the socio-cultural construction of the sexes”, coined and adopted by feminist scholars writing about gender in Arabic in the early 1990s.

With the gradual spread of the concept of “gender” in Arabic, a group of Arab scholars proposed the translation of “gender” as *al-junusa*, which is a term they coined by deriving it from the Arabic root (*j n s*), which they introduced and propagated in an issue of *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, devoted to Gender and Knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The term, however, did not receive general acceptance, nor was it used systematically by all the contributors to the *Alif* issue itself. Since the late 1990s onwards, two terms have gained momentum as equivalent to the term “gender”. The social sciences have adopted the earlier translation *al-naw’ al-ijtima’i* turning it into an equivalent one-word term *al-naw’*, which literally means the “kind” or “gender”. Having dropped the adjective (*al-ijtima’i*, which means “social”) the translated version now moves beyond the domain of the social studies into the humanities as well. However, at more or less the same time, the word *al-jender* has been increasingly used in Arabic as a transliterated equivalent to the English word/concept/term “gender”.

In my translation of “gender” into Arabic, I have opted for the word “*al-jender*”.<sup>10</sup> My decision was based on several points: 1) the use of the word *al-*

<sup>8</sup> I have discussed the challenges of translating the word “gender” in an earlier article in the context of reflecting on the experience of translating the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* into Arabic; see: Hala Kamal, ‘Translating women and gender’, pp. 262–264.

<sup>9</sup> See: ‘Editorial’, pp. 6–7. For more on the translation of gender into Arabic, see: Samia Mehrez, ‘Translating gender’.

<sup>10</sup> Similar to the Anglo-American context, the word/concept/term “feminist” exists in Arabic and thus its translation follows its direct equivalent in Egyptian/Arab writings. It becomes commonly used especially with the emergence of the Egyptian fem-

*jender* in Arabic coincides with the foreignisation strategy that I have adopted in the translation of feminist texts. It also maintains the term as a foreign concept loaded with its own history; 2) As a word used in Arabic, it enjoys derivational flexibility by applying Arabic grammatical rules of derivation to the root (*j n d r*); hence the possibility of using such forms as *al-mutajandira* (gendered) or *al-jandara* (gendering) etc., which is not as possible with the root (*n w '* ) – the other equivalent to gender; 3) In the context of translating feminist literary criticism, a further complication arises. The word *naw'* without a qualifier (i.e. *al-naw' al-ijtima'i*) becomes confusing, as it carries the connotations of literary genre (*al-naw' al-adabi*) rather than the implied socio-cultural dimensions embedded in the word/concept/term “gender”. Thus, although the word *al-naw'* may essentially denote “gender” in the contexts of development, sociology and political science, the same word initially denotes “genre” in the context of literary studies; 4) the Arabic language has a long history of assimilation and appropriation of foreign words. An early example can be found in the word *al-firdaws* (which means paradise), which is not originally Arabic, but has been used in Arabic texts, including the Quran. More modern examples can be found in such terms as “democracy” which is Arabized as “*dimoqratiya*” among many other examples of concepts as well as scientific and technological terms; 5) the form *al-jender* renders itself easier as a transnational feminist term in its own right, without remaining limited to merely sounding like an Arabic word.

### 3.4. Feminisation

Feminisation is used here to indicate the process of inserting women in the masculine grammatical structures of (Arabic) language. I will limit my discussion here to one stark example of the default masculinity of Arabic, and the possibility of feminizing it. Unlike the English language, where common nouns, adjectives and verbs are neutral (neither take a feminine nor a masculine form), their Arabic equivalents appear in both forms. Thus while the word “translator” in English does not imply the translator being a woman or a man, the Arabic equivalent could be either *mutarjim* (translator in the masculine form) or *mutarjima* (translator in the feminine form). However, just as the word “translator” in English initially implies the masculine (with the form *translatress* sometimes used to specify the feminine form of the word), similarly when translated into Arabic, the commonly used form is the masculine, unless there are other indicators (proper nouns or pronouns) of whether the common noun refers to a woman or a man. Thus, the phrase “the

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inist movement since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when feminist writers were using the term *niswi* and *niswiya* in reference to feminist and feminism.

translator selects” (which is neutral in English) gets conventionally translated into the Arabic verb phrase “*yantaqi al-mutarjim*” (which is in the masculine form).<sup>11</sup> In the case of the English phrase, although the initial meaning implies reference to a man (from the predominant masculine perspective), the Arabic phrase asserts the masculinity of the “translator” through the use of the masculine form of verb and noun, instead of reflecting the possibility of the “translator” being a woman. This becomes grammatically fortified in the plural form of the noun-verb combination, as we find that in the Arabic language the use of the plural masculine form of nouns, adjectives and verbs is a grammatical imperative, even if the group referred to includes only one man among several women. So the phrase the “translators select” would be conventionally grammatically translated into the Arabic verb phrase *al-mutarjimun yantaqun*, regardless of the fact that these “translators” are composed of several women and just one men.

The feminisation of Arabic here means the insertion of women, and the assertion of their presence in the translated text. It is in Godard’s and Flotow’s sense (explained in the previous sections of this paper) a process of supplementing as a feminist translation strategy. Instead of implying that the neutral form of the noun, adjective and verb in English implies masculine forms, I decided in my feminist translation to, constantly, assert linguistically the feminine presence – in both singular and plural forms – as long as there are no indications in English of the masculinity of the lexical items in question. Thus, I have chosen systematically in my feminist translation (and my writing in general) to insert women in the text. I would therefore translate the phrase “the translator selects” as “*tantaqi al-mutarjima aw al-mutarjim*” or “*yantaqi al-mutarjim aw al-mutarjima*”, which in back translation would become “the (feminine) translator or the (masculine) translator” or “the (masculine translator) or the (feminine) translator”, while the verb which precedes the first noun would take its form in terms of femininity or masculinity.

When dealing with a similar phrase in the plural, feminisation again is used to make women’s presence visible in the text, rather than being subsumed by the masculine plural form. So I would translate the phrase “translators select” as “*al-mutarjimat wa-l mutarjimun yantaqun*” which in back translation would be “the (feminine) translators and (masculine translators) select”. Here again the feminisation is not only limited to the insertion of the feminine noun, but it also includes the problematic use of the verb in the Arabic sentence. When the verb follows the plural masculine noun in a noun phrase, then it is translated in the plural masculine form; whereas it would

<sup>11</sup> One of the conventions of the Arabic language is that a sentence should preferably begin with the verb, unless it is a noun sentence – a possibility in the Arabic language, or for special rhetorical effect.

be ungrammatical to use the verb in the feminine form. This brings me to the point of feminisation and grammaticality; whereby I wish to highlight that my feminisation of the text is performed in such a way as not to disrupt grammatical rules in the Arabic language. The process thus does not involve a confrontational subversion of the Arabic language, as much as attempts at inserting women into grammatical structures. To me this is an important strategy, as it provides the feminist text with grammatical credibility instead of having the feminist content undermined by an ungrammatical form. Thus, by feminising the feminist text in the process of translation, women's visibility and voice on the textual level may be considered – by traditional reading and writing conventions – unfamiliar and odd, but at least not unacceptable and grammatically incorrect!

### 3.5. Feminist voice(s)

When thinking about feminist voice(s) in translation, we can recognize at least two dominant voices: the author's feminist voice in the source text (ST) and the additional translator's feminist voice in the target text (TT). The feminist translator is particularly cautious not to end up eliminating the author's voice in the process of asserting her own (translator's voice). The main challenge that emerges here is that of generating a feminist translation while maintaining the author's and translator's balanced visibility: how can this plurality if not multiplicity of voices be ensured, particularly in the light of ideological affinity between author and translator? In addition to the strategies used above in the process of translation, it is important to introduce the author(s) wither in the introduction or in a separate list of contributors, highlighting the authors' engagement with feminist thought. In all cases, any accurate translation would preserve the feminist discourse embedded in the ST, whereas the challenge lies in inserting the translator's feminist voice, and asserting visibility through relevant footnotes, an informative preface, and the possible use of a glossary as well as typographical emphasis, among other strategies.

In addition to the ethical implications of translator's visibility in the text, in the sense of asserting the interpretative dimension of translation, the feminist translator's voice can be also included in a preface, glossary and footnote. In the case of translating feminist literary criticism, I believe I asserted my feminist voice through the introduction and glossary. The articles are thus preceded by an Introduction subtitled "feminist literary criticism and feminist translation" in which I pointed out the two-fold project involved in the translation: the production of knowledge in Arabic in feminist criticism and feminist translation. The Introduction explores and explains the following:

the definition of feminist approaches to literary texts, the difference between women's writing and feminist texts, an outline of feminist literary criticism in the West, and of the history of feminist criticism in Egypt; followed by a brief justification of the articles selected for translation. The Introduction ends with an overview of the notion of feminist translation and the challenges and strategies involved in the process of producing a feminist translation. And finally, the book ends with an English-Arabic glossary, which offers a list of concepts and terms, strictly related to feminist thought and activism, derived from the articles included in the book. The glossary thus indirectly suggests the stabilization of feminist concepts and terms in Arabic – especially those that have been in circulation for the past few decades.

### **Conclusion: translation as feminist agency**

Translating feminist texts involves the implementation of both feminist theory and translation studies in the translation process. In the case of translating feminist literary criticism into Arabic, feminist translation praxis entails the implementation of concepts and approaches of feminist literary theory and criticism, Arabic studies and translation studies in the translation process. Like any other translation process, translating feminist texts from English into the Arabic language requires the linguistic mastery of both languages. There are, however, other additional requirements when using a feminist approach in translation: 1) a deep understanding of feminist terminology and theory; 2) the conscious realization of the translation process as one that entails interpretation, mediation and transformation; 3) reflection on the ethical implication involved in translating feminist thought; 4) an awareness of the prospective readership in relation to the readers' and translators' specialisation.

Feminist translation into Arabic can additionally carry aspects of feminist agency. In the context of the scarcity of research and critical work devoted to the analysis of women's writing and feminist texts written in Arabic from the feminist perspective, the translation of such work into Arabic is a source of academic and critical empowerment through providing feminist knowledge in Arabic. In fact, translation here becomes a process of feminist knowledge generation and production; and by offering Arabic speaking readership access to feminist knowledge, translation plays a feminist role in raising awareness and pointing to potential areas for feminist enquiry and scholarship. The feminist translator becomes an active agent in empowering young feminist scholars and writers, and furthering feminist methodologies across the disciplines. The feminist translator's contribution is, thus, not lim-

ited to translation, interpretations, re/writing, transformation, mediation and representation, but by spreading feminist ideology, s/he moves beyond, into the realm of feminist activism.

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