

## Feminist Translation Applied on Specimens of Nawel Saadaoui's and Ahlem Mosteghanemi's Novels

KOUDJA Baya<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia

bkoudja@pnu.edu.sa

Received: 20/11/2019,

Accepted: 30/12/2019,

Published: 31/12/2019

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper deals with the feminist theory in translation with special focus on the applicability of its techniques to embody the feminist discourse in literature, which expresses the intellectual awareness of woman in various cultural contexts, for literature is the most appropriate space in which women can express their concerns and sufferings from male dominance. The focus on feminist literature stems from the fact that it intersects with feminist theory in translation which uses particular strategies to express the ideological and political awareness of women, embodied in a language beyond inherited stereotypes. In this paper, we try to apply this theory to samples taken from the translations of the novels of the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadaoui and Algerian writer Ahlam Mosteghanemi, and investigate the extent to which this feminist theory in translation can embody the feminist discourse linguistically, intellectually, culturally and stylistically.*

**KEYWORDS:** Feminist, Translation, Novel, Specimens

### 1- Problem of defining the term “Feminism”:

Scholars could not agree on the term given to literature that is written by women. The terms “feminist literature” and “women’s writing” are both used.

Feminist literature distinguishes between feminine and masculine in all its ideological connotations. Whereas, women’s literature is confined to the circle of women. (Dogman, 2011, pp.5, 6).

1 -Feminist literature: relates to intellectual awareness.

2 -Women’s literature: refers to literature that is written by women.

In our study, we rely on the term feminist, that is, feminist writing, which is related to Feminism to describe feminist intellectual awareness.

## **2- Brief historical overview of feminist literature:**

Women's literature is the space where women express their desire and willingness to get rid of the restrictions imposed on them by male-dominated society. In this regard, Virginia Woolf argues that society looks at women with contempt and considers them as minors: "Nothing could be expected of women intellectually" (Woolf, 1959, p.82) That is to say, no intellectual effort was expected of women (woman is not intellectually qualified).

## **3- Most important waves of Feminist literature:**

Feminist literature started in the West where feminist movements and concepts emerged. It went through three waves, classified by researchers and historians according to the demands voiced by the feminist movement at each stage. It is noteworthy that the feminist movement constantly changed its perspectives.

- 1- First wave:** started with the first feminist statement issued by the English writer Mary Wollstonecraft in her famous book "A Vindication of the Rights of women" in 1792, which opened the door to female writers to enter the realm of writing through using male pseudonyms. For instance, Charlotte Bronte used the pseudonym "Currer bell" in her novel 'Jane Eyre', published during the Victorian era, Mary Ann Evans, in her turn, wrote her book titled "Middle March" under the pseudonym "George Eliot" so as her romantic and feminist ideas, ahead of her time, would not be negatively judged.
- 2- Second wave:** was represented by the writers who presented the feminist issue as a main subject in their writings, expressing their feminist thought with courage to change their traditional status, among others, Virginia Wolf and Simone de Beauvoir, especially when her book "The second sex" was published, in which she dealt extensively with various women's issues.
- 3- Third wave:** was reflected in the emergence of new relationships in novel writing which are far from the traditional ones such as the family concept. This literature has a common feature with translation which

is basing the reality analysis on discourse rather than linguistic structure. This discourse has resulted in postmodernism concepts, hybrid literature and values that go beyond gender.

As for Arabic literature, we mention the following novelists: Zeinab Fawaz, May Ziada, Ghada El-Samman and Nawal Saadaoui (especially her novel "Woman at point zero" under study), Fadila Farouk in her novel "Ta'alKhajal", Asia Jabbar, Ahlam Mosteghanemi and other female writers who have innovatively expressed their rejection of customs and traditions that oppress Arab women.

#### **4- Feminist literature objectives:**

The female writer entered the world of literature to talk about her experience in life and express her inner thoughts and feelings which cannot be well-expressed by man no matter how he can empathize with her. This concern was reflected in the writing style and language, through which, women portrayed their sufferings, misery and suffocation using words, phrases and sentences denoting the psychological nature of woman (Essayouf, 2002, p.215). Female writers used literary to highlight their role in society and clearly state their visions of relations and power balance, thus, continuing their struggle to face injustice, oppression and exclusion, regain control of their destiny and encourage themselves and other women to live, love, laugh and feel happy as women.

"Repressed suppressed.... women have taken care of their own destinies, and encouraged each other to live, love, laugh, and be happy as women". (Rosemarie, p.42)

#### **5- Intersection between translation studies and gender studies:**

After the evolvement of feminist literature, it has become a core interest for several studies in various disciplines, including translation. The feminist theory which began with the Canadian school was formed in the eighties. One of its most important features is its interest in gender, which coincided with the second wave of the feminist literature.

Translation studies knew a cultural turning point coinciding with gender studies, the question shifted from searching for good translation standards to investigating the best linguistic forms to express social, historical and gender differences, how the translator can transfer these differences from

one language into another, as well as faithfulness degree in feminist translation.

Thus, how does feminist translation deal with source text when it is contrary to its principles and ideology?

### **6- Feminist theory in translation:**

The term feminist translation raises the same issues as those raised by feminist writing. Feminist theory seeks to eradicate patriarchal authority and male dominance within language by creating a new meaning in the target text and highlighting gender differences as well as feminist discourse and ideology.

### **7- Feminist translation techniques:**

Throughout history, language has never been a neutral means of expression; it was subject to man's authority for so long and was used to express a unilateral vision of the world. In contrast, the feminist literary movement in general, and feminist translation in particular emerged to establish new linguistic rules and styles that guarantee women's intellectual and social freedom by refusing to write in masculine style and authoritarian thought. In this regard, Sherry Simone says: "Women's liberation must first be a liberation from language" (Simone, 2005, p.7)

Women are liberated by language; they write and translate texts in a language that speaks in favor of women. This emancipation may occur through going beyond the masculine pronoun to achieve women's freedom and genders justice.

Male dominance in language is reflected through using words expressing masculinity at the lexical, morphological and metaphorical level. This theory seeks to add the feminization mark at the end of some names which have been so far confined to the masculine pronoun to eliminate male dominance. At the metaphorical level, a description of the connection between women and translation in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in France by Gilles Menage was reconsidered, the phrase "*les belles infidèles*" (cheating beauties), which is based on the idea that translation, like a woman, is a traitor if it is beautiful and honest (Castro, 2009 p.5) The translation of the above phrase became "Rebelle et infidèle" (rebellious and unfaithful), and through this phrase the project of women's awareness and the formulation

of new feminist intellectual terms were embodied. Thus, a new feminist dictionary emerged.

#### **7-1 Addition:**

It consists of replacing words employed by male discourse with neutral or general ones, for example, replacing the word brother with sister or sibling, and the word father with parents when the gender is not specified (Simone, 2005, p.118).

#### **7-2 Word playing:**

It consists of amplifying the initials of words that refer to women such as the word Woman or Daughter to emphasize the feminist presence in the text.

#### **7-3 Hi jacking:**

This technique seeks to guide the understanding of meaning through expressing some ideas in various language forms in order to serve a given position, such as focusing on the lack of options for women suffering from repression in society.

#### **7-4 Ridding language of male domination:**

It consists of translating and replacing the word “man”, which refers to masculinity with “human being”, which includes both genders, as well as changing the masculine pronoun “his” in English to the plural pronoun “them” which combines both genders.

#### **7-5 Footnoting:**

It provides the reader with historical information and focuses on the historical role of women.

### **8 - Study of translation samples from Nawal El Saadaoui and Ahlam Mostaghanemi's novels:**

#### **Sample analysis:**

One of the techniques and strategies adopted by the feminist theory in translation is beginning the translation with an introduction or a foreword in which the translator explains the reasons and objectives of the translation and comments in order to avoid stinging criticism. The aim is generally to define feminist literature and to point to its distinction from male literature. We will analyze them extensively when we study translation samples taken from each novel.

## **8-1 "Woman at point zero" by Nawal El Saadaoui (2003 edition - the first edition was issued in 1975)**

### **Translation by Sherif Hatata "Woman at Point Zero" (2007)**

#### **Translator: Sherif Hatata**

He is an Egyptian doctor, writer and novelist, born in 1923. He was married to Nawal El Saadaoui and then to the writer and film critic Amal El Gamal. He is the author of many books including, *The eye with metal eyelid* (1974) and *The Defeat*. (1978) .

#### **Faithfulness constraints and ideology impact in "Woman at point zero" by Nawal El Saadaoui:**

Based on the theoretical framework presented above, in which we were as brief and concise as possible, we will analyze the English translation of Nawal El Saadaoui's novel "Woman at point zero" to see to what extent the translator was faithful in his translation or guided by ideology when it comes to Arab feminist literature with all its specificities, dimensions and impacts.

We have chosen this novel, written by Nawal El Saadaoui because it reflects the status of women in Egypt and describes it in the smallest details, so it dealt with all the hardships faced by Arab Egyptian women such as injustice, violence, oppression, sexual harassment and feelings of loss due to men's control and cruelty. The novel tells the story of "Firdous", a woman condemned to death who suffered, since her childhood, from an authoritarian male-dominated society in which woman is considered as inferior, and from well-worn and unfair traditions.

#### **On the introduction:**

The first thing we notice when we read the English translation of the novel is that the translator included a page under the title "Praise for this book" that came before the translated pages, which comprised the opinions of critics and journalists on the novel, which they praised and considered as a novel that depicts the suffering of women in the Arab world and calls for rebellion against its outdated traditions.

Moreover, the translator included a foreword written by Miriam Cooke, in which she summarized the novel in an unnatural tone that expresses ideology. In fact, she tried to guide readers and make them sympathize with the heroine and revolt against the Eastern man and society as she said:

“It does not matter if this story is true or made up, or a bit of both (which it is). What matters is that it unfolds a universal tragedy as any of Sophocles, even if without the epic heroes”.

Some may say that the translator is free to include an introduction or a foreword. However, we believe that the introduction and foreword, which were not chosen at random, show implicitly the translator position and ideology which is contrary to the principle of faithfulness in translation since he became “visible”, especially in considering the novel as a global tragedy comparable to that of Sophocles. This is what we deem to be an absence of objectivity and impartiality. It would have been better to give the English readers the opportunity to judge the content of the novel themselves.

**Sample one:**

“Wafi sabah alghadi In 'akun huna, walan 'akun fi 'ayi makan yaerifuh 'ahad” (El Saadawi, 2003, p.14)

“Tomorrow morning, I shall no longer be here. Nor will I be in any place known to man”. (El Saadaoui,2007, p.9)

We can see the feminist tendency reflected in the translator's choice of the word "man" as equivalent to the word “Ahad”, the heroine, Firdous, meant that she will go to another world after being hanged by humans on earth (men and women in general) without specifying the gender. The translator chose the word "man" instead of "mankind" or "human being" to highlight the heroine's hatred and disgust of men, her desire to leave their world as well as the fact that she is not sad about leaving this world since she will be away from them and get rid of their oppression and arrogance. It is a semantic choice that may aim to guide the reader in understanding the novel in a certain ideological way stemming from a feminist thought; which does not respect the faithfulness principle in translation

**Sample two:**

“Wasabah kol jumeaty artadi jalbaba annazifa anwa yudhhib liaslia ljumeat fi aljamie”(Saadaoui, 2003, p.15)

“Every Friday morning, he would put on a clean galabeya and head for the mosque to attend the weekly prayer”. (Saadaoui, 2007, p.10)

We note that the translator tried to be faithful in rendering the word "djelbab" and based his translation on his background when he chose the equivalent "galabeya" which is widely used in the Egyptian dialect and printed it in italics to be easily distinguished by the English reader, but he did not respect the language register because the word "djelbab" is derived from classical Arabic, while the word "galabeya" belongs to the Egyptian dialect. He resorted to the Egyptian dialect to make the reader recognize the specificities of Egyptian society with regard to dressing, which is a kind of ideological guidance.

Furthermore, the sentence "Yusali el jumuat" was translated as "attend the weekly prayer", which is a general translation that is somewhat far from the original and does not necessarily refer to the Friday prayer for Muslims because it did not specify the day on which this prayer is performed, a piece of information that we consider very important and should not be neglected or omitted. The reader can understand the Sunday Mass which is a prayer performed each Sunday. The adjective "weekly" cannot, in any case, refer to "Friday prayer", the translator could have translated it as "Friday prayer" since the writer mentioned Friday twice to emphasize it.

### **Sample three:**

"wa'arah baeda Isalaty amshi bayn 'amthalih min alrijal yatahadathune ankhutbat aljumeati, wakayf an 'imam aljamie kane azima lbayanwal balaghatwa'Iiejazih ma baedah 'iiejaz". (Saadaoui, 2003, p.15)

"I would see him walking with the other men like himself as they commented on the Friday sermon, on how convincing and eloquent the imam had been to a degree that he had surpassed the unsurpassable". (Saadaoui, 2007, pp.10-11)

It is clear to us that the translator sought to be faithful in rendering the word "imam" so that he preserved it because of its Islamic religious connotations, especially as it is related to the Friday sermon. Imam has a leadership position in the Arab-Islamic society and provides religious guidance. Thus, the translator preserved this word with its semantic dimensions and meanings, adopting the borrowing strategy that enabled him to be faithful to the original text. Moreover, this word carries ideological and religious connotations and evokes meanings relating to



religion, preaching, piousness, fear of God, chastity, purity, justice and other morals.

**Sample four:**

"...'aw sawt 'anfasaha lmuntazimat min wara' alkitab, la 'araa wajah wala 'aerif 'iidha ma kannay ima yashkhur 'aw yaqi zaanya lhath" (Saadaoui, 2003, p.18)

"...and the sound of his regular breathing reaching me from behind the book so that I could not tell whether he was snoring quietly in his sleep or wide awake and panting, his hand would continue to press against my thigh with a grasping, almost brutal insistence". (Saadaoui, 2007, p.13)

It is clear that the translator added a descriptive sentence that does not exist in the original as exaggeration and amplification to show the uncle's sexual exploitation of his niece, giving a detailed description of the scene and not committing to the principle of faithfulness to serve a certain ideology with the aim of magnifying the suffering experienced by the heroine Firdous when she was a child using precise description and addition. The author implicitly referred to what the uncle was doing to Firdous without immersing in details, but the translator exaggerated his description adopting addition and amplification strategies to dramatize and make the reader sympathize with the heroine since she is a victim.

**Sample five:**

"wahu yadd: yamara, yabnt al..." (Saadaoui, 2003, p.58)

"He kept on repeating: "Slut, bitch...". (Saadaoui/2007, p.28)

We note that the writer Nawal El Saadaoui avoided mentioning the intended dysphemism not to offend the Arab reader and mentioned only the word "mara" and the three suspension points, which is a technique of euphemism, because the Arab reader does not accept reading such abusive words. Therefore, the writer took into account the specificity of the Arab reader. Whereas, the translator rendered the neutral word "mara" with the word "prostitute" in English, which is an exaggeration, and added a synonym of this word, which led to the amplification of meaning. The translator may be willing to highlight the humiliation experienced by the heroine to make the English reader sympathize with her more and more

thus, reinforcing prejudice and stereotypes that this reader already has about Arab women and their suffering in the patriarchal Arab society. The translator stated the explicit meaning because he realized that the English reader can accept such words compared to the Arab reader.

### **Analysis of samples of the novel “Memory of the Flesh” by Ahlam Mosteghanemi (1993):**

Translation by Raphael Cohen **Bridges of Constantine** (2013). A British writer and translator based in Egypt, who translated many Arabic novels into English.

### **Manifestations of Feminist thought in the introduction of Memory of the Flesh:**

The introduction of the translation of the novel reflects some aspects of feminist thought that are embodied in certain intellectual and thematic trends of the novel, such as focusing on awareness of women in Algerian society of the importance of writing. “It is the act of exteriorising woman’s inner thoughts and its weapon to express herself”. Women with their vulnerability and fragility always look for the most powerful means to show and defend themselves”, said Mosteghanemi. “Did not you be a woman of paper, who loved and hated on paper, abandoned and go back on paper and kill and revive simply at the stroke of a pen” (Mosteghanemi, p. 15.)

#### **Sample one:**

“honak mudun la takhtar qadaraha...faqid hakam ealayhaalt tarikh kama hakamate alayha aljughrafia 'ala atastaslim walidha la yamlik 'abnawuha alkhiar dayimaan” (24)

There are cities that do not choose their faiths history and geography have condemned them not to surrender. So, their sons do not always have a choice (p24)

We note male dominance in the translation through rendering the word “*abna'ouha*” with “sons”, while the Arab word combines both sons and daughters.

**Sample two:**

"ahasad almadhin, wa'ahsad al'atfal alrudeu, li'anahum yamlikun wahdahum haqa alsarakhw alqudr atealyh... la 'adhkur min qalyaqdi al'iinsan sanawat ihal'uwlaa fi taelam alnatq wataqdi al'anzimata le arabia tbaqi ataneumruh fi taelimih alsmt" p.27

"I envy the minarets. I envy infants, they alone have the right and ability to scream, before life tames their vocal cords and teaches them silence. Who was it who said: man spends his early years leaning to speak, and the Arabs regimes spend the rest of his life teaching him to be silent."(p.16)

The word "rodaa" was translated into "infants", which is an advanced stage of childhood, while infants are new-borns. Therefore, there is a decrease in the intensity of the meaning of freedom in the English word, as the suggestion given by the meaning of the infant is the freedom to reveal and express woman's inner thoughts and feelings. The term "insan" was translated as "man" which clearly reflects the male dominance in the translated text, the word "human being" comprises both genders.

**Sample three:**

-hdhihalmar'at la tarsum 'iila abiwaqieiaata...

-wlimadha sumiyat liwahtiha 'aetadhar'?

-'inani rasamat uhaaet dharali sahibatiha. (p.85)

-This is a woman who can only be painted with realism.

-Why did you call her portrait 'apology'?

-Because I painted it as an apology to the subject. (p.64)

Cohen translated the word "sahbatha", referring to the owner of the painting with the word "subject" which limits the presence of woman in the text.

### **Conclusion:**

We note that both novels belong to feminist literature, for they comprise linguistic forms and semantic connotations in favour of women who experience suffering, harassment, poverty, oppression and exclusion, in a language that leads the reader to sympathize with them.

1-The translation of Nawal El-Saadaoui's novel was characterized by faithfulness, except in some instances that included amplification used to guide the English reader to empathise with Egyptian women to voice her concerns at the international level.

2-As for the translation of Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novel, the translator highlighted the male presence through using some terms denoting masculinity, in addition to the omission of some words and phrases employed by the author in the novel that have feminist connotations.

Moreover, points of intersection between feminist literature studies and translation leads to investigating the extent of neutrality and objectivity of the translation especially when the translator is a man.

The aim of the feminist translation is not limited to bringing social justice but restoring the woman self-value. Many scholars in this field consider the text as a production and the translation as a reproduction, thus, they equal woman to translation which is a disdainful view, "Because they are necessarily defective, all translations are reputed females" (Simone, 1996, p.1) In this regard, Chamberlaine responded that it is a question of power. To sum up, the power balance may change with feminist literature and translation, this fact is likely to give translation new degrees of awareness of cultural, social and political contexts and opens the door for other studies in the field of feminist translation dealing with the importance of gender in the translation process.

## Bibliography

- Addādisī, A. (2017). *Azmat al-jins fī al-riwāyah al-'arabīyah bunn al-niswah*. Lubnān: Mu'assasat al-Raḥāb al-Ḥadīthah.
- Aitchiston, C.C. (2003). *Gender and Leisure. Social and cultural perspectives*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Al-Qāṭarjī, N. 'A. (2018). *Al-ghazw al-nā'im, dirāsāt ḥawl athar al-'awlamah 'alā al-mar'ah wa al-usrah wa al-mujtama'*. London: Dār Ī-Kutub.
- Al-Sayyūf, N. (2002). *Qaḍāyā al-mar'ah bayn al-ṣamt wa al-kalām fī al-riwāyah al-niswīyah al-'arabīyah*. Al-Urdun, al-Jāmi'ah al-Urdunīyah.
- Amico, E. (1998). *Reader's guide to women's studies*. Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Annapurany, K. (2016). A prospective study of feminism waves, phases, issues and critical analysis. *International Journal of Applied Research* 2(5): 424-426.
- Belsey, C. & Moore, J.C. (1997). *The feminist reader: Essay in gender and the politics of literary criticism* (2nd ed.). Basing Stoke: Macmillan Press.
- Boxer, M.J. & Quataert, J.H. (1987). *Connecting spheres: Women in the Western world, 1500 to the present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Castro, O. (N. D). *Re examining Horizons in Feminist Translation Studies, Towards a Third Wave*. Vigo Universidad, Mak Andrews Translaion.
- Dawghmān, A. (2011). *Al-kitābah al-niswīyah bayn al-tawqī' al-jinsī wa al-baḥṭh 'an al-hawīyyah janūsiyyah*.
- De Beauvoire, S. 1949, *Le Deuxieme Sexe*, Gallimard, Collection Ideas .
- El Saadaoui, N. (2007). *Woman at point zero*. (Trans. Sherif Hetata). United Kingdom: Zed Books.
- Flotow, L., V. (1997). *Translating in the era of Feminism*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Frey, L. (2002). *New directions in group communication*. USA: Sage Publications.
- Gale, Cengage Learning. (2003). *A study guide for Annie Ernaux's "Shame"*. USA: Gale.
- Hollows, J. (2000). *Feminism, femininity and popular culture*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody. Passionate politics*. London: Pluto Press.
- Leonardi, V. (2007). *Gender and ideology in translation: Do women and men translate differently? A constrastive analysis from Italian into English*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Mosteghanemi, A. (2013) *Bridges of Constantine*. (Trans. Raphael Cohen). London: Bloomsbury.

- Mustaghānami, A. (1993). Dhākirat al-jasad. Ṭ.5 - Bayrūt, Lubnān, Hāshin Antwān.
- Nichols, J.K. (1996). Mary Shelly: Frankenstein's creator. First science fiction writer. USA : Conari Press.
- Popescu, F. (2009). Perspectives in translation studies. United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars.
- Ryan, B. (1992). Feminism and the women's movement. New York & London: Routledge.
- Sa'dāwī, N. (2003). Imra'ah 'inda nuqṭat al-ṣifr. Dār al-Ādāb.
- Simone, S. (2003). Gender in translation. Cultural identity and the politics of transmission. London & New York: Routledge. Squire, C. (2009). The social context of birth (2nd ed.). Oxford & New York: Radcliffe.
- Tawfīq, A. (1998). I'tirāfāt nisā' adībāt. Al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Amīn.
- Thong, R. (1992). Feminist Thought, A Comprehensive Introduction. Routledge. London. Walters, M. (2005). Feminism: A very short introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, V. 1959. A Room of One's Own, Third edition. London. The Hogarth Press.