

FEMINISM AND TRANSLATION

Some of the most exciting developments in translation studies since the 1980s have been part of what has been called “the cultural turn.” The turn to culture implies adding an important dimension to translation studies. Instead of asking the traditional question which has preoccupied translation theorists—“how should we translate, what is a correct translation?”—the emphasis is placed on a descriptive approach: “what do translations do, how do they circulate in the world and elicit response?” This shift emphasizes the reality of translations as documents which exist materially and move about, add to our store of knowledge, and contribute to ongoing changes in esthetics.

More importantly, it allows us to understand translations as being related in organic ways to other modes of communication, and to see translations as writing practices fully informed by the tensions that traverse all cultural representation. That is, it defines translation as a process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it.

This turn in translation studies prepared the terrain for a fruitful encounter with feminist thought. Feminism has been one of the most potent forms of cultural identity to take on linguistic and social expression over the last decades. “La liberation des femmes passe par le langage” was a familiar rallying call of the 1970s: women’s liberation must first be a liberation of/from language. Through the work of feminist scholars over the last twenty to thirty years, there has emerged a clear sense of language as a site of contested meanings, as an arena in which subjects test and prove themselves. And so it is hardly surprising that translation studies should be nourished in important ways by feminist thought.

The consequences for translation have been various and decisive. Over the years, the critique of sexism in language has moved from a largely corrective and action-oriented attention to vocabulary to a broader examination of the symbolic power of the feminine in language. Attention has shifted from critical analysis of a single linguistic code (English, French) to the conceptual terms regulating the intervention of individual and collective subjects within speech and writing.

The alliance between translation studies and feminism therefore emerged out of a common intellectual and institutional context. As fields of inquiry which emerged during the 1970s and gained increasing institutional recognition through the 1980s, translation studies and feminist thought are similarly grounded in the dynamics of a period which gave strong prominence to language. Translation studies have been impelled by many of the concerns central to feminism: the distrust of traditional hierarchies and gendered roles, deep suspicion of rules defining fidelity, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value. Both feminism and translation are concerned by the way “secondariness” comes to be defined and canonized; both are tools for a critical understanding of difference as it is represented in language.

- Simon Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. Routledge 2005.

1. What is the focus of the "cultural turn" in translation studies?

- A) Correct translation techniques
- B) Descriptive approach to translation
- C) Traditional translation theories
- D) Circulation of translated documents

2. What role does ideology play in the process of translation, according to the essay?

- A) It informs and shapes the translation process
- B) It stands above translation as an objective standard
- C) It has no influence on the translation process
- D) It is a corrective force in translation

3. What has been a common concern in both feminism and translation studies?

- A) Defining fidelity in translation
- B) Examining the power dynamics in language
- C) Promoting traditional hierarchies and gender roles
- D) Establishing universal linguistic rules

4. What is the connection between feminism and language, as mentioned in the essay?

- A) Feminism seeks to liberate women from language
- B) Feminism prioritizes traditional hierarchies in language
- C) Feminism promotes fidelity in translation practices
- D) Feminism aims to establish universal standards of meaning

5. What has nourished translation studies in important ways, according to the essay?

- A) Corrective language actions
- B) Feminist thought
- C) Traditional hierarchies in language
- D) Universally accepted standards of meaning

Answer 1: B) Descriptive approach to translation

Answer 2: A) It informs and shapes the translation process

Answer 3: B) Examining the power dynamics in language

Answer 4: A) Feminism seeks to liberate women from language

Answer 5: B) Feminist thought