

## **A snapshot in time: Gender in translation for the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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### **Introduction**

If we date thinking about gender in translation to Roman Jakobson's early musings on its role in 'mythological attitudes of a speech community' (Jakobson 1959, 237) and the confusion of children encountering differently gendered Death in translated fairytales, the topic has accompanied the field of Translation Studies from its very beginning. The intervening six and a half decade have generated a staggering number of research strands, subfields and translation approaches, as the broad umbrella of gender encompasses everything from early feminist translations (Chamberlain 1988; Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Simon 1996), to landmark works on transgender identities (Robinson 2019; Rose 2021).

However, these six decades have also brought a number of new challenges for translators and interpreters as the role of gender in language use expands and transforms. The Me-Too movement irreversibly changed feminist discourse and how we talk about sexual violence by exposing issues such as victim-blaming, but also highlighted the harmful gendered stereotypes entrenched in languages and the need for a particularly mindful approach amongst translators and interpreters. The push for the recognition of transgender rights and the increasing visibility of nonbinary people have brought a number of linguistic quandaries, whether it is the question of how to translate singular 'they' and neopronouns into languages with a much stronger presence of grammatical gender (see e.g. Völkening 2022), or how to deal with the translation of nonbinary characters

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in literature and media, such as in the Booker Prize winner novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (Evaristo 2019).

Gender-neutral language is also increasingly becoming a standard requirement in translations for corporations with a global reach, frequently imposed without clear guidelines on how to achieve these in languages that have gendered terms built into their grammatical systems. These are further complicated by the ubiquitous use of neural machine translation, which frequently reveals hidden biases assimilated by algorithms that replicate gendered stereotypes. The past years have also brought several discussions about representation, such as the heated debate about Amanda Gorman's poem *The Hill We Climb* (2021) and its Dutch translation (Kotze and Strowe 2021); these discussion pose questions about whether the identity and lived experience of translators correlates with their expertise, but also about the ways gender categories intersect with sexual orientations, race, class, (dis)ability and other factors.

The aim of this special issue is to capture some of these broadening definitions, shifting challenges and transformations of our understanding of gender from a range of different viewpoints and methodological approaches. The issue opens with Gabrielė Pocevičiūtė's article exploring subtitles to the series that embodied American womanhood in the late nineties and early noughties, *Sex and the City*. A comparison of French and Lithuanian translations reveals substantial differences in the quality and overall suitability of the two sets of subtitles, and presents compelling arguments about the importance of translation ethics and professional empathy, particularly in women-centred works.

Vasiliki Misiou in the second article in this issue moves the conversation from feminist translation strategies to (de-)gendered language in an exploration of an English text rooted in the experience of transgender characters, which is then elevated in an innovative and rule-bending translation into Greek. Misiou demonstrates that the seeming rigidity of gendered grammatical forms can not only become an invaluable asset in questioning gender binaries, but also directly contribute to the enrichment of the target culture.

The confrontation of gender-neutral expressions with a language with strongly gendered grammatical forms is further picked up by Barbora Vinczeová, who situates her inquiry into one of the most controversial areas in present-day political climate: translation for children. Her compelling exploration of a translation from a majority into a minority language demonstrates the usefulness and suitability of a chosen translation strategy, highlighting the importance of thoughtful and creative methods for linguistic transfer aimed at a curious and open-minded youthful audience.

The following article by Oľga Wrede turns the focus of gender-sensitive expressions into the area of legal translations, where the role of language as a vehicle for promoting equality remains the source of heated

debate. Using translations between German and Slovak, two strongly gendered languages, Wrede compares a number of different linguistic strategies and confronts them with other factors integral to legal translation such as readability and accuracy, as well as with societal norms impacting the work of the translator.

The human factor is further explored in the article by Soňa Hodáková and Miroslava Melicherčíková, as they turn their focus from the gendering of the text to the gender of the translator. Their quantitative study uses standardised psychological tools in order to explore the differences in the perception of anxiety and motivation in the highly demanding role of an interpreter along the gendered axis, and confirms that female interpreters score higher in both variables, offering compelling new data impacting our understanding of what remains an overwhelmingly female-led industry.

The final article by Candelas Bayón Cenitagoya and Beatriz Guerrero García offers a glimpse into the future with a speculation on feminist translation in and beyond the Anthropocene. Using Haraway's cyborg theory as a lens through which to explore the changing landscape of Translation Studies, the two authors consider the role of feminist approaches in the age of CAT tools and artificial intelligence, and offer thought-provoking possibilities for growth beyond the traditional dichotomies of male/female and original/translation.

Lastly, the issue closes with a review of Helen Vassallo's 2023 book *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing* by Candelas Bayón Cenitagoya, which evaluates the author's toolkit for feminist Translation Studies and foregrounds the pivotal role of the publishing industry in moulding societal perceptions of women's writing in translation.

In the same way as the road to global gender equality cannot follow an idealised linear trajectory, so does the field of gender in Translation Studies follow sometimes unexpected creative niches and innovative undercurrents alongside the regular paradigms. This special issue offers space to pause at the close of the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to take stock of the breadth and depth of some of these research areas, bringing together gender as a social group, as a grammatical category, and as a lived experience of those who are being translated and those doing the translating.

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