THE CHALLENGES OF GENDER TRANSLATION AS A CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSFER

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Translation is an important instrument of communication which helps in decoding cultures, languages and concepts. It is a dynamic process, being closely linked to the progress and permanent changes within a particular society, and languages at the same time. The paper focuses on defining the concept of gender, as well as the relationship between gender, culture and translation; offer and describe the basic principles of the representation of gender in English and Romanian languages; establish a theoretical background for the translation of gender in the literary works; determine the main techniques used in the translation of gender as well as to establish challenges in translating gender.

Keywords: gender, translation, culture, cross-cultural transfer

Translation has been long considered as a cross-cultural transfer, this being supported by scholars such as M. Gadpaille, Vesna Kondric Horvat, V. Kennedy, and others. Moreover, this transfers the transfer into a Target Language (TL) of a standard set of values, ideas and beliefs that govern a particular community. For this very reason, a translator must be knowledgeable of the ideas, beliefs, and values that connect to the languages being translated [4, p. 45]. The term "gender" was coined in the 1970's with multiple meanings and uses. Its biological and linguistic interpretation has more and more frequently been replaced by the sociocultural one, inspired by feminist and queer-theoretical approaches. It was used to describe the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity as against the biological differences of the sex. As Greville Corbett stated there are no natural languages where the relations between the gender (or class) of a noun and the biological sex of the noun's referent are exactly one-to-one; however, the role of the biological male/female distinction plays a certain role in assignment of grammatical gender in all languages that display gender difference [1, pp. 57-58].

Following its coinage, the term "gender" penetrated the general usage, increasingly appearing in the professional and specialized literature of the social sciences. According to Pamela Jakiela, "different systems are used by different languages for classifying nouns". She argues that gender languages assign many, sometimes all, nouns to distinct sex-based categories, masculine

and feminine [10, p. 6]. Many languages, by using different pronouns, distinguish between human males and females. In the English language, this is related to the use of nouns that are not gender-specific to refer to roles or professions, as well as avoidance of the pronouns *he*, *him* and *his* to refer to people of unknown or of indeterminate gender, i.e. instead of *fireman* people tend to use *firefighter*, *individuals* instead of *men*, and *humanity* instead of *mankind*. In the case when the gender of the person referred to is unknown or indeterminate, we may avoid the third-person pronoun *he* by using gender-neutral alternatives: such as singular *they*, *he or she*, or *s/he*. However, it should be noted that some gender-neutral terms still evoke the image of a man, like *philosopher* and *physicist*. This fact is due to the history, e.g. at the end of the 19th century it was suggested that women's intellectual activity should be limited because they need all the energy to develop their reproductive functions, as it was considered to be unhealthy for women, thus endangering the future of the human species.

In order to perceive the role of gender in the cross-cultural transfer via translation, the definitions of gender and sex are to be considered. In this regard, A. N. Neculăisei pointed out that these two terms serve to delineate anatomical and cultural differences between men and women. Thus, according to its definition, sex is a biological concept that is determined by genetics and biology, while gender is produced / reproduced by society and varies over time and across cultures [8. p. 31]. According to another definition, gender is a grouping of nouns into classes of masculine, feminine, and sometimes neuter, such that the choice of a noun of a given class syntactically has an effect on the form of some other word or element of the sentence or discourse [11].

Generally, researchers have scientifically proven that gender differences are influenced by culture. The masculinity-femininity aspect reflects the degree of interchange ability of gender roles in a given society. Therefore, a society is considered to be a masculine one, in the case when the gender emotional roles differ clearly, men being seen as authoritarian, harsh and focused on material success, while women being seen as modest, gentle and concerned with the quality of life. A society is considered to be a feminine one when gender emotional roles overlap, meaning that both men and women show modesty, gentleness and concern for their life quality.

Due to the fact that language is a product of human beings in interaction, and that language is based on human experience, a considerable amount of researches in the field of translation are being focused on the gender notion in translation, gender and translation being a very active and increasingly diverse field. Researches on the topic of gender and translation were done constantly. The most famous authors are: Luise von Flotow with

her studies about "Gender and Translation" [3], Marlis Hellinger and Bußmann, Hadumod in their work "Gender across Languages" [5], Susan Ehrlich, Miriam Meyerhoff and Janet Holmes with their research: "The Handbook of Language, Gender and Sexuality" [2].

These are researchers who approached gender from the grammatical, lexical and morphological and surely translation points of view. In the process of rendering gender from Source Language (SL) into the TL, the translator should pay attention to the fact that gender is "the most puzzling of the grammatical categories", as mentioned by Greville Corbett in his work "Gender" [1, p. 75], it is a "huge mechanism" that implies grammatical, morphological and lexical aspects, as well as social, pronominal and grammatical genders. Between genders and their language usage, there are many differentiations such as vocabulary, usage of power, solidarity and indirectness, the habits of interruption and exclamation. However, in order to ameliorate the communication between genders it is not enough to define those differences, it is also necessary to accept them and learn how to recognize them.

From the point of view of translation, it was prven that languages differ one from each other, the distinction between male and female in both English and Romanian languages is perceived in many ways: 1) By suffixes added to the masculine form: heir-heiress (moștenitor-moștenitoare); 2) Common nouns in which the first element indicates gender: boy student- girl student (student-studentă); 3) Common nouns in which the second element indicates gender: grandson-granddaughter (nepot-nepoată); 4) different words: fox-vixen (vulpoi-vulpoaică). According to Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bußmann, gender in the English language is a semantic category, with important social implications. English has a restricted class of personal nouns with lexical gender, i.e. their semantic specification includes a property (female) or (male): aunt, queen, vs. uncle, king. This property determines the choice of anaphoric pronouns: *she* for members of the first nominal class, *he* for members of the second. The majority of English personal nouns, however, are unspecified for gender, and can be used to refer to both female and male referents: person, neighbour, movie star, drug addict; they can be pronominalized by either *she* or *he* or – in neutral, non-specific contexts – by singular *they* [5, p. 107].

Angela Stanco in her work, *How to Translate Gender,* mentioned that languages may differ greatly in the way translators encode the category of gender in their lexical and grammatical systems. [13, p. 4]. The researcher also called gender in the English language as "a covert category" that is proven by its grammatical, lexical and morphological aspect. Therefore, grammatically it is represented by the 3rd person personal pronouns female

and male animate and the inanimate (*he/him, she/her, it*); *he* (and its related forms *him*, *himself*, *his*) is used in the case when the referent is male, or something to which male characteristics are attributed, e.g.: *man, boy, father; she* (and *her*, *herself*, *hers*) is used in the case when the referent is female, or is an object personified as female. This is common with vessels such as ships and airplanes, and sometimes with countries. *It* (and *itself*, *its*) is used in the case when the referent is something inanimate or intangible, a non-animal life-form such as a plant, an animal of unknown sex, or, less often, a child when the sex is unspecified or deemed unimportant, such as: *book, desk, baby, beauty.*

Compared to the Romanian language, the English language uses the natural gender instead of grammatical gender for its nouns such as: wife, husband, dear, stag; while Romanian nouns follow the natural gender rule: soţ (husband) being masculine, and soţie (wife) feminine noun. However, all other Romanian nouns have a gender in comparison to English where there is no natural gender, or it cannot be inferred from the noun. Morphologically, the English nouns are represented by the derivational suffix *–ess* that turns male or generic nouns into female (ex. actor/actress, poet/poetess, lion-lioness) and into compound nouns (ex. chairman/ chairwoman) [6, p. 4]. Lexically, it is represented with the help of different lexical items when referring to either a male or a female (man/woman, horse/mare), but also through collocations with gender specific adjectives (e.g. beautiful/handsome). The same rule is also applied to the Romanian language. For instance: soră (sister), frate (brother); mătuşă (aunt), unchi (uncle). At the same time, nouns are classified semantically (masculine, feminine, neuter and common gender), therefore the following words denote the common gender, e.g. inhabitant, owner, professor, pupil.

On the other hand, the basic peculiarities of gender in the Romanian language are: **1.** Romanian is the only Romance language that has three genders deriving from Latin: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Some of the Romanian neuter nouns are inherited from Latin, such as: cap – capete (head) - lat. (caput); ou – ouă (egg) - lat. (ovus), etc. According to M. Hellinger, borrowings from different languages have enriched the group of neuter nouns: sfat – sfaturi - advice, val – valuri - wave (slav.), pahar – pahare - glass (hung.), geam – geamuri - window glass (turk.), aparat – aparate - apparatus (germ.), computer – computer - computer (engl.), fenomen – fenomene - phenomenon (fr.), etc. [5, pp. 132-133]. One of the characteristics of the neuter gender in the Romanian language is that it does not have any formal particularities. The neuter nouns in the singular look like masculine nouns, while in the plural they look like feminine nouns. The same applies to adjectives, pronouns and pronominal adjectives. When they modify or

replace a neuter noun in the singular they appear in their masculine singular form, and when they modify or substitute a neuter noun in the plural they appear in their feminine plural form [7, p. 79]. **2**. The gender of many inanimate nouns is arbitrary in terms of extra linguistic categories. For instance, the following nouns belonging to the same thematic group, have different grammatical genders: *pantof – pantofi - shoe* is masculine, *palton – paltoane - winter coat* is neuter, and *fustă – fuste - skirt* is feminine [9, p. 26]. **3**. The dictionary form of a noun (i.e. the nominative sing. form) does not help much in recognizing its gender since there are no formal markers that can indicate without ambiguity the gender of a noun. For example nouns as *ship, car, town* usually refers to as "she" [9, p. 27].

Compared to the English language, the Romanian nouns are divided into three classes (called genders)**:** masculine**,** feminine**,** and neuter. As a rule, human nouns do not have neuter gender; words such as *popor* (people) or *mamifer* (mammal) are not really contradictory examples, as they are either collective or generic nouns. However, neuter cannot be used for gender inclusive or unspecific reference. Besides, feminine and masculine nouns also include common nouns [5, p. 232].

However, the most difficult types of gender to translate are the grammatical and social genders. Both of them are important linguistic categories that are used to demonstrate that the translation process is seen not only as a cross-cultural transfer but also as a cross-ideological transfer. The grammatical gender refers to gender assigned to nouns. Some languages do this while others do not. When translating between two language systems some problems can arise. One lies in the presence or not of a gender-specific article or pronoun in the SL, and its lacking in TL. The issue arises when the gender is not specified in the SL and it could change the context in the target language, as in the case of "*I do*", no gender is associated with the pronoun "*I*", however, in many languages not only must the pronoun be gender specific, but the verb form of "*do*" must be conjugated based on gender as well [14]. The issue of translating the personal pronoun *I* can be encountered in the literary texts. The Social Gender refers to the biological gender based upon a noun use and the society in which it was used. According to Uwe Kjær Nissen the social gender is the property of a word according to which people assign "generally male" or "generally female" [12]. Moreover, as the assignment of social gender is based on societal conditions, it turns out to be a rather complicated part of the translation process, consider the following example En: One of my *secretaries* was remarking only this morning how well and young I am looking. = Ro: Una dintre *secretarele* mele au observat abia azi dimineață cât de bine arăt.

The assignment of social roles based on gender is a consequence of cultural-religious interpretations and historical and environmental factors. Therefore, translations from one language to another are often very difficult. This difficulty lies in the fact that it enables the transfer between two cultures where all traditions, symbols, life conditions and methods of experience representation are different. The following example approaches the concept of love that is very broad and abstract in its meaning which makes it difficult to understand. En: To be head over heels in love.= Ro: Și-a pierdut capul după *ea*. / Ro: *Ea* i-a sucit capul *tânărului*. This examples highlights that the gender of the referent is neutral in the English language, therefore it can refer to either masculine or feminine. However, in the Romanian language there are two equivalences that refer in the first case to masculine gender and to feminine in the second one. The possible solutions for a translator are to make use of the sex-stereotypical substitution, that consists in finding a synonym that belongs to the same gender as the source word, e.g. En: *man-person* = Ro: *bărbat-individ;* and selecting a gender corresponding word in the TL which the target reader is familiar with, in order to keep the sex-based opposition; and to provide the TT with a footnote that indicate the divergent gender of the word in question in the SL.

When it comes to the translation of a text, the whole translating process goes long further than the simple transfer from one language to another. Therefore, the translator has to be aware of the values, beliefs that govern the community of language being translated, as well as of the grammar and semantic peculiarities of both the SL and the TL. The main task is to consider all the gender aspects in the ST as to determine what an ideological impact an accurate translation may have on both the TT success and the target reader response.

In order to avoid offending the target reader by inadvertently using language that might be considered sexist, the following guidelines are provided by Oxford scholars: A) in the situation when the choice is between a word which specifies a person's gender and a word which doesn't, the translator should opt for the neutral one, unless their gender is relevant to the context. For example, in general situations "*chairman* (preşedinte) is substituted by char or chairperson, *policeman* (poliţist) or *policewoman* (poliţistă) by *police officer* (ofiţer de poliţie), *spokesman* (purtător de cuvânt) by *spokesperson*, etc. [15]. B) In the case when reference to humanity, the use of structures such as "the human race" (rasă umană) or "humankind" (umanitate) rather than "mankind" (omenire) is recommended. Therefore, the main aim of a translator is to analyse all gender aspects in the ST as to determine what an ideological impact may provide an accurate translation in both the TT success and the target reader response. To provide an accurate

translation, the process does not just start with the translating action, it also implies a full research done on the subject of the text and context.

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