

Unveiling the Invisible: The Power of Translator Visibility in Shaping Feminist Novel

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Abstract:

This article investigates the role of the translator and their visibility in the process of translating feminist novels. In fact, translating feminist literature involves tackling nuanced gender issues and advocating for equality over linguistic and cultural boundaries. Thus, this study aims to highlight the translator's interference and the impact of their visibility on the transference and embrace of feminist ideologies. Hence, this paper questions the impact of the translator's visibility in acting upon the feminist theory and the way it influences the target text. Therefore, to explore this issue, we focus on Alif Shafak's novel, "Black Milk," and its Arabic translation. Moreover, in our analysis, we draw upon the strategies presented by Von Flotow in order to shed light on the relationship between the translator's visibility and the feminist perspective in translation. Furthermore, by examining the translation process and its implications, we endeavour to provide deep insights into the role of the translator's visibility in promoting feminist discourse within translated texts.

Keywords: Translator Visibility; Feminist Novel; Gender; Sociocultural Studies; Translation.

ملخص:

يناقش هذا المقال دور المترجم ومدى وضوح تواجده في عملية ترجمة الروايات النسوية؛ حيث تتضمن ترجمة الأدب النسوي التعامل مع قضايا النوع الجنسي المعقدة والتأكيد على المساواة بين الثقافات واللغات المختلفة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إلقاء الضوء على دور المترجم وتأثير وضوح تواجده على نقل الأيديولوجيات النسوية وتلقيها. كما يتناول مسألة ما إذا كان ظهور المترجم ضروريًا لخدمة النظرية النسوية وكيف يؤثر ذلك على النص المترجم. ولفهم هذه المسألة، نركز على رواية "حليب أسود" للكاتبة إليف شفق وترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية. ومن خلال تحليلنا، نستعين باستراتيجيات المنظرة فون فلوتو

لتسليط الضوء على العلاقة بين ظهور المترجم والمنظور النسوي في الترجمة. ومن خلال فحص عملية الترجمة وتداعياتها، نسعى إلى تقديم نظرة شاملة حول دور ظهور المترجم في تعزيز الخطاب النسوي داخل النصوص المترجمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مرئية المترجم؛ الرواية النسوية؛ الجندرية؛ الدراسات الاجتماعية الثقافية؛ الترجمة.

1- Introduction:

The translator's visibility has become a subject of increasing interest and debate within the realm of translation studies. As the field continues to explore the intricate relationship between translation and feminist theory, the role of the translator as an active agent in representing and promoting feminist perspectives has garnered significant attention. “Feminist translators are not just passive intermediaries, but are active agents who shape the meaning and reception of texts, and who have the power to challenge and subvert dominant power structures through their translation practices” (Vassallo, 2021).

This article delves into the significance of translator visibility in serving feminist theory through an analysis of Alif Shafak's novel, "Black Milk," and its Arabic translation.

Alif Shafak's novel, "Black Milk," serves as an ideal case study for investigating the impact of translator visibility on feminist discourse in translation. Known for her exploration of gender issues and cultural identity, Shafak's work delves into the experiences of women in patriarchal societies, challenging traditional norms and giving voice to marginalized perspectives. Analysing the translation of this novel into Arabic provides valuable insights into how translator visibility influences the presentation and reception of feminist themes within a specific cultural and linguistic context?

Tymoczko says that “Feminist translation practices involve a critical awareness of the translator's positionality and the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape the source and target texts.” (2010). In order to guide our analysis, we rely on the strategies proposed by Von Flotow, which encompass various translation practices that intersect with feminist theory.

These strategies include self-translation, explicitation, and cultural domestication, among others. By examining the translator's choices and their approach to these strategies, we can evaluate how translator visibility affects the translation process and ultimately shapes the representation of feminist ideas in the target text.

By engaging with the topic of translator visibility and its significance in serving feminist theory, this article contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender and translation. It sheds light on the complexities of conveying feminist discourse across languages and cultures and highlights the importance of acknowledging the translator as an active participant in shaping the reception of feminist ideas. Understanding the role of translator visibility in promoting feminist theory is crucial for achieving accurate and impactful translations that foster inclusive and diverse literary landscapes. .

2- Translating Feminism: Empowering Voices and Bridging Cultures

Feminism in literature refers to the exploration and representation of feminist ideas, themes, and perspectives in literary works. It involves examining the portrayal of women, gender roles, power dynamics, and societal expectations within literary texts. Feminism encompasses two elements: Firstly, it is a value system that drives social change to achieve gender justice within the hierarchical structure of society. Secondly, it is a social theory that analyses and explains the root causes, dynamics, and structure of violations against women. "Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength."- (Steinem, 1992) other words, feminism questions the reasons behind social inequality and injustice in power relations between women and men, as well as among women.

2-1 The Essence of Feminism

The feminist movement emerged in the 1960s (Freeman, 1975),, initially taking shape in the United States. This movement gained political momentum when Americans declared their independence from colonial rule in 1776. The declaration of independence stated that "all men are created equal" without explicitly mentioning women. The feminist movement in

America emerged as a radical approach encompassing civil rights and sexual liberation movements. It spread to Europe, Canada, and Australia, and has now become a global movement that challenges the status quo in the developing world. Some proponents of the feminist movement argue that the U.S. government does not give significant attention to women's roles and the challenges they face. Feminist theory aims at understanding the nature of gender inequality, it falls under the umbrella of critical theory, which in general have the purpose of destabilizing systems of power and oppression.

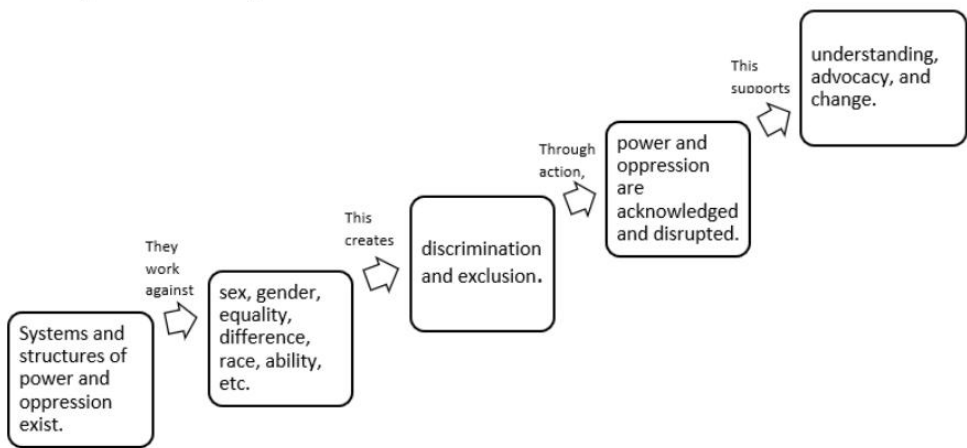


Figure 1: Model of feminist theory

(<https://opentext.wsu.edu/theoreticalmodelsforteachingandresearch/chapter/feminist-theory>)

2-2 Feminism in Translation:

Feminism in translation studies is an area of research that examines the intersection between feminist theory and the practice of translation. It explores how gender, power dynamics, and identity shape the process of translating texts and the implications of translation for feminist discourse. The practices of feminist translation involve translating women's work, feminist works, and challenging patriarchal translation of the women's texts (Simon, 1996). Feminist translation studies aim to shed light on the

challenges and opportunities faced by translators when conveying feminist ideas across languages and cultures, as well as the role of translation in promoting gender equality, representation, and social justice.

One key aspect of feminism in translation studies is the recognition of the translator as an active agent and the consideration of their subjectivity, positionality, and agency within the translation process. Translators are not seen as neutral conduits but as individuals who make conscious choices that can either reinforce or challenge gender biases and inequalities present in the source text or culture. This perspective emphasizes the importance of translator visibility and raises questions about the ethics and politics of translation.

Massardier Kenney (1997) says that a redefinition of feminist translation will “contribute to an examination of the translating activity in general; by emphasizing the importance of gender categories and the mechanisms through which the “feminine” is excluded or is valued” and, to show that “translation is a crucial form of cultural production” (1997, p.66). Furthermore, feminism in translation studies engages with issues of representation, voice, and silencing. It examines how gendered power structures may influence the selection of texts for translation, as well as the visibility and recognition of women writers and their works in translated literature. Feminist translation scholars also explore the concept of “translation as rewriting” and the potential for translators to actively reshape and reinterpret texts to reflect feminist ideals and address social inequalities.

Overall, feminism in translation studies seeks to uncover the complexities and implications of translating feminist texts and ideas. It underscores the importance of considering gender and power dynamics in the translation process, promoting translator visibility, and advocating for translations that foster gender equality, inclusivity, and social change. By examining these issues, feminist translation studies contribute to the broader fields of translation studies and feminism, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the role and impact of translation in advancing feminist goals.

3- Power of Translator's Visibility

The visibility of the translator in novel translation studies has been a topic of debate, with some arguing that the translator should remain invisible and others advocating for greater recognition of their role (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0907676X.2018.1465451>)

Translator's visibility in translation refers to the presence and recognition of the translator as an active agent within the translation process. It encompasses the acknowledgment of the translator's role, agency, and subjectivity in shaping the translated text. Traditionally, translators have been considered invisible intermediaries, aiming for a seamless transfer of meaning from the source language to the target language. "The translator's visibility in novel translation studies can be enhanced through the use of paratexts, such as introductions and footnotes, which provide readers with information about the translator and their work." (Ibid) However, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of translator visibility, particularly in relation to promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical considerations in translation. In the context of feminist translation, visibility becomes even more significant. Feminist translators often advocate for their visibility as a means to challenge and subvert patriarchal norms and biases present in the source text. They aim to make feminist ideas more visible and accessible to target audiences, thereby promoting gender equality and social change.

Lawrence Venuti, a translation theorist, argues that translators should not strive for invisibility in their translations. Instead, he advocates for a more visible and active role for the translator in the translation process. Venuti believes that a translator's visibility can help to draw attention to the fact that translation is an act of interpretation, and that it involves making choices that can shape the meaning of the original (Venuti, 1995, 17)

Venuti argues that translators have historically been rendered invisible in translation processes, with their contributions and agency downplayed or even erased. This invisibility can be attributed to a dominant ideology that prioritizes the illusion of transparency and unmediated access to the source text, effectively obscuring the translator's role as an active

mediator. Venuti critiques this notion of transparency, arguing that it perpetuates a monolingual and monocultural framework that overlooks the ethical, cultural, and political implications of translation. (Ibid. pp1-2).

In response to the invisibility of translators, Venuti advocates for the visibility of translators and their interventions in the translation process. He suggests that translators should embrace their role as "performers" and make deliberate choices that draw attention to the foreignness and cultural specificity of the source text. By making their presence and interventions visible, translators can challenge dominant norms, promote linguistic and cultural diversity, and raise awareness of the complexities involved in translation. (Ibid.)

Therefore, in the context of Lawrence Venuti's theories, the visibility of the translator refers to the deliberate acknowledgment and recognition of their role, choices, and interventions in the translation process. It is a way to challenge the traditional emphasis on transparency and highlight the translator's agency, subjectivity, and cultural mediation.

4- Feminist Translation Strategies

Luise von Flotow, a translation scholar and feminist theorist, has written extensively about feminist translation strategies. In her book "Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'," she argues that traditional translation practices have been complicit in perpetuating patriarchal values and gender inequalities. To counter this, she suggests several feminist translation strategies that can help to challenge and subvert these dominant power structures. (Von Flotow, 2019, 1-7):

4.1- Rewriting and Revising:

She emphasizes the importance of rewriting and revising the source text to challenge and transform gender biases. This strategy involves rethinking the language and structure of the original text to create a more inclusive and gender-sensitive target text.

4.2- Visibility and Voice:

Von Flotow highlights the need for visibility and giving voice to

marginalized groups, particularly women, in translation. This strategy involves consciously representing and amplifying the voices of women in the target text, ensuring their perspectives and experiences are accurately portrayed.

4.3- Contextualization:

The researcher emphasizes the significance of considering the social, cultural, and historical contexts in both the source and target cultures. Understanding the power dynamics and inequalities in these contexts helps translators navigate and challenge gender biases present in the source text.

4.4- Collaboration and Dialogue:

Von Flotow emphasizes the importance of collaboration between translators, authors, and readers in the process of feminist translation. This strategy involves engaging in ongoing dialogue and consultation with the author or community to ensure the translation accurately reflects their intentions and addresses gender-related issues effectively.

4.5- Activism and Empowerment:

Von Flotow advocates for using feminist translation as a means of activism and empowerment. This strategy involves using translation to challenge and disrupt patriarchal structures and promote gender equality and social change.



(Von Flotow, 2019)

5. Exploring Translation Strategies in Enhancing Visibility through the Novel “Black Milk”

In this section, we aim to apply the strategies of feminist translation to the novel "Black Milk" and its Arabic translation. Our objective is to examine whether the translator's visibility is evident and whether they have effectively employed their skills and influence in the service of feminism.

"Black Milk" is a compelling novel by Elif Shafak that explores the intricate journey of a woman as she navigates the challenges of motherhood, womanhood, and personal identity within a patriarchal society. (Shafak, 2011) The story delves into the protagonist's experiences, exposing the societal pressures placed upon women and the sacrifices they are expected to make. Shafak critically examines the idealized image of motherhood and the conflicts women face in balancing their own desires with societal expectations. The novel also addresses broader issues of gender inequality and the limitations imposed on women, emphasizing the need for women to challenge traditional gender roles and seek personal fulfillment. Through its exploration of culture, identity, and historical context, "Black Milk" offers insights into the complexities of navigating cultural expectations while striving for empowerment. The novel weaves personal stories with larger societal contexts, shedding light on the interconnectedness of personal and collective struggles. Ultimately, "Black Milk" is a thought-provoking and captivating work that invites readers to reflect on the multifaceted nature of feminism and the pursuit of gender equality.

In our analysis, we follow a two-step process. Firstly, we present examples from the source text and its translation to provide concrete instances for examination. Secondly, we scrutinize these examples through the lens of the strategies that have been cited in our study.

Through this analysis, we aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the translator's approach and the extent to which they have embraced feminist translation principles. By examining the selected examples in the light of these strategies, we can gain insights into the translator's visibility and their ability to navigate the complexities of feminist translation. This approach

allows us to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of the chosen strategies on the translated text and their contribution to advancing feminist discourse in translation studies.

5.1- Example1: Visibility and Voice: The Title

Black Milk On Writing, Motherhood, And The Harem Within (Shafak, 2011)

حليب أسود، مذكرات (العلي، 2016)،
حليب أسود، الكتابة والأمومة والحريم (درويش، 2016)

The title "Black Milk" is a symbolic representation of contrasting elements, drawing upon the imagery of black and white and the metaphorical associations of milk and writing. Elif Shafak, a renowned Turkish author, used this title for her book, which explores the intersection of motherhood, creativity, and feminism.

The symbolism of the milk being white while the writing is done with a black pen suggests the dichotomy between the societal expectations and experiences of women. The whiteness of the milk represents the traditional idealization of motherhood and the pressures placed on women to conform to traditional roles and expectations. It can be seen as a symbol of purity, innocence, and nurturing.

On the other hand, the act of writing a novel with a black pen represents the challenges and struggles faced by women who strive to break free from societal norms and express their individuality and creativity. The black pen symbolizes rebellion, defiance, and the power of self-expression. It represents the act of writing one's own narrative, outside the confines of societal expectations.

Shafak's comparison of the child with a novel in the field of feminism highlights the connection between motherhood and creativity. Just as a child is a creation that emerges from a woman's body, a novel is a creation that emerges from the writer's mind and imagination. By equating the two, Shafak suggests that the process of writing and the act of mothering both involve labor, nurturing, and the exploration of identity.

If we analyze the translation, we can observe that Darwish remains very faithful to the source text. He translates all the titles with their respective details *الكتابة والأمومة والحريم*. On the other hand, Al Ali provides a main title which is *حليب أسود* and adds the word "مذكرات" (memoirs), which summarizes the sub-title of the novel.

But it is important to note that the word "Hareem" *حريم* used by Shafak is an Arabic word adopted into Turkish language. Shafak intentionally chose to use this word because it carries a deeper connotation. Rather than simply using the word "women," she opted for "Hareem" to evoke a specific meaning. In Arabic, *حريم* "Hareem" refers to a particular context, typically associated with a secluded space where women reside. This choice adds a layer of significance and cultural resonance to her portrayal of women in the novel.

So the strategy here involves consciously representing and amplifying the voices of women in the target text. And we can say that both of translators was visible in translation.

5.2- Example2: Margin Area

They are flesh-and-blood sisters but they function under Sultan Fatih's Code of Law.*

Fatih Code of Law: The Code of Sultan Fatih legalized fratricide in the fifteenth century in the Ottoman Empire, allowing rulers to kill their brothers so that they would not pose a threat to the throne. (Shafak, 2011, 57)

لو أعطيت الفرصة لاقتلعت أعين الأخريات إنهن أخوات باللحم والدم بيد أنهن يتصرفن
بدموية قوانين السلطان محمد الفاتح (العلي، 2016، 40)

Our observation pertains to a specific aspect in the text, where the author, Elif Shafak, made a significant point by mentioning the laws of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror and providing an explanation of their significance. However, it appears that the translator did not give due attention to this crucial detail and chose to omit it from the translated version. This omission is noteworthy because it deprives the readers of

important historical and cultural context.

By excluding the explanation of the laws, the translator missed an opportunity to provide valuable information to readers who may not be familiar with the history of Turkey and its sultans. It is important to remember that not all readers possess prior knowledge of specific historical events or cultural nuances, and therefore rely on the translation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text.

Furthermore, the translator's decision to exclude this explanation assumes that the Arab readership is already well-versed in the culture and conquests of Muslims. However, this assumption may not hold true for all readers, as their backgrounds and knowledge levels may vary. It is the translator's responsibility to ensure that the translated text captures and conveys the intended meaning and information present in the original text.

In light of these considerations, the translator's omission of the explanation of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's laws can be seen as a missed opportunity to provide a richer reading experience and a more accurate representation of the author's intentions. By including this marginal note, the translator would have preserved the integrity of the text and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural elements at play in the narrative.

The translator fails to leverage their influence and abilities to actively contribute to feminist causes. The word "power" refers to the translator's authority and impact in shaping the translated text. By not employing this power in a way that aligns with feminist principles, the translator misses an opportunity to advance feminist values and perspectives through their work.

5.3- Example 3: Rewriting and Revising: Préface

In the novel "Black Milk," the translator's introduction serves as a testament to their awareness and comprehension of feminist principles. They demonstrate this by prominently featuring a female writer who eloquently introduces the novel, honoring and recognizing the experiences and

challenges faced by women.

The translator's decision to let a woman writer introduce the novel with positive and empowering words about women further emphasizes their alignment with feminist ideals. It signals a conscious effort to give agency and recognition to women's perspectives and experiences, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable portrayal of gender in literature.

Overall, the introduction by the translator in "Black Milk" reinforces their visibility regarding feminism through the intentional inclusion of a woman writer's empowering words, promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of women's narratives and perspectives.

In contrast to the first translator, the second translator of "Black Milk" appears to be more closely connected to the original text and remains faithful to the author's stylistic choices and narrative structure in the source language. When he translated the quotations of Leo Tolstoy,

By conserving the steps of the author in the source language, the second translator demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving the integrity and authenticity of the original work. This approach suggests a focus on maintaining the author's voice, tone, and literary techniques, ensuring that the translated version captures the essence of the original text.

While the first translator prioritizes feminist visibility and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, the second translator's emphasis lies in providing readers with an accurate representation of the author's intentions. Their adherence to the author's narrative progression and linguistic choices suggests a desire to convey the story in a way that remains faithful to the source material.

Both approaches have their merits and can contribute to a rich and comprehensive reading experience. The first translator's focus on feminist visibility and representation may provide readers with a new and nuanced perspective on the text, while the second translator's commitment to faithfulness may appeal to those who prioritize a more faithful rendition of the author's work.

Ultimately, the choice between these two approaches depends on the goals and preferences of the translator, as well as the intended audience for the translated work.

“I have previously read several novels by the author with translations by Derwish, and most of the translations were satisfactory. However, his translation of the book "Black Milk" was more like drinking spoiled milk. I'm not sure if it was a rushed translation or done reluctantly.” (<https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1502729400475202200>)

It seems to me that the subject of the book did not appeal to the translator or fall within their sphere of interest and understanding. It is a purely feminist topic, addressing various aspects of women's biological and psychological concerns and their relationship to the issue of creativity and writing. The subject, in this way, can be considered within the framework of feminism and all the historical, social, and literary debates associated with the term.

(<https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1502729400475202200>) حليب أسود نجمة إدريس

5.4- Example4: Activism and Empowerment

In the given text, there are words used by Shafak in here novel that discuss the variations in perspectives between men and women, and how these words are translated in relation to Alali.

المرأة	الرجل	Man	Woman
رقيقة	عضلي	Masculine	Feminine
خجولة	خشن	Bold	Modest
غائبة	حاضر	Dominant	Passive
طبيعة	ثقافة	Culture	Nature
الليل	النهار	Day	Night
عاطفية	منطقي	Rational	Emotional
الجسد	العقل	Brain	Body
حسية	لمسي	Intelligible	Sensitive
أفقية	عمودي	Vertical	Horizontal
الاستقرار	السفر	Moving	Settled
وحيدة العلاقة	متعدد العلاقات	Polygamous	Monogamous (or multiple partners)
أقوال	أفعال	Doer	Talker
ذاتي	متجرد	Objective	Subjective
رثائي	تمجيدي	Logos	Pathos

Shafak aims to highlight the differences between men and women in a patriarchal society. It is evident that the translation remains faithful, and the translator's visibility is apparent in this context. Specially in the words Feminine and Masculine by عضلي ورقيقة to avoid the gender.

6- Conclusion:

Our analysis reveals that translator visibility plays a significant role in serving feminist theory within translated literature. The translator's visibility through self-translation and explicitation can facilitate the retention and transmission of feminist messages, ensuring their preservation across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Additionally, cultural domestication, when strategically employed by the translator, can enhance the accessibility and relevance of feminist ideas in the target culture. Conversely, a lack of translator visibility may obscure or dilute feminist perspectives, potentially diminishing their impact.

The visibility of the translator is indeed necessary to effectively serve feminist theory in translation. By employing Von Flotow's strategies, we have demonstrated how translator visibility can shape the representation of feminist themes and perspectives in translated texts. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing and embracing the role of the translator as an active agent in promoting feminist discourse. Future research should continue to explore and refine the strategies employed by translators to ensure the accurate and impactful conveyance of feminist perspectives in translated literature.

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