

An Exploration into the Semiotic Rationale for Gender Shifts in English-Arabic Literary Translation: the case of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Lina Fadel

Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies (LINCS), Heriot-Watt University,
Edinburgh, UK
lf(a)ebs.hw.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

'Shifts' that occur in texts during the course of translation have long been a central issue in Translation Studies. However, this issue is understudied in Arabic, even though grammatical, socio-cultural and ideological differences continue to shape linguistic transfer from and into English, particularly where gender relations are concerned. Apart from some feminist attempts on the part of Arabic thinkers, who mainly dealt with gender relations and their effect on the socio-political aspect of Middle-Eastern life, the works of two Arab scholars, Adonis (1973/ 2011) and Muqaddam (2010), were probably the only accounts of gender in language that exposed the bias that Arabic exhibits against the 'female' through marginalising the 'feminine'.

This study is an investigation into the underlying socio-cultural connotations of and rationale for gender shifts in literary translation from English into Arabic. The investigation is cross-disciplinary in that it addresses a translational problem, but it does so by drawing on research within gender studies, as well as semiotic and sociological approaches to translated texts. The study hypothesizes a link between the various kinds of shifts found when comparing Toni Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye* and its two Arabic translations (which constitute the primary corpus), and the Arabic translators' decision, informed by their gender ideologies, to detach themselves from the signification channels with which they are familiar on the socio-semiotic level. It is suggested that this link can be better elucidated by applying a control corpus-based approach to the translations which employs a control corpus of literary, non-translated texts in Arabic.

Given its empirical, product-oriented, nature, this research adopts as its methodological approach a paradigm which has been elaborated by combining three main methodologies: van Leuven-Zwart's comparative and descriptive analysis of shifts (1989, 1990), Hatim and Mason's four-step methodology for semiotic-conscious translation (1990), and Toury's three-phase methodology for a systematic descriptive study of the translation product and its wider socio-cultural system (1995). A fourth methodology, corpus-based tools, will also be employed for the proposed confirmatory analysis and in order to support the results of the manual analysis of the primary corpus. The method of data analysis consists of a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses. The overall data analysis is divided into two stages: analysis of the primary texts and confirmatory, corpus-based, analysis which is argued to provide great insight into the Arabic gender tradition in literary writing and, therefore, to inform the analysis based on the patterns and individual instances discerned in the analysis of primary data.

The findings confirm that translational shifts are more governed by socio-linguistic norms than determined by linguistic rules. The translators' techniques indicate the type of gender relations present in Arabic that seemed to govern the translational process(s). It was possible to determine the influence of the translators' gender ideologies in the target texts (TTs), which were indicators of both their idiosyncrasies and the norms of the target culture (TC). Further, it was evident that the translators' presence was felt in going, albeit to varying degrees, against the norms, and sometimes rules, of the Arabic culture and language.

KEYWORDS: corpus-based studies, gender studies, shifts of translation, semiotics, socio-grammatical norms, sociology

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