Feminist translation and feminist socio-linguistics in dialogue: A multi-layered analysis of linguistic gender constructions in and across English and Turkish

Emek Ergün

Abstract

This article, focusing on Turkish and English, explores various intersections between feminist translation and feminist sociolinguistics to bring the fields into conversation and expand their intellectual and geopolitical scopes. The first section discusses the broad historical points of connection by concentrating on the critiques of sexist language. Thus, it demonstrates how the fields share a common feminist politics of language. This intersection is illustrated by an example from my Turkish translation of Hanne Blank's Virgin. *The second section explores a more specific alliance by examining feminist critiques and manipulations of pro/nominal gender systems. This discussion is supported by more examples from my translation, as well as examples from Cemile Çakır's Turkish translation of Leslie Feinberg's* Stone Butch Blues. *The last section provides feminist sociolinguistics and translation teachers with ideas on how interdisciplinary cooperations can expand students' political awareness of gender/sexuality dynamics with regard to language and translation. The significance of this intersection is demonstrated by a translation experiment.*

KEYWORDS: FEMINIST TRANSLATION, FEMINIST SOCIOLINGUISTICS, TURKISH, ENGLISH

Affiliation

University of Maryland, USA
Email: demiremek@yahoo.com

equinox
www.equinoxpub.com

equinoxonline

Each of us is here now because in one way or another
we share a commitment to language and to the power of language,
and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work
against us.
Audre Lorde (1984:43)

Introduction[1]

This paper explores various layers of intersection between feminist
translation and feminist sociolinguistics to demonstrate that the fields
share more than the common denominator 'feminist', which when exposed
could facilitate prolific interdisciplinary exchanges. Reflecting Lorde's faith
in the political power of language to transform silence into words and
action, as expressed in the epigraph, both feminist translation and feminist
sociolinguistics scholars in general share a commitment to gender politics.
It is the contention of this paper that if these fields are brought into further
conversation and cooperation, their potential for enhancing sociopolitical
change will be heightened. The paper examines these interdisciplinary
connections through multiple translation examples focusing primarily on
the pro/nominal linguistic configurations of gender in and across English
and Turkish.

There are several reasons why English and Turkish are selected as
the focus of this paper. Firstly, these are the languages that I am most
familiar with as a language and translation scholar and translator. More
importantly, since Turkish and English have different linguistic structures
and resources to communicate gender, a comparative study of them would
solicit unasked questions and produce illuminative examples, which could
be invigorating for both fields. Furthermore, the paper aims to bring
together English, a language proclaimed to be the 'lingua franca' of today's
global world and studied extensively in both feminist sociolinguistics and
feminist translation studies and Turkish, a minor language that has been
largely neglected in both fields.[2] Juxtaposing two languages that occupy
asymmetrical positions in the cultural economy of globalization, including
academia, could highlight the potentials of a disciplinary coalition between
the fields more strikingly and expand their scope not just intellectually, but
also geopolitically.

This paper examines three practical translation examples, each illus-
trating a partnership between the fields. The first part discusses the broad
historical and theoretical points of connection by concentrating on the
critiques of sexist language offered by feminist sociolinguists, feminist
fiction writers and feminist translators. In other words, the first part
demonstrates how feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation share

a common feminist politics of language. In doing so, the section also sets up the historical framework of the paper. The implications of this broad intersection are illustrated by examples from my Turkish translation of Hanne Blank's *Virgin* (2007/2008). The second part discusses a more specific alliance between the fields by focusing on disruptions and manipulations of pro/nominal gender systems by feminist sociolinguists, writers and translators. This discussion is supported by other examples from my *Virgin* translation and examples from Cemile Çakır's Turkish translation of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993/2007). The final part provides teachers of translation and sociolinguistics with ideas on how pedagogical alliances between the fields can effectively be used in expanding students' political awareness and understandings of gender and sexuality dynamics with regard to language and translation. The significance of this intersection is demonstrated by a translation experiment.

Although throughout the paper I mention the categories of theory, history, practice and pedagogy to point out the intersections between feminist translation and sociolinguistics, I should note that such marking is artificial and used here only to highlight the large spectrum of potential connections between the fields. Since theory, history, practice and pedagogy are always intermingled and implicated in one another, these categorical markings should not be taken as jointly exhaustive or mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they should be read in relation to one another and only as partially addressed themes with blurred boundaries aiming to motivate productive collaborations between feminist sociolinguists and translation scholars.

Intersections in the feminist politics of language

The interrelation between language and gender, especially the debates on the 'generic' use of *he*, has been a critical subject of theorizing since the nineteenth century but the issue has gained impetus after the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s as part of the second wave of Western feminist movements (Curzan 2003:74–79). The centrality of language in the feminist politics of this era is illustrated well in the 1970s' slogan, 'La libération des femmes passe par le langage' (women's liberation passes through language) (Simon 1996:8).[3] Early studies on language and gender generally reflected the perspective of linguistic determinism, the idea that language directly affects, even determines the way people perceive and experience the world. Pioneering, though controversial, works by Lakoff (1975), Spender (1980) and Daly (1978) advocated this deterministic stance through their discussions of the role of 'man-made language' in sustaining women's subjugation. These feminist scholars, whose main focus was on linguistic

representations of women, were especially concerned with the idea that women were silenced, turned invisible and alienated by 'patriarchal' language built on the norm of masculinity. From this theoretical outlook, the solution to the man-made prison of language was to either radically transform and reclaim language or completely abandon patriarchal language and create a women's language.

With the sweep of poststructuralist thought across disciplines beginning in the late 1960s, linguistic studies on gender went through serious transformations as central concepts such as language and gender were subjected to profound questioning and deconstructing. As Cameron (1992) notes, the biggest impact of poststructuralism on feminist linguistic studies began to be felt from the 1980s on, when language was reconstructed as a dynamic, rather than fixed, system of signification regulating and producing actions and identity positions. This new conceptualization of language as a terrain of contested meanings and discourses marked by unequal power relations, in addition to gendered subjectivity as an embodied and performed effect of discursive repetition (reflecting Butler's landmark theory of gender performativity, 2006) importantly highlighted the possibility of human agency, resistance and social change through meaning and knowledge production. Thus, poststructuralism not only reaffirmed the centrality of language in feminist politics, but also drew feminist scholars' attention to historically contingent (both complicit and resistant) uses of language in the context of regulatory discourses. By integrating *discourse* (microanalysis of specific textual elements) and *Discourse* (macroanalysis in a Foucauldian sense), the new generation of feminist sociolinguists began attending more closely to the interplay between subjective language use and regulatory ideologies and institutions to deconstruct phallogocentrisms.

Feminist critiques of sexist language had serious impact not only in linguistics, but also in literature. From the 1960s onward, numerous women poets and novelists began experimenting with linguistic gender forms, specifically pronominal gender forms, as a response to feminist scholars' calls to question and challenge the normalization of gender hierarchies in and through language. Many of these experimental works have been produced in Western Europe, the US and Canada and, as Livia (2001:20) shows, questioned the linguistic gender regime by either using existing pronouns in new ways or creating new pronouns 'to downplay, eradicate, or reverse the traditional grammatical insistence on gender'.

From linguistics and literature, feminist critiques of sexist language spread into translation studies in the diglossic and cross-fertilizing cultural context of Quebec. When the sociolinguistic concerns of the Quebec sovereignty movement converged with those of the feminist movement, it created a ripe cultural setting for the literary phenomenon of *écriture*

féminine (writing in/of the 'feminine'), already started in France, to move in. The most prominent Canadian representatives of *écriture féminine* include Brossard, Gagnon, Théoret and Bersianik (and e.g. Cixous and Irigaray in France). These writers have problematized linguistic and discursive silencing of women and creatively experimented with language to produce women-centred discourses. Linguistic strategies such as unconventional spellings, subversions of grammatical and semantic gender systems, neologisms and puns have innovatively been put into political use in these texts. In turn, their translations required similarly subversive and political writing strategies, which generated 'feminist translation'. As a multidisciplinary praxis where poststructuralist thought, postcolonial theories, cultural studies and feminist theories were brought into close dialogue within the context of translation studies, feminist translation emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, most notably with the works of Godard, de Lotbinière-Harwood and Gaboriau. From Quebec, feminist translation has limitedly spread into the US and some European countries, yet it has remained largely marginalized as a legitimate field of academia.

In Turkey, the topic of feminist translation has drawn little attention from academia, although the longstanding translation studies departments are academically prolific and the vibrant feminist movements in the country have been nourished greatly by translation. This disinterest in feminist translation can partly be attributed to the lack of feminist linguistic activism in the country (Braun 2001). In countries like Turkey, where feminist movements have not engaged in large-scale interrogation of meaning making processes and language as a major institution of systematic gender oppression, the links between translation and gender politics have not been fully recognized as a significant area of scholarly research and political action. Interestingly enough, many of the writings on the history of feminism in Turkey do mention Turkish translations of key feminist texts, such as Simone de Beauvoir's and Kate Millett's works, yet solely as a sidenote.[4] Neither the textual translation processes of these works as crucial political projects of the feminist movement, nor their enhancing, interventionist and transformative effects are brought under close historical scrutiny. Thus, the translational reinforcement of the feminist consciousness and movement remains undertheorized in the feminist historiography literature of Turkey. In short, given this major gap in both the feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation literature on Turkish it becomes obvious how much the two fields could gain from collaborative research studies on Turkish as well as other neglected languages. The fact that both fields share a feminist politics of language seems to have already paved the way for such collaborations.

Another intersection between the fields emerges on the subject of reading, or more specifically the 'implied reader' to borrow Iser's (1980) key concept. In broad terms, implied reader refers to a hypothetical reader for whom the text is structurally designed to address itself and who is required to actively cooperate with the text to create meanings. Feminist sociolinguists' problematizations of gendered language, feminist literary writers' manipulations of linguistic gender forms and feminist translators' subsequent interventions in language to enable translated texts (feminist or not) to travel into the receiving culture with a feminist consciousness inscribed in them all assume a politically engaged role for their implied readers. This role includes questioning the function of language in normalizing and sustaining women's oppression, participating in the (re)writers' deconstructions of hetero/sexist language forms and uses and finally recognizing that language can be a tool of resistance and empowerment. In short, works produced in these fields generally assume a common implied reader whose feminist consciousness about gender and language (among other issues) is heightened and/or transformed in the reading process.

This political effect is partly achieved by feminist linguistic and textual strategies, such as pro/nominal interventions, that disrupt the phallocentric symbolic order and impede an easy and fluent reading experience. Such a disruptive reading process takes place precisely because what is being read does not confirm the hegemonic values of the linguistic and cultural system. Moreover, the reading activity takes place in a discursive context that either does not recognize and accept such subversive language uses as legitimate or marginalizes them under normative linguistic forms. In other words, since language as a meaning making system too often reproduces and naturalizes the male norm, feminist writers and translators find innovative strategies to refrain from perpetuating phallogocentrisms. This in turn complicates the reading process for the reader who is typically habituated to reading male-dominant discourses, masked under seemingly unideological, natural and fluent textual structures. This does not mean that only readers of feminist texts problematize sexist language or that every actual reader of feminist texts does so. However, feminist writers and translators deliberately manipulate linguistic resources for their implied readers. In doing so, they induce 'an alien reading experience' to increase the possibility of political critiques and problematizations of gendered language by the reader (Venuti 2008:16). I argue that epistemological cooperations among feminist sociolinguists and feminist translation scholars would generate invaluable insights for both fields if they collaboratively study the linguistic processes and elements of constructing implied feminist readers and activating 'alien reading' experiences. The example I

discuss next, which is from my own feminist translation, illustrates how a lexical translation decision can be informed by both feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation theories while applying the notion of simultaneous disruption of male-centered language and fluent reading.

Hanne Blank's *Virgin* (2007) offers a feminist historical account of sociocultural and medical constructions of virginity in Europe and the US. The book demonstrates that virginity, which is often regarded as an indisputable fact, is actually an unstable sociocultural invention engineered by male-dominant institutions, such as family, medicine, education, religion, law and medicine, in the service of heteropatriarchal control of women's bodies and sexualities. I translated *Virgin* into Turkish (Blank 2008) partly because I wanted to challenge medicalization of female virginity, which is a powerful control mechanism over women in Turkey precisely because it has been effectively medicalized through medical discourses and practices like virginity examinations. Medicalization turns virginity into a much more powerful tool of disciplining and controlling women's bodies because it constructs virginity as a fixed, unchangeable 'fact' of nature and science by presenting the hymen as its 'objective' physical criterion. Thus, I translated *Virgin* hoping that the travels of its feminist discourses into the Turkish context would unsettle the conventional terms of virginity in the country and stimulate the readers to question the hegemonic discourses of women's sexuality and to reassess their embodied knowledges and experiences.

One textual strategy I used to enact this intention involved the translation of the term 'hymen', the scientific pillar of virginity. In Turkish, the most widely known terms for virginity are *bekâret* ('virginity') and *kızlık* ('girlhood'), with 'virgin' (presumably unmarried) women referred to as *bakire* ('virgin') or more often as *kız* ('girl'). Similarly, hymen is referred to as *kızlık zarı* ('membrane of girlhood'). This hetero/sexist linguistic usage reflects the definition of women's bodies from a heteronormative perspective and in their subordinate relation to male bodies as the distinction between girlhood and womanhood (read: childhood and adulthood) is based upon the penis and whether it has 'marked' the vagina or not. Moreover, the term reduces women to vaginas. Given this heteropatriarchal sociolinguistic background, the question I had to answer in my translation was how to translate 'hymen' into a phallocentric language that defined womanhood on the bases of the vagina and its penile penetration.

In order to refrain from creating a text that would play into the discursive configuration of women's bodies on the basis of the male norm, I decided to translate 'hymen' as *himen*, a word borrowed from English and used almost exclusively in medical contexts in Turkish. I chose to use *himen*, rather than *kızlık zarı*, because the term sounded more neutral, in part because it is a medical term with associations of 'objectivity', but more importantly

because it is an 'alien' word lacking a history of sociolinguistic interactions with other sexist discourses circulating in the cultural sphere and thus, at least on the surface, does not have the immediate sexist connotations that 'the membrane of girlhood' brings into mind. In other words, in a project trying to deconstruct the medical construction of virginity, I ended up using a medical term for the sake of creating a nonsexist discourse and perhaps contributed to the medicalization of virginity. How do I explain this dilemma?

The scientifically endorsed term *hymen* is a depoliticized and dehistoricized concept that does not reveal its *his*tory of sociocultural and medicolegal creation; its service to the patriarchal institutions of marriage, family and compulsory heterosexuality; and its mythic being disguised as an 'objective' given. In my translation, I used the term *himen*, yet contextualized it in a political discourse where the concept is subjected to serious deconstructing. This, I hoped, would expose the gendered body politics behind the scientific construction of hymen and reveal its relations with systems of male-domination. In other words, I used the medical term *himen* in a textual context that infused it with the critical content it lacked. I used *himen* against itself: the text undermined *himen*'s presumably static 'being' by historicizing it, hence disclosing its sociomedical invention. Thus, a potential shortcoming at the lexical level was compensated for at the larger discursive level through subversive politicization of the concepts of hymen and virginity. A scientifically sterilized term was 'contaminated' by the feminist 'mythbuster' discourses of *Virgin*. In short, although there is no easy way out of this dilemma, in the context of this particular feminist translation project, with limited linguistic resources at hand, I could not think of a better strategy than problematizing the *master's* own words and concepts to attack *his* masterful construction of virginity as a scientific fact.

The experimental deployment of *himen* in the Turkish *Virgin* (in Blank 2008, Ergün 2008) becomes more meaningful when the political role of the translator's implied reader is considered. As I mentioned above, *himen* is an almost unknown term in everyday Turkish language. Even in medical discourse, it is not used consistently. For instance, in medical reports given after virginity examinations in Turkey, the result is not phrased as 'hymen intact/hymen not intact' or 'virgin/not virgin', but as 'girl/not a girl' (*kız/kız değil*). Since many of the readers are unfamiliar with the term, it is highly likely that the use of *himen* functions to interrupt the fluent reading process, which was a strategy consciously planned (though never guaranteed) by the translator. The implied reader is hypothesized to critically reflect on the implications of *himen* when s/he first encounters this alien term and ultimately participate in the translator's interrogation of virginity in particular and sexist language in general. In other words,

the disruption of the reading experience is designed by the translator to increase the political power of the feminist discourses of *Virgin*.

The political potentiality of this textual disruption was further strengthened by my use of paratextual spaces to activate the reader's political engagement with the text. In the Turkish *Virgin*, the word *himen* first appears in the 24-page long preface that I wrote to situate the political narratives of *Virgin* in the historical context of Turkey. Here, I not only questioned the heteropatriarchal concept of virginity, criticized the mainstream politics of virginity in the country and highlighted feminist activisms on the issue, but also defined my translation strategies as 'feminist' and explained my preference for *himen* instead of *kızlık zarı*. As a precaution for the possibility that the reader skipped the preface I incorporated a translator's footnote when *himen* was first used to draw the reader's attention to my disapproval of sexist language and refusal to reproduce male-dominant discourses on women's bodies. In this context, the use of *himen* and the attending paratextual commentaries are both potentially disruptive not only for the reading process, but also for the dominant gender paradigms of the receiving culture because the political discourse in which the term is deployed goes against the hegemonic values and ideologies of the culture.[5] Such commentaries in translation, especially feminist-identified ones, are sometimes 'seen as superfluous "noise" that distracts from the actual text' (von Flotow 1996:78) and criticized for disrupting the flow of the text and spoiling its assumed 'uniformity'. Yet, this example shows that they can accomplish important political functions, such as increasing the translator's long-denied visibility and the reader's participation in the political projects of feminist language and translation. The example also highlights how feminist translation and feminist sociolinguistics inform one another in terms of feminist language praxis. Therefore, interdisciplinary collaborations between the fields could be both epistemologically and pragmatically expanding and enriching for feminist politics of language. In fact, if we want to increase the political impact of feminist critiques of hetero/sexist language across and beyond academic boundaries such alliances appear to be a feasible option with great potential.

Intersections in the feminist politics of pro/nominal gender

Gender pronoun systems in general and the so-called 'generic' masculine pro/nouns in particular have been one of the most debated topics in feminist sociolinguistics. The debate has occurred especially in languages where pronouns are differentiated on the basis of gender with masculine forms often constructed as 'generic'. In general, feminist critiques of such 'generics' reflect de Beauvoir's (1949/1989:xxii) notion of humanity being

defined as man and woman being defined 'not in herself but as relative to him', as an Other of universal/man. The dichotomous construction of gender is inscribed in and through language, whose gender pronouns force speakers not only to position others (as well as themselves) as gendered beings but also to assign an *either* feminine *or* masculine identity, with each category ascribed with different and hierarchical characteristics, roles, values, spaces, etc. In this context, man/male/masculine constitutes the unmarked norm against which woman/female/feminine is marked, defined and otherized.

In Anglophone contexts, where feminist critiques of false generics have been most intensive, the public controversy on the topic erupted in 1971 when women students at Harvard Divinity School protested against their professors' 'generic' use of masculine forms. This was discarded by the chair of Linguistics as 'pronoun envy' under the claim that generic use of masculine forms is a linguistic (read: 'scientific and objective') fact and has nothing to do with the social (Livia 2001). This depoliticizing and dehistoricizing approach to language is criticized by both feminist sociolinguists and feminist translators for whom language is not simply a fixed set of rules and meanings outside the social, but a dynamic order of signification in and through which the social is performed.

Feminist sociolinguists' critiques of male 'generics' are shared by feminist translators who aim to make women visible in their texts and thus refuse to use masculine 'generics'. One example is de Lotbinière-Harwood's feminist translation of Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre* from French into English (1984/1989). In her preface, she explains her use of feminine pronouns to translate masculine 'generics' by stating that her translation is a feminist activity wherein she 'has used every possible feminist translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language' (9). Interestingly enough, the very reason why de Lotbinière-Harwood can 'resex' the text is because English has gender pronouns. What happens when the target language, like Turkish, does not have any grammatical gender forms? In this section, by drawing on two translations from English into Turkish, I will answer this question to reveal how feminist language and translation studies share a politics of gender pro/nouns and broaden the fields' intellectual and geopolitical scopes beyond the Anglophone world.

How is Canadian feminist translators' concern about achieving textual visibility for women (either to achieve a positive representation of women and/or to present a critique of the heteropatriarchal orders) to be practiced in languages where the proposed linguistic resources (e.g. gender pronouns and grammatical gender) do not exist? The first two examples illustrating this problem come from my translation of *Virgin* (2008), where I rendered feminine possessive pronouns by adding the word 'woman' to the text since

the Turkish pronominal system does not communicate gender. In the first example, which is a subheading, *her* refers to both Queen Elizabeth and the unexploited lands and hypersexualized women in the 'New World', all of whom share the adjective 'virgin' in the British imaginary.

1. Her treasures having never been opened (2007:187)
2. Hazineleri hiçbir zaman açılmamış olan kadın (2008:279)
3. The woman whose treasures have never been opened (backtranslation)

Since this subheading emphasizes the configuration of the 'New World' lands and women as female virgin embodiments, whose 'treasures' have not been 'opened' by (male) colonialists yet, I did not want to erase the gendered geopolitics underlining it and rewrote it by inserting 'woman'. In other words, this translational intervention was to ensure that the inter-sectional nature of the issue at hand (colonialism and heteropatriarchy justifying and sustaining each other) was emphasized.

The second example also illustrates the use of the same textual strategy to prevent a potential misreading of *George* Sand as a male novelist and to ensure women's positive visibility in the text:

1. In an 1843 letter to her half-brother, novelist George Sand… (2007:209)
2. Roman yazarı bir kadın olan George Sand, 1843'de üvey erkek kardeşine yazdığı bir mektupta… (2008:310)
3. In a letter that s/he wrote to her/his half brother, George Sand, who is a woman novelist… (backtranslation)

These nominal additions were motivated by my political desire to maintain a feminist critique of male-domination (as in the first example) and positive female visibility (as in the second example), both of which would disappear if the English third person pronoun was replaced only by the corresponding genderless Turkish pronoun.

A comparative textual analysis of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) and its Turkish translation by Cemile Çakır (2007) also reveals the use of similar translation strategies, where the political stake seems to be even higher than in *Virgin*. The novel, a landmark in LGBTT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual) literature, tells the story of Jess/e, whose life reveals not only her/his travels and travails around fluid gender identities but also the various forms of violence s/he experiences in the deeply heteronormative society of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. The character's oscillation between different gender and sexual identities is skilfully textualized through fluctuating gender pronouns, which, however, becomes problematic when the text is translated into a language without

gender pronouns. This brief analysis of the Turkish translation of the novel illustrates how different linguistic resources are put into action to achieve politically similar discursive effects.

Although *Stone Butch Blues* is full of strategic pronominal usages, only a few selected examples and their translations are discussed here due to space limits. The first example occurs when Jesse, a butch lesbian, stays over at a friend's with two children who engage in the following conversation about her:

1. "Is he awake?" Scotty asked. "Yeah," Kim answered, "she is." (Feinberg 1993:157)
2. "O adam uyanık mı?" diye Scotty sordu. "Evet," Kim yanıtladı. "Kadın uyanık." (Feinberg 2007:201)
3. "Is that man awake?" asked Scotty. "Yes," answered Kim. "The woman is awake." (backtranslation)

The dialogue reveals the children's confusion about Jesse's gender identity, which does not fit into the dichotomous categorization of gender with clearcut boundaries. In order not to erase the potential questioning of gender underlying this conversation, Çakır uses 'man' and 'woman' instead of genderless pronouns, perhaps creating a more arresting discourse than the source text.

The second example from *Stone Butch Blues* appears in one of the most dramatic episodes in the novel after Jesse starts hormone 'therapy' and passes as a man (Jess) to survive the profound homophobia of the society. The event takes place during a union meeting, where Duffy, the only person there who knows about Jess' past, accidentally reveals her/his 'true gender identity' by a single feminine pronoun exerting an irrevocable violence. At this point the question becomes, how to translate 'pronominal gender violence' into a presumably genderless language?

1. "If we had more like Jess, we'd win it hands down. I trust Jess. She's proved she's for the union 100 percent." (1993:206)
2. "Eğer Jess gibi daha çok kız arkadaşımız olsa hiç zahmetsiz kazanırdık." (2007:264)
3. If we had more girl friends like Jess we'd win it hands down. (backtranslation)

Here, Çakır turns the pronominal gender violence into a nominal one and relocates the syntactical occurrence of that violence by adding the compound noun 'girl friend' to the middle of Duffy's utterance, rather then maintaining it at the end. Despite the use of different linguistic tools, the sudden stunning effect of the utterance is achieved (though earlier) and so is the linguistic violence implied by it. Recalling this incident later in the

novel, Jess tells another friend to 'just try to remember the right pronoun in a public place', which Çakır translates, 'Yalnızca toplu yerlerde kadın olduğumu açığa vuran sözler etme' (Backtranslation: Just don't say words revealing that I am a woman in public places) (1993:213; 2007:272). In other words, the translator rewrites the utterance by rendering 'pronouns' with 'nouns', reemphasizing the fact that language, no matter what linguistic form it takes, can be a tool of gender violence.

In the final example, the problem is not caused by *he* or *she*, but *it*, used by a customer referring to Jesse after she goes 'back' to being a butch woman: '"How the hell should I know what it is?"' (1993:224). This remark questions not simply Jesse's gender anymore, but also her humanness which necessitates a clearly categorizable gender identity. However, since the Turkish third person singular pronoun 'o' does not differentiate on the basis of animacy, this remark poses a serious challenge to the translator. Çakır translates this sentence using 'o' (he/she/it) but adds a translator's note in parentheses right after the remark to explain its derogatory implications: 'Here the speaker uses *it*, an English pronoun used for animals and goods, instead of *he* or *she*. But since this differentiation does not exist in Turkish it is very difficult to express this' (2007:286–287). Interestingly, in the translation of the next sentence reflecting Jesse's reaction, 'I had gone back to being an *it*', the English 'it' is kept and not rendered as 'o': 'Bir "it" olmaya geri dönmüştüm'. What is fascinating about this translation is that 'it' in Turkish means 'dog' and is also used as an insult referring to a worthless and inferior person. Although we cannot know whether this bilingual pun was intended by Çakır, it certainly adds multiple layers of derogatory meaning to 'it' and thus intensifies its political message.

These examples show that the translator has dealt with pronoun problems by exploiting the limited gender resources of the Turkish language to create a politically powerful text, which illustrates her commitment to the LGBTT politics of the novel. This commitment is also expressed in the translator's preface, which Çakır ends by wishing 'for a world where people are not humiliated and contemned because of their being human, their self existence' (2007:7). The translator also has a very high visibility throughout the novel achieved by the translator's preface and more effectively by numerous parenthetical translator's notes. All of these translator's notes are inserted within sentences, unlike the usual practice of footnotes and thereby constantly disrupt the fluent reading process and remind readers that they are reading a translation.[6]

This section has discussed that feminist translation and sociolinguistics intersect by sharing a concern with the political implications of gender pro/nouns, illustrated through two politically framed translations where sociolinguistic questionings of linguistic gender are applied. All

the examples provided in this section shed light on the close connections between language and gender politics and how this relation can not only be oppressive and violent but also be exploited for feminist goals such as achieving visibility for women in the textual realm and questioning dichotomous and fixed constructions of gender and sexuality identities.

Pedagogical intersections

This section partially answers how translation studies and sociolinguistics could benefit from each other in educating their students to graduate with critical awareness and political accountability on issues of gender and its simultaneous intersections with other relations of power. The exigency of this cooperation is illustrated by an experiment, where translation studies students in Turkey are asked to translate a linguistically genderless text from Turkish into English and explain their decisions.

Translation instructors could benefit from sociolinguistic readings on gender to expand students' theoretical understandings of gender dynamics with regard to language and translation. Susam-Sarajeva (2005) offers valuable curriculum suggestions to instructors planning to teach gender issues in translation courses as well as Ergün's (2010a) article, which is conveniently accompanied by a detailed teaching guide (2010b) on the subject. Similarly, sociolinguistics instructors could benefit from feminist translation praxis to help students concretize abstract theories and increase their language and gender awareness at the intercultural *and* interdisciplinary levels. Having students translate (non)hetero/sexist texts or experimental feminist writings, or comparatively analyse feminist translation samples along with source texts and translator's prefaces might generate productive class discussions in both fields. Castro's (2009) article is a useful source for planning and teaching such courses.

The research study I conducted with translation studies students and graduates was inspired by Baxter's (2005) experiment (Galician/English) on the effects of the translators' (and their culture's) hetero/sexist biases on their translation practices.[7] Baxter claims that linguistic discussions of non-hetero/sexist language should urgently be incorporated into translation courses for translators as social agents who are embedded in heteropatriarchal cultural contexts reflect (often unconsciously) their biases onto their works and thus, produce hetero/sexist translations. The experiment discussed here not only confirms Baxter's findings but also offers a teaching tool that could be used in translation and linguistics courses 'to alert the translator to the potential dangers of interpreting the world through their own social conditioning' (Baxter 2005:online). Participants were recruited through a translation studies instructor and translators'

and translation students' online groups in Turkey. The study, advertised as investigating 'theoretical and pedagogical connections between linguistics and translation studies', was conducted via email. In this email, I asked students to translate from Turkish into English the following paragraph describing a romantic scene between two characters whose genders are textually unstated:

> Sevgilisinin dudağına küçük bir öpücük kondurup terden sırılsıklam olmuş yataktan çıplak kaslı bedenini çıkardı. Bir an gözü, sevgilisinin davetkar çıplaklığının aynadaki yansımasına takıldı. Sanki yaramaz bakışlarını üzerinde hissetmiş gibi o da bir anda çarşafa sarındı, "üşüdüm" diyerek... Saatine baktı, üçüncüye zamanı olmadığını görünce yere saçılmış giysilerini kaptığı gibi banyoya koştu. Hızlı bir duş alıp aceleyle evden çıktı. Bir saat içinde hastanede olması gerekiyordu. Ameliyat edeceği iki hastası vardı o gün, ikisi de beyin ameliyatı.

> After placing a tiny kiss on *her/his* lover's lips *s/he* pulled *her/his* naked muscular body out of the bed soaked in sweat. For a moment, *her/his* eyes got caught on the reflection of *her/his* lover's inviting nudity on the mirror. As if *s/he* felt *her/his* naughty eyes on *her/himself s/he* suddenly covered *her/himself* with the sheet saying "I'm cold..." *S/he* looked at *her/his* watch, realizing that *s/he* did not have time for a third, grabbed *her/his* clothes scattered on the floor and rushed to the bathroom. *S/he* took a quick shower and left the house in a hurry. *S/he* was supposed to be in the hospital in an hour. *S/he* had two patients to operate on that day, both brain surgeries.

I wrote this paragraph with no explicit gender references, but intentionally infused it with gender stereotypes, which could easily lead to a hetero-sexualized scenario with the qualities of activeness, muscularity, sexual appetite and surgeon being stereotypically associated with masculinity and passiveness, coyness and indirectness with femininity. The goal of the study was to see whether and how students gendered the characters through English pro/nouns, whether they translated the paragraph in ways reproducing heteronormativity and whether they problematized gender ambiguity in their explanations.

In total, 22 people (16 women, six men; from several universities) participated in the study. Although the study originally targeted translation studies students only, graduates of such programmes and two professional translators also sent in responses. Out of 22 participants, 18 translated the text using gender stereotypes rewriting it as a description of a hetero-sexual encounter. Among these 18, only six mentioned their struggles with translating genderless Turkish pronouns into English. These six participants noted the 'hesitation' and 'conflict' they experienced in the translation process due to the text's gender ambiguity. Yet, despite their

problematizations of gender ambivalence, the participants complied with the stereotypes evoked by the text and opted for solutions confirming gender and sexuality norms, which they often justified by stating that it was the mental image triggered 'by the narrative'. As one student wrote, 'as soon as I saw the word muscle I decided that the character was male and assessed the text in that way'. Hence, in general most of the participants performed the hetero/sexist biases of their social habituation without problematizing them from any political perspectives.

On the other hand, four participants produced 'resistant' translations. One female student constructed the main character as female and the 'passive' one as male, thus creating a resistant text in terms of gender dynamics, but not heteronormativity. A male student used *he* for the main character but the gender-neutral 'lover' for the second character, creating a potentially resistant text in terms of sexuality politics. One male student used *he/she* forms for both characters and thus generated a text that linguistically reproduced neither heteronormativity nor sexist stereotypes. In his explanation, he stated that he did not want to impose gender stereotypes on a text that did not offer sufficient data on the characters' identities. Additionally, a student translated both characters as female producing a lesbian narrative but only because she had accidentally been informed that the study was for *Gender and Language*. She noted that if she had not seen the journal reference, she would have 'behaved' herself and translated the text in line with gender stereotypes.

One final example shows how this study can be useful and even eye opening as a class exercise to raise students' critical awareness on gender politics. A student participant who translated the text stereotypically and noted that gender pronouns caused translation problems later started questioning his initial choices when I asked him on what basis he made his decision. He answered first by defending his choice: 'I think it was obvious who was a woman, who was a man in the text'. Then, within the same response, he started asking himself whether he approached the text with some biases and disappointedly concluded that he probably reflected a form of 'internalized sexism' onto his translation: 'Right now I am thinking if the muscular one was a woman? Did I approach the text in a sexist way?'

Though not generalizable due to the unrepresentative sample, these findings indicate that translation can not only reflect but also more importantly perpetuate the dominant gender/sexuality norms, silence social minorities and condemn 'them to the realms of not existence with a sweep of the pen' (Baxter 2005:online). Therefore, both translation and sociolinguistics students should be exposed to politics of gender, sexuality and other systems of oppression as these are sustained in and through language. They should realize that even 'little' linguistic particles like pronouns have

serious ideological implications. Bringing up issues of linguistic oppression and activism in both translation and sociolinguistics courses can increase students' critical knowledge and awareness on relations of power and help them act more responsibly in their language and translation practices. Given that translators are often regarded as 'cultural brokers', it is extremely important for them to recognize that language and translation practices are never ideologically innocent but always connected to power structures and to become aware and accountable of the ways in which their social positionality and historical situatedness affect their translations.

Conclusion

This article, focusing on English and Turkish, has discussed various inter-sections between feminist translation and feminist sociolinguistics with the aim of stimulating dialogues between the fields and expanding their epistemological and geopolitical reach. As the first section demonstrates, the necessary groundwork for such interdisciplinary alliances already exists between feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation since they pursue a similar politics of feminist language. Both fields approach language as a site of contested meanings, discourses, identities and power relations. And with this comes the possibility of intervening in social reality to achieve resistance and facilitate sociopolitical change through linguistic and discursive activism, which is exactly where feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation intersect most strongly.

However, this political commonality has not culminated in joint academic undertakings so far. Interestingly, feminist translators and feminist translation scholars have been more attentive and responsive to developments in feminist sociolinguistics than feminist sociolinguists, who have not benefited from feminist translation practices and theories as much. It is the hope of this paper that scholars from both fields find inspiration in this article to travel across academic boundaries, explore each other's epistemological terrains and reveal or create other theoretical, practical, empirical, pedagogical and political interconnections. The first section of this paper offers such a point of intersection between the fields, which seem to share a common politically constructed 'implied reader' whose fluent reading experience is disrupted by deliberate textual strategies. Feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation scholars can collaboratively study such language strategies not only in relation to implied and actual readers, but also generate other or more effective linguistic strategies in the process to further feminist politics of language.

The second section has discussed another, yet more specific, issue that both fields are similarly concerned about: pronominal gender. Feminist

translation and feminist sociolinguistics, whose dominant geopolitical focus has been on Western languages and cultural contexts, have emphasized this issue considerably because the construction of gender is achieved mainly through pronouns in languages such as English and French. However, in 'genderless' languages, such as Turkish, the focus of linguistic gender construction shifts from pronouns to other elements of language and therefore, requires differently designed studies. The translation examples presented in the section show how different languages with different gender resources can achieve women's visibility, offer feminist critiques and exert linguistic gender violence. Such collaborative studies can be undertaken on neglected languages to better understand how gender norms are displayed and resisted in and across differently equipped languages. These alliances would not only enlarge the geopolitical breadth of the fields, but also raise new epistemological issues and bring fresh perspectives to gender and language/translation studies. This could, in turn, expand the reach of feminist politics of language beyond academic boundaries. The pedagogical intersections discussed in the third section illustrate another front to achieve this effect of expanding and disseminating feminist language and consciousness. The section shows how feminist translation and feminist sociolinguistics could benefit from each other in raising students' awareness on gender and language issues. The experiment presented here not only offers a potentially memorable classroom exercise but also illustrates what is at stake in training students to question their gendered sociocultural inheritances and become politically conscious and accountable in their future linguistic practices.

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to convincingly demonstrate that the political power of language, acclaimed by feminist sociolinguistics and feminist translation, can be enhanced if conversations and cooperations are initiated between the fields. Obviously more research is needed on other intersections and other languages to build more promising and politically influential bridges. Hopefully, this paper will generate a catalytic effect in that direction.

About the author

Emek Ergün is a doctoral candidate at the Language, Literacy and Culture PhD Programme, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where she also teaches at the Gender and Women's Studies Programme. She is writing her dissertation on the subject of feminist translation as transnational political activism by focusing on the translation and reception of *Virgin*. She holds an MA in Women's Studies from Towson University. Her research interests include feminist translation, transnational feminism, and gender, sexuality

and language. She has presented and published a number of interdisciplinary papers in these fields, most recently in *Language and Linguistics Compass*, and translated books into Turkish such as Hanne Blank's *Virgin: The Untouched History*. She is currently working on the collective project of the Turkish translation and adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Notes

1   I would like to thank Dr. Christine Mallinson and Mehmet Ergün for their endless encouragement and help, the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive feedback, the guest editor for organizing this very special edition and the research participants for their invaluable contributions.

2   I am not claiming that Turkish has been neglected in the discipline of translation studies *per se*. On the contrary, Turkish has been studied quite extensively in translation studies when compared to other minority languages. Rather, I am trying to highlight the fact that feminist translation as a theory and practice has not been studied deeply in relation to the Turkish language and Turkey's historical and intellectual context.

3   While Simon (1996:8) translates the slogan as 'women's liberation must first be a liberation of/from language', both of us translate the French 'langage' as 'language'. Interestingly, the slogan uses *langage* instead of *langue* or *parole*, reminding one of the distinction made by Saussure. In Saussure's theory, while *langue* refers to language as a social system of signification, *parole* refers to individual speech acts. And *langage* is composed of these two elements. When applied to the feminist slogan above, this distinction reveals that feminists of the time regarded both the social and individual aspects of language as man-made and that had to be discarded to achieve women's liberation. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this important detail to my attention.

4   For instance, Tekeli (1998), in her article on the development of feminist movements in Turkey, presents a short chronological list of major events. The list, which includes around 45 entries, has several entries directly or indirectly related to translation. Unfortunately, none of these are discussed at length in the main body of the article. Perhaps the most important entry in the chronology is, '1983, Kadın Çevresi [Women's Circle] is founded as a company; feminist books are translated and published; a book club is formed and discussion meetings are organized' (343). Women's Circle, formed by a group of prominent feminist scholars and activists, is often regarded as the first (and pioneering) feminist group in the recent history of Turkey. However, despite its historical significance, this 'feminist translation group' is awaiting further research, which could highlight the role of translation as a political driving force in the context of Turkey.

5   The Turkish *Virgin* has received a lot of positive attention from the Turkish press in both mainstream and marginal (e.g. feminist) newspapers and magazines, where reviews of the book and interviews with the translator

and/or the author were published (see, for instance, Bayraktar 2008, Gülen and Eren 2009, Kızılarslan 2009 and Öğüt 2008). Most of these reviews seem to agree with the translator's problematizations of the term *kızlık zarı* and use *himen*. Thus, they participate in disseminating the feminist language and feminist virginity politics pursued in the book.

6   While Turkish translation of *Stone Butch Blues* has not received as much media attention as *Virgin* has, it is mentioned and/or discussed mainly on LGBTT venues, such as Kaos GL's (a prominent LGBTT organization in Turkey) website and magazine. However, none of these sources discusses the translational choices but they focus mainly on the storyline and politics of the book.

7   In her 2010 article, Olga Castro also reports conducting a similarly inspired experiment with English/Galician translation students, where the 'Male-As-Norm Principle', in Braun's terms, is just as strongly confirmed.

References

Baxter, R. N. (2005) On the need for non-sexist language in translation. *International Journal of Language, Society and Culture* 15. Retrieved on 20 December 2009 from http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/ARTICLES/2005/15-1.htm

Bayraktar, I. (2008) Bekaretin el değmemiş tarihine yolculuk [Journey to the untouched history of virginity]. *Taraf Kitap*, November 4: 2.

Blank, H. (2007) *Virgin: The Untouched History.* New York: Bloomsbury.

Blank, H. (2008) *Bekâretin "El Değmemiş" Tarihi.* Translated by E. Ergün. Istanbul: İletişim.

Braun, F. (2001) The communication of gender in Turkish. In M. Hellinger and H. Bußmann (eds) *Gender Across Languages*, Volume 1, 283–310. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Butler, J. (2006) *Gender Trouble.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Cameron, D. (1992) *Feminism and Linguistic Theory.* 2nd ed. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Castro, O. (2009) (Re)-examining horizons in feminist translation studies: Towards a third wave? Translated by M. Andrews (1trans-17trans). First published in *MonTI, Monographs in Translation and Interpreting 1* (2009): 59–86. Retrieved from http://repositori.uji.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10234/11953/CastroReexamining.pdf

Castro, O. (2010) Non-sexist translation and/in social change: Gender issues in translation. Translated by C. Melly with an 'Author's Afterword'. In C. Maier and J. Bóerie (eds) *Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism – Traducción/Interpretación y Compromiso Social* 106–120. Granada: Ecos.

Curzan, A. (2003) *Gender Shifts in the History of English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486913

Daly, M. (1978) *Gyn/ecology.* Boston: Beacon Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1949) *The Second Sex.* Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

de Lotbinière-Harwood, S. (trans.) (1984/1989) Preface. In L. Gauvin, *Letters from an Other* [Lettres d'une autre]. Toronto: Women's Press.

Ergün, E. (2008) Önsöz: Türkiye'de Bekâretin 'El Değmemiş' Tarihi [Preface: The 'Untouched' History of Virginity in Turkey]. In H. Blank, *Bekâretin 'El Değmemiş' Tarihi [Virgin: The Untouched History]* 11–34. Istanbul: İletişim.

Ergün, E. (2010a) Bridging across feminist translation and sociolinguistics. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 4/5: 307–318. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2010.00208.x

Ergün, E. (2010b) Teaching and learning guide for: Bridging across feminist translation and linguistics. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 4/5: 337–347. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2010.00219.x

Feinberg, L. (1993) *Stone Butch Blues*. Los Angeles: Alyson Books.

Feinberg, L. (2007) *Sevici Türküsü*. Translated by C. Çakır. Istanbul: Artshop.

Gülen, H. and Eren, D. (2009) Bekâret kavramı yeniden sorgulanıyor: 'Toplumsal bekâretin izleri…' [The virginity concept is being requestioned: 'Traces of social virginity…']. *Birgün*, July 29.

Iser, W. (1980) *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kızılarslan, Y. (2009) Utanç, saflık, erdem simgesi bekaret zaten hiç yok muydu? [So virginity – the symbol of shame, purity, virtue – never existed anyway?]. *Bianet*, February 7.

Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper and Row.

Livia, A. (2001) *Pronoun Envy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

Öğüt, H. (2008) Bekârete yamuk bakış [A skewed look at virginity]. *Radikal Kitap*, October 31.

Simon, S. (1996) *Gender in Translation*. New York: Routledge. http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203202890

Spender, D. (1980) *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge.

Susam-Sarajeva, Ş. (2005) A course on 'gender and translation'. In J. Santaemilia (ed.) *Gender, Sex and Translation* 161–76. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Tekeli, Ş. (1998) Birinci ve ikinci dalga feminist hareketlerin karşılaştırmalı incelemesi üzerine bir deneme (An essay on the comparative analysis of the first and second wave feminist movements). In Ayşe Berktay Hacımirzaoğlu (ed.) *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler* (Women and Men in 75 Years) 337–46. İstanbul: İş Bankası ve Tarih Vakfı Yayınları.

Venuti, L. (2008) *The Translator's Invisibility*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

von Flotow, L. (1997) *Translation and Gender*. Manchester: St Jerome.