Elraz, Inbal

Supervisor: Prof. Miriam Shlesinger

His Translation vs. Her Translation - Gender and Translation

Abstract

His vs. Hers: does gender shape one's translation?
Dept. of Translation and Interpreting Studies

Gender is a sociolinguistic variable and its influence is evident in different areas. The study reported here deals with this variable as manifested in translations. Most studies to date have focused on gender differences in informal contexts – correspondence or spoken language (Meyerhoff 1992, Holmes 1993, Haas 1944). An exception to this has been a recent study concentrating on gender-oriented characteristics in formal contexts, taken from the British National Corpus (Koppel et al. 2003). While these studies all deal with original writing, the one reported here explores potential differences in the language of men and women who translate the words of others, whether in writing or orally. To my knowledge, it is the first empirical study in this domain which compares translations by males and by females.

In light of the gender-oriented differences observed in spoken and in written language, similar differences were expected in translated texts as well. These were assumed to include vocabulary (particularly the use of hedges and of words that do not have an obvious equivalent in the target language), explicitation, omissions, additions, register etc. Specifically, it was hypothesized that (1) gender-oriented characteristics will be manifested in the translations and will serve as an indication of the translator's gender; (2) characteristics manifested in written translation will also be manifested in simultaneous interpretation.

The study consisted of two parts. The written one focused on textual elements in the text that were expected to generate features reflecting differences between

female and male translations. The text in which they appeared was submitted to an equal number of male and female translators working from Hebrew into either English or Spanish. The oral part consisted of two 1,600-word texts interpreted (simultaneously) from English into Hebrew by four professional interpreters, two women and two men.

References

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