Michele Sala (ed.)

GENDER, LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION. REPRESENTATIONS AND TRANSCODIFICATIONS

CERLIS Series

Series Editor: Stefania M. Maci

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Gender, Language and Translation: Representations and Transcodifications

Contents

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Gender, Representations and Transcodifications. An Introduction

Gender as a dimension of language has been extensively discussed in the course of the past decades and research – from a variety of perspectives (i.e. sociology, anthropology, linguistics, literature, philosophy, speech communication studies, media and feminist studies, etc. cf. Henley/Thorne 1975, Lakoff 1975, Miller/Swift 1980, Kramarae et al. 1983, Radway 1984, Kurzon 1989, Cameron 1990, 2006, Corbett 1991, Roman et al. 1994, Wodak 1997, Lazar 2005, Pascale 2007, Garzone 2020) – has significantly contributed to raising awareness about gender-related issues. Especially in recent times, as critical consciousness expanded about the importance of equality, inclusiveness, representation and empowerment of any marginalized group – or, conversely, of the dangers of any form of discrimination, concealing, or domination – the debate on gender has gained momentum and provided ground for in-depth analyses and discussions that, while moving in different directions and having different purposes, stem from two main epistemological apexes: a predominantly linguistic one (assessing gender as a linguistic construct, typically in language and discourse studies) and a cultural, social, and political one (where gender is dealt with as a socio-cultural construct, notably by critical theories, CDA, cultural studies, feminist research, etc.).

The former set of approaches is mainly descriptive in character and aimed to explore how gender is openly or implicitly codified

through the means of language (i.e. lexis, morpho-syntax, sentence structuring, collocational preferences, pragmatic presuppositions, textual, stylistic and genre conventions, etc.), and, more precisely, investigates in what ways language may represent potentially sexist meanings and how it lends itself to be used – or is indeed exploited – to channel gender bias.

The latter group of approaches – which are primarily meant to point out the implicit sexism in discourse-as-social-practice, with the purpose of containing and neutralizing it (cf. Fairclough 2003, van Dijk 2011, Maass et al. 2013) – is based on the assumption that language contributes to establishing and corroborating gender stereotypes, relegating women to specific, secondary or less important roles than those rhetorically open to men or connoting female identities in terms of emotions, attitudes and other qualities markedly different from those associated to men.

The purpose of this volume is to examine the ways in which and the effect to which the two epistemologies can blend for the study of gender – the critical one providing clear orientation, analytic matrixes, and interpretive models, while the linguistic one offering the tools to locate, collect, structure and examine linguistic material.

In fact, since the idea of gender as a discursive representation of socially constructed identities – and not merely a biological feature – combines language, perception and (their effects on) experience, its investigation benefits considerably by merging and integrating the two sets of approaches where, notably, linguistic criteria (i.e. the notion of grammatical and natural gender, of markedness, of category availability, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of language relativity, etc.) may be – and have been – used by cultural research as methodological resources and, conversely, concepts from cultural theories (i.e. the notion of identity, power, bias, also interpreted in terms of oppression, control, discrimination, etc.) can be – and have been – resorted to in language studies as organizing principles and theoretical matrixes within which to frame both research and findings.

Given the slant of this volume – which, as reflected in the title, assesses the interplay between gender-related codifications and trans-codifications, and seeks to see in what ways and to what extent language 'with' or 'about' gender influences our representation, understanding, and response to it – it is worthwhile outlining the ways in which these

linguistic and cultural perspectives, despite their possible overlap, differ especially from a methodological standpoint, since this justifies and motivates their complementarity.

Linguistic analysis (from grammar studies to pragmatics and discourse analysis, from genre research to LSP) investigates language use by observing texts, distinguishing regularities and idiosyncrasies, identifying possible trends and establishing their relevance (through quantification, measuring, comparison, etc. notably in Corpus Linguistics) eventually attaining potential generalizations, whose validity needs to be tested and verified in broader contexts of use. It is a soft domain which is grounded in 'organized scepticism' (Merton 1973), where hypotheses require validation through empirical evidence (in data-based procedures) or, conversely, where evidence is made scientifically relevant through forms of model abstraction (in data-driven procedures): in both cases assumptions are questioned (to then be, ideally, verified), and linguistic data are investigated, considered in the light of their collocation, co-text, context and purpose, compared and contrasted with standard or similar phenomena (often by resorting to reference corpora), in order to allow for workable descriptions, tenable explanations and solid generalizations. This data-centred orientation may result in fragmentation of research (different foci, methods, contexts, perspectives, criteria of analysis, etc.) and results (similar analyses of comparable material may yield dissimilar results, cf. Gal 1989, Severiens/Ten Dam 1997, Maegaard 2005, Newman et al. 2008) without this hindering the soundness of the research, but actually contributing to the complexification and articulation of scientific knowledge (see also Balietti et al. 2015). Precisely for its tentative and sceptical stance, linguistic research minimizes the expression of attitude, overt evaluation or judgement (Giannoni 2006, Gotti 2003): being mainly aimed at fostering the understanding of the functioning of language, even when it is meant to point out problems and promote changes which are felt to be beneficial for the community (because, for instance, inclusive or empowering for the minorities), emotive emphasis, judgment or (even common sense) opinion are likely to hinder and have a negative impact on the perceived soundness of the research.

Cultural and critical studies, on the other hand, offer frameworks by which to interpret gender as a social construct, providing abstract

interpretive models, paradigms or keys concepts, through which to make sense of it, and more precisely, by which to relate seemingly unrelated notions or experiences for them to cohere, and make gender-associated phenomena (linguistic, representational, experiential, cultural, etc.) cognitively manageable. Such models are abstractions whereby gender-related issues are seen in the light of general principles (i.e. power, control, patriarchy, etc., cf. Habermans 1991) and as resulting from the dynamic interplay of opposing forces (i.e. oppression vs resistance, identity vs fragmentation, etc.). Such generalizations are motivated and paradigmatic in character. They are motivated in terms of the analysts' stake, stance, interest, and goals (Delphy 1984, Jackson 1996, Haraway 2004, Harding 2004), and, as such, they are likely to systematize reality, perception and experience through processes of ordering, prioritization and hierarchy of meanings, typically by resorting to different perspectives and "a triangulation of various methods and theories depending on the question being researched" (Winter 2014: 249, cf Zohrabi 2013). Despite the fact that cultural research is anti-positivistic and anti-objectivistic (Grossberg 2010, Winter 2014) – precisely based on the assumption that reality-as-social-construct cannot be analysed 'objectively' – the models it offers have a paradigmatic character in that they are inferentially applied to phenomenological interpretation, thus conferring cognitive relevance, homogeneity and coherence to our reading of reality and allowing for a deeper understanding of it (Domholdt 1993).

On this basis, research on gender and/in language benefits from the combination and cross-fertilization of the two approaches, where the linguistic one provides tools and the cultural one, direction – the former offering material and workable ways to handle them, while the latter giving them critical shape. Or conversely, where the linguistic level substantiates abstractions, intuitions and models offered by the cultural level, and provides linguistic evidence to validate critically favoured interpretation. These forms of fertilization contribute to the advancement of the research on gender, and foster understanding which is best achieved interdisciplinarily.

The volume is divided into two parts. The former, consisting of three chapters, provides some general perspectives on gender in language and translation (respectively, answering research question such as: What do we mean by gender? How is research on gender and language carried out? How can culture specific and language internal traits -- among which gender – be translated?). Each of the four chapters of the second part, instead, investigates how gender-related representations and meanings are codified and/or transcodified in media products, institutional texts, and legal discourse.

The opening chapter, by JANE SUNDERLAND, provides a near-comprehensive and articulate discussion of the concept of gender from various perspectives. On the one hand, it encompasses the notion of gender as a dimension of language and a linguistic resource: on a word and sentence level, morphological markings such as policeman vs. police officer and discursive preferences (e.g. generic vs specific third person pronouns) may affect both representational choices and interpretation, given still-prevalent 'male as norm' uses and understandings. On the other, more notably, it considers the idea of gender as a social construct – that is, what lies behind various linguistic and social behaviours through which identities are established, normalized and made (stereotypically) recognizable. These behaviours, consequently, are variously knowingly performed, favoured (by the media, education systems, institutions, traditions, cultural conventions, etc.), aligned to, corroborated in social actions, and sometimes resisted and subverted - with varying degrees of awareness and intentionality on the parts of social actors.

The second chapter, by MICHELE SALA, provides an outline of the main epistemological approaches through which to assess the study of gender and language and, specifically, points out the complexities arising from the blending of different research methods and perspectives. By distinguishing language research on gender (where the focus is on language) from gender research on language (the focus being on gender), the chapter discusses the possible misapplication of understandings and evaluations which are essential to gender as a social construct to language as a vehicle for social construction, or, from another angle, it assesses the problems of transferring notions concerning gender as a product of semiotization to language as a tool

for semiotization – as if language almost by default codified degrees of gender bias, rather than being a semiotizing tool whose potential is affected by the (conscious or subconscious) intentions and attitude of the users, the purpose of the communication and the context of its use. The chapter argues that, although the two notions can be combined in research, the essential distinction between gender-as-construct and language-as-code is relevant in order to study and promote gender equality in language use, so as to maximize inclusion and representation and minimize stereotyping and bias.

Starting from the consideration that in every culture there are forms of language use that are (stereotypically) considered to be preferred for/by women (as originally was hiragana in Japan) or textual realizations and genres which are thought to be more suitable than others to represent female identities and experience (like diaries in Heian era Japan), in her chapter YO TABAYASHI assesses the main issues related to the transfer of culture-specific elements (gender being one of them) between cultures which are markedly dissimilar (for history, tradition, social organization, culture, etc.), namely the Japanese, the Italian and the American one – using as a reference point the translations of the novel *Kitchen* (1988) by Banana Yoshimoto. After providing an outline of the ways culture-relevant meanings, in the translation process, can be exported – through imposing or persuasive strategies – or imported – through borrowing and amalgamation techniques – the chapter points out how, especially the latter techniques, are related to and bring about forms of domestication or foreignization.

The second part opens with a chapter authored by ROXANNE H. PADLEY that focusses on the semiotization and translation of gender-relevant meanings as they are codified in popular media products, notably TV series, by taking as a showcase the medical drama *Nip/Tuck*, an American series which dramatizes the lives and exploits/experiences of two plastic surgery doctors, a domain – that of plastic surgery, especially in its mediatization – that is ripe of stereotypes closely or remotely associated to gender identity and representation (i.e. the myth of beauty-seeking, the fear of aging, the problems of body consciousness, etc.). The chapter analyses how gender-related references are textualized and then translated – in accordance to their purpose being internal to the economy of the drama (i.e. depending on

the characters' attitude and sensitivity towards gender and gender related issues) or, more broadly, as depending on social and cultural factors (i.e. with respect to ideas of political correctness, female objectification, marginalization, etc.).

The next three chapters consider gender related issues and the problem of (fair) gender codification in institutional communication and legal settings. Starting from the idea that different languages have sensibly to drastically different ways of marking gender (grammatically, lexically, referentially, and socially) – this being due to their morphological structuring and etymological developments – and, on the other hand, given the necessity, especially in specific contexts such as the legal one, of representing individuals – or notably citizens – as equals, hence minimizing all differentiations among which gender-based ones, the chapter by GIULIA ADRIANA PENNISI investigates how EU guidelines and recommendations for non-discriminatory language metalinguistically handle intrinsic gender-related marking in the ways they are drafted, and does so by comparing the English version of such texts (English being a non-grammatically gendered language) with the Italian ones (Italian being a grammatically gendered language) so as to evidence the strategies and techniques which are used by drafters in both languages, not only to promote, but notably to lexicalize gender fairness.

A similar analytical orientation is to be found in the following chapter, whose authors, MICHELA GIORDANO and MARIA ANTONIETTA MARONGIU, examine the language exploited in the drafting of informative brochures issued by the European Institute for Gender Equality by comparing the English and the Italian versions of the same texts. On the basis of the (social and moral) problematicity of some of the contents dealt with in these brochures and their close or remote relationship to gender – ranging from, notably, genital mutilation and gender based-violence to disability, poverty, education, etc. – and in consideration of the different level of awareness and sensitivity towards gender and the notion of gender fairness shared by the two cultures, the chapter analyses how metadiscursive strategies, both interactive and interactional, are used to favour specific interpretations, codify recommendations, promote good practices and persuade readers about the relevance of gender equality.

The closing chapter discusses one of the paradoxes found in the language used in official EU websites and documents to lexicalize a specific role within the framework of EU institutions, namely the term ombudsman. Originally a loanword from Swedish (corresponding to commission + man), the term seems to have resisted the neutralization trend that has affected other English nouns for professions and roles. The chapter by MARÍA LÓPEZ-MEDEL points out that this paradox is two-fold. On the one hand, EU guidelines for gender equality – the ones that are expected to be primarily followed by drafters of official EU documents and producers of EU websites – expressly favour and promote the replacement of man-ending words with neutral alternatives (as ombudsperson would be); nonetheless, precisely in said outlets, the masculine form ombudsman is the preferred form by large (300 times more frequent than ombudswoman). On the other, the office of EU ombudsman has been held by a woman for almost a decade, hence a neutral term (representative, commission, authority, office, etc. are those offered by the author) would be, not only fairer, but more referentially transparent.

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