

PRONOMINAL GENDER AS A CHALLENGE FOR TRANSLATION

Yu.V. Lysanets, PhD, A.K. Pavelyeva, PhD (Poltava)

The process of translation has been characterized by Hans J. Vermeer as a “cross-cultural transfer” [6, p. 32]. Indeed, this transfer requires the in-depth knowledge of ideology, stereotypical ideas, historical and cultural features, gender connotations in the source text, as well as understanding the author’s individual style and intentions. In this context, translating the pronominal gender is one of the most difficult problems that translators may encounter. This paper will focus on peculiarities of translating the pronominal gender of the sun and moon images in literature.

Stereotyping the solar and lunar genders reflects the unique features of perceiving, structuring and conceptualizing the surrounding world by a certain culture. Most commonly, the sun and moon are personified as male and female, following the Greek tradition, which postulates the solar god Helios and the lunar goddess Selene. Likewise, the Latin masculine noun “sol”, and feminine “luna” have given birth to words in French or Spanish with the same genders. By contrast, in German the “sun” is feminine, and the “moon” is masculine. This is due to the fact that the Norse mythology conceptualizes the sun goddess Sól, and her brother, the moon deity Máni. As to the English language, while it does not assign grammatical genders by means of articles, there is the notion of “poetic” pronominal gender, as in Lewis Carroll’s *The Walrus and the Carpenter*: “The sun was shining on the sea, / Shining with all *his* might <...> The moon was shining sulkily, / Because *she* thought the sun / Had got no business to be there...” [2, p. 5]. Thus, the English poetic tradition has generally taken up the Romance gender. However, there are exceptions to this tendency. For instance, J.R.R. Tolkien’s universe has been influenced by the Norse mythology, and therefore, his writings demonstrate the challenging conceptualization of the female sun and the male moon.

Dealing with pronominal gender of sun and moon, translators may implement several strategies. One of them is switching genders according to the target language. The example of this tendency is the Russian translation of Gustav Meyrink’s *Die Keimdrüse des Herrn Kommerzienrates* (1926), where the anthropomorphic male moon

(“*der alte Herr Mond*”) is transformed into the image of woman, which changes the plot significantly: cf. “<...> *er zog aus der Brusttasche seines Smokings einen kleinen Kalendar*” [3, p. 195] / “<...> *Кокетливым жестом она извлекла из-за корсажа миниатюрный календарик*” [1, p. 554]. As one can observe, this strategy triggers dramatic changes in the narrative structure. Another strategy consists in preserving the gender of the source language, providing the target text with a footnote explaining this grammar difference. The example of this strategy is the French translation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*: cf. “<...> the Sun raised up *her* head. *She* hardly believed her fiery eyes” [5, p. 397] / “<...> *la Soleil* levait la tête. *Elle* en croyait à peine ses yeux de feu” (**Les Elfe (et les Hobbits) considèrent le Soleil comme du genre féminin*)” [4, p. 215].

Thus, differently assigned grammatical genders can become a real challenge for translators. Further research of strategies in translating the pronominal gender in literary texts is essential for translation studies, teaching world literature, and developing students’ multilingual competence.

References

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