

# *Skopos and Feminist Strategies in Translating Gendered Language*

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**Abstract:** This article talks about translation within the theory of Skopos and Feminist Translation. To combine Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation Theory, the translator can find a more harmonious way to translate the source text into the target text, which can help to ensure the gender neutrality, cultural adaptation, and the empowerment of marginalized voices.

## 1. Introduction

Translation is a complicated process that involves not only the transfer of linguistic elements but also the preservation of cultural nuances and ideologies contained in the source text. This essay explores the combination of Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation Theory to provide a comprehensive framework for translating the gendered language. Skopos Theory developed by Hans J. Vermeer, emphasizes the purpose or function (skopos) of a translation. Feminist Translation Theory, which originated in gender studies, scrutinizes power dynamics, cultural biases, and gender in translated texts. By combining these two theories, a nuanced approach that respects the intended purpose of a translation and advocates for gender equality and cultural sensitivity.

## 2. Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation Theory

“Skopos theory defines translating as an intentional, interpersonal, partly verbal intercultural interaction based on a source text”<sup>[4]</sup>. The appearance of Skopos Theory makes up the limitation of translation because “it allows the possibility of the same text being translated in different ways according to the purpose of the target text and the commission which is given to the translator”<sup>[4]</sup>. According to Skopos Theory, the purpose of a translation determines its strategies and methods<sup>[4]</sup>. The translator should think about the target audience, target culture, and the function of the translated text. Skopos Theory allows translators to meet the requirements of the translation and to make some changes of the original text and provides a more flexible and dynamic way for translators to adapt to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to Castro and Ergun and Ren  berler, feminist translation study is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on feminism<sup>[3]</sup> and translation and brings many courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels across the world<sup>[6]</sup>. Besides, Bozkurt states that “feminist translation is against the twofold inferiority of women and translation<sup>[2]</sup>. To erase this false equivalence, one should forget about the traditional views on translation theory and practice”. Simon argues that “feminist translation

theory aims to identify and critique the tangle of concepts which relegates both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder.”<sup>[7]</sup> Feminist Translation Theory focuses on the power structures in language and translation. It explores how gender roles, identities, and biases are represented and reinforced in translated texts. “The feminist translation movement was initiated by a group of feminist writers and translators in Quebec in the late 1970s and early 1980s and it was thought to be the articulation of feminist ideology to translation”<sup>[6]</sup>. Through a feminist perspective, feminist translators aim to challenge patriarchal norms, promote inclusion, amplify marginalized voices, and fight for women.

In the context of feminist translation, Skopos Theory enables translators to make a balance between staying true to the source text and addressing issues of gender bias, stereotypes, and inequality. Based on translation Skopos, Sun points out that feminist translators are now trying to use novel strategies to do the translation or even to rewrite the source text to highlight and emphasize gender discrimination<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3. Combining Skopos and Feminist Translation Theory

“Translators have sought out contemporary women’s writing in order to translate it into their own cultures”<sup>[9]</sup>. Skopos Theory encourages adaptation to the target language and target culture, and under the case of feminist translation, this may involve “supplementing”<sup>[10]</sup> gendered language and challenging stereotypes of women. As von Flotow mentioned, gender awareness in translation poses questions between social stereotypes and linguistic forms, which highlights the importance of the cultural context<sup>[9]</sup>. The combination of Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation is extremely suitable for gender translation. When discussing the culture of Skopos Theory, Du points out that “translating means comparing cultures”<sup>[4]</sup>. Skopos Theory’s emphasis on culture aligns with the feminist goal of fostering inclusion. Translators should make translations that convey the original meaning, and represent the cultural values, promoting a more inclusive representation of gender.

Simon states that “long excluded from the privileges of authorship, women turned to translation as a permissible form of public expression”<sup>[7]</sup> and translation was an important part of the social movements, such as the fight against slavery and first-wave feminism. Feminist Translation Theory aims to give a voice to marginalized groups, and by incorporating Skopos Theory, translators can achieve the purpose of empowering women and other marginalized identities. This may concern with choosing words and expressions that challenge traditional power structures. For example, “Shey, shem, sheir” are used to replace “he/she, him/her, his/hers”<sup>[8]</sup> (Baron 1986, as cited by Sun 2021, 277).

“The skopos rule shows that a translational action is determined by its skopos”<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, when combining the Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation theory, the aim is to make the original text fit the women’s view of the target language. Following the Skopos Theory, translators need to adopt strategies to fulfill the purpose of translation. Feminist translation aims to erase bias and discrimination. Therefore, the common purpose of the two theories is to achieve functional equivalence of women audiences. When translators adopt the two theories, they need to make choices that satisfy the translation purpose and feminist principles and to be aware of gender expressions.

The application of Skopos Theory and Feminist translation strategies offers a balanced approach to translating gendered language. The combination of the two approaches can complement each other’s strengths and make the translation more efficient. Skopos Theory emphasizes the purpose of combination, and Feminist translation gives a voice to women and marginalized groups. Therefore, their combination helps women and marginalized groups to represent their ideas and earn for their identities.

#### 4. Skopos and Feminist Strategies: A Harmonious Integration

According to Sun, “in feminist translation, the translator’s subjectivity is intertwined with its translation Skopos as two aspects”<sup>[8]</sup>. Feminist translation aims to define the relationship between the source text and target text, and feminist translation is an action-based theory to achieve visibility in society<sup>[8]</sup>. This highlights translators’ subjectivity and stresses translation from a feminist view, which means the combination of Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation is a good way to deal with the translation of gendered languages.

Jabir points out that Skopos Theory is “one of the functionalist approaches whose aim is to dethrone the source text”<sup>[5]</sup>. Skopos theory aligns with the notion of functional equivalence, emphasizing the importance of achieving the intended function of the translation. Translators should consider the influence of linguistic choices on the reception and interpretation of the text based on gender language.

The integration of Skopos Theory and Feminist translation strategies represents a harmonious approach to the complex task of translating gendered language. Skopos Theory emphasizes the purpose and function of translation, providing a basis for understanding translators’ role in conveying meaning within a specific communicative context. This integration allows translators to fulfill the purpose of translation and to convey gendered language. “Skopos theory can be a strong theoretical support to explain rising female subjectivity and feminist translation aim”<sup>[8]</sup>. By employing strategies such as neutral language, translators can create a more equitable representation of gender identities. This integration is not without challenges, but it signifies a promising direction for the evolution of translation practices caring about marginalized groups.

Both Skopos Theory and Feminist translation strategies emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity. As Du says, translators are the receivers of the source text and source culture who will inform the target audience and target culture<sup>[4]</sup>. Skopos Theory encourages translators to consider the cultural context of the target audience which is similar to Feminist translation that advocates for cultural adaptation and the removal of gender stereotypes ingrained in language. Their combination is without contradiction and is very harmonious which let the two theories do their best work.

#### 5. Challenges and Criticisms

While the integration of Skopos Theory and feminist strategies provides a comprehensive framework for translating gendered language, it still with some challenges and criticisms.

“The problem of word choice has been addressed in other contexts as well, notably in cases where the English translation demonstrates an insufficient knowledge of female biology” (von Flotow 1997, 19). Therefore, translators have to create some words or change some expressions to convey these messages, which may be very hard for translators to find a word to replace and make the translation lose its original meaning. Critized by Jabir, Skopos Theory is “largely determined by the author’s personal intentions”<sup>[5]</sup>. Different translators may interpret the intended languages differently, leading to variations in the application of Feminist translation strategies. This subjectivity may lead to inconsistencies in translating gender language. Jabir sets forth that some actions do not have any intention or purpose and not every translation can be interpreted as purposeful<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, Skopos Theory may not be that useful in some cases.

Besides, there may be resistance to Feminist Translation because it challenges traditional gender norms. Translators may face resistance from publishers, readers, or even the source text authors, inhibiting the use of Feminist Translation. Therefore, the translators must be more sensitive to the target culture and source culture of their acceptance of Feminist Translation. What’s more, von Flotow mentions that feminist writing was for an educated readership with some knowledge of the burgeoning women’s movement and those willing to engage in linguistic work instead of popular

consumption<sup>[9]</sup>. “This elitist type of translation thus presupposes have an academic background, a bilingual and bicultural understanding of the text as well as an appreciation of linguistic change as a political catalyst”<sup>[9]</sup>.

Those challenges and criticisms of gender awareness in translation “come from within the feminist camp draws attention to the cultural differences between women”<sup>[9]</sup>. The differences in ethnic background and religious beliefs are significant enough to make understanding between women based on gender alone relatively unlikely<sup>[9]</sup>.

In the future, there are still many problems and challenges translators need to overcome and conquer. A combination of Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation Theory faces two theories’ problems, but it can also bring many benefits to the translation process. Moreover, challenges will be conquered by more and more translators involved and translators will create more approaches to make translation theory more perfect.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of Skopos Theory and Feminist translation strategies not only enriches translation studies but also addresses a critical need for inclusive and equitable language representation. The translation of gendered language stands at the intersection of linguistic forms, cultural sensitivity, and social stereotypes. The combination of Skopos Theory and Feminist strategies enables translators to translate the gendered language with a nuanced approach and more specific. Thinking about the intended function of the translation, translators can apply Feminist Translation Theory such as gender neutrality, cultural adaptation, and the empowerment of marginalized voices. By combining the different translation approaches, translators can contribute to a more equitable discourse, challenging original norms and promoting social change through the power of words. The aim of combining the Skopos Theory and Feminist Translation Theory is to better translate the source text to the target culture and give a voice to women.

As we look to the future, this combination guides translators to fulfill their communicative purposes. Translators need to refine and expand these integrated approaches, creating a better translation to improve contemporary society. As the feminist movement promotes the appearance of Feminist Translation Theory, translators also can use translation to change society. Today’s social environment enables more diverse ideas to appear and be generated, which means translators can use their creativity to do more unexpected things.

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