

# ***E-C Translation through the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory – Exemplified by Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s Two Translation Versions by Translators of Different Genders***

**Zhu Zijing<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>School of English Studies, Xian International Studies University, Wenyuannan Road Changan District, Xian, China*

*a.100439@yzpc.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The issue of gender inequality has been an uncharted territory in academic research about translation. With the pressure of the Feminist Movement, the gender issue started to draw the attention of translation studies. Translation enables readers to see beyond their own cultural backgrounds and to have new vistas of the world and history, which makes it a perfect platform for feminists to assert their ideas about the socio-economic situations of women and the complex relationship between the two genders. Uncle Tom’s Cabin, in full Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly, written by female writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, has been translated into Chinese by a number of Chinese scholars. This thesis regards the versions translated by male translator Li Zixiu and female translator Wang Jiaxiang as research objects to analyze their differences in terms of translation strategies to explore how translators can contribute to literary translation from the feminist point of view. Finally, this study found that the female translator is more gender-conscious, and has adopted a unisex-orientated vision, asserted her gender identity, and employed gender inclusive language.

**Keywords:** Feminist Translation Theory; Uncle Tom’s Cabin; Contrastive Study

## **1. Introduction**

The Feminist movement has an impact on society in various fields, including the literary world. Feminist translation theory analyzes the strategies for feminist translators to refuse the stigmatization of women by the patriarchal society and call for equal rights and social status for the two genders through translation. As a novel written by a female writer, Uncle Tom’s Cabin has shouldered great responsibility in making women’s voices heard. Gender awareness is of great significance in the translation of the novel, and this thesis will compare two Chinese versions of the book translated by translators of different genders to demonstrate how feminist translators with a high level of gender- awareness put the feminist translation theory into practice and make a contribution to the overall feminist movement.

### 1.1. Feminist Translation Theory

According to feminist translation theory, the translator's gender identity should be of vital importance in the study of its translation. The work of translating also has a highly gendered nature. Having been excluded from prestigious forms of education and public affairs, women have thus turned to the position of being translators. Misogynist stereotypes of female translators are silent, submissive, and passive [1]. Feminist translators are those who bravely challenge this stereotype and utilize translation as a venue for the dissemination of feminist opinions. In this way, they leave 'signatures' of themselves on their works of translation deliberately to assert their identity, and readers will be able to acknowledge the translator's individual interests, needs, cultural and political characteristics and comprehend their insights and opinions [2].

Translation, as a never-neutral or innocent act, can shoulder great responsibility in making feminism transnational and, therefore, should be placed at the heart of feminist studies [3]. The third wave of feminist movements has shed light on identity politics, transforming feminists' participation in translation into political activity. By adopting various strategies, they make females visible in languages, which contribute to making females seen and heard in reality—the ultimate goal of feminist translation.

### 1.2. Feminist Translation Study in China

Feminist translation theory was introduced to China in the late 20th century. For a long time, the study of feminist translation theory in China mainly focused on its introduction and preliminary exploration of feminist translation [4]. Liao Qiyi, the first explorer of the integration of feminist and translation theories in China, studied and promoted western feminist translation theories. Chinese scholars Mu Lei, Liu Yaru, and Ge Xiaoqin further explored this new academic field and reflected on the traditional patriarchal vision of translation, and stated the necessity and importance of introducing feminist translation theories to China.

In the past two decades, with more women becoming professional translators and devoting themselves to translating literary works and theory studies, feminist translation theories were applied in practice and became more systematic.

The feminist translation theory has developed on a global scale with the third-wave and forth-wave feminist movements. New concepts and ideas concerning gender issues have been put forward while new questions have also been raised and new problems have emerged. However, the study of feminist translation theory in China still centers the traditional ideas and has not yet shifted its focus towards the major topics of third-wave and forth-wave feminism, for example, multicultural inclusion, identity politics, intersectionality and the digital revolution [5]. Compared to other translation theories, feminist translation theories in China remain a less charted area and call for more practice and research.

This Thesis will apply feminist translation theory in the analysis of two different versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* translated by a male and a female translator to demonstrate the feasibility of practicing strategies in support of feminism and gender equality.

## 2. Feminist Analysis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written at a time when both South and North had maintained the slavery system for over a hundred years. Women and African-American people were excluded from "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" promised by the Declaration of Independence. As a novel written by a female writer, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was frequently criticized by the academic world dominated by men and was accused of conveying too many sentimental emotions and was not considered to be a serious literary work. In the feminist movement of past centuries, *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin was rediscovered, reread, and retranslated by feminists. The book was applauded then not only because of its vivid and truthful depiction of African-American people's life in the 19th century, but also because of its contribution to the development of feminism.

Many of the heroines created by Harriet Stowe perform heroic acts and present respectable qualities like bravery, intelligence, and kindness. Noticeably, those women of color in Stowe's novel demonstrated great courage and dignity in the rebellion against oppression and were no longer silent and submissive. Focusing on these traits can be effective in dismissing conventional gender stereotypes.

Feminists believe Harriet Stowe played an important role in challenging patriarchal society's limitation of women's voices in the political and cultural sphere. Her willingness to fight against the unjust in society was so strong that she still voiced out to speak about the reality of those suppressed and to support the abolishment of slavery.

The practice of feminist translation theory is of vital importance in the translation of a novel with such close association with feminism. Females' activities, emotions, thoughts, aspirations, and life choices are depicted at great length in the novel, and the story is rendered in the vision and perspective of a woman. Feminist translators can adopt feminist translation strategies to amplify the feminist ideas embodied in the novel.

### 3. Comparing the Two Translators' Versions of Uncle Tom's Cabin

Uncle Tom's Cabin has exerted great influence on Chinese society ever since it was first translated into Chinese in 1901 during the Qing Dynasty. A number of renowned translators have translated the work. This thesis has chosen two versions of the translations; one was translated by a female translator Wang Jiexiang, and the other was translated by a male translator Li Zixiu.

Wang Jiexiang studies the works of female writers and African-American writers. This thesis believes she has practiced the theories of feminist translation in her version of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Next, this thesis will analyze the differences between the two translators' works and conclude how a female translator's awareness of gender issues influences her translation and how a feminist translator can assert their identity and stance in the text and appeal to the readers.

#### 3.1. Adopt a Unisex-orientated Vision

Women, as "the second sex", were considered passive to male desire and submissive to male dominance.

Male translators often unconsciously adopt a male-orientated vision of women, which treats the female body as a material object for scrutinization, appreciation, and lust. The male-orientated vision is to serve male pleasure, social benchmarking, and even commercial profit [6]. Adopting a unisex-orientated vision indicates avoids the objectification of the female body and refuses the normalization of the sexualization of the female.

Marriage often marks the existing status hierarchy in the literature and is bound up with the property and economic relations [7]. The male-orientated vision views the male as the protector and owner of his wife. The tone and selection of words are of much importance in translating content about marriage. A feminist translator can refrain from using words and expressions that belittle women in marriage by adopting a unisex-orientated vision that does not demonstrate unequal gender norms and gender roles.

Example 1: "By Jupiter," said the trader, turning to him in admiration, ..... (Chapter 1, p8)

Translation by Li Zixiu: "老天哪! " 奴贩馋涎欲滴, 转身冲着谢尔比说, ..... (p5)

Translation by Wang Jiexiang: "朱庇特主神作证, " 奴隶贩子赞美地转身向他说, ..... (p5)

Li translated “in admiration” as “salivating”, which has an explicit sexual implication since what makes the trader “salivate” is a woman. Li’s translation is male-orientated because the emphasis is put on how feminine beauty makes men react and excites the desire of men. Wang adopted the unisex-orientated vision and was more faithful to the original text by translating “in admiration” directly as “admiringly”, which is a word with little sexual implication.

Example 2: She had been married to a bright and talented young mulatto man, ..... (Chapter 2, p16)

Translation by Li Zixiu: 她嫁给了一个聪明能干的混血青年。(p12)

Translation by Wang Jiayang: 她和一个聪明、有才能的、有二分之一黑人血统的青年结了婚, .....

Example 3: “.....Tom’ll have another wife, in a year or two; and she had better take up with somebody else.” (Chapter 21, p325)

Translation by Li Zixiu: “.....汤姆一两年后会再讨个老婆, 她呢, 也最好再找个主儿。” (p289)

Translation by Wang Jiayang: “.....汤姆过一两年会再找个老婆, 克洛最好再找个别人。” (p263)

In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the marriages between African-American people are often discussed. In the second example, the difference of the arrangement of words in the two versions of translation is subtle and may be considered unimportant for someone without much awareness of gender issues. The verb Li used, ‘嫁给’, emphasizes on the female becoming a part of the male’s family. Wang used ‘和.....结婚’, which only indicates the fact of two people becoming a couple. In the third example, Li’s tone in translating ‘having another wife’ suggests that Tom is the active one in the potential marriage and owns more decision-making power. Li also used the word that can be literally translated into English as “owner” when referring to Aunt Chloe’s future husband, while Wang translated “somebody else” simply as “another” person. In a patriarchal society, language is a man-made artifact designed to reflect men’s lives and leaves women indescribable [8]. A translator with the unisex-orientated vision and with an acute awareness of gender inequality would make no indication of who is more important and possesses the dominant power in a marriage.

### 3.2. Assert the Translator’s Identity

The process of translation explores the limits and intertextuality of languages and is constantly modifying, deferring, and displacing the original [9]. The feminist theory denies that translation is to reproduce and considers the aim of feminist translation as to produce and create meaning that reveals feminine identity. Feminist translators redefine fidelity of translation and challenges male social and cultural domination [10]. They speak up for their own gender through translation. Compared with male translators, female translators are generally more sensitive to the unequal social status of males and females, and more aware of the imbalanced distribution of power between two sexes due to personal experiences. The implicit approaches to patriarchal society involved in the original works of female writers may be overlooked or mistranslated by male translators but well-perceived and faithfully translated by female translators. There are also circumstances that words like “man” and “human” make the original meaning ambivalent because they can refer to mankind as a whole but can also refer solely to male, therefore leaving space for feminist translators to assert their gender identity and reveal the harsh truths of patriarchal society and speak against gender discrimination in their own voices.

Example 4: In fact, everybody in the room bore on his head this characteristic emblem of man's sovereignty; whether it was felt hat, palm-leaf, greasy beaver, or fine new chapeau, there it reposed with true republican independence. (Chapter 11, p138)

Translation by Li Zixiu: 实际上, 屋里面人人都头戴这样一顶礼帽, 象征着至高无上的男子汉大丈夫气概。无论是毡帽也好, 滑腻的水獭帽也好, 都高踞于人们头上, 显示出名副其实的共和独立精神。(p115)

Translation by Wang Jiexiang: 其实, 屋子里每个人的头上都戴着一顶标志着男性权利的帽子, 无论是毡帽、棕榈叶帽、油腻腻的獭皮帽, 还是讲究的新礼帽, 全都以真正共和独立的精神稳居在男人的头顶之上。(p107)

Analysis: Whether the author used the word 'man' to refer to males or people as a whole is uncertain. Li translated 'man's sovereignty' as the 'tough and strong masculinity', which indicates according to his understanding the 'man' here refers solely to male and the word 'sovereignty' that suggests dominant power and ownership praises the male qualities. While Wang translates 'man's sovereignty' as 'rights that belong to males' with no accomplishment of this sex's controlling power. 'There it reposed with true republican independence' was translated by Li as 'demonstrated the true spirit of republic and independence', which was very faithful to the original text. Wang translated this part as '(like the new hats,) the spirit of republic and independence reposes safely on the heads of males' with a clear emphasis on who the dictators of so-called 'true republican independence' are. In Wang's version, the text not only satirizes the hypocritical white people who oppress African-American people but still consider themselves as supporters of independent human's rights, which are fundamental for the republic; it also points out the fact that only white males had enjoyed the independence, freedom, and equality. White males were the first-class citizens at that time; they monopolized the power to formulate laws and the right to participate in politics. All the women were repressed by the patriarchal society regardless of their racial identity, and women of color, who were the most discriminated against and exploited, suffered from dual oppressions.

### 3.3. Use Gender-inclusive Language

Since the second wave of feminism, scholars have been challenging the naturalization of androcentric language.

One of the most distinct characteristics of androcentric language is to use masculine words like 'he' to refer to a generic person and 'man' to refer the humanity [11]. Males were in charge of the creation and use of language for most of the time in history, so the life experiences of females were left undocumented, and even the very existence of females and their participation in social activities were ignored. The mainstream androcentric language and gender-exclusive words have contributed to the inactivity and invisibility of females in the literary world. Male translators are more inclined to use gender-exclusive words in translation because they simply consider it a tradition and a habit. Female translators are often less comfortable with the androcentric language and make efforts to select words that include women.

Example 5: His fathers were mighty hunters...calls everybody "stranger" with nonchalant bonhomie, ..... (Chapter 11, p138)

Translation by Li Zixiu: 他们的父辈都是非凡的猎手, .....而且他们总是带着一丝亲昵, 把什么人都称作“老兄”。(P116)

Translation by Wang Jiexiang: 他们的祖先是强有力的猎人.....他们管任何人都和蔼而随便地叫“异乡人”。(p107)



The word Li used to translate ‘fathers’ conveys the same meaning, which is ‘the male ancestors’. In Wang’s version of translation, she used the Chinese word ‘ancestors’, which is gender-inclusive. Li translated ‘stranger’, the word people in the pub to address each other as ‘brother’ in Chinese. Li selected this word deliberately in an attempt to demonstrate the casual manner in how people in the pub talk with one another and how they fraternize. ‘Brother’ or ‘bro’ in short is frequently used in conversations among males and represents the exclusivity of the males’ community and the absence of the participation of any females. Wang’s translation was more faithful to the original text. She simply translated ‘stranger’ as ‘people from other places’ and therefore refrained from using words that exclude women even if there is no evidence in the context that suggests the absence of women in the pub.

#### 4. Conclusion

The comparison of male and female translators’ translations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin demonstrates how different levels of gender awareness influence the translation and provides examples for feminist translators. Previous researchers have already discussed what strategies can be adopted in translation to serve the goal of the feminist movement, while this thesis focuses on more subtle issues that may be overlooked by less gender-conscious readers and has proved feminist translators can state their political stance by adopting the unisex-orientated language, assert their gender identity as female by challenging the institutional inequality of patriarchal society and make women heard and seen by using gender-inclusive language. This thesis believes not only should female translators study the feminist translation theory, but male translators should also take the initiative to familiarize themselves with the theory in order to avoid unconscious use of male-orientated language and mistranslation of feminist works. This thesis has contributed to the study of feminist translation theory by making an analysis concerning the detailed but significant differences between feminist translators’ work and male translators’ work, which is especially vital for male translators since they are more inclined to ignore such differences due to habits and tradition. Researchers concerned about gender issues and feminism can further study what efforts can be made to promote feminism in translation on a micro level, for example, the adjustment of tone and the selection of pronouns. Although the literary world distinctly differs from the real world, it often reflects and highlights issues in reality, including the gender issue. Forbid from receiving education and participating in intellectual activities for thousands of years, women had been unheard, misunderstood, and discriminated against. The awakening of women in recent centuries has made radical changes in society in terms of the development of gender equality. However, in less developed and conservative areas, the idea of gender equality is still new or even unheard of. It is the translation that helps spread ideas across the globe and educate mankind. Feminist translation theory plays an important role in spreading feminism and encouraging women to defend their rights.

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