



Gender and Paratextual Visibility: A Case Study of Iranian Fiction Translators

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Abstract

Radical orientation in the feminist movement evoked numerous criticisms calling for a more neutral and non-political paradigm toward women. The urge for visibility is a long-established intersection between gender and translation. Paratexts, as elements outside the text proper, have created a promising avenue for redirecting translators' visibility outside the textual background. This study sets out to investigate how male and female fiction translators employ their prefaces as an opportunity to elaborate on themselves as translators and their profession as a delicate and serious task. One hundred translators' prefaces in the fictions translated from English into Persian were analyzed using thematic analysis. The contents of translation- and translator-oriented themes reflected female translators' preference for speaking in the first person and asserting more personal accounts, whereas men preferred the third-person point of view and focused mostly on introducing the original authors and their works. The overall results of this study showed that female and male translators were mostly reluctant to talk about their translation process and its possible challenges or delicacies.

Keywords: paratext, visibility, preface, male and female translators, theme

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Introduction

The intersection between translation and gender was highlighted through the works of Simon (1996) and Von Flotow (1997). Simon (1996) sheds light on the practices of many feminist translators, focusing mostly on the translation of the Bible from French into an Anglo-American background. Working on the historical background, and premises of feminist approach, Von Flotow (1997) provided a more organized account of the interrelation between translation and feminism.

Feminism has been criticized for its inconsistent and paradoxical ethics that provided the ground for the manipulation of translation as an instrument for attaining feminist interests and benefits (Arrojo, 1995). Afterwards, new paradigms such as “women identified” (Godayol, 1998), “gender in translation theories” (Eshelman, 2007), and “gender-conscious” (Martin, 2014) have been proposed to readdress the women position in the translations. In this respect, Godayol (1998) asserts that feminist advocates have a markedly political disposition, and the manifestation of delimited feminists’ policies and ideals, but “women identified” and the related concepts imply a primary preoccupation that isn't always feminist.

The present research strives to look at differences between male and female translators from the relatively new perspective of paratexts to explore how Iranian female and male translators resorted to prefaces as their commentaries to highlight accounts of translation discourse and uncover their personal assertions. Any information given by translators in their prefaces that draws readers' attention to translators and the act of translating is referred to as paratextual visibility.

Gender, Translation, and Paratextual Visibility

Undeserved preconceptions of inferiority and second-class status ascribed to “women” and “translation” have developed a long-standing relationship between these two categories. Both women and translation phenomena have strived to foreground their presence, and visibility through various approaches. For this purpose, foreignization as a textual orientation was proposed by Venuti (1995) more than two decades ago. He coined the term “(In)visibility” to describe the positions of translators in Anglo-American culture. He believes that translators are invisible because they follow the norms established by reviewers, publishers, and readers that a good translation is fluent and readable. Venuti (1995) advocates the foreignized approach to translation to uncover cultural differences and translators’ creativity in translation. This dichotomy of foreignization and domestication has been widely criticized (Pym, 1996), Shamma (2009), and Cronin (2010). In this regard, Pym refers to three points that have not been adequately supported by Venuti’s theory: firstly, ignoring the translator’s authorship by copyright contracts; secondly, the low proportion of English language publications and, thirdly, the notions of invisibility and readability identified mostly in the English language. Moreover, foreignized target texts may not be consistent with the requirements of the reader, and due to the limited freedom in the rendering process, the textual domain provides limited space for translators’ visibility.

Translators’ traces and footprints in the text domain have also been

previously urged in women-identified approaches that have been criticized from different perspectives. Chesterman (2009, p. 19) criticizes the textual orientation of translation studies because it undermines translators' presence and role behind the target texts. Leech also points out that the focus of the translation discipline has been on "the power that a translator has in relation to the text rather than to his relations as a professional being (2005, p. 14).

Therefore, opening up new avenues to illuminate translators' visibility and presence is strongly felt. Genette divides paratexts into "peritexts"—internal parts like as prefaces, dedications, notes, titles, and blurbs—and "epitexts or distant elements"—outside the text itself, such as interviews, reviews, criticism, and so on (1997, pp. 4-5). In Batchelor's view, the paratextual study in translation studies establishes an interaction between ideological concerns through the topic of gender (2018, p. 36). The detachment of paratexts from actual translations, especially in prefaces, set translators free from the constraints of the source text and its equivalent, and paved the way for adding assertions for which no place is found in a translated book. As Hermans asserts, translators have a "second voice", which may not be detected in the actual translations but is directly heard in the paratextual elements (1996, p. 27).

In female-oriented methods, approaching paratexts in this way has not been overlooked, and prefacing has been recognized as a technique for boosting the standing of female translators. Prefaces are one of the most common types of peritexts, accounting for roughly one-quarter of Genette's book on paratexts and offering almost limitless space for translators' assertions.

Prefaces as the Most Significant Peritext:

The paucity of discourses on translations, especially among female translators, seems to be a common concern. Dimitriu (2009) points out that the limited number of translators' prefaces has put them in a more invisible position than before and created a considerable gap between theory and practice in translation studies. She urges the translators to "develop a more professional meta-language" to improve the "quality" of their prefaces (2009, p. 204). Prefaces are viewed as translators' "ontological narrative" (Somers & Gibson, 1993) and their "democratic spaces of individuality" (Feltrin-Morris, 2016), that "can construct and contest authority" (Oktar & Yetkiner, 2012).

Wechsler (1998, p. 262) declares that when reviewers are encountered with sophisticated prefaces inserted by translators, they are obliged to regard translators as prominent contributors to developing the translated versions. Translatorial prefaces refer to "introductions, notes, afterwards, or any other commentary preceding or following a translation written by the translator" (McRae, 2010, p. 7). Venuti (1995) as the most prominent advocate of translator' visibility, regards prefaces as significant contributors in enhancing the visibility of translators. In a similar vein, Bush (1994) agrees that translators' prefaces, as well as their footnotes and names on the book cover, are a technique to emphasize the translators' authority. Publishers, he argues, are among the forces who oppose the inclusion of translational prefaces in fiction (pp. 115-116).

The paramount importance of these opening elements may be due to their independent nature from the source texts that gives translators more freedom in how they are presented and visible. Several scholars have discussed the functions and potentials of prefaces. Prefaces, according to Landers (2001, p. 103) and McRae (2010, p. 40), can provide substantial evidence and intriguing insights into a book's self-assertions and reasoning, as well as explanations about the decision-making process. Preface, according to Venuti (1986, p. 181), is a crucial, concrete tool for uncovering the translation process and explaining the text's "labor of transformation."

A careful investigation of the translators' prefaces and comparing them with translations, according to Dimitriu, may also be useful and valuable for translation studies in determining translation norms and ideals at any particular moment (2009, p. 202). Prefaces are particularly important in paratexts, according to Tahir-Gürçalar, because they can be used to identify the translator's agency (2011, p. 115). In Norberg' opinion prefaces provide possibilities for translators to reinforce their reputation, writing on the translation points "without being immediately challenged" and "anticipate and prevent criticism from reviewers and readers" (2012, p. 104). This paramount significance pertaining to prefaces, on the one hand, and the rarity of translators' prefaces, especially among the females, on the other hand, justifies further research in this area.

Literature Review

In her study of translators' prefaces, Eckerle (2016) discovered that female translators have a tendency to follow certain patterns, such as establishing a personal connection with their readers and including personal dedications in their reader-oriented prefaces as doorways into the world of print. With respect to the influence of gender on the translation field, Leonardi is recognized as among the first scholars to focus different ways of translating among men and women, based on the presuppositions of different patterns of speaking. She introduces a framework "for the contrastive analysis of the translation strategies of male and female translators" (2007, p. 19) and raises interest in how females and males translate the same original text differently. She explored the Italian into English translated novels in terms of lexical, textual, grammatical, and pragmatic levels and concluded that ideologically-driven shifts in the translation are affected by translators' gender.

Ahmadian (2010) examined 150 female and male translators concerning their translation quality in expressive and informative texts. Females showed better performance, but their differences were not statistically significant. LotfiKashmar et al. (2013) also explored the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of MA female and male translation students. It was concluded that both groups' practical skills were superior to their theoretical knowledge, and males exhibited higher levels of theoretical factors than females, though this difference was not statistically significant.

In two translations of Austin's *pride and prejudice*, Panou (2013) looked at the disparities in linguistic forms used by male and female translators. The study showed that the female translator was mostly concerned with elaborate descriptions of emotional assertions and hedging devices; while

the male translator showed the tendency toward a more formal and more sophisticated use of language.

Araghizadeh and Jadidi (2016) conducted a study on 53 MA translation students to investigate the relationship between translation quality, translators' epistemological beliefs, and gender. Their findings depicted no significant relationship between epistemological belief and translation quality; however, in the case of gender, it was revealed that male translators translate better than females with respect to translation quality.

Regarding the effect of translators' gender on translation adequacy, Diachuk (2017) investigated the translations of Marguerite Yourcenar's novel *L'Oeuvre au Noir*. She demonstrated that male translators applied a wider circle of lexical and stylistics resources of Ukrainian words and expressions. On the other hand, female translators unearthed sensitivity to gender-related issues, and sometimes deviated from original author's storyline and the characters' gender representations.

Method

Materials

Using a convenient sampling, 600 fictions from various authors and genres were selected from English to Persian translations. Fictions, here refer to novels, novelettes, and short stories based on made-up events (Abrams & Harpham, 2011). The books were written by a diverse group of English writers and were translated by a large number of Iranian translators, that result into a deeper understanding of the context and roles of prefaces.

Procedure

First of all, the gender of the translators and the presence or absence of translatorial prefaces were examined in the corpus. Three hundred and thirty books were translated by males and 210 versions by females. One hundred and 64 books were found with prefaces among the male translators and 54 books with prefaces by female translators, indicating the severe paucity of prefaces among females. Finally, 50 females' and 50 males' prefaces were randomly chosen for the final analysis.

These prefaces were studied concerning their point of view that is regarded as a narrative tool that accounts for observed modifications in literary translation and as a sign of the translator's authority and visibility (Munday, 2008). Secondly, prefaces were investigated through thematic analysis, which was proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as an accessible and adaptable qualitative method. This method was chosen because, in Batchelor's view, it leads to unearthing thematic patterns of translator's prefaces and could "deepen our appreciation of what paratexts do", and contribute to finding "something that actually presents common practice in a given culture or era" (2018, p. 161). Finally, the fictions containing the extracted themes were counted in the whole data, and their frequency was obtained in all the corpus. Some of the books, for example, had no theme on the translator or the translation discourse, and in some other cases, all the subcategories of the themes were found.

Data Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 16-20), thematic analysis, a qualitative analytical technique used in this study, is carried out in six steps:

1. Getting to know the data: During the first step, all of the translators' prefaces were read numerous times to get a sense of the overall context. Some notes were taken at this time, and early impressions for the next steps were formed.

2. Initial code generation: preliminary codes were constructed in this step based on interesting or relevant patterns observed in the data. The study's goal was kept in mind at this point, and each segment of data that was pertinent to the goal was coded. Due to the lack of an electronic version of the fictions, all of the processes were completed manually using hard copies of the books.

3. Theme extraction: This process involved extracting themes by identifying data relationships. These were transient themes that could be categorized as main themes or sub-themes later or deleted entirely.

4. Theme review: The initial themes from the previous phase were developed and re-evaluated. They were divided into multiple themes or combined with others. The relationship between each theme and its pertinent data was investigated, and the themes' consistency over the full data set was assessed.

5. Theme naming and defining: Each theme was examined in depth in this step to verify that it had sufficient content and fit into the overall work. Themes were finally identified by concise and explicit names after the scope and subject matter were determined.

6. Writing-up: The final stage began with a well-developed set of themes to be examined in the final analysis. It is critical that the analysis delivers a clear, cohesive, logical, non-repetitive, and entertaining presentation of the data's story. Finally, some straightforward and simple examples were provided to further elucidate each concept.

The Results

Regarding the point of view, prefaces were divided into the first-person, the second-person, and the third-person. Male translators reflected more tendency toward writing in the third-person (60%) and females were more oriented toward the first-person point of view (52%) that the overall results can be found in the following table:

Table 1
Translators' Point of View in Their Prefaces

Type	Males		Females	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
The first-person singular	17	34%	26	52%
The first-person plural	3	6%	5	10%
The third-person	30	60%	19	38%

Thematic analysis of the prefaces in the first step yielded two overall contents of original-oriented and translation-oriented themes. Original-

oriented themes were categorized into information on the original authors and their works. Translation-oriented were classified into accounts associated with translators themselves and those with the discourse of translation. Table 2 depicts the overall results of these two themes, and in tables 3 and 4, further categorizations of “translator” and “translation discourse” are presented.

Table 2
Themes Extracted from Female and Male Prefaces

Types	Sub-categories	Males		Females	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Original	original author	38	76%	29	58%
	original work	38	76%	32	64%
Translational	Translator	18	36%	28	56%
	translation discourse	21	42%	19	38%

Original-Oriented

Original Author. This theme included personal information, social and political status, and previous works or interviews of the original authors. Although all the translators were highly concerned with elaborating on the original author, this preoccupation was higher in men (76%) than women (58%). Moshref (1938/2009), in his preface of *Brighton Rock*, introduces Green as a prominent writer: “Green accompanies the modern man and, in various individual and social moods, he talks, sees and listens on behalf of him. Consequently, he is considered among the most popular writers in the world” (p. 7).

Original Text. This category explored the content of fiction, as well as its characters, the motivation for its development, and its history. It also took into account the originals' popularity among SL readers, and also their translations into other languages and film adaptations. A large proportion of the extracted themes were dedicated to this content, and like the previous theme, male translators devoted a higher degree (76%) comparing the female translators (64%). Eftekhari, in his preface of Crichton's *Terminal Man*, talks about the notions discussed in the book:

Scientific theories and methods in the present book go back to the beginning of the 1970s. Therefore, there is a big difference between these theories and today's complicated discoveries. Many of these theories and methods have been proved today that may set the ground for accepting Crichton's other opinions in the future (1972/2005, p. 5).

Translation-Oriented

Translator. This category was concerned with any information that draws readers' attention to the translator as a real individual on his/her own. Eckerle (2016) believes that prefaces are the most appropriate places for inserting translators' personal information (p. 105). Asserting emotional feelings bring translators out of their shadowy presence and undermine their existence as prominent individuals who has the right to make comments on what they have done. Constraints on source and target text are removed in the

prefaces and translators are free to speak directly to their readers. In the present study, the frequency of the “translator” theme was found to be surprisingly higher (56%) in female translators in comparison to male translators (36%). This theme was further classified into the following subcategories:

Translators’ Sympathy. Paratexts can be applied to elaborate on translation where translators can assert their personal feelings toward the original author or the source text that have been preoccupied with all its lines and words during the translation process. These kinds of self-assertions can be inserted nowhere except prefaces. In the male and female prefaces, only four and three examples of this type of intimate association were found, respectively. Samiyian, for example, talks about her close engagement with the story of the country of men and its events:

When starting the translation of this book, I never imagined being absorbed by its every line and page. All the moments of the rendering process, I found myself not as the translator but as someone engaged in the sequence of events narrated by Soleiman. It is safe to claim that I saw myself not as the translator but as a member of the protagonist’s family (1970/2016, p. 7).

Choice of the Public. Translators’ limitations as mediators between source and target texts lower their latitude for direct communication with their readers. Eckerle (2016) holds that intimate connection between translators and readers help “to make the preface a metaphorical bridge between private life and established text” (p. 103). Warhol is of the view that when the actual reader is addressed as “you”, the text is elevated to a “real event, an exchange of ideas that the novelist hopes will result in real consequences” (1989, p. 203). In the present study, 22% of the whole themes in female translators’ prefaces were identified with the choice of the public that was much higher in comparison to 8% found in male translated fictions. Dana, as an example, in her preface of Matheson’s *Feather*, talks about her readers’ affections:

When I write these lines, my heart is infused with the love and kindness of my unseen readers that encouraged me in my work. Some of my dear readers have posted me some beautiful gifts in the shape of feathers. All of these favors show that you are satisfied with my translation (1927/2016, pp. 18-19).

Behnam specifies and addresses his audience in his translation of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper*: “The readers of this book are generally adolescents and young people who are interested in reading funny and advisable stories. It is hoped that they will be satisfied with the work” (1881/1909, p. 3).

The above-mentioned quotations are examples of the communication of female and male translators with their audiences. In the first one, Dana, as a female translator, creates a much more intimate interaction with her readers in the first-person point of view, but in the second one, Behnam, as a male translator, addressed his audience from a third-person point of view and by

applying more neutral words.

Lightening Rods. Lightening rods, coined by Genette, involves modest remarks of translators, is a method for defending against criticisms, "that is, to neutralize them -and indeed- to forestall criticism by taking the initiative" (Genette, 1997, p. 208). On this basis, translators admit their possible mistakes and any modifications, especially in translating great works that pose significant challenges. Eight percent of the males' and 6% of the females' extracted themes were devoted to this category. Haji Nasrollah, in his preface of the translated version of Wild's *fisherman and his soul*, talks humbly about the possible weaknesses in his work: "This rendering definitely suffers from its own deficiencies [...]. I hope that specialists in the translation field support amateurs like me" (1981/2005, p. 7).

Exit Notes. Exit notes, mostly located at the end of the prefaces, revolved around three items: dedications, acknowledgments, and hope for the translated version's popularity. Pruneau (2016), in his Ph.D., categorizes dedications into personalized and generalized and argues that writers develop a close contact with their young readers by using the first-person possessive pronoun "my," whose pragmatic role is to construct identity (p. 99). Exit notes, in Bilodeau's view, may provide "a stronger rhetorical convention" (2019, p. 71) to draw the readers' attention to the translators' presence. This theme allows translators to dedicate their work to general readers and, more specifically, personal readers, and to express gratitude to various agents, such as friends, publishers, families, or collaborators, who were somehow influential in completing the final version. These insertions bring prominent visibility to translators as agents who regard the translated version as their own property. One of the surprising points in the present study is the much greater tendency of females (56%) in comparison to males (24%) to add exit notes in their prefaces that, like the findings in "point of view" and "translator points", indicate more emotional assertions.

Translation Discourse. This theme included accounts concerned with the phenomenon of translation, divided into translation strategies and challenges, the choice of the original texts, faithfulness, and translation aids. Prefaces provide a precious opportunity for translators to underscore their profession as a delicate and sophisticated task and eliminate unrealistic misconceptions about it as a straightforward and unchallenging activity. This information is influential in enriching the translation field and reducing the gap between theory and practice in translation studies. Moreover, since translators are mostly recognized as hidden and reticent in their work, these accounts provide valuable explanations of their choices and translation procedures applied to their books. Forty-two and 38% of the books contained this kind of information by males and females, respectively.

Strategies and Challenges. This theme is devoted to any explanation of various strategies taken for rendering different items, such as proverbs, proper nouns, archaic words, titles, or information on the overall method adopted for translating the whole work, and the difficulties encountered in the translation process. Female and male translators were equally concerned with adding these kinds of accounts to their prefaces (28%). Manipulations of the original title or the explanations behind its choice are among the subjects

explained in this category. Translators sometimes deviated from the original title and even chose a new title which prefaces provide an appropriate space to talk about their rationales behind their modifications. Mosaed, for example, in her preface of William Golding's *The Spire*, justifies her last choice of the title: "The title "spire" had no appropriate equivalent in Farsi. The closest word was "منار" which has its corresponding "minaret" in English sounded as inappropriate. Consequently, I chose the title "برج" (tower) as the best (Golding, 1983/1990, p. 14).

The Choice of the Text for Translation. This theme is dedicated to the process in which translators were attracted to translating the original texts and the motivations behind their rendering. Just 2 and 5 cases in this regard were found in male's and female's commentaries, respectively. Haghparast, for example, in her translation of Asimov's *Last Answer* (1980/2014), elaborates on choosing the original version for translation:

Selecting a work among Asimov's hundreds of books was a challenging task. I wanted to translate this book because our today's science fiction literature needs to enjoy the inclusion of books like this and children now have the right to enjoy a portion of Asimov's work and his sweet language (p. 2).

Table 3

Categorization of "Translator" Theme in Males' and Females' Prefaces

Types	Males		Females	
	Sum	Percent	Sum	Percent
Choice of the public	4	8%	11	22%
Sympathy	4	8%	3	6%
Lightening rods	4	8%	3	6%
Exit notes	12	24%	28	56%

Table 4

Categorization of "Translation Discourse" Theme in Males' and Females' Prefaces

Types	Males		Females	
	Sum	Percent	Sum	Percent
Strategies and challenges	14	28%	14	28%
Choice of the text for translation	2	4%	5	10%
Faithfulness	2	4%	4	8%
Translation aids	7	14%	2	4%

Faithfulness. Declaring fidelity to the original authors and their works is one of the contents that accounts for a low proportion of the overall themes (4% in males and 8% in females). The scarcity of this theme may be due to the fact that strict fidelity to the source text is no longer regarded as a yardstick in translation studies. Behnam (1881/1909), in his translation of Mark Twain's *prince and pauper*, confesses to his loyalty in translating the original text, "In this version, the translator has done his best not to distort the content of the original. The author's conclusion and message are preserved at 100 percent, so readers will not feel any shortage in this respect" (p. 3).

Translation Aids. Talking about multiple sources of help in translating

the original text in terms of human support or using various books, dictionaries or encyclopedias, etc., is included in this theme. The male translators were more associated with referring to their aids in the translation process (14%) comparing the female translators (4%). Hosseini, a well-known translator, in his preface of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (1936/1999), admits others' help in the translation process:

I owe it to my scholars' friends if I was able to complete this masterpiece. Toraj Yarahmadi edited the three first chapters, and Dr. Parviz Talebzadeh paralleled these three chapters with original text again. Dr. Kamran Ehtesham and Dr. Mahmood Darom also revised some parts of the book based on the original version, and they helped me tackle some of its problems. There is a legal letter in chapter 8 that was translated by the well-known lawyer and translator, Manoochehr Badiei (pp. 11-12).

Conclusion

This study aimed to present a snapshot of the differences between Iranian female and male translators in applying their prefaces as an opportunity to accentuate themselves and their work. The thematic analysis of the prefaces revealed that both female and male translators were highly preoccupied with introducing the original authors and their books, although the percentage of this engagement was higher for men. These findings are consistent with Norberg's words that finding prefaces, as the most significant type of paratext, written by translators is rare and finding commentaries about translation by them is even rarer (2012, p. 105).

Expressing more self-assertion and personal intimacy by female translators, despite the rarity of their prefaces, was noticeable. These results are consistent with Eckerle's assertions about women's tendency toward some conventions, such as creating an intimate connection with their readers and inserting personal dedications in their reader-oriented prefaces as channels for entering the world of print (2007, p. 103). Panou (2013), similarly, showed that female translators were more concerned with extensive explanations of emotive declarations and hedging strategies, whereas male translators tended to employ language in a more formal and sophisticated manner.

Except for the highlighted female translators in terms of their self-assertions and personal statements, which have been proved to be their inherent psychological characteristics, few commentaries were discovered on the translation discourse among females and males. This finding contradicts Bilodeau's (2019) findings, which found that the topic of translation was covered in somewhat more than half of the publications in the sample, including discussions of translation techniques and text selection. As a result, prefaces in the present study have not applied in Shamma's view (2015) as a ground for elevating the status of translation and the overall position of their discipline, or as a "ample room for an author's manipulation and creativity" (Eckerle, 2007, p. 97).

The paucity of translation discourse in translators' prefaces needs further investigation that may be better understood in interviews or questionnaires conducted on translators. Norberg's (2012, p. 114) claim that

elaborating on translation strategies and principles may draw criticism from reviewers, might be regarded as a possible hypothesis in explaining males' and females' reluctance to talk about their translation choices and strategies. External pressure to not insert translators' prefaces or their content from influential factors such as publishers may be another rationale for explaining the paucity of their prefaces. Publishers, according to Bush (1994), are among the agencies who oppose the addition of translational prefaces to fiction (pp. 115-116). Landers (2001, p. 166) proposes supplying translations to scholarly publications as a solution because they are more likely to include a preface discussing the translations' obstacles and difficulties. The current study's concentration on the English language, and fiction genre may limit its applicability. As a result, investigating gender and paratextual visibility in a variety of languages and genres could yield intriguing results.

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