

Gender and Linguistic Sexism in Elisabetta Cametti's *I guardiani della Storia* and Its Translation into English and Spanish

Abstract: Language is one of the strongest and most valuable tools that is within our reach and that allows us to communicate in society. However, through both written and spoken language, a certain gender inequality can usually be perceived. Nonetheless, there are some considerable differences depending on the languages. While Spanish and Italian are rooted in a patriarchal society, English seems to be more neutral when it comes to gender. Some nouns used to designate professions clearly represent the best examples of sexist language and dictionaries are a fair reflection of this. In order to deepen the topic from a gender translation perspective, this work will analyze some of the jobs that appear throughout the novel *I guardiani della Storia*, written by the Italian author Elisabetta Cametti, and its translation into Spanish (by Claudia Conde) and into English (by Scott P. Sheridan). Therefore, this analysis will present a study of the differences among the three languages regarding linguistic sexism as well as examine how gender issues can influence the reception of the translated texts.

Keywords: *Elisabetta Cametti, gender inequality, jobs and professions, linguistic sexism*

The elimination of sexist language is a necessary condition for eliminating sexism in any society.
Sara Shute, *Sexist Language and Sexism*¹

1. Introduction

It is commonly known that language is one of the strongest, most precious and useful tools that are within our reach and that allows us to communicate in society. Nonetheless, through both written and spoken language, a certain gender bias can usually be perceived. Such inequality may vary depending on different cultural and social factors.

Spanish and Italian societies present a long tradition based on dominance and submission and, consequently, their respective languages are influenced by strong androcentrism² characterized by a noticeable masculine perspective. Some nouns used to designate jobs and professions clearly represent examples of sexist language and dictionaries are a fair reflection of this. This is largely due to the almost non-existent role of women in the labor market until the 20th century:

Fino a metà del secolo scorso Stati e Chiese hanno riservato alla donna il compito esclusivo di essere sposa e madre. Le professioni più qualificate le erano escluse e questo spiega perché le posizioni che erano riservate all'uomo hanno creato termini solamente di genere maschile (come 'dotto', 'medico', 'chirurgo', 'giudice', 'sindaco', 'assessore').³

¹ Sara Shute, "Sexist Language and Sexism", in Mary Vetterling-Braggin, ed., *Sexist Language: A Modern Philosophical Analysis* (Totowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co, 1981).

² According to Calero Fernández, androcentrism assumes that the measure of all things is taken from men and that, if women are taken into consideration, they are always treated as a deviation or separation from the standard, built on masculine patterns. Androcentrism leads to the underestimation and even concealment of the feminine; but it can also be accompanied by a misogynistic component. M^a Ángeles Calero Fernández, *Sexismo lingüístico. Análisis y propuestas ante la discriminación sexual en el lenguaje* (Madrid: Narcea Ediciones, 1999), 9.

³ Until the middle of the last century, being a wife or a mother were the only roles that States and Churches attributed to women. They were excluded from the most qualified professions and, as a result, the positions that were reserved for men have created

For centuries, it was a widespread notion that men were superior to women. Women have been considered lesser beings due to their physical nature. Traditional philosophers such as Rousseau, Diderot or Voltaire promulgated negative and harmful arguments against women in order to exclude them from the political, social and economic order. Based on such discrimination, patriarchy's power has predominated, placing the figure of the woman as dependent and submissive to the authority of a man, whether it is the father, the husband or any other male relative. Therefore, the role that the community has assigned to women has been none other than that of being mothers and wives and that of caring for sick relatives – whether they are children, parents or other family members – unable to benefit from any kind of privilege or right.

According to the feminist linguist Deborah Cameron, feminist theory has inevitably analysed the differences between women and men paying particular attention to the sexual division of labor:

Present to some degree in all known societies, in which some tasks are women's and others are men's. Men's work is economically and socially valued; women's usually is not. (The societies which most closely approach sexual equality seem to be those in which women control their own production, and men need the things they produce). Some feminists have looked particularly at women's obligation to do domestic work and childcare, suggesting that mothering, apart from its role in restricting women economically, may have consequences for the psychology of women and their children, reproducing the cycle whereby women mother and men do not.⁴

It is worth noting that the topic of sexism in language is probably the best known of all feminist linguistic concerns. Sexist language in nouns used to designate professions is inextricably linked to women's discrimination in the workplace and, as a result, there are different occupations associated to each gender (which are not interchangeable). Their subordinate role forces women into a marginalized and subservient position in all fields. All this has been discussed by M^a Ángeles Calero Fernández (1999) in her work *Sexismo Lingüístico*:

El rol social que se ha asignado tradicionalmente a la mujer es el de esposa y madre, lo que supone el cuidado del hogar y de la familia. Su formación iba destinada al buen cumplimiento de la función que le había correspondido dentro de la sociedad, de modo que no podía acceder a ningún trabajo cualificado como no tuviera que ver con las enseñanzas que había venido recibiendo. Esas enseñanzas reducían el abanico de posibilidades laborales a lo propio de la actividad doméstica: bordar, coser, servir, lavar, ocuparse de los niños y de los enfermos, cocinar, planchar. Estos oficios, al formar parte del universo femenino – juzgado como inferior –, quedaron estigmatizados, y fueron excluidos de la dinámica laboral de los varones.⁵

Calero Fernández proposes the following case: the definition of the word *criar* ('to raise') according to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española*:

'*Criar*': Nutrir o alimentar la madre o la nodriza al niño con la leche de sus pechos, o con biberón' (DRAE, 1992). Esta definición deja por sentado que un padre no se ocupa de criar a su hijo/a porque no lo nombra como individuo que pueda encargarse de ello. Bien es cierto que un varón no puede amamantar, pero sí que

terms only for masculine gender. Sergio Lepri, "Lepri. Le scorrettezze (culturali) del linguaggio", *Giulia Giornaliste* <http://giulia.globalist.it/attualita/articolo/2017/07/11/lepri-le-scorrettezze-culturali-del-linguaggio-2004659.html> (2013). In English the neutral form prevents this situation. Translation by the author.

⁴ Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, Second Edition (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 5.

⁵ The social role that has traditionally been assigned to women is that of wife and mother, which involves the care of the home and the family. Their education was destined to the proper fulfillment of their role within society and, as a result, they could not access any qualified job as it did not correspond to the education they received. Thus, the range of job possibilities was reduced to domestic activity itself: embroider, sew, serve, wash, take care of children and the sick, cook, iron. These trades, being part of the female universe – considered as inferior – were stigmatized and excluded from male labor dynamics. Calero Fernández, *Sexismo Lingüístico*, 109. Translation by the author.

puede preparar y dar un biberón. Como se observará, la redacción es obsoleta y, a través de ella, se les ve el plumero a los académicos.⁶

Surprisingly, if we carry out the same search almost two decades later, we notice that the definition of the term *criar* offered nowadays by the RAE⁷ remains exactly the same. The Spanish language is commonly characterized by sexist prejudices which constitute the result of the role that women have been expected to adopt for centuries. Nowadays, Spanish and Italian languages continue to transmit messages that reinforce women’s traditional status and ideas that preserve their subordination in speech. However, as Deborah Tannen notices, such cultural and rooted traditional model adopted by society must change: “Lo que hace falta para realizar cambios es la comprensión de los modelos de conducta humana tal como existen hoy en día, una apreciación de la complejidad de estos modelos y un respeto humano por los otros seres humanos”.⁸

2. Dictionaries as a non-neutral tool

Throughout industrialization, women were gradually incorporated into the workplace but, evidently, without obtaining the same rights and working conditions as their male colleagues. Women had neither the opportunity to occupy certain social positions nor to take leadership roles and, therefore, in the case of Spanish language, nouns such as *la ministra*, *la alcaldesa* o *la jueza*⁹ were only used to refer to the minister’s, mayor’s or judge’s wife. Even today, in some of the DRAE¹⁰ entries which contain both genders, the feminine is defined according to the masculine – as a colloquial use – ‘wife of...’ or ‘woman who held the position of...’. This is another example of male dominance and supremacy throughout history. While men have been placed at the core of the entire working world because they are seen as superior beings, women are perceived as dependent on men, submissive and easier to mould.

Thus, despite being an exceptional tool – both from the lexical and cultural point of view – dictionaries are not neutral resources in that a strong ideological interference in lexicographical compilations can be clearly perceived. Another example of this can be found in the analysis carried out by Aurora Marco López.¹¹ Her analysis focuses on the study of how gender difference in the field of professions and positions is presented according to the DRAE.¹²

Among the slogans outlined by the author in her work and registered exclusively using feminine word endings, most of the cases have already found the masculine connotation as can be observed in the following terms collected in the DRAE:¹³ “aeromozo,za”, “azafato,ta”, “comadrón,na” o “costurero,ra”.

⁶ Ibid., 96. According to the DRAE (1992), ‘To raise’ means the action of nourishing or feeding the child by the mother or the wet nurse with the milk of their breasts or a feeding bottle. In the words of Calero Fernández, this definition assumes that a father does not raise his child in that he is not mentioned as an individual who can handle this situation. It is true that a man cannot breastfeed, but he absolutely can prepare and give a baby bottle. As it will be observed, the writing is obsolete and, through it, one can unearth what the academics are implying.

⁷ Real Academia Española.

⁸ “What is needed to make changes is the comprehension of the human behavior models as they exist nowadays, an appreciation of the complexity of these models and a demonstration of respect amongst humans”. Deborah Tannen, *Género y discurso*, (Barcelona: Paidós, 1996), 25. Translation by the author.

⁹ ‘minister (f)’, ‘mayoress’ or ‘judge (f)’.

¹⁰ *Diccionario de la lengua Española* - Real Academia de la Lengua Española. Edición del Tricentenario. Actualización 2017, <http://dle.rae.es/?id=DgIqVCc>, accessed 14 March 2018.

¹¹ Aurora Marco López, “Lenguaje, sexismo y educación”, in M^a Isabel Sancho Rodríguez et al., eds., *Lengua, literatura y mujer* (Jaén: Universidad de Jaén, 2003).

¹² *Diccionario escolar de la Real Academia Española*, 1998.

¹³ Both dictionaries DRAE and DRAE have been compared. As Marco López points out, the DRAE edition analyzed is a reduced version of the *Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia* (hereinafter called DRAE). Marco López, “Lenguaje, sexismo y educación”, 20.

Nevertheless, many other terms proposed by Marco López, such as “carabina” or “chacha”,¹⁴ continue to hold the only feminine mark.

Regarding the Italian language, it is necessary to highlight the case of the terms *casalingo/casalinga* in order to reaffirm the fact that there seem to be appropriate professions for each sex which do not seem to be interchangeable. By consulting the *Treccani*¹⁵ we find the following definitions:

Casalingo *agg.* 1. Di casa, domestico, familiare. 2. Per la casa, per gli usi domestici: *oggetti c.*; anche sostantivato al plur.: *negozio di casalinghi*.

Casalinga *s.f.* 1. Donna che attende in casa propria alle faccende domestiche e non ha altra professione. 2. Lo stesso che *casalina*.¹⁶

As it can be observed, the only term that designates the profession of a person who carries out the household tasks is exclusively feminine. Consequently, does this mean a man cannot take charge of the house and devote himself solely to domestic chores? Once again, through a didactic tool such as the dictionary, endowed with a strong cultural and ideological burden, an unavoidable androcentric and patriarchal society is reaffirmed.

Fortunately, throughout the last decades, women have fought for absolute incorporation and integration into the labor market, becoming the main protagonists. Little by little, and especially from the second half of the 20th century, women have occupied traditional male environments thanks to their emancipation and autonomy as well as to their ongoing struggle for equality among men and women. Due to this constant and complicated battle, in which women have come up against major obstacles in the male-dominated labor market, nowadays we can refer to *la jueza* not as the judge’s wife but as the woman who has authority and power to judge and sentence.¹⁷

Thus, social transformation reflects the change of women’s role which is shown in the use of language regarding professions and trades: “al mismo tiempo que la sociedad va evolucionando hacia un modelo más igualitario, el lenguaje puede contribuir en gran medida a esta mudanza, haciéndonos visibles, porque queremos nombrar y ser nombradas desde nosotras mismas”.¹⁸

By comparing Italian and Spanish, it could be said that language gender inequality within the field of professions is even more palpable in Italian. Within the Spanish language, every time the use of feminine terms such as *abogada*, *ministra*, *jueza* or *médica* to refer to the woman who exercises each of these jobs is becoming more common.¹⁹ Even new terms have been invented such as *presidenta* which has been established by the RAE, in order to indicate the female gender of *presidente*.

In the case of the Italian language, due to various social, economic and cultural changes in recent years, there has been a growing need to create the feminine form of those professions that in the past were only reserved for men such as *il professore/la professoressa* (‘the male/female teacher’):

¹⁴ The male term *chacho* is also accepted by the DRAE (2017 edition) but with a very different meaning: *muchacho*, ‘boy’. However, the word *chacha*, exclusively feminine, is a synonym of ‘maid’, ‘babysitter’ with a somewhat negative and derogatory connotation.

¹⁵ *Treccani, l’enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*. “Casalingo”, “Casalinga”, <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/casalingo/>, accessed 20 April 2018.

¹⁶ The masculine adjective *casalingo* is described as a synonym of homely, domestic, family. On the other hand, the feminine noun *casalinga* refers to a woman who does housework, as a synonym of ‘housewife’.

¹⁷ “jueza: la persona que tiene autoridad y potestad para juzgar y condenar”, DRAE (2017).

¹⁸ At the same time that society evolves towards a more egalitarian model, language can contribute to a large extent to this change, making us visible, because we want to name and be named from ourselves. Marco López, “Lenguaje, sexismo y educación”, 14, translation by the author.

¹⁹ Although the use of feminine professions is becoming more frequent, DRAE still holds the meaning of some terms such as *médica*, *jueza*, *ministra*, etc., as ‘the woman of’ (in a colloquial and disused sense).

Con l’ingresso della donna in alcune professioni certe potenzialità grammaticali hanno aiutato, nel passato, la soluzione del problema: col suffisso ‘essa’ (‘professoressa’, ‘dottoressa’), col facile femminile della parola che è un participio passato (come ‘deputata’) o delle parole col finale ‘era’ (‘infermiera’, ‘consigliera’, ‘bersagliera’).²⁰

Nonetheless, there are many other cases in which professions that indicate a certain prestige or a high social status maintain the masculine invariable form. For this reason, although it is possible to use words such as *ingegnera*, *ministra*, *medica* or *soldata*, people usually decide to maintain the masculine form followed by the name and surname of the woman who exercises such profession: *l’ingegnere Giulia Verdi*, *il soldato Carla Tancredi*, *il ministro Tina Anselmi*. A second option is to add the word *donna* before or after the profession: *la donna soldato*, *il ministro donna*.

In Spanish, a similar situation can be found: one of the possible options of partial feminization consists of keeping the masculine name of the profession followed by the noun ‘woman’: *una mujer soldado*, *una mujer fiscal*.

In conclusion, language is a constantly changing tool that must be adapted to different social, economic and cultural changes. Any argument concerning linguistic sexism, the feminization of terms, the elimination of the generic masculine, etc., generates an inexorable atmosphere of controversy and debate. As a result, the translation of any type of text that includes words referring to professions in both genders will be a task of great complexity and diligence.

3. Elisabetta Cametti’s *I guardiani della Storia*²¹ analysis

In order to deepen the argument from an applied discourse-analytical perspective, the different jobs appearing throughout Elisabetta Cametti’s novel *I guardiani della Storia*²² will be analyzed. In order to have a large comparative framework, the analysis is based on a comparison between the translated Spanish²³ and English²⁴ versions and the official version in Italian. When it comes to translate words relating to jobs and professions from Italian – a language which is characterized by grammatical gender – into English – a language defined by a neutral gender – great difficulties are not expected, yet as Cameron notes, “the lexicon and grammatical system of English [also] contains features that exclude, insult and trivialize women”.²⁵ On the other hand, particular attention will be given to the Spanish translation since it is a gendered language and more difficulties in translation may arise.

The profession that the Piedmontese writer Elisabetta Cametti bestows to the protagonist of her first novel represents a case of linguistic sexism. Katherine Sinclair is “direttore generale della 9Sense Publishing”²⁶ one of the most powerful global publishers located in London. Even though the word *direttrice* actually exists in Italian, the author has opted for the use of the generic masculine to refer to the profession exercised by the protagonist and which will be discussed throughout the entire novel. However, in the case of the Spanish version, the translator Claudia Conde preferred to use the feminine form of the word, that is, *directora*. Regarding the English translation, the term ‘general manager’ is

²⁰ Lepri points out the different ways of forming feminine words in Italian arising from the inclusion of women in certain professions. Those words can be formed by the use of suffixes such as ‘-essa’ or ‘-era’ as well as by the use of a feminine past participle as, for example, ‘deputata’. Sergio Lepri, “Il femminile dei nomi che indicano cariche e professioni”, <http://www.sergiolepri.it/il-femminile-dei-nomi-che-indicano-cariche-e-professionioni/>, accessed 12 March 2020.

²¹ Elisabetta Cametti, *I guardiani della Storia* (Firenze and Milano: Giunti Editore, 2013).

²² *The Guardians of History* is a thriller full of intrigue and suspense. The story revolves around Katherine, a strong and determined woman who tries to solve an archaeological mystery by revealing innumerable secrets long buried by history.

²³ Elisabetta Cametti, *Los guardianes de la Historia* [2013], trans. by Claudia Conde (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 2015).

²⁴ Elisabetta Cametti, *The Guardians of History* [2013], trans. by Scott P. Sheridan (Seattle: Amazoncrossing, 2015).

²⁵ Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, 101.

²⁶ “General manager of 9Sense Publishing”.

generally used. It is not easy to define the practice of translation, but it can be determined by the identity of the translator and this, in turn, can be partially detected from his/her strategies.

As is commonly thought by part of society, feminizing nouns referring to professions decreases the prestige of that particular occupation. Maybe for this reason, Elisabetta Cametti has decided to maintain the masculine form of *direttore*, with a view to maintain the prestige of the working position played by the protagonist in her job. Katherine’s role in her company is not simple at all: because she is a woman she must deal with many obstacles, one of them being the definitive dismissal from her job. On several occasions throughout the novel, references are made to the gender discrimination that often bursts into the workplace.

After analyzing the translation of the different professions that appear throughout the original novel, it is interesting to note the presence of some foreign words such as *manager* or *art director*. As indicated in Zanichelli’s web section *Aula di Lingue*,²⁷ “i nomi invariabili di origine straniera possono essere femminili, si dirà perciò: la manager, la leader, la designer, ecc”.²⁸

Nonetheless, in another case, the author Elisabetta Cametti again decides to use the masculine form to allude to one of her female characters as *un art director*. On the contrary, once again, the Spanish translator has opted to use a noun followed by an adjective that implies female gender: *una directora artística*.

Practical analysis I

Original version (IT)	(SP)	(EN)
direttore generale	directora	general manager
un art director	una directora artística	-

3.1. The term ‘manager’

The English word ‘manager’ is used several times by different characters and, as a consequence, different translations of this term have been offered in Spanish. Three examples – and their corresponding translation into Spanish – in which several characters use the word ‘manager’ to refer to Katherine are shown below:

1. Jethro addresses Katherine: “Voleva avere maggiori informazioni sulla tua relazione con Bruce. Ma io non ho potuto dargli grande soddisfazione: gli ho detto che era la prima volta che ti incontravo. E che, per quello che ho potuto notare, sei un manager di altissimo livello e di raro valore”.²⁹

“Quería más información sobre tu relación con Bruce. Pero yo no he podido satisfacer su curiosidad. Le he dicho que era la primera vez que te veía y que, por lo que he podido averiguar, eres una directiva de altísimo nivel y de enorme valor”.³⁰

²⁷ Zanichelli, “Le professioni”, *Aula di Lingue*, <http://aulalingue.scuola.zanichelli.it/benvenuti/2012/06/21/le-professioni/#comment-14061>, accessed 7 June 2018.

²⁸ In Italian, the invariable nouns of foreign origin can be feminine so the feminine article + the foreign word can be perfectly used.

²⁹ Cametti, *I guardiani*, 105. In the English version the term ‘manager’ is not used. The translator has chosen other strategies. A translation of this quote is: “He wanted to know more about your relationship with Bruce. But I told him that was the first time we had met. And that, from what I could see, you were quite a rare asset to 9Sense”. Cametti, *The Guardians*, 49.

³⁰ Cametti, *Los guardianes*, 95.

2. Lia, a worker of Katherine’s company, affirms: “Siamo il team della donna manager³¹ che gli ha cagato in testa e che gli ha rifiutato il lavoro: ci segherà a uno a uno”.³²
 “Somos el equipo de la ejecutiva que se rio en su cara y le negó un trabajo”.³³
3. Katherine says: “Ed è questo il punto. Io non sono un ‘manager da procedure standard’ [...] Io sono il manager che ha segnato il cambiamento. Che ha portato l’azienda ai massimi storici”.³⁴
 “Ahí precisamente está el problema. A mí no se me pueden aplicar procedimientos estándar, porque yo no soy una directiva estándar. ... Soy la persona que ha marcado y dirigido su gran transformación, la que ha llevado a la empresa a sus máximos históricos”.³⁵

Practical analysis II

Original version (IT)	(SP)	(EN)
un manager	una directiva	quite a rare asset
donna manager	la ejecutiva	the woman manager
un ‘manager	una directiva	-

As it can be observed in the three aforementioned examples, the translation of the word ‘manager’ varies depending on each case. Firstly, *un manager* has been translated as *una directiva*.³⁶ Secondly, the Italian author has decided to add the word *donna*. However, if we pay attention to the translation into Spanish, there are no traces of the word *mujer* since in Spanish it is much more appropriate to use a feminine noun as is the case of *ejecutiva*, ‘executive’. Thirdly, we face two different cases. On the one hand, *manager* has been translated again as *directiva*; on the other hand, the term has been translated according to the following definition: “la persona que ha marcado y dirigido su gran transformación”.

Once again, the term ‘manager’ has not undergone a feminization process since the author continues using the definite and indefinite masculine article.

3.2. The term ‘avvocato’

The use of the term *avvocato* to refer to a woman who practices law is another case of linguistic sexism. The Italian term *avvocato* possesses two different feminine forms which represent different meanings or connotations: *avvocata* and *avvocatessa*:

La prima è di uso non comune, e per lo più ironico o scherzoso, con riferimento a donna che eserciti l’avvocatura ... La seconda forma, *avvocatessa*, è, invece, largamente usata per indicare, senza particolari connotazioni di registro, sia la donna che eserciti l’avvocatura sia la moglie dell’avvocato; può acquistare, diversamente, una sfumatura scherzosa quando sia riferita a donna dalla parlantina sciolta, risoluta nel sostenere le ragioni proprie o altrui.³⁷

³¹ Lia pretends to say that she belongs to the team of Katherine, ‘the woman manager’.

³² Cametti, *I guardiani*, 175.

³³ Cametti, *Los guardianes*, 160.

³⁴ Cametti, *I guardiani*, 183.

³⁵ Cametti, *Los guardianes*, 168. Once again, in the English version the word ‘manager’ does not appear: “That’s exactly my point. I deserve more than standard procedures. I’ve dedicated my life to this company and led it through a meteoric rise”. *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁶ Female senior manager.

³⁷ According to Denoto, the first meaning *avvocata* is of uncommon use, and mostly ironic or joking, with reference to a woman who practices law. The second sense, *avvocatessa*, is widely used to indicate – without particular register connotations – both the woman who practices law and the lawyer’s wife. Otherwise it can also acquire a humorous tone when referring to a really talkative woman. Paolo Denoto, “Qual è il femminile di avvocato?”, *Treccani, l’enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*.

To all this, Paolo Denoto adds that, within legal language, it is commonly preferred the use of the masculine form ending in -o, especially in some phrases such as *avvocato fiscale* or *avvocato d’ufficio*,³⁸ to refer indistinctly to a man or a woman. In Spanish, the feminine form *abogada* is accepted by the RAE even in phrases such as *abogada de oficio*, *abogada del Estado*, *abogada fiscal* o *abogada general*.³⁹

Nevertheless, taking up Cametti’s novel, the author has decided not to feminize this term whereas the Spanish and English translator preferred to omit it:⁴⁰ “L’avvocato è in riunione in questo momento”. ‘Ho bisogno di parlarle subito. È molto importante’”.⁴¹ “En este momento la señora Bron está reunida”. ‘Tengo que hablar con ella enseguida. Es muy importante’”.⁴²

Practical analysis III

Original version (IT)	(SP)	(EN)
L’avvocato	la señora Bron	-

Even though in Spanish the use of the feminine term *abogada* is more common, other alternatives are also preferred. Indeed, the use of the generic masculine is still imposed as Almeida Suárez⁴³ shows in the following example of a job advertisement: “Se necesita abogado. Los interesados pónganse en contacto con la empresa llamando al número que se indica al lado”. In order to avoid the generic masculine (*los interesados*; *abogado*) the author raises the following alternative: “Se necesita abogada o abogado. Las personas interesadas pónganse en contacto con la empresa llamando al número que se indica al lado”.⁴⁴

Going back to the case of the Italian language, the alternative I suggest to Almeida Suárez’s example would be “Cercasi avvocato o avvocatà”.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, after performing a quick online search, it can be observed how all web pages offering a job as a lawyer only refer to the male gender: *Cercasi Avvocato collaboratore*, *Funzionario avvocato cercasi*, *Avvocati cercasi*, etc. Thus, the unquestionable disuse of the term *avvocata* in Italian confirms Denoto’s contribution as well as Cametti’s decision in that, once more, the Italian author uses a masculine term to refer to one of her female characters.

Furthermore, through this last example drawn from Cametti’s work, it can be perceived how the use of masculine nouns designating professions can easily lead to different cases of ambiguity. If we only read: “L’avvocato è in riunione in questo momento”,⁴⁶ the reader can freely interpret the gender of the character. We must continue reading in order to verify that, indeed, it refers to a female lawyer, thanks to the use of the indirect pronoun: “Ho bisogno di parlarle subito”. Thus, as Uwe Kjaer Nissen notes, “When a language that shows grammatical gender marks gender syntactically in a way unavailable to a pronominal gender language, difficulties may arise for the translator as to how to supply the information about the sex of the person in question”.⁴⁷ Languages that do not mark gender in some constructions,

³⁸ ‘Tax lawyer’ or ‘public defender’.

³⁹ Referring to a woman: ‘public defender’, ‘district attorney’, ‘tax lawyer’ or ‘Advocate General’.

⁴⁰ This part is omitted in the English version.

⁴¹ Cametti, *I guardiani*, 168.

⁴² Cametti, *Los guardianes*, 154.

⁴³ Manuel Almeida Suárez, *El sexismo en el lenguaje. Guía para una práctica no sexista de la lengua*, Colección Publicaciones Institucionales (La Laguna, Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de la Laguna, 2017), 39.

⁴⁴ “Lawyer required. Those interested should contact the company by calling the number indicated below”. Author’s alternative: “Female or male lawyer required. Those interested should contact the company by calling the number indicated below”.

⁴⁵ Once again, in English it will be much easier: ‘Lawyer wanted’, as the gender-neutral term ‘lawyer’ refers to a man or a woman.

⁴⁶ Cametti, *I guardiani*, 168. This part is omitted in the English version.

⁴⁷ Nissen Uwe Kjaer, “Aspects of Translating Language”, *Linguistik Online*, 11.2 (2002).

resort to other methods to supply the reader with the necessary information. In this specific case, by adding the indirect feminine pronoun.

Within the Spanish language, cases of ambiguity can be also perceived: “Los empresarios españoles demandan reformas laborales”.⁴⁸ In this case, it is not clear whether the meaning is inclusive or exclusive, that is to say, if we are dealing with a case of the generic masculine or, by contrast, the exclusively masculine. According to some psycholinguistic studies, when the generic masculine refers to professions or trades, there are those who understand the noun as masculine and those who understand it as the generic masculine. If we contrast it again with other Italian examples of the same nature, we find an identical situation:

Occorre incentivare imprenditori e lavoratori, per tornare ad assumere.

I giovani imprenditori italiani che hanno deciso a dispetto della crisi e delle difficoltà oggettive di restare e scommettere ancora sul sistema Italia concludono con una riflessione sul Jobs act: ‘Rischia di essere solo una fiammata: nato per creare lavoro per i giovani invece sarà solo una grande illusione’.⁴⁹

Both examples show certain ambiguity: does the news refer to young entrepreneurs of both genders or, by contrast, does it only refer to the male group?

4. Conclusions

Language has been shaped historically from an androcentric perspective. The constant struggle faced by women over the centuries has resulted in major achievements in women’s role in our society. Nonetheless, sex discrimination continues to be present in many spheres of our everyday lives, including the linguistic field.

To combat this linguistic sexism, we have reached a series of conclusions. Firstly, it is necessary to seek, find and promote alternatives in order to avoid the use of sexist language as well as to eradicate all kinds of prejudices: “Family, educational institutions and society represent three basic pillars that may contribute to reduce inequalities”.⁵⁰

As a consequence, it is absolutely necessary to insist on the promotion of an equal education and *coeducate*, that is to say, to permit the individual’s total development by rejecting any kind of social prejudice – including patriarchal sociocultural traditions and attitudes. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, both in Spanish and Italian societies, throughout history, language has been built from an androcentric perspective characterized by certain patriarchal attitudes, which have been in charge of favoring the use of sexist language. However, the solution proposed here is the promotion of an androgynous image of the human being through the non-sexist use of language. The elimination of sexist language is a necessary condition for eradicating sexism in any society.

Regarding the promotion of equal education, it is also necessary to remove sex discrimination from teaching materials (whether they are textbooks, reading books, literary works, etc.), as well as to promote the use of non-sexist language by teachers, educators, parents and tutors:

⁴⁸ Almeida Suárez, *El sexismo en el lenguaje*, 19. “Spanish businessmen demand labor reforms”. In this particular case, in English there is not any case of ambiguity since we can use the feminine word ‘businesswoman’.

⁴⁹ Federica Bosco, “#Amegliaitalia. Gli imprenditori cosa chiedono alla politica? Dalle riforme alla grande illusione del Jobs Act”, *News Italia Live* (2015), <https://newsitalialive.it/amegliaitalia-gli-imprenditori-cosa-chiedono-alla-politica-dalle-riforme-alla-grande-illusione-del-jobs-act/>, accessed 18 April 2018. “We need to encourage entrepreneurs and workers in order to return to hire”; “The young Italian entrepreneurs, after facing the crisis and the objective difficulties of staying and betting again on the Italian system, conclude with a reflection on the Jobs act: ‘It risks to be just a flare: born to create work for young people but it will be only a great illusion’”, translation by the author.

⁵⁰ Marco López, “Lenguaje, sexismo y educación”, 15.

No hay que olvidar que la lengua lo es todo. Es el vehículo del pensamiento, es el principal mecanismo de comunicación que empleamos, y es el vehículo que se utiliza (tanto en su forma oral como escrito) para transmitir los conocimientos en las aulas ... la lengua está presente en cualquier actividad que se haga en la vida, por lo tanto, también en el acto de enseñar.⁵¹

The promotion of non-sexist language in Spanish can be carried out through the use of generic and collective nouns such as *funcionariado*, *alumnado*, *profesorado*, *tripulación*⁵² ... or even by creating a feminine form for each masculine, and vice versa, in every word that has a single form.⁵³

Feminization entails adapting language to the different social and cultural realities within a context of equality. We must not exclude women from public discourse but make them present and name the world as it is: in masculine and feminine. Nevertheless, it is not easy to create new terms since there are no established morphological or semantic reasons to accept some forms and reject others. There are not well-defined rules on when a feminine form can be accepted or not. Why has the feminine form of *gerente/gerenta*⁵⁴ been created and not that of *conserje/*conserja*?

In regard to Cametti’s translation, it is curious to observe how the biggest divergence can be found in the translation into Spanish and not in the one into English. So as to say, although both Spanish and Italian languages are characterized by grammatical gender, the translator Claudia Conde decided to use more feminist signs in her translation into Spanish than the hints that are found in the original edition, as the Italian author has often opted to use masculine terms or a gender-neutral approach to refer to women. This is the reason why the translation into English, as it is a language defined by a neutral gender, has had minor problems related to this.

Despite expectations, it has been observed a bigger analogy between the Italian and the English works than between the Italian and the Spanish ones. For this reason, and as it was fostered in the previous paragraphs, gender representation in translations can be determined by the identity of the author (which can be partially detected from his/her strategies). This article illustrates the importance and power that both language and translation have as they are means to legitimate or subvert the *status quo*; they are instruments to show oppression and gender liberation.⁵⁵ Translations make use of these strategies, yet they leave a personal trace, as it is the case of the Spanish writer Claudia Conde.

Considering everything, language conditions the way we think and, as a result, it becomes a necessary tool to achieve equal opportunities for everyone. Society, relationships between individuals and the way those communicate among them are continuously changing and language must adapt itself to all this. A certain sector of society considers the argument that defends the use of language as a means to bring a change to society as puerile. That is, a part of society believes that the use of non-sexist language will not prevent the position of subordinate women in our societies. Unfortunately that language will not change this situation. Nonetheless, as Almeida Suárez indicates: “Es importante saber que la lengua juega un papel importante en la organización de la realidad y que, por tanto, un modo de cambiar la

⁵¹ We must not forget that language is everything. It is the vehicle of thought, it is the main communication tool we use, and it is also the vehicle that is used (in both oral and written forms) to transmit knowledge in the classroom ... language is present in every activity we do in life, therefore, it is also present in the act of teaching. Calero Fernández, *Sexismo lingüístico*, 68, translation by the author.

⁵² ‘government employees’, ‘students’, ‘faculty’, ‘crew’.

⁵³ As has already been done with the terms *juez/jueza* (‘judge’), *presidente/presidenta* (‘president’), etc.

⁵⁴ According to the DRAE, the masculine term is preferred even to indicate the feminine form (except in some South America countries): “Para el f., u. m. la forma *gerente*, excepto en Arg., Bol., Chile, Ec., Hond., Méx., Nic., Par., Perú, R. Dom., Ur. y Ven., donde se usa t. *gerenta*” (DRAE, 2017).

⁵⁵ Olga Castro, “Introduction: Gender, Language and Translation at the Crossroads of Disciplines”, *Gender and Language*, 7 (Equinox Publishing, 2013), 5-12.

realidad requiere modificar, paralelamente, el lenguaje que la designa y nombra".⁵⁶ Sexist language distorts the truth and we urgently need to demand concrete changes and advocate a nonsexist, neutral and gender inclusive language which does not exclude women or men. As Deborah Cameron observes:

The reason why changes ought to be made in language is to bring it into line with the way things really are. It is the business of language to represent reality, so to the extent that it is stuck in a vanished world where woman's place was in the home, and so on, language is misleading us and failing to do its job.⁵⁷

We must adopt this optimistic perspective in that language is a vehicle for cultural transmission that is available to everyone and can change the world. We still have a long road ahead to achieve full equal rights and opportunities among men and women. So, why not starting by using words like *ministra* or *jueza*⁵⁸ so as to give even more voice to women who exercise those types of professions which have been considered exclusively masculine over the years?

⁵⁶ It is important to know that language plays an important role in organizing reality and that, as a result, a way to change reality requires modifying, simultaneously, the language that designates and names it. Almeida Suárez, *El sexismo en el lenguaje*, 20, translation by the author.

⁵⁷ Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, 101.

⁵⁸ 'minister' or 'judge' (referring to a woman).