

## Analysis of Gendered Differences Through the use of Conjunctions: A Writer's Perspective

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### ~~Abstract~~

Language has been of great interest to both linguists and writers. While linguists have examined its deep structure and dynamics, writers have usually taken it for granted owing to its immediate availability. Similarly, while linguists, by nature, have always retained language at their disposal, writers have been forced to understand its nature and nomenclature. However, within the domain of language, the space of translation comes to represent a site where both literary and linguistic aspects come into play.

Nevertheless, the intricacies of translation and the principle of gender further complicate the matter of language. Different narrative styles and certain usage of language have, time and again, greatly conformed to the traditional gender roles assigned to women, and reinstated patriarchal subjugation. Noted feminist theorists like Sherry Simon has argued in a similar vein that both translated works and women occupy a marginalized position owing to the role of an authoritative master played by an original text or man, respectively.

In the light of these statements, the following essay would attempt to break down translated texts into their constituent parts; mainly conjunctions whereby each enjoys an independent function. By doing so, the essay shall consider differences among women through the lens of a linguist.

**Keywords:** Linguist, language, translation, women, conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions, also known as conjunctions, are words that join two verbs, nouns, adjectives, phrases or sentences. In English, we distinguish seven conjunctions with seven distinct uses. 'For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So' are remembered in one phrase FANBOYS. 'And' is used to combine two things of equal rank or significance, 'but' is used to mean something contrary to what has been said, 'or' indicates choice, 'yet' is similar in meaning to but, 'so' indicates a result. Though belonging to the same category, each has a special function, meaning and place in a sentence. Misusing any of them disturbs the semantics of a given sentence. For example, to say, 'I play football and basketball' is completely different from saying 'I play football or basketball.' That is to say, one cannot be substituted with another as per our wish. Language users end up in embarrassing situations when misusing either conjunctions or punctuation marks for that matter. For example, to say, 'I already ate mama' is not semantically equivalent to saying, 'I already ate, mama.' The absence of the comma implies that the daughter ate her own mother which sounds funny yet scary. Therefore, the absence and presence of punctuations or conjunctions direct the semantic translations of the sentence, and ultimately that of the whole situation. Thus based on various theories of translation, the following paper adopts a newer approach towards analysing the position of women.

In her book *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett takes a firm stand claiming that "translation is not innocent. It is a highly manipulative activity charged with significance".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Tejaswini Niranjana<sup>2</sup> also advocates translations to be a political action, as according to her the question of translation also comes to incorporate the issue of representation. In her renowned book *Siting Translation*,<sup>3</sup> Niranjana claims that the question of translation has become the question of representation and that translation has become a site for negotiating and resisting certain power structures. It may be mentioned here that ranging from various oral narratives composed during ancient times, to modern-day narratives popularised through various forms of media, have all projected women to be weak creatures. Our task as researchers is to differentiate between false representations and reality. Instead of attacking an advertisement that for instance displays a woman as a dependent, we shall be producing another equally important narrative that shows her as a successful independent subject via the same medium; an advertisement, in this case. Readers of such visual texts, hence, shall be before two narratives; one belittling women while the second praising them. Since an infinite number of translations emerge in the process – representations and their readings are never final.

In literary theory, we argue that the different theories enable literary critics to interpret texts differently. Using both linguistics and translation as tools of interpretation, we shall argue that women are not helpless or peripheral. Rather, similar to conjunctions, they are translated as occupying tiny spaces in societies/texts. However, just like conjunctions, they are capable of maintaining and/or disturbing the semantic order. That is to say, they occupy a distinct position as per their social roles. It is manifest in the various functions they perform. Following post-structuralist and/or post-modernist theories, language not only describes the world around us but also equally contributes to constructing that same world. Women, as constituents of such a construct, are being seen through language, be it written, oral, or audio-visual. While every

sentence in the English language requires at least one conjunction, so does the matrix of a given society. However, one must realise that every act of trying to write the women's experience in the form of words, requires the act of translating it from the zone of lived experience to the world of words, and hence, in due course, some meaning is always lost in translation. Nevertheless, such translations are necessary so as to enable the transference of meaning and ideas to the larger world around them. Societies here are translated through texts that generate discourses that are semantically better enabled with the inclusion of women. In other words, any reading exclusive of women and their roles, essentially lacks in the natural qualities of lived experiences. Many feminist writers argue that the patriarchal system is 'ruling by consent' for women work as agents in those same structures that control them or against which they are fighting.<sup>4</sup> That said, women, read as conjunctions, enjoy a dual agency whereby they represent- both order and disorder. Hence, they need not belong to empowerment movements. To break out of this politics of translation and to prevent the loss of meaning there is a rather significant need for the woman to translate herself by making use of the different lenses that might be accessible.

Through the lens of translation, let us consider the experience of the woman as the source text which, given the diversity of contexts—political, social, economic and religious—is heterogeneous. A given attempt at a target text shall, by necessity, be exposed to the aforementioned factors, hence playing an equal role in producing the final translation/representation. Walter Benjamin, a Marxist thinker and translator, stresses the importance of the role played by history. He moreover thinks that the task of the translator is particularly challenging due to the inclusion of the historical element.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a translation is expected to be contextualized under any circumstances,<sup>6</sup> and hence, to translate any woman based on the generalizations made either on the media or even within the very act of writing, is a fatal approach. Instead, each woman shall be encouraged to self-present a translation that goes in accordance with specific contexts and daily experiences she herself undergoes. While every translation is surely inclusive of some, it is equally bound to leave out such other translations.

Likewise, in his book entitled *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard presents his notion of hyperreality.<sup>7</sup> He speaks of four successive stages through which an image passes till it hits a hyperreal status. These are a reflection of a basic reality, masking and perverting a basic reality, masking its absence, turning into a pure simulacrum with no relation whatsoever to reality.<sup>8</sup> To clarify his thoughts more, Baudrillard takes on the example of Disneyland in Los Angeles. Disneyland, according to him, is presented as imaginary to make us believe that the rest is real when in fact all LA and America are no longer real but hyperreal.<sup>9</sup> Put differently, Baudrillard claims that the image throughout time has become so fixed that it seems irreplaceable. Similarly, we shall argue that the circulated images or representations of women have got absolutely fixed which unfortunately led many women to embrace them as reality. Although such representations of women have not met with a wide acceptance, it is painfully noted that such representations of women had been readily made use of in various texts and narratives, and have thus further propagated a biased and false notion about women. Hence, a prerequisite for liberating

themselves from structures imprisoning them would be to opt for multiple self-translations in accordance with

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the context. The multiplicity, post-modern and post-structural theories advocate, is the key toward resisting false narratives. These schools of thought have helped create spaces for negotiating meanings unlike traditional theories which believed in a unitary whole; one fixed truth. Young writers among women then have the responsibility of stepping forward to contest such a “unitary image of woman.”

Contemporary theorists like Gideon Toury<sup>10</sup> are in favour of this line of thought where it is unlikely to obtain one ultimate truth. Toury states, “All translations privilege certain properties/meanings at the expense of others, and the concept of a ‘correct translation ceases to be a real possibility’.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, all efforts directed at erasing differences in our contemporary times smell of the colonial experience when universalism was advocated as the norm. Robert J.C. Young analyzes the post-colonial experience claiming that the need of the hour is producing new knowledge and new epistemologies that resist the existing ones.<sup>12</sup> Women too have been witnessing another kind of patriarchal colonization. Their voices have been muted and their experiences have gone undocumented. Henceforth, similar to the colonized and in face of the universality of translation proposed by the colonizer, women are required to start producing counter-discourses that value their experiences and voice their sufferings. In other words, women are but texts that can be interpreted differently in line with different literary theories. Several readings shall culminate in numerous translations of which none stands as the “correct.” Reading women via the lens of conjunctions, in this respect, stands acceptable yet prone to change. For, some feminists might find such a reading belittling. However, to balance any given simple sentence or a complex dialogue, those same feminists would be employing all kinds of conjunctions and punctuations to guarantee cohesion.

To conclude, the question of translation is the question of representation, be it written, oral, or audio-visual. Women shall translate difference via their own terms, acknowledging shortcomings along the way. Given the cyber context we belong to, too many platforms are available to circulate one desirable narrative or another. In this essay, we have taken the platform of academic writing to translate ‘woman’, as a heterogeneous concept in the light of our linguistic background. Translation theories, however, have enabled such a space to be used for resisting false readings of women. Translation can be effectively deployed to create a space to accommodate differences and welcome newer perspectives. Throughout the argument and from a linguistic point of view, women, particularly, yet not exclusively, are interpreted as conjunctions. In contrast to traditional theories of translation which prefer universality to variety, the majority of theories operating from the 1990s onwards agree that there is nothing as ultimate translation; only “translations of translations of translations.”<sup>13</sup> In this regard, quite a complex concept like “woman” is capable of being translated in multiple ways using different tools. In line with the translation of women as conjunctions, we can equally argue for another translation in light of both punctuation marks and prepositions which are part and parcel of any given text. Opting for

yet another new translation, however, does not hinder the comprehension of the text; here 'woman'. Rather, it helps "shine upon the original all the more fully."<sup>14</sup> That is, the woman is here the source text which enjoys the luxury of numerous interpretations in accordance with the adopted literary theory. Those

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interpretations add to, modify, strengthen, and/or refute earlier ones as per the current context within which they are presented. Whether being the 'source text' emancipates the woman from the masculinist and patriarchal trap of being objectified and 'gazed at', is a question that shall require a fresh engagement.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory & Practice*. p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana is a professor and head of the Department of Cultural Studies, at Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Nivedita Menon, "Sexuality, Caste, Governmentality: Contests over 'Gender' in India."

<sup>5</sup> In his essay "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin argues against traditional theories of translation which emphasize meaning transfer.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Glasser.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*.

<sup>10</sup> Gideon Toury was a translation scholar & professor of Poetics, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at Tel Aviv University. He is known for the term "translation norms," which places emphasis on time, culture and context in translation.

<sup>11</sup> Gideon Toury, *In Search for A Theory of Translation*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Robert Young, "What is Postcolonial?" p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Octavio Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters", p. 154.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, 2000, p. 21