

Workshop

**Towards a Feminist Translation Theory?  
Connecting Feminist and Translation Theory**

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Department of Translation Studies | University of Graz

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# Mirella Agorni

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## **Has Translation Throughout History Condemned Women to the Margins of Cultural Production, or Has it Brought Them out of Enforced Silence?**

Is it possible to conceive of a theory of translation, or rather several theories, about the work of women who have produced and published translations throughout history? At first glance, the answer seems to be no, largely due to the different historical, cultural and social contexts that have shaped the work of these women. I believe that the variables, starting with the historical, cultural and social contexts, are particularly subtle in the case of women who crossed the publication barrier. In fact, these variables are more numerous and especially more volatile than in the case of male authors. However, a more nuanced examination might reveal common threads. In this sense, a more pertinent question might be: to what extent can or should historically and culturally contextualised translation strategies be integrated into the development of broader theoretical feminist frameworks?

Indeed, while the formulation of a comprehensive theory may be elusive, we can attempt to identify and classify the translation strategies employed by women translators in different periods. In this paper, I will analyse examples from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries to see whether recurring strategies emerge that could inform feminist translation theory today. The topics I will explore include:

- Translation and authorship: examining women who gained recognition not just as translators, but as authors in their own right.
- Collaborative translation: considering formal and informal collaborations, particularly between women.
- Intellectual membership: focusing on the scientific community and the intersection of translation and popularisation.
- Translation for children and educational texts: exploring contributions often overlooked in traditional translation studies.

By discussing the cases of Aphra Behn (1640–1689), Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), Catherine Talbot (1721–1770), Mariangela Ardinghelli (1728–1825), Giuseppa Barbapiccola (c.1700–c.1740), and Bianca Milesi Mojon (1790–1849), I aim to open a dialogue on how we might better incorporate the strategies of female translators into feminist theory. My talk will be experimental, inviting discussion on these criteria and considering whether they can be applied to other female translators in different historical periods and contexts.

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- 2024 "The Role of Women in Translation History: Translating and Collaborating in the Re-Shaping of Italy in the Early Romantic Period", in: Bolufer, Monica/Guinot-Ferri, Laura/Blutrach,

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**Mirella Agorni** holds a PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Warwick (UK) and teaches applied translation and translation theory at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. Her research interests are mainly focused on translation history, translation theory, and translation and tourism. Her published volumes include *Translating Italy for the Nineteenth Century: Translation and an Imagined Nation in the Early Romantic Period 1816-1830s*, Peter Lang 2021; *Translating Italy for the Eighteenth Century: British Women, Translation and Travel Writing 1739-1797*, Routledge 2002/2014; *La Traduzione: Teorie e Metodologie a confronto*, Led 2005. She is PI of the national project DIETALY on the English-language institutional tourism promotion of Italy as a destination for international visitors over the past 100 years. She has just completed a project to make the archive on the history of translation by Prof. Jean Delisle accessible, now available in electronic format:

<https://pric.unive.it/projects/hitrade/home>.

# Olga Castro

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## Feminist Translation Theory in the Era of Transnational Feminisms

In my presentation I will propose, as argued elsewhere (Castro and Ergun 2017, Castro and Spoturno 2020), that *transnational feminist translation studies* constitutes a productive methodological framework to forge mutually enriching encounters between feminist and translation theory. Indeed, in the era of transnational feminisms, an increasing number of feminist scholars are paying attention to the "transnational" and to translation as a crucial tool to enable (or disable) border-crossing practices, solidarities and interventions for global social justice. They are also emphasising the potential that translation (as an inexorably process of intercultural and ideological mediation) has to facilitate the advancement of research in some of the central features of transnational feminisms, such as reflexivity and positionality, intersectionality, the articulation of different forms of agency and resistance, or the need to decolonise theory and practice by challenging different forms of knowledge (see Krafft and De Souza 2023 and 2024). However, far from that militant purpose, anecdotal evidence suggests the term "transnational" has been understood differently in different scholarly traditions and geographies, as well as in different disciplines – for example, in cultural studies (and to a great extent, also in translation studies), the "transnational" is often understood as simply going across and beyond national borders (Vatanabadi 2009). This has ultimately led to some scholars questioning its validity as a useful category for feminist translation theory (see Castro, Ergun, Bracke, Fonseca and Spurlin 2024). Taking this different understanding of the "transnational" in feminist studies and in translation studies as a starting point, my aim is to offer a more nuanced understanding of how the "transnational" is (and can be) conceptualised in feminist translation studies. By so doing, I will be hopefully able to demonstrate not only the analytical potential that translation actually brings to feminist research, but also the new perspectives that transnational feminism can bring to challenge mainstream translation theory.

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**Olga Castro** is “Beatriz Galindo” distinguished senior researcher at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, Spain, and Reader in Translation and Transcultural Studies at the *University of Warwick*, UK (on leave 2024-2027). She is co-founder and editor-in-chief of the journal [Feminist Translation Studies](#) (Taylor & Francis) and has published extensively on the social and political role of translation in the construction of gender and national identities, with a particular focus on transnational feminism, multilingualism, self-translation and stateless cultures in Spain. She is currently Co-IP of the “[Feminist Translation Network](#)” project, funded by the AHRC, and member of the “Translation and Reception of Contemporary Feminisms in Catalonia” project, funded by the FSLXI Solidarity Fund UAB. She was Principal Investigator of the projects “Stateless Cultures in Translation” (British Academy, 2018-2021) and “Changing the translation landscape from multilingual Spain” (AHIF, 2022-23). Between 2017 and 2021 she was Vice-President of the Association of Programmes in Translation and Interpreting of Great Britain and Ireland (APTIS). She is also corresponding member of the Royal Galician Academy.

# Eleonora Federici

University of Ferrara

## **What are you Talking About? Translating Science Fiction Feminist Languages as a Means of Avoiding Sexism in Language**

The focus of my talk is about translation as an effective means of unveiling sexism in language and in social behaviours. I will focus on the Italian context taking into consideration feminist science fiction works and the possible linguistic debate these novels can open. Science fiction feminist novels are interesting for their use of inclusive language and the creation of neologisms. Since semantic and lexical asymmetries are visible both in English and in Italian often revealing an agreement of the speaker with a male universality principle and morphology, translations of texts can become an arena for a rethinking of both language use and translation role in society. My aim is to demonstrate how the questioning of sexism in language in science fiction feminist novels can be translated and become a starting point for a rethinking of sexist linguistic behaviours in the Italian context. Furthermore, since neologisms and non-existent words are part of these texts, the translation is a powerful tool to work on a more inclusive language on a wider context. Translation of these works can function at different levels:

1. At a narratological level, it stretches the possibilities of narrating feminist activism from an engaged political perspective.
2. At a cognitive level it presents worlds which have to be processed differently by readers.
3. At a pedagogic level it can be used for ethical explorations about different social structures (stories about how the world is and how it should be) and a different use of language.
4. At a linguistic level it makes us aware of the power of words to talk about our world, and how words can change our way of thinking.

Last but not least, the translation of these works can develop theory building around the issue of inclusive language, unveiling how important is the practice of translation in mirroring social changes and/or the difficulties of accepting a linguistic revolution. Practice can surely help to build up and develop theoretical stances and methodologies.

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# Luise von Flotow

University of Ottawa

## The Transnational and the Decolonial in Feminist Translation and Translation Studies

The 'transnational' aspect of feminist work in translation and translation studies has been developing since 2014/2016, moving away from 'western' Eurocentric topics in the field toward the 'global South,' otherwise known as the 'global majority,' and the local feminist cultures there. In this vein, translation studies serve as a way to 'know' these cultures better, or in a very first step, to acknowledge that women activist thought and textual creation has been prevalent in many other parts, cultures, and eras of the world (Dharmasiri 2017). While 'transnational' approaches have developed rapidly, with conferences, scholarly publications (Flotow and Farahzad 2017; Flotow and Kamal 2020) translations, special journal issues (*Mutatis Mutandis* 2019-2020) and theoretical materials (Castro and Ergun, 2017), the term 'decolonial translation' has recently emerged and requires attention. Does it apply to feminist work in translation studies? And if so, how? And in regard to what kinds of texts, what kinds of materials, and to what end? How can 'decolonial' political thought be applied to feminist approaches to translation studies? This question will be addressed with reference to the recent *river in an ocean* (trace, 2023), a collection of essays "about translation" by eleven women from southeast Asia, Africa, Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Edited by Nuzhat Abbas and published in Toronto, the collection opens with a foreword by Françoise Vergès, whose work on decolonial feminism sets the tone. What is decolonial feminism, in Vergès' terms? How does decolonial feminism apply to translation? How is it made visible and effective in work *about* translation? To what extent is decolonial feminist translation also transnational feminist translation? Where recent work in transnational feminist translation and translation studies has been driven by a perception of translation as: "politically and theoretically indispensable to forging feminist, prosocial justice and antiracist, postcolonial, and anti-imperial political alliances and epistemologies" (De Lima Costa and Alvarez, 2014, p.557-558), what can be the impact of 'decolonial feminist translation?'

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**Luise von Flotow** has taught Translation Studies at the University of Ottawa in Canada since 1995. Her main research interests lie in the areas of feminist and gender issues in translation, translation as cultural diplomacy, and audio-visual translation. Recent publications include: *The Routledge Handbook on Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal, 2020; *Translating Women, Different Voices and New Horizons*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Farzaneh Farhazad, Routledge 2017.

She is also a literary translator. Recent publications include: *Running*, Isabel Bogdan's *Laufen* (2019), DeuxVoiliers 2024; *All the World's A Mall*, Rinny Gremaud's *Le monde en toc* (2016), UAlberta Press, 2023; *Manikanetish*, Naomi Fontaine's *Manikanetish* (2018), Anansi 2021; *The World on Your Back*, Thomas Melle's *Die Welt im Rücken* (2016), Biblioasis 2023; *They Divided the Sky*. Re-translation of *Der geteilte Himmel*, by Christa Wolf (1963), UOttawa Press, 2013; *Everyone Talks About the Weather. We Don't*. ed. Karin Bauer. Political columns by Ulrike Meinhof, Seven Stories Press, 2008.

# Ting Guo

University of Liverpool

## **Economies of Visibility: Translation and Transnational Queer Feminism**

In the past decades, feminist translation studies has experienced significant new trends, in particular related to the advancement of digital technology and the rise of global media culture. Not only the channels and ways through which feminist knowledge and information are disseminated and consumed are changing, the representation of the local and regional feminist culture have also been affected by the accelerated commodification trend driven by the increasingly globalised markets. Bringing together the research on the politics of visibility in popular feminism (see Banet-Weiser 2018, 2015; Keller and Ryan 2018, Hegde 2011) and the work on fandom and transnational feminism (see Yang and Xu 2017, Guo and Evans 2022, Zhao 2024), this paper problematises the “visibility”-focused model when interpreting the cross-cultural and linguistic flow of feminist media texts, highlighting the convergence between fanish and feminist modes of global consumption and production of feminist knowledge.

While there is a rich literature on translator’s agency in the politics of visibility in feminist translation theory, which usually describe the process of making woman, as a political category, more visible through translation because women has been historically marginalised in various texts, especially in literature, there is a prominent focus on “the interlingual, sometimes word-for-word rendering of another culture’s texts, their representation and dissemination in a post-Anglo-American and European feminist world” (Flotow 2023: 840). While this perspective on the politics of visibility is no doubt valid and important, it does not capture the complexity and diversity of feminist texts produced and circulated in the transnational networked and media-saturated world permeated by advanced capitalism, where gender inequality is now understood through an economic context and feminism is also articulated and performed in an economy of visibility. This economy, as Sarah Banet-Weiser argues, “increasingly structure not just our mediascapes, but our cultural and economic practices and daily lives” and have also “fundamentally transformed politics of visibility, because visibility itself has been “absorbed into the economy” rather than a route to politics (Banet-Weiser 2015: 55).

For example, queer female fans are aware that some media companies present texts as potentially queer/feminist to get a queer-feminist identifying audience to engage with them, but without having overtly queer female characters or storylines, a practice known as queerbaiting (Ng 2017), which acknowledges a queer female audience while at the same undermining queer female representation. Translation can, for example, be a useful way for fans to reveal the queer subtext or insert new queer feminist readings into the original texts to resist the problematic representations imposed by the industry. Through a case study of the English translations of 天官赐福 (Heaven Official’s Blessing) (2020), a Chinese *danmei* anime series produced by Bilibili, and transnational queer female fans’ creative engagements with this *danmei* narrative (in the form of Vlog and fanart), the paper demonstrates how attenuated and complicated expressions/ideas of queer feminisms can be re-framed and circulated through translation in popular cultural products and how popular (queer) feminism is critiqued through by online communities that are formed around a shared interest in a specific media text or media cultures. It proposes new ways to identify the nuanced evidence of queer female fans’ counter-reading of the translation-mediated queer feminist media texts and conceptualise the rise of transcultural and translational feminist fandom in the era of social media.

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**Ting Guo** is Senior Lecturer in Translation and Chinese Studies at University of Liverpool. Her research focuses on fan translation, translation of queer media texts and translation history. She publishes widely in journals such as *Translation Studies*, *Translation and Interpreting Studies* and *Literature Compass* and is particularly interested in the pivotal role of translator in the reproduction and dissemination of knowledge and initiating social changes. Her ongoing AHRC funded project "Translating for change: Anglophone queer cinema and Chinese LGBT+ movement" explores new ways to visualize subtitling practices by Chinese queer fans and how Anglophone queer culture has been translated into Chinese in films.

## Rim Hassen

Durham, UK

### **Feminist Theories and Strategies in Women's Translation of The Qur'an**

The two major tasks of this presentation are to outline the key challenges in identifying a “feminist” translation of the Qur'an, and to assess where women's renditions of the sacred text of Islam stand in relation to feminist theories and Islamic feminism. The first part summarizes the main feminist theories, methodologies and strategies employed by women translators to interpret gender-related content in the sacred text, especially verses considered to be patriarchal and male-biased. The second part focuses on how women translators approached the textual and paratextual elements of the sacred text of Islam. Particular attention will be given to feminist strategies and techniques employed to challenge patriarchal language and include women's perspective. It is undeniable that certain feminist expectations and methods might not be reconcilable with the sacred nature of the Qur'anic text, but women translators of the Qur'an seem to have found innovative textual and paratextual strategies to include core feminist ideas such as gender equality and women's visibility in/and through language. The feminist theories, strategies and techniques employed by women translators of the sacred text of Islam, could shed new lights on the interdisciplinary relation between feminist theories and Qur'an translation, in which women translators are faced with the challenge of working with a “holy” source text on one hand and following their feminist agenda on the other. How can they bridge this contrast and how could their approaches reveal the role that religious texts' translation can play in defining a feminist theory of translation?

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**Rim Hassen** received an MA and a PhD in Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies from the University of Warwick and worked as a Research Associate in the University of Cambridge researching and comparing translations of religious texts for an interfaith online project. She is currently a Bilingual Education Officer at Durham City Council working with the EAL (English as Additional Language) team, which uses translated resources and practical tools to enable international students learn English while following their education. She co-edited the special issue of *Parallèles: Women Translators of Religious Texts* (2022) and published various articles on translations of the Qur'an by women, including “Mediation and Conflicts in Zaida's French Translation of the Quran” (2018) and “Negotiating feminine identities through translation: Western Women Translating the Quran” (2016).

# Julia Kölbl

University of Graz

**“Ich will noch eine Spalte für kleine Notizen aus dem Französischen haben.”<sup>1</sup>**

## **How Approaches of Early Women’s Rights Activists (1848–1918) to Translation Can Help Build the Conceptual Foundations of a Feminist Theory of Translation**

Feminist translation studies has always advocated for a broader understanding and conceptualization of translation. To this day, scholars of feminist translation studies are not only concerned with systematically dissolving binary and gendered approaches to translation (original/translation; author/translator; production/reproduction etc.), but above all with broadening our understanding of both what and who can be considered a “translation” and a “translator” (see for instance Castro et al. 2011:2f.; Bracke/Morris/Ryder 2018:219; Ergun et al. 2020:5-8). With these considerations in mind, I aim to address the following question: What parameters must be included in a translation concept that is to form the basis of a first draft of a feminist translation theory?

The empirical basis for my reflections consists of my research on the translation activities of 32 early women’s rights activists in the German-speaking world (1848-1918). I will make particular use of selected translation-related excerpts that I have created for a total of 2.500 issues of the journals associated with the proletarian and radical-bourgeois women’s movement in Austria, Germany, and German-speaking Switzerland. The choice of excerpts for my talk is informed by a typology that I have developed during my research. In theoretical terms, my argumentation takes André Lefevere’s (1992) notion of *rewriting* as its starting point, with which he defined translation as an autonomous textual production that (a) is based on a foreign-language publication and (b) always influenced by the ideological and political structures of the target culture’s literary landscape.

Using examples of different manifestations of translation that can be observed in the context of the political women’s press and women’s rights activism at the time, I would like to discuss selected parameters that a translation concept would have to include in order to be able to describe the forms and processes of translation that I have observed. These parameters include:

- (1) Translation as political behaviour (Gagnon 2010)
- (2) Actor-centeredness
- (3) Social situatedness
- (4) Cultural context
- (5) Time of translation
- (6) Horizontality of translation praxis
- (7) Function of translation

Starting from these specific parameters and the ways in which they interconnect, my paper eventually aims to stimulate a broader debate about the notions and understandings of translation underlying a feminist theory of translation.

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<sup>1</sup> “I want one more column for small notes from French” [translation J.K.]; letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, Paris, 11 March 1894.

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**Julia Kölbl** is a PhD candidate and research project member at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Graz. Her research interests include translation and gender history, activist translation and feminist translation studies. Her dissertation thesis examines the interrelationship between women's translatorial and feminist-activist work in Austria, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland between 1848 and 1918. Since July 2023, she is the main researcher in the research project *Women-translation-activism in German-speaking countries, 1848–1933* funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). Previously, she has also published on the English-speaking volunteers who provided interpreting services for the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).

# Vasiliki Misiou

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## Historicising Feminist Encounters in Translation: Challenges and Potentialities

Drawing on my research on the contribution of translation to (proto)feminist consciousness-raising in 19th-century and early 20th-century Greece through the circulation of texts and ideas by women translators, editors and writers, this paper centres on the need for historicising the relationship between feminism and translation and for reflecting methodologically on how to achieve this. Building on the aforementioned contextualized historical case study, I argue for the importance of investigating actors, contexts and practices within a framework shaped by three key concepts, namely intersectionality, politics of location, and resignification. Further research could help reinforce and deepen some of the questions that have emerged: 1) Which women act as translators and what are their teloi? Which power relations and elements intersect with one another?; 2) What are the texts translated? Are (proto)feminist strategies applied when transferring texts to another context?; 3) Are there local specificities at play? How do they impact the decisions and choices made?; 4) Which “theories, agendas and energies” are “imported” (Castro and Ergun 2017: 99)? Have there been instances of resistance and/or refusal to engage with concepts and ideas?; 5) How are texts and ideas recontextualised and resignified influenced by the context in which translators are situated? Do new discourses emerge?; 6) What are the connections and networks of women actors formed across place and time? How have they come together “across (and despite) national borders” (Castro and Ergun 2017: 99)?; 7) Are there other lineages, influences, approaches yet to be unearthed?; 8) Can broader patterns of transmission be traced back? By applying a feminist translator-based approach and by studying (proto)feminisms and their interrelationship with translation over time through their various encounters, archival/historical research can contribute to the dialogue for a feminist translation theory from an interdisciplinary perspective that will accommodate principles, goals and practices in all their diversity.

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## José Santaemilia

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### **Feminist Translators at Work: On the Pervasive Struggles Between Feminism and Femininity, and Towards a Feminist Translator Studies**

In this presentation, data will be provided for a debate on the presence of women and men in the world of professional translation in Spain, especially in literary or editorial translation. This will involve paying attention to a masculinised work culture, which powerfully generates stereotypes and social expectations regarding (mostly) women and their associated 'feminine' qualities. An initial conclusion is that job positions in the world of professional translation are largely gendered, with women translators experiencing double segregation (horizontal and vertical), which severely limits their full participation in the workforce. In spite of the difficulty for obtaining reliable data on the translating profession, we will review some indicators from various reports on editorial translation (2002, 2010, 2017), published by both the Ministry of Culture and the ACE Translators association, all of them highlighting the fact that translation in Spain (and, predictably, in most of Europe) is a *feminised* labour market. We will assess what that means for women and for the profession in general.

This invites us to rethink the persistence of the dichotomous gender-related social categories of *femininity* and *masculinity* or, rather, *femininities* and *masculinities*. *Femininities*, in particular, are especially relevant in this discussion, as they are not only a cluster of cultural constructs but also of cultural impositions on the contested category of *women* –which is plural, but continues to be undervalued. Drawing on authors such as Pierre Bourdieu (1998), Richard Anker (1998), or Clare Walsh (2001), we will review the stereotypes (both positive and negative) traditionally associated with women, and their enormous influence in the translating profession.

Maybe the time is not ripe yet, maybe there is too large a gap between academic goodwill (and also serious research) and grim reality, but it seems imperative to work towards the articulation of a *feminist translation* work environment, which will presumably face the hostility of many translators and many professionals in managerial positions. In order to bridge this gap between theory and practice we need to encourage reflections around the concepts of translator agency and ethics. A *feminist* theory of translation should bring 'feminine' and 'feminist' values to the fore, thus probably generating some degree of resistance in the profession. *All* translators are (should be) invited to engage in critical and responsible translations, embracing the positive values of *feminised* skills and abilities while at the same time de-essentialising these same values, consciously subverting all traces of discrimination and subordination.

Translation is (can be) a powerful tool to fight for equality and dignity. A paradigm shift towards a 'feminist translator studies' subdiscipline –suggested by Castellano (2021) and Vassallo (2023)– seems to be gaining momentum, mobilising translators to adopt an intersectional, plural, activist, empowered stance. This should lead to a re-positioning of feminine values in society as well as in the translating profession; to a positive re-evaluation of translation as a feminist endeavour; or to the strengthening of ethics as a key building block of both a theory and a practice of translation. A good way of putting it would be to paraphrase Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – 'we should all be feminist translators'.

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## **Unruly Words, Unruly Bodies: Feminist Disability Studies in Translation**

The problem of the female body – how to define it, what form it should take and who has the right to make decisions about it – has been one of the central tenets of feminism since its earliest iterations. However, as one billion people in the world – every seventh person – live with some kind of disability (WHO, 2011), any discourse surrounding feminism has to also include the specific needs and requirements of disabled women in order to be truly intersectional. The scope for a rewarding overlap between feminism and disability studies as academic disciplines has been already acknowledged since the early 2000s (Garland-Thomson, 2005; Hall, 2011), however the language surrounding this intersection and the linguistic transfers associated with the process of translation embedded in it are yet to be fully explored. Thus far, the only full-length volume bridging translation practice with the disabled experience is a collection by Indian scholars edited by Sati and Prasad (2019); this book, together with several recently published papers hint at a wide range of possible future avenues of study at the intersection of translation and disability studies.

This paper contributes to this new area of research through an exploration of translation strategies and paratextual material with a focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time period that formed our Western understanding of the ideal female body (Holmes, 2004; Klages, 1999). Using Johanna Spyri's children's classic *Heidi* (Spyri, 1881, 1888) as a case study, with its model of a disabled young woman magically cured by the narrative, the paper explores how the words that underpin our understanding of the conventional abilities of the female body shifts across time and space. Setting this example into the wider context of feminist translation paradigms, the paper maps how different languages speak about health and disease within a gendered framework, how the translation process affects the feminist perception of the non-normative body, and how the continuously evolving language of disability impacts future direction of feminist translation studies.

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