Traces of Ideology and the ‘Gender-Neutral’ Controversy in Translating the Qurān: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Three Cases

Abdunasir I. A. Sideeg
Department of Applied Linguistics
Yanbu University College
Royal Commission-Yanbu Colleges and Institutes,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract:
This research article aims to explore and critically examine the controversy of ‘neutral-gender’ language in the context of translating the Qurān into English. It investigates three different cases in which ‘gender-neutral’ translation is explicitly or implicitly involved. The article attempts to answer questions pertinent to the nature of traces of ideology that produce ‘neutral-gender’ translations of the Qurān in English and the effect of this type of translation on shaping the Qurānic message. It employs a critical qualitative framework that allows for the researcher’s subjective interpretations of relevant texts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used for the analysis of data. In this article, three texts across fourteen versions of the Qurān in English are investigated. A control version is used to check the three cases sampled. The ‘gender-neutral’ language in translating the Qurān reflects complex traces of ideology as it is not motivated by the feminist agenda alone. The case of Helminski, for instance, shows how cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Sufi doctrines, and feminist agendas combine to produce a radical reading of the Qurān in English. Plus, the ‘gender-neutral’ approach may contribute to the unjustified loss of core stylistic and discoursal features that are peculiar to the SL text. However, ‘gender-neutral’ translation is not all ‘evil’ as it might in particular few cases broaden understanding of some Qurānic verses in translation.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist agenda, Gender-neutral language, Ideology, Qurān translation