

# Gender Issues in Translating Women's Language in Aslan's Novel *Nile Sparrows*

Sameh S. Youssef

Faculty of Arts, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt

**Abstract**—This study investigates the means to translate features of women's language in Ibrahim Aslan's novel *Nile Sparrows* from Arabic into English. Selected Arabic and English excerpts are placed in two questionnaires for native speakers of the two languages to decide whether the excerpts reflect features of women's language. While responses to the Arabic questionnaire showed that the excerpts were brimful with features of women's language, responses to the English questionnaire showed the neutrality of the translations. Eight selected examples were classified into three categories and analyzed using Reiss' (2000) instruction criteria in light of Lakoff's (1973) framework of the features of women's language. The study found that reproducing the features of women's language in another language may require sacrificing the lexical equivalence for stylistic equivalence based on how the translator settles the conflict between formal and functional equivalences. The study maintains that no one solution fits all when translating women's language. Determinants of the translation decision depend on several factors, such as the nature of the target language, language level, ethnicity, geographic area, and topic.

**Index Terms**—Arabic, Aslan, gender, translation, women's language

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the means of translating women's language from Arabic into English in Ibrahim Aslan's *Nile Sparrows* (2005). Robin Lakoff started the endeavors in language and gender studies as early as the 1970s. She wrote *Language and Woman's Place* in 1973, laying the foundation for the language studies of gender. Lakoff posited that women have a distinct style of speech, which is widely known as *women's language* and reflects linguistic features that reinforce the idea of women's inferiority to men due to social factors. Coates (2016) also maintained that men and women have different speech behaviors. Although competent language users can identify women's language, it is challenging to translate it because different languages have various features of women's language.

Reading Ibrahim Aslan's Arabic version of *Nile Sparrows* (2005), the discourse of women can be easily identified as women's language uttered in Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Therefore, this paper revolves around how these Arabic utterances are translated into English and how to overcome the challenges of translation in a manner that equivalently reflects the features of women's language.

The study scans the relevant literature and discusses the process of data collection and classification before setting the methodology of analysis. The collected data from the Arabic novel and its English translation are categorized and analyzed. The study employs the instruction criteria suggested by Reiss (2000), probing into the strategies used in translating women's language. As suggested solutions are offered, the analysis is followed by a discussion and conclusion.

This study is intended for translators, translation studies readers, linguists, and gender specialists. It seeks to answer the following research question: What techniques should be used while translating women's language to reproduce equivalent language features and effects in the target language?

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Studies conducted on the features of women's language in English are multiple, unlike Arabic. However, scarce studies have been conducted on the translation of women's language. The literature on the language of women is rich, as Lakoff (1973) highlighted the discrimination against women in several cultures in general and linguistic discrimination in particular, hence the idea of her deficit theory. Thorne and Henley (1975) suggested in their dominance theory that differences exist between men's and women's language. They assumed the difference is based on social factors, like power inequality, since their theory is based on the dominance of men who form the norms of society, including the language domain. In this context, Freed (2003) argued that the media critically imposes ideas about gender differences.

Although most studies on gender-based linguistic differences have focused on phonological features, others have focused on different elements of gender-based linguistic differences. For example, Pan (2011) attempted to address the features of female language in English from different perspectives, including lexicon, grammar, themes, and styles, in addition to phonology. The study found that women's language differs from men's due to several factors, giving paramount significance to social and cultural elements. Oktapiani et al. (2017) probed the features of women's language

as portrayed in the movie “The Devil Wears Prada.” The study found that intensifiers were the most frequent features of women’s language in the movie, while hypercorrect grammar was absent as informal language was primarily used. However, the study also found that women’s language serves different language functions, such as expressive, directive, and metalinguistic functions.

Moreover, Bäck and Debus (2019) hypothesized that women talk less in parliament than men due to gender stereotyping that controls party representatives in seven European countries. The study found that women’s participation increases when discussing topics viewed as feminine, while women are less represented in legislative debates in topics viewed as masculine. Meanwhile, Zhu (2019) discussed the distinctive features of women’s language, attributing them to physiological, psychological, historical, social, and cultural factors. Pebrianti (2013) discussed features of the language of Indonesian female bloggers, who tend to use intensifiers most frequently while avoiding strong swear words. This finding reflects the social status of stereotyped women as inferior, resulting in uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Scholars worldwide have discussed women’s language from different perspectives (i.e., reasons that may lead women to talk differently). Arabic is no exception. However, unlike English, Arabic gender studies are fewer. For instance, Rosenhouse (1998) and Sadiqi (2006) argued that despite the significant development of Arabic sociolinguistics, gender studies in Arabic still lag behind other languages. Rosenhouse (1998) studied the speech habits of Arab women and found that when Arab women’s language is compared to men’s, differences exist on all linguistic levels, such as phonology, syntax, and lexicon, including the level of discourse topics. The study concluded that when a language offers more than one structural solution, differences between the language of males and females can be found.

Researchers have also investigated the language of women in the Quran. For example, Al-Ulaimat and Al-Muheilan (2011) investigated women’s discourse in Surat Yusuf, considering phonological, morphological, structural, stylistic, and connotative aspects. The study found that the verses addressing women’s discourse have different levels of phonological, morphological, and syntactical structures that show repetition and consistency with the context, among other features.

Furthermore, studies have been conducted on gender language based on the country. For example, Sadiqi (2003) explored the language of women in Morocco and found that Arabic in Morocco is a male language, so men may be more competent given their opportunities. In Saudi Arabia, Ismail (2012) studied the differences between young male and female languages in formal interviews and found that women tend to use more vernacular pronunciations and dialectal words than men. The study also determined that social and cultural norms explain each gender’s choices. Probing language differences between men and women in Jordanian-spoken Arabic, Al-Harabsheh (2014) investigated gendered conversational styles by focusing on phonological differences and found linguistic differences because women are more linguistically conservative than men. In an empirical study, Muslah (2019) compared how Iraqi women and men use Arabic and body language in class and everyday communication and found that the language scene in Iraqi society is male-dominated, even in academic institutions.

Although little literature exists in Arabic, it is even more scarce in terms of translating features of women’s language. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, the paper by Inoue (2003) is the only study on translating women’s language. It probes the means to translate from Japanese into English metalinguistic devices (i.e., reported speech and quotations) in two novels as features of women’s language by investigating the process of reproducing women’s language in the target text. Inoue argued that when women’s language is dislocated into another language, a regime is required to reproduce it successfully. Other studies have focused on the translation process in the era of feminism, translating the works of women writers or problems of translating grammatical gender. However, they have not investigated translating women’s language. Hence, the significance of this present study is that it attempts to fill this research gap.

### III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In 1999, Aslan wrote his second novel, *Nile Sparrows*, a chronicle of the daily life events of a four-generation rural family that migrated to Cairo. The events mainly occurred in Al-Warraq, the author’s poor neighborhood on the Nile. The novel starts with a question about the sudden disappearance of the grandmother and ends with a question by the grandmother, which asks people about the way to her home village. The two main characters in the novel are Abd al-Reheem and Nargis, a brother and sister. While Abd al-Reheem pursues his wild desires, Nargis is quite the opposite: she dies without fulfilling her simplest dream. In the novel, Aslan narrates the lives and sufferings of ordinary Egyptians through spontaneous events, combining eloquent and simple language as he code-switches between Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Egyptian.

Mona El-Gobashy, an associate professor of history and sociology of politics in Egypt and the MENA region at New York University, translated the novel. Her note concerning the translation says that she retained the stylistic features of the Arabic novel to “let the imagination wander in the eloquent silences and nuances of what is left unsaid” (2004, p. vii). Mona adds that when she talked to Aslan, he stressed that the novel had an Egyptian spirit, as reflected in several themes and scenes. The language used in the dialogues was no exception.

This study assumes the universality of the phenomenon known as women’s language to investigate how utterances of women’s language are translated from Arabic into English in Aslan’s *Nile Sparrows* by focusing on the discourse of Nargis. Throughout the novel, Nargis talks in women’s language. Therefore, following the intuition of a reader of

Arabic literature, translator, and researcher, 13 excerpts by Nargis that do not show the identity of the speaker were selected and placed in a questionnaire that asked Arabic native speakers of both sexes and different ages whether the speaker is male, female, or neutral (i.e., may be a male or female). No context was given to the questionnaire respondents to strengthen the idea of a woman uttering the excerpts. This step aimed to verify that the selected excerpts honestly reflected features of women's language.

Meanwhile, the English translations of the same utterances were collected in another questionnaire for native English speakers. The English questionnaire sought to determine whether the same features were reflected in the English translation to help determine how successful the translator rendered the features of women's language. The targeted number of respondents for each questionnaire was 25. However, the English questionnaire received 26 responses, while the Arabic one received 62.

Arabic native speakers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Canada, and France participated in the questionnaire: 64.5% were females, while 35.5% were males. The percentage of participants younger than 20 years old was 14.5%, while 46.8% were between 20 and 40, and 38.7% were over 40. When asking the respondents to select who was more likely to say each of these utterances, most indicated that the utterance was more likely said by a woman in eight of 13 excerpts. Therefore, these eight utterances offered clear examples of the features of women's language, especially when they were shown to the respondents without reference to their contexts.

On the other hand, English native speakers living in the United States, Canada, Britain, India, Pakistan, Egypt, and Eastern Europe responded to the questionnaire: 53.8% were females, while 46.2% were males. Moreover, 19.2% of the participants were younger than 20 years old, another 19.2% were between 20 and 40, and 61.5% were older than 40. The respondents were prompted to answer whether a man, a woman, or a neutral party was likelier to say the utterances. Most responses suggested that most utterances were neutral, with very few examples suggesting that a man or a woman said them.

The following table depicts the eight utterances in Arabic and their English translations:

TABLE 1  
LIST OF EXAMPLES OF WOMEN'S LANGUAGE AND THEIR ENGLISH TRANSLATION

	Arabic Example	English Translation
1	طيب يا خويا اخلعه (...) والا انت يعني عليك ذنب تقضل طول عمرك وانت تعبان منه؟ (ص. 18)	Then, have it pulled. (...) Or are you atoning for some sin and having to spend your whole life in pain? (p. 9)
2	يادي الخبية على حكاية النور دي يا ولاد. (ص. 32)	What's going on with this power? (p. 10)
3	كده برضه تعملها يا بو عبد الله؟ (ص. 45)	So you've gone and done it, Abu Abdalla? (p. 27)
4	يا مصيبيتي (ص. 68)	Oh my God! (p. 43)
5	سلم على أمك وخالك عبد العزيز وستك عزيزة يا وله. (ص. 71)	Say hello to Mother and Uncle Abd al-Aziz, and don't forget grandmother Aziza, boy! (p. 45)
6	تقول لها؟ طب انتيل على خبيتك السوداء. (ص. 79)	Tell her? Oh shut up, you idiot. (P. 51)
7	يخبيك يا عبد الرحيم. (ص. 83)	You've really done it this time, Abd al-Reheem. (p. 54)
8	عواف يا دلال. (...) أقشر لك واحدة (برتقال) يا عبد الرحيم؟ (ص. 137)	How are you, Dalal? (...) You want me to peel you one (orange), Abd al-Reheem? (p. 81)

Three categories emerged when classifying these eight utterances from a functional perspective:

*Category 1: Arabic examples with terms of endearment and expletives (Examples 1, 2, 5, and 8)*

*Category 2: Arabic examples reflecting women's helplessness (Examples 2, 3, and 4)*

*Category 3: Arabic examples denoting the avoidance of using strong words (Examples 6 and 7)*

The analysis also adopted Reiss' (2000) instruction criteria to assess the adequacy of the target text. The criteria provided a checklist for the analysis, with linguistic components and extralinguistic determinants. For the purposes of this study, the criteria were condensed to the following:

Linguistic components:

- Semantic/lexical equivalence
- Grammatical/stylistic features

Extralinguistic determinants:

- Place (features of the country and culture)
- Affective implications (irony, emotions, and humor)

The following section offers suggested translations as needed to explore adequate strategies for translating women's language.

#### IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses examples from each category. The English translation is assessed in light of the features of women's language that Lakoff (1973) suggested, using Reiss' (2000) instruction criteria. However, women's language

features have changed. Bassiouney (2009, p. 130) argued that since the 1970s, the position of women has changed significantly worldwide, resulting in a change in women's language. Xia (2013) also argued that women's language features change over time, while Mills (2005) indicated that Lakoff's list of features in the 1970s seems anecdotal today. Nevertheless, the following is an alphabetical list of Lakoff's (1973) suggested features of women's language:

1. Avoidance of strong swear words (e.g., *shit* and *the f-word*);
2. Emphatic stress (e.g., *brilliant* and *marvelous*);
3. Empty adjectives (e.g., *charming* and *cute*) and empty boosters (e.g., *I am happy you are here*);
4. Hypercorrect grammar;
5. Intensifiers (e.g., *just*, *so*, *absolutely*, *highly*, and *completely*);
6. Lexical hedges or fillers (e.g., *It may rain tonight*);
7. Precise color terms;
8. Rising intonation on declarative,
9. Super polite forms (e.g., *euphemisms* and *indirect requests*);
10. Tag questions.

#### A. Category 1: Endearment and Expletives

Terms of endearment and solidarity indicate how well people know each other. According to Holmes (1998), women tend to focus on the feelings of the person they talk to. According to Lakoff (1973), women also tend to use expletives, which may seem "meaningless" but are not, as they define the social context of an utterance. The following table is a reading of the responses from the two questionnaires:

TABLE 2  
RESPONSES EXTRACTED FROM THE TWO QUESTIONNAIRES FOR ENDEARMENT AND EXPLETIVE EXAMPLES

No.	Arabic Example			English Translation		
1	طيب يا خويا اخلعه (...) والا انت يعني عليك ذنب تفضل طول عمرك وانت تعبان منه؟ (ص. 18)			Then, have it pulled. (...) Or are you atoning for some sin and having to spend your whole life in pain? (p. 9)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	14.5	69.4	16.1	11.5	26.9	61.5
2	يادي الخيبة على حكاية النور دي يا ولاد. (ص. 32)			What's going on with this power? (p. 10)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	4.8	85.5	9.7	15.4	7.7	76.9
5	سلم على أمك وخالك عبد العزيز وستك عزيزة يا وله. (ص. 71)			Say hello to Mother and Uncle Abd al-Aziz, and don't forget grandmother Aziza, boy! (p. 45)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	21	53.2	25.8	26.9	42.3	30.8
8	عواف يا دلال. (...) أقشر لك واحدة (برتقال) يا عبد الرحيم؟ (ص. 137)			How are you, Dalal? (...) You want me to peel you one (orange), Abd al-Reheem? (P. 81)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	4.8	82.3	12.9	7.7	76.9	15.4

The disparity in the percentages between responses, as evident in the four excerpts, shows that the Arabic excerpts reflect features of women's language, while the English ones do not. Changing or deleting the terms of endearment and expletives in the Arabic excerpts with other "neutral" terms gives the utterances a different sense, which may not reflect the sense of feminine language. Consider the following:

TABLE 3  
MODIFIED EXCERPTS AND THEIR LITERAL TRANSLATION FOR ENDEARMENT AND EXPLETIVE EXAMPLES

Excerpt 1 (Modified)	Literal Translation
طيب اخلعه (...) والا انت يعني عليك ذنب تفضل طول عمرك وانت تعبان منه؟	Then, have it pulled. (...) Or are you atoning for some sin and having to spend your whole life in pain?
Excerpt 2 (Modified)	Literal Translation
يادي الخيبة على حكاية النور دي	What a disappointment about this issue of power!
Excerpt 5 (Modified)	Literal Translation
سلم على أمك وخالك عبد العزيز وستك عزيزة.	Say hello to Mother, Uncle Abd al-Aziz, and grandmother Aziza.
Excerpt 8 (Modified)	Literal Translation
مساء الخير يا دلال. (...) أقشر لك واحدة (برتقال) يا عبد الرحيم؟	Good evening, Dalal. (...) You want me to peel you one (orange), Abd al-Reheem?

After deleting/changing the terms of endearment/expletives, the Arabic excerpts sounded neutral, except for Excerpt 8, which included an action culturally linked to women (i.e., peeling an orange for someone). This finding agrees with Ochs (1992), who saw that gender differences in language are due to the different roles played by men and women in each community, stating that the link between power and language is context-sensitive and variable, depending on the culture and interlocutors.

Responses to the English translations, except for Excerpt 8, showed that they fell short of conveying the features of women's language. Instead, the translator translated the meaning neutrally, which Boase-Beier (2012) saw as a problem,

arguing that linguistic choices in the source text reflect the desired effects the writer wants to have on readers, such as providing the readers with clues to attitude, viewpoint, or ideology. Yousef (2012, p. 56) argued that when translating literature, the translator “has to be aware of the cultural norms, beliefs, morals and the ideologies of the cultures into or out of which he is translating.” Therefore, suggested translations for the four utterances may include some of Lakoff’s (1973) features of women’s language to faithfully reflect the Arabic source text.

In Excerpt 1, after the application of the instruction criteria on linguistic components, semantic equivalence was found, as the meaning was transferred successfully. However, lexical equivalence was not fully achieved as the translator ignored translating the utterance (يا خويا). There was also grammatical/stylistic equivalence failure since women’s language was not successfully transferred. Regarding extralinguistic determinants, no problem occurred in the place (e.g., the country and the culture), but a problem existed in achieving equivalence in the affective implications. The sense in the Arabic utterance is care, so the endearment expression (يا خويا) should be translated to reflect an emotional sense that the translator ignored. Therefore, the utterance (طيب يا خويا اخلعه) can be translated using an English term of endearment, reinforced by an exclamation device to replicate the effect created in the source text. The target text should reflect features of women’s language, which in this case could be the use of expletives, such as (*well*). A suggested translation for this excerpt is (*Oh dear! Well, have it pulled*).

Excerpt 2 has two instances that need intervention. The first is the expression (يادي الخيبة) that denotes helplessness, which is covered in more detail in Category 2. Therefore, no suggestion is made for this expression here. The second is the expletive expression (يا ولاد), which in several instances is translated literally as (*boys*), which is neutral and does not reflect women’s language. The instruction criteria for this excerpt are saved concerning the same utterance when discussed again in Category 2. A suggested translation for this part of the utterance can be (*dearies*). In this context, Xia (2013) argued that women tend to use diminutives (i.e., sweetie and dearie) more than men.

The same also applies to the expression (يا ولله) in Excerpt 5, which can be translated as (*cutie*). No issues were found when applying the instruction criteria to the extralinguistic determinants. However, the linguistic components showed otherwise, with semantic/lexical equivalence without stylistic equivalence. Notably, the English translation of the whole utterance is somewhat archaic. It does not reflect the smoothness nor the spontaneity of the utterance in Arabic or the features of women’s language. As a result, a suggested translation for Excerpt 5 can be (*Cutie, say hello to your mom, Uncle Abd al-Aziz, and Granny Aziza*).

In Excerpt 8, the Egyptian colloquial Arabic expression (عواف) is problematic in translation, as the expression is widely associated with women in certain social classes and geographical areas. This word does not have a one-to-one equivalent word in English regarding meaning, language level, or a link to one gender. It is a greeting wishing that God bestows on the addressee good health. Therefore, the translator may opt to translate the greeting function of the utterance or supplement it with lexical additions to reflect the sense of the source text utterance and use other stylistic devices to reproduce the features of women’s language.

Apparently, the translator resorted to the first option, using the utterance (*How are you, Dalal?*). Translating this expression depends on the translator’s decision as gender practices, according to Eckert (1989), differ from one culture to another and even within the same culture from one group to another. Therefore, a suggested translation for (عواف يا لول) is (*Hi Dalal. Be blessed with good health*), but this translation looks archaic and long and does not qualify to fit in the target culture.

The second part of the utterance, offering to peel an orange for Abd al-Reheem, can be rephrased to include some features of women’s language, such as lexical hedges or fillers, like modals or adverbs, to be equivalent to the source text. The translator may also use a question tag in the utterance, as women frequently use question tags for several reasons, including securing agreement, avoiding direct disagreement (Al-Harabsheh, 2014), and keeping the conversation going (Xia, 2013). Semantic, grammatical, and stylistic equivalence results from applying the instruction criteria, but the utterance has a lexical inequivalence that can be overlooked for the sake of the smoothness of the translated text so that it appears like the original. In the extralinguistic determinants, it would seem weird in the target culture that a casual greeting would turn into prayers for good health. Therefore, the suggested translation for this utterance is (*How are you, Dalal? (...) Abd al-Reheem, you want me to peel you one (orange), right?*)

### B. Category 2: Women’s Helplessness

Lakoff (1987, p. 380) stated that emotions are usually seen as feelings alone, which is wrong since emotions have conceptual contents. He added that emotions have “an extremely complex structure, which gives rise to a wide variety of non-trivial inferences.” Therefore, emotions generally carry meanings that require translation. According to Freed (2003), women’s language reflects their feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and insecurity in society. In this context, the helplessness is reflected in women’s discourse in Arabic, but the English translation shows otherwise. The following table is a reading of the responses from the two questionnaires:

TABLE 4  
RESPONSES EXTRACTED FROM THE TWO QUESTIONNAIRES FOR WOMEN'S HELPLESSNESS EXAMPLES

No.	Arabic Example			English Translation		
2	(يادي الخيبة على حكاية النور دي يا ولاد. (ص. 32))			What's going on with this power? (p. 10)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	4.8	85.5	9.7	15.4	7.7	76.9
3	كده برضه تعملها يا بو عبد الله؟ (ص. 45)			So you've gone and done it, Abu Abdalla? (p. 27)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	21	64.5	14.5	26.9	26.9	46.2
4	يا مصيبيتي (ص. 68)			Oh my God! (p. 43)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	0	98.4	1.6	0	30.8	69.2

The wide gap between responses in the two questionnaires shows that the above three Arabic excerpts reflect features of women's language. In contrast, most respondents to the English questionnaire saw the translations as neutral.

In Excerpt 2, the utterance (يادي الخيبة) is an Egyptian colloquial expression of helplessness that women widely use, hence the 85.5% in the Arabic questionnaire. However, issues arise at the lexical and stylistic levels when applying the instruction criteria to the English translation. The translator omitted the vocative (يا ولاد), resulting in a neutral utterance that does not reflect the air of powerlessness and helplessness in the discourse of Nargis. This feature is maintained by Lakoff (1973) and Hall et al. (2021). Furthermore, Ochs (1992) posited that gender and language work together to generate socially organized pragmatic meanings. Therefore, to have an equivalent translation, suggestions include (*Well, I think this issue of power bursts my bubble, dearies*) or (*Well, I think this issue of power is a real bummer, dearies*). Although the suggested translations employ fillers, hedges, and diminutives, such as "well, I think" and "dearies," slang words are not preferable because of their masculinity. Xia (2013) said men prefer slang to appear more masculine, while women use more euphemisms. Therefore, the suggested translation for this excerpt is (*Oh my! I think this power outage is a disappointment, dearies, isn't it?*) since it employs an exclamation, fillers, a hedge, a diminutive, and a question tag, aligning with women's language.

In Excerpt 3, Nargis is in the graveyard, sitting on the ground and crying for the death of her husband. When the wooden coffin passes her, she cries in reproach and says the utterance in Excerpt 3. Although Nargis is talking to her dead husband, this utterance is a short monologue, so no response is expected. However, it functions to show Nargis' helplessness and fragility at this moment. The translation transfers the lexical and semantic meanings of the utterance when applying the instruction criteria but fails to achieve the stylistic equivalence to reflect the feature of helplessness. The translation of this utterance should have received extra attention at the end of Chapter 2, which symbolizes the end of a chapter in the life of Nargis. According to Al-Harashsheh (2014, p. 872), it is "implausible to divorce language from society, as language can be only understood in its social context." He added that linguistic choices are influenced by the participants, social context, topic, and discourse function. Thus, the translator can add some of Lakoff's features (e.g., hedges and question tags) to solve this issue. A suggested translation that shows the helplessness of Nargis is (*Dear me! You've really gone, Abu Abdalla, haven't you?*).

In Excerpt 4, Abd al-Reheem visits Nargis and tells her that he divorced his wife, so she replies (يا مصيبيتي), which literally means (*O, my woe/misfortune*). Although she is not supportive of this marriage, it does not stop her spontaneous reaction, perhaps because divorce in the Egyptian culture is a serious issue, and women show solidarity with other women. The instruction criteria application shows lexical inequivalence, though all other parameters are achieved. However, this lexical inequivalence is acceptable due to cultural considerations.

The utterance in Arabic indicates women's tentativeness and powerlessness, a language feature that exists heavily in women's language, according to Lakoff (1973) and Svendsen (2019). The translation of the utterance as (*Oh my God!*) is generally acceptable, but it has a high percentage of responses as a neutral expression. A possible translation for this excerpt is (*Oh, fudge!*), which is an attempt to avoid stronger words, as discussed in the next category. However, the expression is still strong, although it reflects upset, surprise, and discontent. Nonetheless, it does not match the language level used in the source text. Therefore, a suggested translation is (*Oh my goodness!*) as a modified version of the translated excerpt. The suggested expression is an interjection that functions as a mild alarm and expresses surprise, which fits in the context of this utterance.

### C. Category 3: Avoidance of Strong Words

Al-Harashsheh (2014, p. 881) posited that "women are more conservative than men in conversations, as they employ more politeness strategies than men do." Therefore, women do not use strong or swear words. Lakoff (1973) argued that this conservative nature starts from early childhood. Thus, if a little girl talks tough like a boy, she is scolded. This cultural paradigm is reflected in the repeated use of euphemistic expressions by women, especially in conservative societies. The following table is a reading of the responses from the two questionnaires:

TABLE 5  
RESPONSES EXTRACTED FROM THE TWO QUESTIONNAIRES FOR AVOIDANCE OF STRONG WORD EXAMPLES

No.	Arabic Example			English Translation		
6	تقول لها؟ طب انتنيل على خبيتك السوداء. (ص. 79)			Tell her? Oh, shut up, you idiot. (p. 51)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	16.1	59.7	24.2	50	19.2	30.8
7	بخبيك يا عبد الرحيم. (ص. 83)			You've really done it this time, Abd al-Reheem. (p. 54)		
	Male %	Female %	Neutral %	Male %	Female %	Neutral %
	14.5	61.3	24.2	19.2	30.8	50

According to the responses to the English translation of the two excerpts, the features of women's language are overlooked. Although the translations of the two utterances are not literal, they fail to achieve stylistic equivalence.

In Excerpt 6, Nargis and her husband advise Abd al-Reheem to report to the authorities that he has married so that his wife's monthly pension as a widow is suspended. Otherwise, he may be imprisoned. Reluctantly, he says he will tell her later. Surprised by the reaction of her brother, who happens to be the cashier who used to deliver the pension money to his wife, Nargis responds with the utterance in Excerpt 6, which includes a rhetorical question in response to Abd al-Reheem's surprising and reluctant reaction. She euphemizes the insults she wants to direct at her brother due to his carelessness. The instruction criteria reveal that the English translation transfers the literal meaning but fails to achieve the stylistic equivalence, which reflects the features of women's language. A suggested translation for this utterance is (*Tell her? That's just disappointing, smartie.*). In this suggested translation, several features of women's language are used to express the functions in the Arabic text, including the rhetorical question as an informal replacement of a question tag in (*Tell her?*), the adverb (*just*) as an intensifier, the empty booster in (*that's just disappointing*), a diminutive in (*smartie*), and, above all, avoiding strong words. Xia (2013) stated that women usually avoid strong swear words and dirty utterances, so they rarely say strong words like damn or hell but use utterances like "Oh, dear!" and "My god!" In the suggested translation, the use of (*smartie*) is a euphemism to denote the opposite, a feature of women's language.

Excerpt 7 is Nargis' first utterance when she sees Abd al-Reheem as a groom. The Arabic utterance is a colloquial cliché expression, which literally means (*May God disappoint/fail you*). Sometimes, it is considered a euphemistic expression of surprise addressed to close people as a compliment, so it is not an insult in this context. The instruction criteria application shows that the English translation is functional and successfully renders the meaning, not the stylistic features. A suggested translation to express the air of surprise could start with (*Kidding me?*). However, it sounds more masculine and does not achieve the stylistic feature. Therefore, a suggested translation is (*No way! You've really done it this time, Abd al-Reheem, haven't you?*). In the suggested translation, a colloquial expression is used to denote surprise (*No way!*), and a question tag is used as a feature of women's language while avoiding strong words that a literal translation may generate.

Before proceeding to the discussion, the following table portrays the 8 Arabic excerpts analyzed above and their suggested English translations.

TABLE 6  
THE EIGHT ARABIC EXCERPTS AND THEIR SUGGESTED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

No.	Arabic Excerpt	Suggested English Translation
1	طيب يا خويا اخلعه (ص. 18)	<i>Oh dear! Well, have it pulled.</i>
2	يادي الخيبة على حكاية النور دي يا ولاد. (ص. 32)	<i>Oh my! I think this power outage is a disappointment, dearies, isn't it?</i>
3	كده برضه تعلمها يا بو عبد الله؟ (ص. 45)	<i>Dear me! You've really gone, Abu Abdalla, haven't you?</i>
4	يا مصيبيتي (ص. 68)	<i>Oh, my goodness!</i>
5	سلم على أمك وخالك عبد العزيز وستك عزيزة يا وله. (ص. 71)	<i>Cutie, say hello to your mom, Uncle Abd al-Aziz and granny Aziza.</i>
6	تقول لها؟ طب انتنيل على خبيتك السوداء. (ص. 79)	<i>Tell her? That's just disappointing. You are such a smartie.</i>
7	بخبيك يا عبد الرحيم. (ص. 83)	<i>No way! You've really done it this time, Abd al-Reheem, haven't you?</i>
8	عواف يا دلال. (... أقشر لك واحدة (برتقال) يا عبد الرحيم؟ (ص. 137)	<i>How are you, Dalal? (...) Abd al-Reheem, you want me to peel you one (orange), right?</i>

To verify the suggested translations, a third questionnaire with the suggested answers was dispatched to ten native English speakers who worked as linguists, editors, writers, and language specialists in the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands. Their invaluable responses helped refine the suggested translations.

Nevertheless, interpreting the findings of this paper must be taken cautiously because this study is the first step in a long road to explore the challenges and solutions to translating features of women's language in Arabic literature in general and Egyptian colloquial in particular.

Women have different ways of talking in different languages, so the transfer of the features of women's language requires the translator to be bilingual and bicultural. Coates (2016) maintained that men and women have different speech behaviors in different languages, of which Arabic is not an exception. Features of women's language have hidden semantic and pragmatic functions. While some people may see that some women's language features are meaningless, they reflect important elements in defining meaning, such as how well people know one another, attitudes, education levels, and social context.

Although women's language is a universal linguistic phenomenon, different languages, cultures, societies, and communities use various devices to express the features of women's language. In this context, Inoue (2003) argued that when women's language is dislocated into another language, a regime is necessary to reproduce it successfully. This dislocation is a linguistic and cultural issue. Eckert (1989) saw gender as a complicated social structure, while Xia (2013) indicated that social factors may be the reason for the differences in men's and women's discourses. Moreover, Svendsen (2019) argued that the speech of individuals and groups varies according to gender, ethnicity, class, age, socioeconomic status, and education level. Ochs (1992) posited that gender and language work together to generate socially organized pragmatic meanings. Therefore, to have an equivalent translation, translators must employ fillers, hedges, and diminutives (e.g., "Well, I think," and "dearies") since the use of slang words is not preferable, as it is more masculine. Xia (2013) explained that men prefer slang to appear more masculine, while women use more euphemisms.

Most of the problems in the translated excerpts are stylistic-oriented, as the translator tends to sacrifice the smoothness and originality of the target text to preserve the lexical equivalence. One of the first lessons taught in Translation 101 is that translation entails loss (and gain), and therefore, the translator may sacrifice an element for the sake of another; it is up to the translator to decide which element is more significant. In this context, Youssef and Albarakati (2023, p. 1410) stated that the solution can be achieved through "settling the conflict between finding formal equivalents to preserve the context-free semantics on the one hand and finding functional equivalents to preserve the context-sensitive communicative value on the other hand".

Therefore, this study finds that reproducing the features of women's language in another language may require sacrificing the lexical equivalence for stylistic equivalence based on how the translator settles the conflict between formal and functional equivalences. El-Ghobashy (2004) said that when she translated the novel, the stylistic features of the Arabic novel were maintained. This goal was generally achieved throughout the novel. However, it was not transparent in her translation of women's language.

The analysis shows that the translator of literary works needs to translate freely, without the restrictions of literal translation, to generate the equivalent sense of the source text. Therefore, as evident in the analysis, devices like expletives or terms of endearment may need more than a literal translation to generate an equivalent effect on the text level.

The collated findings of the analysis of the eight excerpts answer the research question on the techniques needed to translate the features of women's language to generate an equivalent effect in the target language. The suggested solutions to transfer the features of women's language from Arabic into English vary from one excerpt to another based on the context, language level used, the participants, and the topic. Suggestions vary from using tag questions, intensifiers, empty boosters, hedges, diminutives, and polite forms to avoiding strong swear words. Therefore, translation has no "one solution fits all" in the current study and across different domains and language pairs. Hence, generalization is not recommended when offering solutions to these gender-related issues, according to Hall et al. (2021).

## V. CONCLUSION

This study revolved around the means to translate the universal phenomenon known as women's language, especially between languages reflecting different cultures with unique perceptions of women's status in society. Therefore, this paper investigated the means of translating women's language in Ibrahim Aslan's (2005) second novel, *Nile Sparrows*. The study reviewed the relevant literature on women's language in English and Arabic by focusing on its general features. The study found scarce literature relevant to translating women's language, hence the significance of this study. After data collection and classification, the selected Arabic and English excerpts were placed in two questionnaires and sent to native speakers of the two languages to decide whether the excerpts reflected features of women's language. While responses to the Arabic questionnaire showed that the excerpts were brimful with features of women's language, responses to the English questionnaire showed the neutrality of the translations. The eight selected examples were classified into three categories and analyzed using Reiss' (2000) instruction criteria while considering Lakoff's (1973) framework of the features of women's language. Suggested translations were offered when needed.

The study finds that successfully reproducing the features of women's language in another language may require sacrificing the lexical equivalence for the sake of the smoothness of the target text, based on how the translator settles the conflict between formal and functional equivalences. Despite the heavy existence of semantic equivalence in the translations of the excerpts, clear inequivalence exists at the stylistic level. Hence, the translator should select appropriate devices in the target language to achieve equivalence and consider that features of women's language vary from one culture to the next, even within the same culture from one group to another. Thus, no solution fits all in translating women's language, which depends on the nature of the target language, the language level, and social factors like ethnicity, geographic area, and topic. Therefore, generalizations in suggesting solutions are not recommended.

The findings of this study must be interpreted cautiously as the first step in investigating the English translation of features of women's language in Arabic literature. This step requires scholars and translators to explore possible challenges and solutions using other theoretical frameworks. It is also recommended that researchers and translators working on different language pairs produce similar studies to verify the findings of this paper.

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**Sameh S. Youssef** was born in Egypt in 1967. He has his Ph.D. in translation and linguistics on a socio-pragmatic analysis of challenges of translating culturally-bound expressions in 2005 from Helwan University, Egypt with first grade of honor.

He is an associate professor of translation and linguistics at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt. He worked in several universities worldwide including the University of Maryland and the French University in Egypt. He has a record of about 30 publications including 15 papers, 8 translated books and 5 book chapters.

Dr. Youssef is a member of several professional societies including Poetics and Arab Society for Comparative Literature. His research interests include translation studies, pragmatics and discourse analysis.