Translation, Ideology
and Gender
Translation, Ideology and Gender

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The topic of gender and translation “has been gaining critical consistency and experiencing a remarkable growth” (Castro 2013, 7) in the past few years, a clear indication that it is a productive field of study. Ever since the emergence of the “cultural turn” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) in the discipline of Translation Studies, there have been numerous works devoted to examining the relationship between the translated text and its social and historical circumstances, some of which have followed a gendered approach.

However, not much attention has been conferred to the ideological constraints in the translation of gender as manifested in the discourse of the health sciences. The research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Innovation and Education entitled “TRACEgencsi” (Traducción y Censura en la Representación del Género; FFI2012-39012-C04-04) was conceived to address this gap in the literature. The project was carried out by a group of researchers at the University of Cantabria and the University of Cantabria.

of León to examine, from a gender studies perspective, how the image of women was transferred from English into Spanish translations not only in the realm of literary texts, but also in scientific discourse. Thus, it addressed issues related to the representation of gender in translation and the ideological implications that the shifts of meaning may bear on the construction of the female image. The development of this research project has indeed confirmed the need to broaden the perspective of the implications of gender and ideology beyond the literary domain in Translation Studies.

Under the auspices of the project, the First International Conference “Translation, Ideology and Gender” was held in Santander in November 2015. The rationale for celebrating this event derived from the need to provide an international forum where insights could be shared regarding the three topics addressed at the conference. In particular, the interest lay on how gender representation may be filtered by power and ideology in translated texts in the scientific and literary domains.

The topic of the conference attracted the interest of numerous academics from a number of countries and the most valuable contributions have been selected and brought together for the present volume. In addition, the volume includes other studies that were sent in response to the call for papers, and which enhance the three sections that comprise this book. Written by distinguished scholars in the field, the papers cover the different aspects in a range of discourses, which guarantees both the academic interest and the required level of proficiency in the research reported. We, therefore, consider that this volume makes an important contribution to the field of Translation Studies and believe it will prove of interest to scholars and academics from different areas of expertise.

Part One is devoted to the intersection of translation, ideology and gender within the field of the Health Sciences. It is composed of two chapters which give an innovative insight into the matter. The first one, by Vanessa Leonardi, sets out to explore gender issues, censorship and ideology in scientific, and more precisely, medical texts, both in their original language and from a translation perspective. From a linguistic point of view, translation is made up of words, which may carry with them a particular ideological positioning. Starting with the assumption that language is not neutral in all its forms, the article will argue that scientific language, far from being neutral and objective, is still characterised by masculine bias.

In the second article, Keltouma Guerch makes a very interesting contribution that deviates from the European centred perspective to transfer us to the Moroccan world and the discrimination that Amazigh women suffer when accessing public health services. Guerch offers a
descriptive account of the oppression of these women in an aim to assess both the impact of cultural, geographical and linguistic estrangement on the quality of health services they get, and also the efforts health workers invest to overcome communication barriers.

Part Two focusses on the part played by narrative and poetry in the crossroads of the three topics of the volume, featuring three chapters that share the contextual background of Francoist Spain and its system of censorship (Godayol, Somacarrera and Lobejón), with the implications this had for the representation of gender, and another article by Royano which underpins the use of poison in literature and related to women.

In her article, Pilar Godayol presents three sample moments in the reception of Simone de Beauvoir under Franco’s regime, relating to her famous essay, *Le deuxième sexe*, considered the bible of feminism during the last century. This essay was crucial for the sustenance of the intellectuals opposed to the regime and a stimulus for the feminist discourses emerging in Spain in the 1960s, so its inclusion is mandatory in a volume such as the one presented here.

Also centred on Franco’s regime is Pilar Somacarrera’s chapter, which deals with Margaret Laurence’s *A Jest of God*, a novel that would not have been translated into Spanish had it not been adapted into the film *Rachel, Rachel* (1968) by Hollywood actor and director Paul Newman. By looking at the parameters of taboo, power, invisibility, discourse, visual dimension, imposition of values and self-censorship in relation to the novel, Somacarrera offers an insight into the repressive state of control Spanish society suffered during the regime, and, specially, the figure of women as represented in Laurence’s work.

Sergio Lobejón’s contribution, as previously mentioned, shares the contextual framework of the two previous chapters from this part, in this case with regard to the field of poetry. Poetry has so far been neglected in most studies centred on dictatorship under Franco, due to its scarce presence in the publishing world and to its attributed character of high-brow literature. Therefore, this contribution is of considerable value since it maps the presence of this genre in the translation field. What Lobejón does is offer an analysis of which poetic works translated from English were originally written by women, focusing on their reception and particularly, on the censorial treatment they received. He also offers an examination of the women involved in the translation process at the time, which target languages they used and which authors they translated, in an unprecedented study of this kind.

The fourth chapter in this part of the book is the one written by Lourdes Royano, which tackles the use of poison in narrative, thus
intersecting with the medical field and offering a perspective of the ways authors may finish their creations either through the death of the female protagonists, as in the novel *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert, or through their involvement in solving a murder, as illustrated by *The Thumb Mark of St. Peter* by Agatha Christie.

Part Three of the volume is the one devoted to gender policies and identity issues. In it, the authors of the two chapters included offer their perception of the links between translation, ideology and gender both in the European context (Federici) and in the world of magazines aimed at women (Rodríguez).

In her article, Eleonora Federici focuses on the European state-of-the-art regarding the intersection between gender and translation studies, offering an updated account of the activities, projects and research that currently conform the European map of the field, with a special emphasis on the Italian case. In doing so, Federici intends to increase the attention paid to these important matters, which are nonetheless left in the background of academic studies.

Last, but not least, Irene Rodríguez writes about women magazines in the Spanish context in an attempt to reveal the mechanisms used in these publications to spread the narrative reflecting the imperfections of women’s bodies to perpetuate a continuous dissatisfaction, so the consumption of certain cosmetics becomes a liberation process. Her article is another step in the path of shedding light on the hidden discourses existing in the field and of raising questions concerning the social consequences derived from translating a text which may be detrimental to the social construction of women.

By gathering these articles together, this volume aims to make a significant contribution to the knowledge about translation, ideology and gender in different geographical and time contexts. Having studied their intersections more deeply, it can be said that this is a topic worthy of further analysis, something that the research project from which the volume derives has attempted to do. Both economic and controlling interests of several agencies and agents have been shown to have a say in these intersections, highlighting the partiality of translation “in the dialectic of power, the ongoing process of political discourse, and strategies for social change” (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xviii).
References


PART ONE:

TRANSLATION, IDEOLOGY AND GENDER
IN THE HEALTH SCIENCES
CHAPTER TWO

GENDER, LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION
IN THE HEALTH SCIENCES:
GENDER BIASES IN MEDICAL TEXTBOOKS

VANESSA LEONARDI

Introduction

Textbooks are a rich source of information of any discipline, and biases contained in them may influence readers’ perception of several issues, such as gender for instance. Textbooks may perpetuate and reinforce gender bias and sexism in several ways (Baldwin and Baldwin 1992; Blumberg 2007, 2015; Brugeilles and Cromer 2009). Starting with the assumption that language is a highly manipulative, powerful and ideological tool for communication, it will be argued that scientific language, far from being neutral and objective, is still characterised by a masculine bias. Crasnow et al. (2015) claim that

[w]hen science was first identified as having a masculine basis, many asked whether this implies that there is a feminine science or that women would do science differently from men […] Most feminist science studies scholars try to understand the relationships among science, gender, race, class, sexuality, disability and colonialism and how science constructs and applies these differences.

The rise of second-wave feminism in the 1970s was accompanied by an ongoing debate over the ways in which medicine differentiates between social groups and supports hegemonic ideologies defining gender roles, as well as those dealing with race and social class. From a feminist perspective, medical discourse has historically constituted a site of sexual discrimination by using medico-scientific justifications for differentiating women from men on the basis of biology and anatomy. This paper is aimed at exploring gender issues, ideology and sexism in scientific, and
more precisely, medical textbooks (mainly anatomy and physiology texts) used at university level, both in their original language and in Italian, including translations into Italian. Translation is one of the most fertile grounds for studying ideological shifts and manipulation in language, as it is not a neutral activity, as also acknowledged by many scholars (Fawcett 1995, 1997, 2001; Venuti 1992, 1995, 1998; Hatim and Mason 1990, 1997; Leonardi 2007). From a linguistic point of view, a translation is made up of words, which may carry with them a particular ideological positioning. A contrastive analysis of translations of medical textbooks into Italian will help better assess whether sexism is maintained or omitted in the final product. Sexism in medical textbooks will be explored 1) by comparing the titles and their translation into Italian, 2) by analysing and comparing the illustrations contained in the source texts (STs) and in the translated versions (including front covers), and 3) through a corpus-driven analysis of sexist vs. gender-neutral terms used in the Merck Manual and in its Italian translation.

**Gender, language and ideology:**

**The phenomenon of sexism**

Gender equality has been the aim of feminism since the 18th century. In broad terms, feminism has always fought for two core issues, namely 1) males and females ought to be equally valuable and 2) commitment to social activism towards the goal of full equality of males and females (Blakemore et al., 2009). Throughout the years, feminist movements have been fighting for different aspects of gender equality. According to Mills (2002), first wave feminism can be associated with the suffragette movement in the 19th and 20th centuries; second wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s can be associated with political resistance against sex discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities as well as women’s emancipation; finally, third wave feminism is concerned with issues of diversity, multiplicity and construction of gender identities and gender (in)equality within specific contexts.

The women’s liberation movement, particularly active during the late 1960s and 1970s, sought to free women from oppression and male supremacy in all fields of society. The term “women’s liberation movement” is often used synonymously with either women’s movement or second wave feminism, although there were, and still are, many different types of feminist groups. Despite this large variety of theories and approaches to women’s issues, all feminist theorists seem to share a
common concern towards the elimination of unfair gender roles, thus fighting against the phenomenon of sexism.

Sexism refers to all the different forms of discrimination based on gender and it questions the imbalance of power between men, who have always been regarded as the superior and privileged class in society, and women, defined and treated as inferior and less important beings. Sexism, in other words, implies questions of power and discrimination, ideology and prejudices in all fields and spheres of society worldwide. The intersection between feminism, language and gender has led to the emergence of feminist linguistics aimed at identifying, demystifying and resisting the ways in which language use reflects, maintains, reinforces and perpetuates gender division and inequality in society (Talbot 2010).

Language is a very powerful tool of communication and its manipulation lies in its use, semantics, ideology and connotations. Throughout the years many scholars have explored the relationship between language and ideology from a variety of perspectives. Hall (1982), for instance, believes that ideology is a reproduction of dominant discourse. Dominant discourse can refer to nationalist, racist or even sexist discourse, among others, where the use and manipulation of language exemplifies this theory of unequal power relations and reinforces the issue of discrimination. Thompson (1984, 131) claims that “the analysis of ideology is fundamentally concerned with language, for language is the principal medium of the meaning (signification) which serves to sustain relations of domination.” A similar opinion is held by Gruber (1990, 195) who acknowledged the fact that ideology is expressed through linguistic forms and, as such, it is created through language. Hatim and Mason (1990, 161) assert that:

*Ideologies find their clearest expression in language. It follows, therefore, that the analysis of linguistic forms is enriched by the analysis of those ideological structures which underpin the use of language […] Behind the systematic linguistic choices we make, there is inevitably a prior classification of reality in ideological terms. The content of what we do with language reflects ideology at different levels: at the lexical-semantic level, and at the grammatical-syntactic level.*

In other words, language is never neutral and it represents its society’s norms and conventions, along with its forms of dominance and discrimination. In terms of gender differences, “[t]he differentiated use of language by males and females is more than just a matter of linguistic forms; it is the use of these forms in society and is ideologically constructed” (Leonardi 2007, 38). The clearest form of language discrimination in terms of gender, for instance, is sexist language. Sexist
language implies gender discrimination and, from a translation point of view, it is interesting to see how non-sexist texts can be turned into sexist texts, consciously or unconsciously, or vice versa (Langen 1992; Simon 1996; Leonardi 2007). The fight against sexist language calls for a non-sexist or gender-neutral language aimed at reducing gender stereotyping and discrimination by employing two main strategies, namely 1) neutralization (replacement of masculine forms with gender-unmarked forms) and 2) feminization (use of feminine forms to mark women’s presence in the language), or even a combination of both. The rationale behind the implementation of gender-neutral language reforms lies in the fact that the use of masculine forms to represent both men and women reflects the traditionally patriarchal society and the gender hierarchy, which grant men more visibility and power, and, therefore, a higher social status than women (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Although many countries have provided recommendations to avoid sexism, there are some places, such as Italy, where sexism is still largely evident and, although the Italian Government has issued similar recommendations, these do not seem to have been taken seriously and implemented as they should. In some cases, such as in the editing and translation of textbooks, both at school and university level, they even seem to have been completely ignored or forgotten. Italian feminist concerns regarding language can be found in the late 1960s through an analysis of linguistic theories developed in both academic and political arenas. For Italian feminist linguists, language encapsulates the dialectic of being a woman in a patriarchal world created for men by men.

The first and most important publications released in Italy, in this respect, were by Sabatani. This author was the first scholar in Italy to approach and explore the issue of sexism in language and her research led to an important publication entitled Il Sessismo nella Lingua Italiana, published in April 1987. Her work was aimed at identifying the forms of discrimination and proposing alternatives or recommendations. Two important issues highlighted in her work deserve attention. First of all, the use of the male generic terms or unmarked masculine forms, which have the dual function of referring to either males or both genders. In this respect, Sabatini (1987, 24) claims that:

The Italian language, like many others, is based on an anthropocentric principle: man is the parameter around which the linguistic universe rotates and organizes itself. A paradigmatic example: the very word «man» has a double meaning because it can refer to both the «male of the species» and also the «species in general», while the word «woman» refers only to the «female of the species».
Another interesting objection raised by Sabatini was the rejection of the “derogatory” suffix –essa suggesting instead the use of the feminine ending –a in job titles. In Cortelazzo’s (1995) opinion, however, it is hard to eliminate sexist connotations in well-established languages, such as Italian, thus the author suggested leaving the –essa ending with its double meaning. Many scholars have approached the issue of sexism in the Italian language (Von Bonkewitz 1995; Thüne 1995; Spina 1995; Burr 1995) either exploring the phenomenon in different realms of society or suggesting possible strategies and changes to deal with it in line with other countries’ policies worldwide. Lepschy (1991, 118), however, acknowledges that the problem does not lie in grammar but rather in discourse, thus implying that sexism is not determined by grammar, and cannot, therefore, be eliminated merely through changes in grammatical rules as it is characterized by more complex issues related to both cultural and social attitudes.

Gender biases in the scientific field

The rise of second-wave feminism in the 1970s was accompanied by an ongoing debate over the ways in which science and medicine differentiate between social groups and support hegemonic ideologies defining gender roles, as well as those dealing with race and social class. Feminist scholars and critics began to question the objectivity of scientific language and identified medical discourse as a site of sexual discrimination which, by using medico-scientific justifications, has always differentiated women from men on the basis of biology and anatomy.

Several educators and feminist scholars claim that science and science education have a masculine image that does not fit female identities (Kelly 1985; Kahle 1985; Kahle and Meece 1994). Others have claimed that science, historically, has been mainly a male domain (Harding 1996). This does not necessarily imply a total exclusion of women, but a significant resistance to their presence in the scientific field can be detected. As a matter of fact, very few women can be mentioned as having been successful in their scientific career. Table 2-1 records some of the most notable exceptions in this respect.

A recent study revealed interesting figures to prove sex inequalities in the scientific field worldwide (Neufeld et al. 2014). According to this work, women are less likely to become scientists in over 80% of countries. As far as academia is concerned, women still face discrimination from early stages in their career on the basis of their “inferior” competence, thus justifying lower wages than those of their male colleagues. Furthermore, the authors claim that sex inequality is also reflected in scholarly
publications and, as a proof, they refer to a recent bibliometric study examining over 5 million publications across scientific disciplines, which showed that fewer than 30% of authors were women and only about one third of the first authors in these publications are women. Finally, their work also found that women are awarded lower research grants than men for their scientific work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Achievements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elena Cornaro Piscopia</td>
<td>Italian Mathematician</td>
<td>Piscopia was the first known woman to receive a PhD, and went on to lecture in mathematics at the University of Padua.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Margarete Kirch</td>
<td>German Astronomer</td>
<td>Kirch was an astronomer who produced calendars and almanacs, and was the first woman to discover a comet, although it was named after her husband Gottfried.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Émilie du Châtelet</td>
<td>French Mathematician</td>
<td>Du Châtelet was the first to suggest that infrared radiation might exist, and improved on Newtonian mechanics, deriving a proof for the conservation of energy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Bassi</td>
<td>Italian Natural Philosopher</td>
<td>Bassi was the second woman to receive a PhD, and the first known female Professor in Europe. She helped introduce Newtonian mechanics to Italy, published 28 papers on physics, and was among the 25 scholars chosen to advise Pope Benedict XIV. Bassi now has a crater on Venus named after her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Sklodowska-Curie</td>
<td>Polish-French Chemist and Physicist</td>
<td>Curie gained her PhD from the University of Paris in June 1903, becoming the first woman in France to be awarded a PhD. Curie became the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Physics, which she shared with Becquerel and Pierre, for their research into radiation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-1: Women in Science, adapted from thestargarden.co.uk.

The presence of women in the sciences, feminist critiques and feminist theories has contributed to changes both in modern science and in studies of science. Feminists question many issues in the field of scientific discourse, ranging from women’s presence and occupation to language. Scientific language tends to be regarded as neutral and objective, but many
scholars, not necessarily feminists, seem to disagree on this concept. Medical anthropologist Emily Martin (1991), for instance, carried out a study on scientific textbooks to determine whether gender biases can be detected in the field of biology. In Martin’s opinion, textbook writers have imbued the sperm and egg with gender stereotypes. The egg is often portrayed as less worthy than sperm, thus depicting women as less worthy than men.

The increased awareness of sexism in different aspects of the medico-scientific fields prompted many theorists and professionals to explore the phenomenon of gender bias in detail. Studies revealed that gender bias led to stereotypical representations of men and women, thus reinforcing and sustaining gender discrimination in the scientific fields. Denmark (1982), for instance, in a review of psychology texts, detected gender differences in the way women and men were depicted in photographs. He claimed that women were portrayed as passive participants whereas men were the active investigators in charge of conducting the experiments. Furthermore, his study revealed that men were more often represented as therapists or researchers.

**Gender bias in English and Italian medical textbooks**

Analyses of medical textbooks, education material, and examination questions have revealed stereotypical sex/gender patterns and even openly patriarchal views (Phillips, 1997; Lent and Bishop 1998; Alexanderson et al, 1998). Sexism in anatomy textbooks is not a new area of research as, throughout the years, many scholars have explored this phenomenon by focusing on different aspects, such as language both at lexical and semantic levels as well as visual language (illustrations of the human body).

In order to investigate the phenomenon of gender biases in medical textbooks, both in the original language and in translation, three main types of analysis have been carried out:

1) Comparison of titles and their translation into Italian;
2) Analysis and comparison of illustrations contained in the medical textbooks and their Italian translated versions (including front covers);
Table 2.2: Comparison of titles of anatomy textbooks and their translation into Italian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Target Text (Italian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Atlas der topographischen und angewandten Anatomie des Menschen (Eduard Pernkopf 1963)</td>
<td>Atlante di Anatomia Sistematica e Topografica dell’Uomo (Tr. Mario Franceschini 1964)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atlante di Anatomia Umana (2nd edition) (Tr. Mario Franceschini, Cesare Ruffato 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Textbook of Anatomy and Physiology (Catherine Parker Anthony and Norma Jane Kolthoff 1975)</td>
<td>Fondamenti di Anatomia e Fisiologia dell’Uomo (Tr. Francesco Osculati 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Beschreibende und funktionelle Anatomie des Menschen (Kurt Tittel 1980)</td>
<td>Anatomia Funzionale dell’Uomo Applicata all’Educazione Fisica e allo Sport (Tr. Giulio Marinozzi 1987)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that in the very first example in table 2-2, the title is translated differently in the two Italian translations. Gender awareness is shown in the translation of this title in the second Italian version, edited in 1986, where the sexist term was neutralized by using the adjective *umana* [human]. The comparison of the source titles with their Italian translations reveals that the Italian translators consistently use *uomo* in their titles, except in the 2nd edition of example 1. However, the source titles sometimes have zero reference (examples 2, 7), two English texts have
non-sexist “human” (3 and 5) and the three German texts have the non-sexist or gender-neutral Menschen [human/people].

Sexism can be, therefore, detected in the Italian translations, thus suggesting inaccuracy and a certain degree of sexist ideology in the translators’ choices. As far as the Italian translations are concerned, it is worth noting how even female translators (not very common in Italian medical translations, which are usually carried out by men), use sexist language, as shown in example 3. This translation was issued in 1983, that is, four years before Sabatini’s recommendations for a non-sexist use of language. Nevertheless, although the other translations mentioned above were carried out after 1987, it seems that Sabatini’s guidelines were neither followed nor implemented, in other words, they were completely ignored. The most striking fact, however, is to see how gender-neutral language used in the titles of the STs was turned into sexist language in the Italian translations.

This tendency was partly explained by looking at the way Italian authors of anatomy textbooks choose their titles. In Italy, indeed, although many medical textbooks adopted at universities are translated versions from English (mainly American texts), German and French, there are also many textbooks written by Italian authors in Italian. The following texts are among the most commonly adopted textbooks in medical faculties across Italy and they are listed in chronological order:

1) Anatomia e Fisiologia dell’Uomo e Igiene (Bruno Monterossi 1944);
2) Manuale di Anatomia dell’Uomo (Gastone Lambertini 1972);
3) Anatomia e Fisiologia dell’Uomo (Paolo Castano 1983);
4) Anatomia dell’Uomo (Paolo Castano, Rosario Donato 1983 / 2006);
5) Anatomia dell’Uomo (Gastone Lambertini, Vincenzo Mezzogiorno 1986);
6) Anatomia del Sistema Nervoso Centrale e Periferico dell’Uomo (Luigi Cattaneo 1989);
7) Anatomia Microscopica degli Organi dell’Uomo (Damiano Zaccheo, Luigi Cattaneo, Carlo E. Grossi 1989);
8) Struttura Uomo: Manuale di Anatomia Artistica (Alberto Lolli, Mauro Zacchetta, Renzo Peretti 1998);
9) Anatomia dell’Uomo – Quick Review (Lucio Cocco, Virgilio Ferrario, Eugenio Gaudio, Lucia Manzoli, Michele Papa, Giovanni Zummo 2006);
10) Anatomia Funzionale del Sistema Nervoso dell’Uomo (Damiano Zaccheo 2012);
Chronological order was chosen in order to determine whether the sexist use of the male generic term *uomo* has changed over the years, especially after Sabatini’s recommendations for a non-sexist use of language issued in 1987.

The first and most striking aspect in terms of sexism, was the tendency to use the gender unmarked term *uomo* to include both men and women, as observed in the translation of foreign textbook titles. This can be simply avoided by using the adjective *umano* [human]: thus, instead of writing *Anatomia dell’Uomo* [Man’s Anatomy], they could have opted for *Anatomia Umana* [Human Anatomy]. Secondly, nearly all of the publications above were written by men, except example 9, one of whose six co-authors was a woman, thus displaying a male supremacy in medical text authorship. Thirdly, it is interesting to note that five of these Italian authors (Grossi, Cocco, Gaudio, Manzoli and Zummo) are also the translators of some of the publications in table 2-2, whose titles and their translations were analysed. It seems that publications and translations in the medical field in Italy rather belong to an elite characterized by a few recurring names and mainly male authors and translators whose writing and translating practice maintains and perpetuates sexism in the medical field.

Although suggestions for changing the titles of these Italian medical textbooks can be followed, other changes should be taken into account, such as modifying the illustrations on the front covers and those inside these publications, which, at least in the case of anatomy texts, tend to reproduce the male body as the standard model. This graphic material belongs to the so-called non-verbal or visual language and more attention should be devoted to this issue, as also discussed in the following section.

**Gendered visual language in medical textbooks**

The use of various semiotic resources in communication has shown that meaning is realized not only through language but also through the integrated use of a wide range of semiotic resources including static and dynamic ones (Goldstone 2004; Kress 2003; Serafini 2011). People have always been exposed to texts that contain visual images, which consciously or unconsciously may help reinforce and support specific ideologies, thus reflecting particular cultural and social attitudes.

Halliday (1978) claimed that language is a semiotic mode and any semiotic mode has to represent three communicative metafunctions,
Chapter Two

namely the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction and the textual metafunction. This view of language had a decisive influence on Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), who extended it in their visual communication grammar. Thus, the authors assert that images, colours, music, typography and other visual modes simultaneously realize the three metafunctions. Therefore, such images and other visual modes can establish a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented. In other words, in their opinion, semiotic systems make it possible to determine and negotiate social and power relationships, and images, therefore, express and carry with them ideological positioning.

In this section, we draw on these theories and the notion that visual language contributes to communication and may be ideologically slanted, and examine their implications in relation to gender. We pose the following questions: Is it possible to talk about the existence of gendered visual language? What can illustrations tell us about gender differences? Can gender stereotypes and biases be detected through an analysis of the graphic material used in textbooks? In order to answer these questions, we focus on anatomy textbooks for medical students, where the male body is usually presented as the standard human body.

As far as visual language is concerned, several scholars have focused their attention on anatomy and physiology textbooks, as they are core texts in medicine and their studies revealed interesting insights into the phenomenon of sexism through pictures. Lawrence and Bendixen (1992), for example, explored the ways in which male and female anatomy were presented in 31 anatomy texts published between 1890 and 1989 and made the following claims:

Anatomists have produced a powerful and authoritative science of the human structure that is vital to advanced work in various areas of medical research and medical practice. Seeing how the normal human body is routinely depicted as male, or male-centered, in illustrations and language hardly invalidates mainstream anatomical knowledge. Yet becoming aware of how much “his” anatomy dominates “hers” in texts designed for medical students exposes unnecessary genitalia, useless comparisons, careless inaccuracies and errors. More important, this process reveals how far Western culture is from creating a non-gendered human anatomy, one from which both male and female emerge as equally significant and intriguing variations (Lawrence and Bendixen 1992, 933).

Mendelsohn et al. (1994) analysed 4,060 images in 12 commonly used anatomy and physical diagnosis textbooks. As far as anatomy textbooks are concerned, their results showed that whereas females were represented
on average in 21.2% of the anatomy text illustrations, males were represented on average in 44.3%, and 34.4% of the illustrations were neutral. Figures dramatically changed in non-reproductive anatomy chapters, where women were depicted on average in 11.1% and men in 43.1% of the illustrations, and 45.8% were neutral images. In the physical diagnosis text, illustrations showed a more even distribution (21.5% female and 24.8% male). Nevertheless, a difference was observed between chapters dealing with the reproductive system, where women were depicted in a mean of 71.1% of the illustrations, and non-reproductive chapters, where the average fell to 8.8%. The authors concluded that in both anatomy and physical diagnosis texts, women are underrepresented in illustrations of non-reproductive anatomy, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the image of the male body as the standard model in medical education. Similarly, Giacomini et al. (1986) analysed 8 textbooks and found that only 11% of the images were female, 64% male, and 25% neutral.

Eight out of the twelve textbooks analysed by Mendelsohn et al. have been translated into Italian. Interestingly, the illustrations were reproduced faithfully in the translated versions, thus preserving the same degree of sexism as in the source texts. Some slight variations were found in several different front covers used in the Italian translations, but they always displayed either a male body or picture or non-gender images. In other words, even in cases where the front cover design was changed in the translated versions, no female images were chosen. It seems, therefore, that no attention is devoted to the graphic material as if this is not considered a form of language. This is potentially a serious error because this content belongs to the so-called visual language and, as such, can maintain, support and perpetuate ideological positioning and gender biases. Words and images go hand in hand and therefore, in translation, they should not be treated as isolated elements. In order to avoid the rising cost of production, advertising and distribution, books are aimed at several countries at once, and the illustrations are created with an international audience in mind. Having said that, however, there are many cases in which the images can be translated to suit the target culture and can be adapted to the target language, such as in children’s stories or advertisements. Although in the case of medical textbooks the choice of not translating the illustrations seems to be motivated by economic reasons, it also raises questions into the incapability or (un)consciousness of reading, interpreting and translating the ideology of visual language and, more specifically, sexism through pictures. Responsibility in translation does not depend merely on translators, as also publishers and readers play an important role in this respect. Translators may be capable
and aware of all this but unable to change anything because of constraints imposed by publishers. There could be a whole range of readers both (in)capable and (un)aware with regard to these issues. These factors need to be taken into account in any contrastive analysis of translations.

A further analysis of the front covers of anatomy textbooks revealed that they tended to display a male body or the image of a man on their front cover. A small percentage of books showed non-gender images and, with one exception, no cover displayed images of women or female bodies or both male and female bodies together. The only exception to the rule was a textbook entitled Essentials of Human Anatomy and Physiology by Elaine N. Marieb, where changes throughout the years were observed in the different front covers used in the different editions of her book. These covers displayed men, women, both of them and even different races and the illustrations inside these books also showed the same tendency to be gender and race inclusive. All the Italian translated versions faithfully reproduced the images displayed both on the front covers and inside these STs. The only difference noted was that the translation of the title in the earlier editions (until 2010), which still opted for a sexist use of language by translating “human” as uomo (e.g. Essentials of Human Anatomy and Physiology translated as Elementi di Anatomia e Fisiologia dell’Uomo). Later editions, however, changed the title into a more gender-neutral option, thus showing, possibly, a certain degree of gender awareness while remaining faithful to the original STs.

Finally, it was interesting to find that all the textbook covers of muscle anatomy (even current editions both in English and in Italian) always display a male body. Not a single textbook, in this respect, was found to display a female body or picture or both bodies.

Gender imbalance in the way women are represented in anatomical pictures, however, can take on different forms of discrimination and sexism, as reported in a scandal which took place in 1971, when an anatomy textbook published in the USA included 77% of female images (Halperin 2009). Its withdrawal from the market was based on the allegation that much of the female imagery (and commentaries) was considered to be pornographic. Most of the female imagery displayed photographs of women in “pin-up girl” poses as well as nude poses, which were deemed unsuitable for an anatomy textbook whereas male images were cropped to hide the model’s face and genitals, as shown in fig. 2-1.