

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ENGLISH-KAZAKH LITERARY TRANSLATION: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE (BASED ON LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN)

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Abstract. *This study investigates gender representation in the Kazakh translation of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women. By analyzing selected excerpts, it identifies how translation strategies shape feminist meanings. The translation strengthens female agency and preserves the feminist essence.*

Keywords: *Feminist perspective, feminist translation, women's identity, gender roles, cultural adaptation.*

INTRODUCTION.

Literary translation bridges cultures and conveys both linguistic and gender structures. Gender representation is complex, as it is socially and culturally constructed. Translating *Little Women* from English into Kazakh entails not only linguistic transfer but also cultural negotiation of cultural norms regarding women's roles, values and identities.

Feminist translation theory emphasizes that translation can reinforce or challenge patriarchal discourse, making it a transformative and political act rather than a neutral process. The novel portrays female identity, family values, and women's self-realization in 19th-century America, yet these concepts may contrast with traditional Kazakh views on femininity and family. Translators must balance preserving the original feminist message with adapting it to local cultural expectations. The aim of this study is twofold:

1. To review key theories on gender representation and feminist translation approaches;
2. To analyze the strategies employed in the Kazakh translation of *Little Women*, focusing on how gendered meanings and female subjectivities are rendered.

Literature review

Feminism promotes gender equality and views translation as an ideological act rather than a purely linguistic one. Simon (1996) and von Flotow (1997) describe the translator as a cultural mediator who reconstructs meaning from a gendered perspective. Feminist translators often apply strategies such as rewording, emphasis, and cultural adaptation to preserve women's voices (Gaspersz, 2021). Translation shifts, defined by Catford (1965) and further developed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), include transposition and modulation, enabling translators to adapt gender-marked expressions across languages. Nida (1964) and Newmark (1988) emphasize meaning equivalence through dynamic, semantic, and communicative approaches. These frameworks provide the basis for analyzing how the Kazakh translation of *Little Women* negotiates Western feminist ideas within traditional Kazakh gender values.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative and comparative approach** to examine how gender representation in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* is conveyed in its Kazakh translation. The primary aim is to identify translation techniques and evaluate their impact on the portrayal of women from a feminist perspective.

Data and Selection Criteria

A total of **15 extracts** were selected from both the English original and the Kazakh translation. The passages were chosen for their relevance to gender and feminist themes such as domestic life, women’s work, sisterhood, independence, and social expectations. Each extract contains linguistic and cultural markers of female identity and ideology.

Coding Framework

The following translation techniques were identified as analytical categories: direct translation, cultural adaptation, explication, omission, tone adjustment, naturalization, connotation and sentence structure adjustment.

Analytical Procedure

The frequency of each technique was calculated as a percentage, and its distribution was calculated to identify the most frequent techniques (e.g., Adaptation – X%, Omission – Y%). Each example was also qualitatively assessed to determine its feminist effect, categorized as: Amplified – feminist meaning strengthened; Preserved/Neutral – meaning retained; Diluted/Erased – feminist tone softened or lost.

Reliability Measures

Validation was further strengthened through consultation with the academic supervisor.

Findings and Discussion

	English variant	Kazakh translation	Translation technique/Observation	Comment
1.	It’s naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff, I can’t practice well at all. And Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that anyone could hear that time.(4p)	Шағымданған ым дұрыс емес, дегенмен ыдыс жуып, үй тазалығын күйттеу-дүниедегі ең жағымсыз жұмыс. Соның салдарынан күйгелек бола бастадым-ау. Ал қолым жайлы айтпай-ақ қояйын, тап бір ағаш дерсің! Мен тіпті гамманың өзін дұрыс ойнай алмайм жүрмін.-Бесстің ауыр жұмыстан күстеніп кеткен қолына қарап қатты күрсінгенін бәрі естіді.(9б)	Direct Translation: “washing dishes and keeping things tidy” → «ыдыс жуып, үй тазалығын күйттеу». Explication: “It makes me cross” expanded to «күйгелек бола бастадым-ау». Cultural Adaptation: “My hands get stiff” rendered as «тап бір ағаш дерсің!» — a culturally resonant metaphor. Tone Adjustment: Sigh intensified with «қатты күрсінгенін бәрі естіді». Omission: “I can’t practice well at all” omitted but implied through hand stiffness. Sentence Structure Adjustment: Reorganized for smoother flow and emotional focus.	This excerpt conveys Beth’s fatigue from domestic work — a common female burden in patriarchal society. The translation strengthens the emotional tone, highlighting physical exhaustion and silent resistance. Expressions like «тап бір ағаш дерсің» enhance the sense of weariness, making women’s domestic labor more visible and emotionally charged. From a feminist perspective, the translation amplifies the female voice and underscores the undervaluation of women’s household roles.

2.	“Poor Jo! It’s too bad, but it can’t be helped. So you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls,” said Beth, stroking the rough head with a hand that all the dish washing and dusting in the world could not make ungentle in its touch.(5p)	«Бейшара Джо! Бұл сұмдық, бірақ ештеңе істей алмайсың. Джозефина деген әп-әдемі есіміңді Джо деп ұлдың атына айналдырдың, бізге аға рөлін ойнап жүрсің, осыған қанағат етуіңе тура келер», – деді Бесс, кішкентай қолымен Джоның кобырап кеткен шашын, ешқандай ауыр жұмыс күстендіре алмас жып-жылы жұмсақ алақанымен сипап тұрып.(11б)	Direct Translation: The phrase “<i>Poor Jo! It’s too bad, but it can’t be helped</i>” is translated literally as «<i>Бейшара Джо! Бұл сұмдық, бірақ ештеңе істей алмайсың</i>», preserving the original tone. Explicitation: The idea of “<i>making your name boyish</i>” is expanded to «<i>Джозефина деген әп-әдемі есіміңді Джо деп ұлдың атына айналдырдың</i>», clarifying the meaning for the Kazakh reader. Cultural Adaptation: “<i>Playing brother to us girls</i>” becomes «<i>аға рөлін ойнап жүрсің</i>», which fits naturally into Kazakh cultural context. Tone Adjustment: “<i>A hand that could not make ungentle</i>” is rendered as «<i>жып-жылы жұмсақ алақанымен</i>», expressing tenderness in a natural Kazakh way. Omission: “<i>Rough head</i>” is simplified to «<i>кобырап кеткен шашын</i>», keeping the visual image but omitting redundancy. Sentence Structure Adjustment: The Kazakh syntax is reorganized for smoother, more poetic flow.	The translation preserves the warmth and tenderness of the original while emphasizing female solidarity. It highlights Beth’s nurturing side and Jo’s independence, showing two contrasting yet equally strong forms of femininity. The feminine empathy expressed through «<i>жып-жылы жұмсақ алақанымен</i>» reinforces the feminist idea that women’s emotional resilience remains unbroken despite domestic burdens.
3.	“I will try and be what he loves to call me, “a little woman” and not be rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else,” said Jo,	-Ал мен әкемнің көргісі келгеніндей кішкентай ханым болуға тырысамын, бетімен кеткен жүгенсіз, дөрекі болмаймын. Қиялға еріп белгісіз жаққа қаңғып кетпей, өз міндетімді осы	Direct Translation: “<i>A little woman</i>” → «<i>кішкентай ханым</i>», preserving the literal meaning. Adaptation: “<i>Face a rebel or two down South</i>” → «<i>оңтүстіктің бір-екі бүлікшісімен бетпе-бет</i>», culturally adjusted for clarity. Explicitation: “<i>Not be rough and wild</i>” →	This translation shows Jo’s inner conflict between duty and independence. Her decision to be a “little woman” symbolizes responsibility rather than submission. It reflects feminist themes of self-control, inner strength, and quiet resistance against

thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.(9p)	жерде, үйде жүріп орындаймын,-деді Джо. Үйде қалып, өзіне-өзі ие болуы оңтүстіктің бір-екі бүлікшісімен бетпе-бет кездескеннен де қиын екенін іштей ойлап қойды.(19)	«бетімен кеткен жүгенсіз, дөрекі болмаймын», expanding the description for precision. Naturalization: “Keeping her temper at home” → «үйде қалып, өзіне-өзі ие болуы», phrased naturally in Kazakh. Connotation Adjustment: The relationship between Jo and her father is made clearer in Kazakh.	restrictive gender roles.
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The analysis of selected extracts from *Little Women* and their Kazakh translations shows how translation techniques affect gender representation and feminist meaning. The translator uses direct translation, explicitation, cultural adaptation, omission, and tone adjustment to reflect women’s identity and emotions.

Explicitation and cultural adaptation help connect Western feminist ideas with Kazakh culture. For example, “my hands get stiff” becomes “like wood,” a natural image that strengthens the emotional effect and makes the feminist message clearer for Kazakh readers.

Tone adjustments make women’s voices stronger, highlighting their endurance and independence. Jo’s assertiveness and Beth’s gentle strength are expressed vividly, emphasizing women’s emotional resilience.

At the same time, omissions and simplifications slightly reduce some feminist nuances. These likely aim to make the translation smoother or culturally suitable but may lessen the critical tone toward gender inequality.

Despite these changes, the translation remains faithful to the novel’s feminist spirit. It presents women as capable, emotional, and strong, while reflecting local cultural values. The translator acts as a cultural mediator, balancing accuracy and ideology to ensure the story resonates with Kazakh readers.

Overall, the translation preserves and sometimes amplifies feminist themes, showing how women’s experiences and struggles are reinterpreted within a Kazakh cultural framework.

Results

The comparative analysis of 15 extracts from *Little Women* and their Kazakh translations revealed various translation techniques shaping how gender and feminist meanings appear in the target text. The Kazakh version not only preserves but often amplifies Alcott’s feminist message through stylistic and cultural adaptation.

1. Distribution of Translation Techniques

Approximately : Explicitation – 24%, cultural adaptation – 21%, direct translation – 18%, tone adjustment – 15%, omission – 9%, sentence structure adjustment – 7%, naturalisation – 4%, substitution – 2%

The prevalence of explicitation and cultural adaptation indicates an effort to clarify gendered meanings and preserve the feminist tone.

2. Feminist Effect of Translation: Amplified – 47%, preserved/neutral – 40%, diluted/erased – 13%

Almost half of the examples amplify feminist ideas, particularly through stronger emotional language and imagery. Jo’s confidence and Beth’s domestic exhaustion are rendered more vividly, emphasizing women’s inner strength and resistance to gender norms.

3. Thematic Observations: Stronger female voice: Expressive and emotional language highlights women’s experiences (e.g., “тап бір ағаш дерсің”); Cultural sensitivity: Western feminist ideas are localized without losing meaning; Selective omission: Some minor details are omitted, slightly softening tone but preserving core ideas; Balanced gender portrayal: Both gentle femininity (Beth) and assertiveness (Jo) are maintained.

4. Overall Findings

The translation reflects a feminist orientation, using creative linguistic and cultural strategies to reinforce gender representation. The translator acts as a cultural mediator, reshaping the text to be both emotionally powerful and ideologically progressive for Kazakh readers.

Conclusion

The Kazakh translation of *Little Women* successfully balances feminist ideals with local cultural norms. Through explicitation, tone adjustment and cultural adaptation, the translator maintains the novel's feminist essence while making it culturally resonant. Minor omissions do not diminish the portrayal of women as emotionally strong and independent. Overall, the translation contributes to the development of a feminist perspective in Kazakh translation studies.

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