Gender in English and Arabic with Reference to Translation

by
Najat Abdul Muttalib   (M.A. in Translation)
Department of Tourism
College of Administration and Economics
University of al-Mustansiria

Abstract

Gender means 'kind' or 'class'. It is a grammatical category based on forms of nouns, pronouns, and/or adjectives.

English language makes few gender distinctions between feminine and masculine. The connection between the biological category 'sex' and the grammatical category 'gender' is very close. For natural sex distinctions determine English gender distinctions. Gender also makes distinctions between animate and inanimate nouns. Moreover, there are common gender and collective gender.

Gender "الجنس" in Arabic is of two kinds مذكرmasculine and مؤنث feminine, and each of them could be حقيقي real or مجازي tropical , i.e. مذكر حقيقي and مذكر مجازي , and مؤنث حقيقي and مؤنث مجازي. Gender distinctions in Arabic are clear, and there are three morphemes which marks feminine gender in Arabic: تاء التأنيث and ألف التأنيث by its two kinds الممدودة and المقصورة.

The research will deal, first, with gender and its kinds in English, and then gender and its kinds in Arabic. Then applied discussion of gender will be done in verses translated from Arabic into English. The last step, as a conclusion, will be a comparison between English and Arabic genders with references to their translation.

The most obvious points in the conclusion show, first, that English gender is natural, whereas Arabic gender is grammatical. Second, gender in English is more relevant to pronouns, whereas gender in Arabic is relevant to nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives. Third, gender is different from one language to another not only in English and Arabic, and that is because of culture-bound.

1. Gender in English

1.1. Natural and Grammatical Gender

Gender in English grammar is traditionally used to refer to a grammatical distinction that corresponds roughly to the semantic distinction between males, females, and sexless things (Sledd, 1959:213). This kind of gender which Lyons (1968:283) calls "natural gender", where items refer to the sex of real world entities, is a biological rather than a linguistic classification of gender (Crystal, 1997:164), (Hartman and Stork, 1972:93). Thus, in English, gender is classified on some natural or semantic basis into masculine, feminine, and neuter; so the words *boy, girl,* and *fan,* for example, are respectively masculine, feminine, and neuter, according to their meaning (Fayadh,1999:54).

As for grammatical gender, there is no semantic association between the gender of a noun and the physical or other properties of the person or object denoted by that noun (Lyons,1968:284). However, grammatical gender does not play an important role in English grammar (Hartman and Stork, 1972:93). For example, *prince: princess*, or *gander: goose* have no thing to do with grammar.

Yet, the distinctions between male, female, and sexless gender have some connexion with natural distinctions, but in many cases it seams to be purely arbitrary without any reference to natural conditions (Jespersen,1976:188). For example, *the sun* takes some times **he** pronoun, or *certain ship* takes **she** pronoun.

Additionally, the gender of an English noun is determined primarily by the personal pronoun, which substitute for it (*he* for masculine, *she* for feminine, or *it* for neuter) (Sledd,1959:213). So, with nouns for which *he* or *she* is the usual substitute, *who* and *that* are used as relatives; with nouns that it replaces, *that* and *which* are usual.

To conclude, a grammatical gender is a system of gender distinctions among *masculine, feminine*, and *neuter* and does not roughly correspond to distinctions among *male, female*, and *inanimate* (Sledd,1959:215), on one hand. On the other hand, there is a correspondence between gender distinctions and sex distinctions in the natural system of gender (ibid.). Thus, natural sex distinction determines English gender distinction (Qurik and Greenbaum, 1973:89). For example, the correlation between pronouns *he/she* co-occur with *who/whose*, whereas *it* co-occur with *which*.

1.2. Animate Gender
1.2.1. Animate single gender

Animate gender includes all the nouns for persons and animals (Palmer,1971:87). Animate personal gender includes masculine and feminine nouns. Masculine nouns are replaced by 'he' and 'who'; feminine nouns are replaced by 'she' and 'who' (Aziz,1989:120).

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:90-91) divide personal gender into two types: "morphologically unmarked(1) gender" such as *brother: sister, gentleman: lady, king: queen, uncle: aunt*, and "morphologically marked gender" such as, *host: hostess, duck: duchess, hero: heroine, widower: widow, usher: usherette.* Jespersen (1976:190-91) states that there is gender for one sex that is derived from words for the other such as, *launderer: laundress, traitor: traitress*, and a more clear ending is seen in *prosecutor: prosecutrix, testator: testatrix.*

As for animate (non-personal)gender, it is related to animals, Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:92) call it gender of higher animals such as, *cock: hen, lion: lioness, gander: goose, stallion: mare.*

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(1)Unmarked that is to be common and can be recognized. It versus marked that is to have a distinctive feature to distinguish it from others (Hartman and Stork, 1972:137).

Palmer (1971:189), however, argues against those kinds of gender. In his appendix he says that these pairs of words of the type *uncle:aunt, brother:sister, stallion:mare* are a lexical feature of English not a grammatical one, i.e. related to sex, not gender. He adds that the words with the suffix (-ess) e.g. *princess*, and *duchess* are also related to lexical feature, since they are irregular, and there are no words as *doctoress* or *kingess* (ibid.).

1.2.2. Animate dual gender

Many lexical items for animate beings do not indicate sex such as, *cousin, friend, enemy, fool,* or for animals, *cat, rabbit, fish, frog, worm* (Jespersen,1976:191).

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:91) say that this class of gender has a number of nouns, *cook, criminal, person, professor, librarian, doctor, student ….etc.* For clarity, it is necessary to use a "gender marker" as *man student, girl friend* or "sex marker" as *a male nurse, a female engineer*.

Jespersen (1976:192) calls the sex marker 'an adjective', so he sees that an adjective must be added to lexical items, e.g. *a male reader, a female cousin, a female sparrow*. He also adds that sometimes sex-word can be combined with sex-word from another species, e.g. *peacock: peahen, cock-pheasant: hen-pheasant, dog: otter, bitch: otter* (ibid.). For human beings he says that there are compound words, e.g. *lady friend: gentleman friend, man servant: woman servant (*ibid.).

1.2.3. Animate common gender

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:91) define the common gender nouns as intermediate nouns that occur between personal and non-personal feature. Nouns may be replaced by either 'he' or 'she' when treated as personal, or by 'it', when they are treated non-personal (Aziz,1989:120). For example, if the mother refers to her *baby,* she will use *he* or *she* according to the sex, but anyone who does not concern emotionally with *the baby* will refer to *the baby* by *it* (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:92). Jespersen (1976:189) mentions a list of nouns, which have one common word and a word for each sex:

parent	father	mother
monarch	king	queen
horse	stallion	mare
deer	stag, hart	hind

1.3. Inanimate Gender

Inanimate nouns or lower animals both are related to the class of inanimate gender (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:93); for example, both *snake* and *box* have 'which' and 'it' as pronouns. However, some nouns with gender markers, e.g. *she-goat, he-goat, male-frog,* and *hen-pheasant* indicate sex.

Aziz (1989:121) calls this kind of gender as lower animals. He defines it as those nouns which are replaced by 'it' and 'which' and are treated as inanimate things, e.g. *snake, fly ant* (ibid.). Jespersen (1976:188) refers, under the heading of **gender**, to words denoting inanimate thing e.g. *it, what, something* which are related to pronouns (ibid.).

1.4. Collective and Other Nouns Related to Gender

Collective nouns are different from other nouns in taking, as pronoun substitutes, either singular (it) or plural (they) without changing number in the noun e.g. *army-it/they* (Quirk and Greenbaum,1973:92). Thus, they can be viewed as personal or non-personal (Aziz,1989:120).

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:93) mention what they call "higher organism". There are names of countries which have different gender depending on their use (ibid.). As geographical units they are treated as inanimate, e.g. *Looking at the map we see France here, it is one of the largest countries of Europe*; or as political economic units they are treated as feminine, e.g. *France has been able to increase **her** exports this year* (ibid.). They add that it is possible to place *ship* and other entities to this characteristic of gender; towards these entities an affectionate attitude is expressed, e.g. *What a lovely ship! What is **she** called*? (ibid.)

2- Gender in Arabic

2.1. Grammatical and Natural Gender

Gender is known in Arabic as 'الجنس' which means "kind" or "sort", and this is different from ' إسم الجنس' (2). [See al-Jerjani, 1986:48]

Arabic Gender 'الجنس' is two kinds masculine مذكر and feminine مؤنث. The two kinds are either: the real gender الجنس الحقيقي or the tropical gender الجنس المجازي (al-Yaziji, 1985:52).

If they are classified according to nouns, they are two:

الاسم المعرب نوعان: ١-مذكر مثل(حاتم، قيس،جعفر، ...)
٢ـ مؤنث مثل (سنية، عزيزة،ليلى، ...) (Hasan،١٩٧٥ : ٥٨٥)

However, Wright (1955:23) classifies nouns according to their gender into three classes: masculine, feminine, and those that are both masculine and feminine.

In Arabic masculine gender is considered the unmarked form, and feminine gender is the marked one; thus, what distinguishes masculine nouns or adjectives from feminine ones is: تاء التأنيث e.g. خَادم،
ألف التأنيث بنوعيها: المقصورة والممدودة and خَادمة
e.g. ليلى، لمياء (Hywood and Nahmad, 1965:27), (Hasan, 1975:585).

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(2) The proper noun اسم العلم is either 'personal' شخصي, i.e. a noun denoting a person by himself/herself (or a thing by itself) e.g. Zaid, or 'generic' جنسي , i.e. a noun denoting the kind (of an animate) e.g. اسامة is the generic name of الأسد or ثعالة is the generic name of الثعلب [see Ibin Hisham,1961:96-97, and Ibid.,1957:138].

Hasan (1975:585-86) adds that there is a mark implied, i.e. تاء التأنيث المقدرة . First, it is in the three letter words as, عين، اذن،أرض, كتف (see also Wright,1955:178) and it can be recognized when the word is minimized as: عيينة،أذينة، أريضة، كتيفة، (p.585). Second, it can be recognized when the word combined with a verb, an adjective, or an administrative as (p.568):

١-العقرب قتلتها . -العقرب السامة قتّالة. ٣- هذه العقرب.

2.2. Animate Gender

2.2.1. Animate single gender

Animate gender includes all the words for persons and animals (Palmer,1971:87). This universal sentence of Palmer can be applied to Arabic. The Arabic masculine nouns: حاتم، قيس، جعفر ... are called مذكر حقيقي 'a real masculine', and feminine nouns: ... ولّادة، هند، عصفورة are called مؤنث حقيقي 'a real feminine' (Hasan, 1975:588).

There are nouns that lacked feminine marker but refer to female sex as, ... سعاد، زينب , Hasan (ibid.) calls such nouns مؤنث معنوي 'semantic feminine'. However, there are masculine nouns that have feminine forms, as خَليفة *successor'* and علّامة *very learned';* Wright (1955:179) calls them مؤنث مجازي 'tropical feminine'. On the other side, Hasan (1975:587) calls such nouns and others as حمزة، اسامة، زكريا ، مؤنث لفظي 'verbal feminine'.

2.2.2. Animate dual gender

In Arabic there are certain measures that indicate adjectives and nouns applied to male and female, Hasan (1975: 591-93) states them:

١ـ فعول: صبور، (رجل صبور أو امرأة صبور).

٢ـ مفعال: معلام، (لكثيرة العلم وكثيره).

٣ـ مفعيل: منطيق ، (للرجل البليغ والمرأة البليغة).

٤ـ مفعل: مغشم ، (رجل أو امرأة مغشم).

(See also Wright, 1955:185-86) and (al-Galayni,1:2000:78)

Moreover, we have proper nouns as صباح، نهاد . Al-Galayni (p.77) adds nouns that have تاء التأنيث but they are applied to masculine and feminine as: السخلة، الحية and الشاة .

3.2.3. Animate common gender

As Arabic has only masculine and feminine genders, so the roots above can be called common genders, in addition to being dual ones. However, as-Safi (1974:134) lists three columns of gender in which he considers the first one as common gender in Arabic and English:

Common العام المشترك	Feminine المؤنث	Masculine المذكر
طفل أوطفلة child	بنت girl	ولد boy
احد الوالدين parent	والدة mother	والد father
طيور داجنة fowl	دجاجة hen	ديك cock
غنم sheep	شاة ٣ ewe	كبش ram

(3) Here the Iraqi writer considers شاة as a name of a female sheep, whereas the Egyptian writer al-Galayni above considers it as a dual gender, for male and female sheep. This proves to us that sometimes gender is related to convention or culture-bound.

Nevertheless, there are other minor kinds of gender, which could be dual or common gender despite of carrying 'feminine name', like: المؤنث اللفظي المعنوي 'semantic-verbal feminine', المؤنث التأويلي 'interpretive feminine', and المؤنث الحكمي 'expressive (gnomic) feminine' (see Hasan 1975:588-89).

2.3. Inanimate Gender

Inanimate nouns are all classified into masculine and feminine. There are مذكر مجازي 'tropical masculine' as, بدر moon, ليل night, باب door …etc.; and مؤنث مجازي 'unreal feminine' as, غرفة room, صحراء desert, ذكرى remembrance (Ibin Ya'ysh: 91as cited in Fayadh, 1999:70).

Hasan (1975:587) calls مؤنث مجازي شمس، دار 'tropical feminine'. There are many nouns which considered feminine "by agreement" (Fayadh, 1999:71) such as: حرب، أرض، نار i.e. agreement with adjectives and sometimes verbs. The above kinds of gender, which Hasan (1975: 588-89) mentions, could be related to inanimate gender.

Many names of countries and towns are considered feminine as: مصر، قرية، بلدة، بقعة ; others are originally masculine هجر،الشام،العراق (Wright,1955:178) [See also (Thatcher, 1958:26)].

2.4. Collective and Other Nouns Related to Gender

Wright (1955:160) says that collective nouns are those denoting masculine and feminine, chiefly animals and plants, e.g. حمام *pigeons,* بقر *cattle,* جراد *locusts* or *grass hoppers,* شجر *trees,* سحاب *clouds* …etc. He adds other nouns that denoting "a rational being", e.g. قوم *one's people or tribe,* رهط *or* نفر *a small number of men,* تجر *a company of merchants* (ibid.:181), but he mentions two exceptions that are originally masculine: ناس *men* and أهل *one's family.*

Thatcher (1958:27) states that many words which are singular in form have a collective meaning, .e.g. حجر *rock,* زيتون *olives.* He adds that to indicate a single object the feminine end (ة-) is appended to such words e.g. حجرة *apiece of rock or stone,* زيتونة *a single olive* (ibid.).

Wright (1955:187) says that there are adjectives, which are, by their signification, applicable to females only, مرضع *barren,* عاقر *pregnant,* حامل *suckling,* مطفل *having a child with her.*

Hasan (1975:593) mentions the same adjectives and says that they are peculiar to females, and they are one of their characteristics. He adds that such adjectives may take 'تاء التأنيث' but to drop it would be better.

3. Translating Gender

Here translation of gender will be discussed from Arabic into English. Four verses will be taken from the Holy Quran translated by Yusuf Ali. They are the verses (37-40) from سورة يس S.XXXVI, pp. 1178-79:

"وآيـة لهـم **الليـل** نسـلخ **منـه** النهـار فـإذا هـم مظلمـون (٣٧) والشـمس **تجري** لمستقر لـه ذلك تقدير العزيز العليم (٣٨) **والقمر قدرناه** منـازل حتى عاد كالعرجون القديم (٣٩) لا **الشمس** ينبغي **لهـا** أن تدرك القمـر ولا الليـــل ســــابق النهــــار وكـــل فـــي فلـــك يســــبحون(٤٠)

> 37. And a Sign for them is the Night: We withdraw therefrom the Day, and behold they are plunged in darkness; 38. And the **Sun** runs **his** course for a period determined for **him**: that is the decree of (Him), the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing. 39. And **the Moon, -** We have measured for **her** Mansions (to traverse) till **she** returns like the old (and withered) lower part of a date-stalk. 40. It is not permitted to the **Sun** to catch up the **Moon**, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: each (just) swims along in (**its** own) orbit (according to Law).

In the above verses, culture-boundness in gender between English and Arabic is clear (v. 38-39). However, الليـل (v.37) is masculine in Arabic as indicated by الهاء in the pronoun منـه، whereas in English the same word is translated genderless.

Moreover, the opposite is clear in v.39 where Arabic is genderless (see the verb عاد) and English has the pronoun 'she' which indicate gender.

In v.38 one can easily recognize how the feminine Sun in Arabic الشمس is translated into the masculine Sun in English, and the masculine Moon in Arabic القمـر is translated into the feminine Moon in English (4). The pronouns that indicated the masculine and feminine (printing in bold above) are 'his' and 'him' in v.38, and 'her' and 'she' in v.39 in English, and تاء التأنيث in تجـري and الهاء in قدرناه (v.38) and الهاء in قدرناه (v.39). In V.40 there is no reference to gender in Arabic, whereas in English the pronoun 'it' (not like the above verses) refers to the Sun and the Moon aside (as inanimate things).

Finally, the translation is convinced in relation to gender, except v.73 which can be translated as such: 'And a Sign for them is the Night: *We withdraw the Day from it,*'

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(4) "In primitive hunting cultures the moon is frequently regarded as male…", whereas "in agricultural traditions the moon is usually regarded as female…" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, (1974, s.v. *moon worship:*300), so English culture nowadays follows agriculture traditions.

On the other hand, "solar deities, gods personifying the sun, is identified with the Supreme Deity."(Ibid., s.v. *sun worship:*389) The Sun is almost always connected with power by all ancient civilization. Egyptians, Sumerians, Akkadians, Iranians, Romans, Mexicans, and Peruvian, for example, regarded the Sun as god, except Japanese who considered the Sun goddess as the ruler of the world(ibid.).

Al-Tibrisi (1959:7:323) says in his interpretation of v. 78 " فلمـا رأى الشمس بازغة قال هذا ربي هذا أكبر فلما أفلت قال يـا قوم إنـي بريء ممـا تشركون" in سورة الإنعـام that the Sun is feminized since she is considered very great because of her amount of light as the same of saying علاّمة or نسابة. However, he says that Abraham talked with the Sun in masculine gender هذا ربي because his language is not Arabic (ibid.).

Conclusion

(1) In English gender is natural. It means that there is an identity between the three genders, masculine, feminine, and neuter, and the biological facts of the person or object, i.e. male, female, and inanimate.

In Arabic, there are two genders, masculine and feminine and only the animate gender is natural. It is divided into natural (real) masculine 'مذكر حقيقي' and natural (real) feminine 'مؤنث حقيقي', whereas inanimate nouns have grammatical gender and it is divided into tropical masculine 'مذكر مجازي' and tropical feminine 'مؤنث مجازي'.

(2) Very few nouns are marked for gender in English, so gender is more relevant to pronouns. As for Arabic, nouns are marked for gender, which are relevant to pronouns, verbs, and adjectives. This difference poses a problem in translation, e.g.

The tall teacher came; he/she was walking slowly.

It can be translated into either

جاء المدرس الطويل وكان يمشي بطيئا. or
جاءت المدرسة الطويلة وكانت تمشي بطيئا.

Only the pronoun in English can show whether 'the teacher' is masculine or feminine, and if the second clause is omitted, the translator may not know the teacher's gender, apart from the text or context.

(3) The gender of nouns in Arabic is obvious and hardly changed, whereas in English gender cannot be recognized without the pronouns [however that is not always true (see the next point)], and it is easily

changed in accordance with emotion (as the example of *the ship* in 2.4. and *the baby* in 2.2.3. above).

(4) English has a few nouns that take certain morphemes to mark feminine forms, and the most common one is (-ess) such as, hostess, poetess, and lioness. In Arabic it has three morphemes to mark feminine form, الالف and الالف الممدودة ، التاءالمربوطة المقصورة التاء. The three morphemes are common. المربوطة sometimes could be the counterpart of the English morpheme (-ess). The above English feminine nouns can be rendered into: 'شاعرة' and 'ضيفة' but not اسدة ; it is 'لبوة'. However, 'tigress' can be rendered into 'نمرة'(depending on culture-bound).

(5) English uses "a gender marker" more than Arabic as *a male nurse* and *a female nurse.* They are translated into one single word for each ممرض ، ممرضة. Arabic has a gender marker but only with roots (see 3.2.2.), such as معطير , which is used for man and woman. As for the translator, he/she cannot recognize whether معطير is a man or a woman without using the gender marker: رجل معطير or امرأة معطير, so they could be rendered respectively, *a man who uses so much perfume,* or *a woman who uses so much perfume.*

(6) Collective gender nouns in English usually correspond to single gender nouns in Arabic as *the army- it/they* is rendered into الجيش.

(7) If substituted by pronouns, certain nouns (as *the sun* and *the moon*) related to convention in their classification as masculine or feminine, e.g. the above nouns would take 'he' and 'she' respectively, i.e. in English. In Arabic الشمس is considered feminine and القمر is masculine. Thus, to translate these nouns in

certain text, the translator should be aware of the use of pronouns.

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