A Comparison of Ecofeminist Concepts in a Persian Novel with Its English Translation: A Case Study[1]

_____ **Shima Tayebi Jazayeri[2] & Farzaneh Farahzad[3]**

Abstract

The term ecofeminism is a portmanteau, the combination of ecology and feminism. It implies that women have a close relationship with nature. It is possible to trace this relationship with nature in their writings as part of their experience. The present study was an attempt to explore the English translation of ecofeminist concepts in the Persian novel "Sāli Dirakht" [Year of the Tree], which appeared as metaphors and similes. Delabastita's translational relations were applied for similes. For metaphors, a set of strategies was identified and classified based on Delabastita's modes of translation of puns. The results were tabulated based on categories of natural elements introduced by ecofeminists and the strategies used for their translation. The findings reveal that natural elements in metaphors and similes were mostly translated into natural elements. As for translation strategies, substitution is the most applied translational relation in similes. Finally, the cases of metaphors translated into metaphors are almost equal to metaphors translated into non-metaphor.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Metaphor, Simile, Translation strategies

2. Corresponding Author: Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Translation Studies, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran; email: shimat.jazayeri@gmail.com

3. Professor, Department of English Translation Studies, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran; email: farzaneh.farahzad@gmail.com

Introduction

According to Warren (2001, pp. 5495–5499), the word "ecofeminisme" was coined by the French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne, in 1974. She believed that women possess a natural ability to protect the environment and resolve the environmental crisis created by modern patriarchal societies. Also, Sturgeon (1997, p. 127) believes that women are instinctively close to nature. Counted as a part of women's experience, it is possible to discover traces of such intimacy with nature in their writings. This relationship with nature is shared by women all over the world. However, as many feminists, especially the third wave, assert that women around the world do not go through the same experiences, this closeness with nature is manifested differently in women's writings and their translations. Therefore, by comparing writings of women with their translation, what women of the source and target languages have in common as well as what distinctive experiences they have, will be highlighted. The ecofeminist concepts will be recognized in the source text and will be compared with their translations. The result reveals how different women's relationship is with nature in the source and target languages.

Translation is defined as "the activity or process of changing the words of one language into the words in another language that have the same meaning." (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Based on this definition, there are always changes or shifts in the process of translation. At the surface of the text, such changes might occur at the word level and larger structures, among which natural elements appeared in metaphors and similes. These natural elements are taken from ecofeminist concepts raised at the end of the 20th century.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, Buckingham-Hartfield (2005, p. 35) believes, is the link between women and nature reflected in fertility, childbirth, and menstruation, connecting women's physiology with nature. This closeness with nature, according to Mellor (1992, p. 44), bestowed them the ability to liberate both women and nature. Şenel (2015, pp. 64–65) indicates that nature was deeply respected by the ancients, but in the modern world, it is cynically exploited by people. So, women and nature have been both inferior to men for a long time. In Sandiland's words (1999, p. 4), at the core of ecofeminism, lies the relationship between women and nature. Merchant (1996, p. xvi) believes that ecofeminists seek ways to save the planet and attain social justice.

In Cixous's first essay on theatre, *Going to the sea/the Mother*, the relationship between women (mothers) and nature is implied (quoted in Dobson, 1996, p. 22). Bray (2004, p. 112), too, believes that sea and water have always

been associated with femininity and motherhood. Moreover, Iranian women have always had a specific relationship with nature, especially gardens and herbs. In Iranian miniatures, women are mostly depicted in nature surrounded by flowers and they had, many of them still have, a thorough knowledge of herbals and their properties. This connection Iranian women have with nature is seen in their writings, too. Identifying the ecofeminist concepts in their writings, detecting the changes that occur in their translation and finally determining which shifts took place in the process of translation would be beneficial for translation teaching and translation practitioners.

Model

The present study is comparative, corpus-based. It is based on a model with three dimensions as shown in figure 1. The parallel corpus consists of a Persian novel "Sāli Dirakht" [Year of the Tree], and its English translation. The focus is on ecofeminist concepts that appeared in metaphors and similes. Some natural elements from cultural ecofeminists were selected, tracked in metaphors and similes, and finally, determined how they were translated into English.
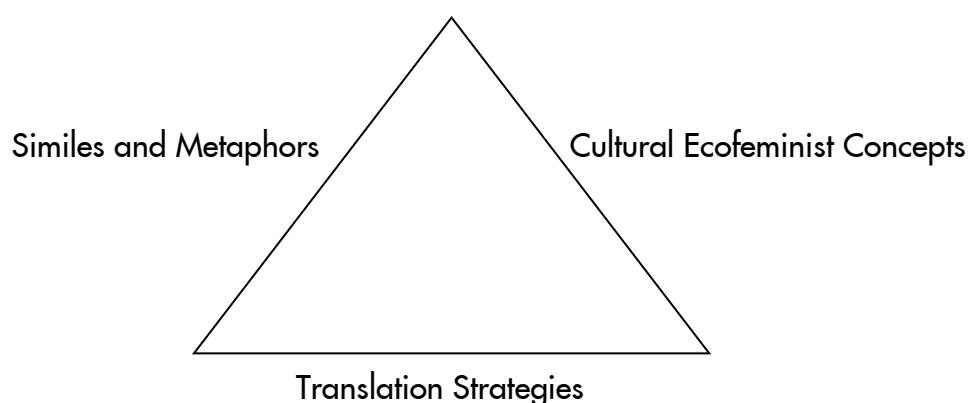

Figure 2. A Model for translation of similes and metaphors

Dimension one is concerned with ecofeminist concepts raised by Susan Griffin (1978). First, some elements defined by Griffin (1978) were taken as the basis of the study; then they were classified into four groups including:

- Botanical elements
- Animals
- Celestial bodies
- Four main elements based on Greek philosophy

It must be noted that by botanical elements, not only the plants and trees but also their parts such as branches, blossoms, and leaves were considered. The same

applies to the second group. So, animals and their organs like trunks, horns, tails, etc. were included in the data. The celestial bodies include stars, planets, the sun, the moon, and the earth. Lastly, the four main elements according to Greek philosophy include air, water, fire, and earth. For air and water, any form of which was considered. Therefore, wind, typhoons, hurricanes, etc. were labeled as air. Interestingly, in Persian, the air element is باد (bād) which literally means wind. In the same order, ice, fog, and vapor are considered as different forms of water. Similarly, for earth in the last group, there are various forms such as soil and dust.

At this point, the focus is on the natural elements and how they were translated into English. Are they translated as natural elements or unnatural? Further, in some cases, they were not translated. Therefore, the data were classified as follows:

- Natural (N): When a natural element is translated into a natural element.
- Unnatural (U): When a natural element is translated into an unnatural element
- Zero (Z): When the natural element was not translated.

It should be noted that the focus was only on the element being natural or not, and not its exact translation. Therefore, if a natural element was not translated literally, for example translating مثل گاو می‌خوری (literally: you eat like a cow) into (you eat like a horse), it is still considered as a natural element translated into another natural element. The same goes for different groups. In the example above, both natural elements were members of the animal group. The same applies to cases in which a natural element from one group was translated into a natural element from another group; for example, مرغ همسایه غازه (literally: the chicken of the neighbor is a goose) translated into "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence". Both are considered natural elements.

Dimension two is related to figures of speech. Metaphors and similes as two of the most important and frequent figures of speech were detected and examined. Metaphor is defined by Knowles and Moon (2006, p. 2) as using language "to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to". According to Newmark (1998a, p. 104), translation of metaphors is "the most important particular problem of translation". In line with Newmark, Guldin (2020, p. 326),

notes that "metaphor and its translatability became one of the central issues …in translation studies". The first step to translating metaphors, according to Larson (1998, pp. 277–278), is to determine whether it is a dead metaphor or a live one. To her, a dead metaphor is an idiom and must be translated as an idiom. Van den Broeck (1981, p. 80) asserts that extra-linguistic factors, i.e., the cultural context are one of the most important problems in translating a metaphor. Newmark (1998b, p. 98) calls for several factors to be considered by translators when they encounter a metaphor: (1) the importance of the metaphor within the context, (2) the cultural factor in the metaphor, (3) the extent of the reader's commitment, and (4) the reader's knowledge.

Cambridge Dictionary (2024) defines simile as "an expression comparing one thing with another, always including one of the words "as" or "like"." However, Pierini (2007, p. 23) admits that the two entities being compared are not exactly alike and there is just one aspect of similarity. In line with Pierini, Gioia and Kennedy (1995, p. 680) emphasize that the things that are compared are "dissimilar in kind" and Dancygier and Sweetster (2014, p. 138) believe that the meaning of a simile is dependent upon using the word "like" and similar words. Finally, Israel (quoted in Erdita, 2021, p. 173) calls simile "an overt act of comparison" which relies on terms such as "like" and "as".

To translate similes, Pierini (2007, p. 31) suggests some strategies including:

- Translating literally
- Replacing the vehicle with a different vehicle
- Reducing the simile to its sense
- Retaining the vehicle adding the similarity feature(s)
- Replacing the vehicle with a brief explanation
- Omitting the simile

Therefore, the length of the unit of analysis was varied since according to Hart (2010, p. 129) metaphors have no specific grammatical structure. Even a single word can be used metaphorically. There is no limitation for the length of a metaphor as Leech (1991, p. 159) asserts that a metaphor may be several lines and Newmark (1998b, p. 94) states that a metaphor can be as long as a poem. The same goes for similes. Further, the comparing words were taken as the criteria for differentiating metaphors from similes. Therefore, any structure including گویی (as if) مانند (like) مثل ;(as) شبیه ;(same as) and the like was considered as a simile.

Dimension three is related to translation strategies. There were two different groups of strategies for analyzing the data. Both were taken from Delabastita (1993). For the translation of similes, strategies suggested by Delabastita (quoted in Osimo, 2014) which he calls translational relations were employed as follows:

- Substitution: translational equivalent
- Repetition: repeating a term without translating
- Deletion: no translation
- Addition: adding some information
- Permutation: changing the location of a term

To analyze the translation of the metaphors, a model was developed based on Delabastita's modes of translation for puns (1993, pp. 192–209). He introduces four modes for translating puns including:

- Pun to pun: translating a pun into another pun
- Pun to punoid: translating it into another wordplay
- Pun to non-pun: explanation
- Pun to zero: no translation

Adopting the four strategies above, metaphors can be translated in four ways including:

- Metaphor to metaphor: when a metaphor in the source text is translated into a metaphor in the target text. The translation is not necessarily, and in many cases, it is not really, literally.
- Metaphor to simile: translating a metaphor to a more explicit version of it, i.e., simile.
- Metaphor to non-metaphor: translating metaphor into plain text which results in an explanation
- Metaphor to zero: no translation

Data Collection

The present study compares a Persian novel with its English translation. The novel, سال درخت "Sāli Dirakht" [Year of the Tree], written by a Persian novelist, Zoha Kazemi, in 2013 and published by Negah Publication, Tehran; and translated into English in 2016 by Caroline Croskery, published by Fog & Candle publication, London was the corpus of the study. Both the writer and the translator are female. All the metaphors and similes including one of the natural elements mentioned

above were extracted. Their translations were detected and classified.[4] First, the focus was on how natural elements were translated, i.e., to a natural element, to something unnatural or zero. Then the strategies applied in translation were determined. The data are tabulated below.

12 similes were detected in which a natural element was included. In all of them, but two, the natural element was an animal. All of them were translated and none was omitted. In only two of the ten similes containing an animal, the natural element was translated into an unnatural element, and the remaining eight similes were rendered using a natural element, mostly the same animal mentioned in the source text. The two similes that include a botanical element, too, were translated into a natural element from the same category.

16 metaphors were detected which included a botanical element. Their translation into natural or unnatural elements is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 1. Translation of botanical elements in metaphors

Naturalness of the element	No.
Natural	8
Unnatural	4
Zero	4
Total	16

Table 1 shows that most of the botanical elements that appeared in metaphors were translated into a natural element. Four of them were translated into an unnatural element and four metaphors including a botanical element were omitted in the English translation.

There are only two metaphors containing an animal in the whole text. One of them was translated into an unnatural element and the other was translated literally, into a natural element.

There were 30 metaphors which include one of the four main elements of Greek philosophy. Table 2 below, shows details about their translation into natural or unnatural elements.

Table 2. Translation of metaphors containing one of the main elements

Naturalness of the element	No.
Natural	18

---

4. Due to the limited number of words allowed, the detailed tables showing metaphors and similes have been skipped.

Unnatural	9
Zero	3
Total	30

As Table 2 shows, from the 30 metaphors found which include one of the main elements, 18 were translated into a natural element, mostly into the same element. Nine of them were not *translated* into a natural element and 3 were not translated at all.

There were 3 cases of metaphors containing one of the celestial bodies. How they were translated is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Translation of celestial bodies

Naturalness of the element	No.
Natural	5
Unnatural	3
Zero	0
Total	8

As table 3 shows, the number of metaphors which include one of the celestial bodies was 8 of which 5 were translated into a natural element and 3 were translated into an unnatural element. There is no example of deletion or zero translation and all of them were rendered.

Table 4. All four groups of metaphors in a glance

Naturalness of the element	No.
Natural	32
Unnatural	17
Zero	7
Total	56

As Table 4 shows, 56 metaphors were found in which the writer used one of the natural elements. Seven out of 56 were not translated. Four of them were in the dedication part of the book where the writer sees herself as a tree with its parts namely root, trunk, branch, and leaves. For the other three cases of zero translation, in one case, two synonyms were used in the text and the metaphorical one was skipped. In the other, the natural element was omitted due to its repetition in the Persian text. The translator connected two sentences, skipping one of the natural elements. In the third case, it seems that this part of the text was a little complex and the translator simply did not see it or preferred not to translate it.

Out of the remaining 49 translated metaphors in which a natural element was found, 32 were translated into metaphors including natural elements. It means

that in most cases the feeling of closeness with natural elements was kept. However, there were 17 cases of metaphors that were not translated with a natural element.

Strategies of Translation

The following translational relations in rendering similes were as follows:

Table 5. Translational relations for similes

Translational relations	Number
Substitution	6
Deletion	4
Addition	2
Repetition	-
Permutation	-
Total:	12

The table shows that substitution was used in 6 similes out of 12. There were four cases of deletion and only in 2 cases, addition was applied. No cases of repetition were detected. Finally, there was no case of permutation. According to Delabastita (Quoted in Osimo, 2014), permutation is what translators call compensation. This is the strategy used to make up for what translators estimated to be lost during the process of translation. When there is no permutation, there is no compensation which means that there is nothing to compensate for; and whatever they needed to transfer to the target language was delivered. According to Delabastita (1993, p. 37), cases in which permutation is applied include footnotes and italics. While italics may appear in novels, you do not see many footnotes or endnotes in novels; in fact, novels rarely include annotations.

Table 6. Translation strategies for metaphors

Translation strategies	Number
Metaphor	24
Simile	3
Non-metaphor	22
Deletion	7
Total:	56

Interestingly, a substantial number of the metaphors were translated into English metaphors. In fact, out of 56 metaphors that were detected in the Persian text, 24 were translated into English metaphors. Normally, the first strategy to render metaphors is to translate them into a metaphor in the target language.

Although metaphors and similes are close figures of speech whose difference is only regarding their being direct or not, not many metaphors were translated into

similes, only 3 out of 56. Similes are direct metaphors in which a comparing word, for instance, like or as, is mentioned. It is possible to deduce that similes are metaphors with a comparing word which makes them easier to comprehend.

Explanation as a strategy for translating metaphors focuses on transferring the meaning rather than the literary feature of the text. It is quite common in the translation of informational texts in which meaning is the most significant part of the text and therefore translation. Regarding literary texts, the beauty and the poetic language of the text are not less important than its meaning. However, the data show that 22 out of 56 cases of the metaphors were translated into plain and explanatory language. So, whenever it was impossible to transfer the artistic features of the text, the meaning of the text was conveyed.

Out of the 56 metaphors, 7 were deleted and not translated at all. Although many critics reject deletion as a strategy of translation, it is seen in the translation of many literary texts, especially novels.

Conclusion

For a clearer understanding of the concluding part, it is organized in several paragraphs.

Translation of Natural Elements in Similes

The fact that the majority of similes with a natural element, almost all of them, contain the name of an animal shows that the writer feels more comfortable with animals among other natural elements. It seems that the writer conveyed her message more easily through similes in which a comparison is made with some animals. It must be noted that in the Persian language, it is quite common to make an analogy with animals and people/objects. It is concluded that here the border between human beings and animals is blurred. Although in likening human attributes and activities to those of animals, there are both positive and negative connotations, what matters, is the nature of such a comparison between the two groups and the possibility of doing so. To be intimate with the natural environment and its components, to feel sympathy with living and non-living objects of nature, it is essential to see the existing similarities between them and human beings.

That 10 out of 12 similes containing a natural element were translated into similes with natural elements implies that the Persian and English languages have the same view about using animals and botanical elements in similes. Likening mostly human beings and in one or two cases, things, to animals and botany is common in Persian and as translation shows is accepted in the English language. It implies that in Persian and English languages, there is the same view about

comparing human beings to animals. This is what ecofeminists believe, that all living beings are equal. Therefore, in translation classes, it is safe to suggest students translate analogies between animals and people as they are.

Translation of Natural Elements in Metaphors

That in the Persian version of the book, which is 147 pages, 56 metaphors were detected means that a metaphor containing a natural element was found in almost every three pages which makes it quite frequent. This frequency adds poetic language to the text. Moreover, it is a conservative way of talking, to be careful with what you say and how you say as a woman who is one of the members of the marginal group in a patriarchal society. As only metaphors containing a natural element were selected, the number of metaphors in general was higher than that. The frequent use of metaphors implies using indirect language. Further, conveying the message of the text through metaphors results in a more effective language. The fact that the dedication part of the Persian novel is in metaphorical language shows that not only does the text convey its message in an indirect language, but even the writer sees herself as a metaphor and introduces herself using them. The writer dedicates her work to "the dear covering earth", which proves an intimacy between her and the earth. This is exactly what ecofeminists believe, the closeness women have with nature.

Unfortunately, the dedication page was simply ignored. Like many paratextual elements that are excluded in some translated texts or go through fundamental changes during the process of translation, namely the cover, the font of the title, etc., this dedication which is completely written in metaphorical language was omitted from the English text. Unlike the cover and the title page on which there is a major change of adding the translator (s)' name, such a drastic change for the dedication page is not inevitable. The dedication page makes the text personal as if the readers feel closer to the writer; it is like a signature of the author, emphasizing the ownership of the text by her. A translated text is the result of cooperation between the translator and the author. Now, the text does not solely belong to the author. This can be a reason for not translating the dedication part. It means that the translator exercised her right by deleting what belongs to the author.

The fact that in most cases the natural element in metaphors was kept as a natural element in translation shows the relationship women of both the source text and the target text have with nature. So, in both English and Persian, it is possible to communicate the message through nature and its constituents, even in symbolic language. It proves the existence of commonalities all women around the world have in their relationship with nature.

However, the relatively high number of cases of metaphors in which a natural element was not translated into a natural element is based on differences between women and their experiences in different societies. As language, in this case literature, is a mirror of culture in a society, it can be concluded that Persian culture encompasses more intimacy with natural elements, a close relationship with Mother Nature, and what "she" bestows on us. Therefore, students must be told to take some distance from the source text, in this case Persian, and focus on how the meaning implied by the metaphor can be transferred into English; considering that it does not necessarily include a natural element.

Translation Strategies for Similes

The fact that half of the cases of similes were translated using the substitution strategy proves what Delabastita (1993) notes about translational relations, as he says that substitution is the most frequent strategy in translation, called it the closest equivalent, although it is always an approximation and never an exact translation. Analysis of the data indicates that the translator found the closest equivalent whenever it was appropriate. It implies that only when a close equivalence, substitution in Delabastita's words, was not possible, the translator resorted to other strategies.

The reason for having no repetition is the distance between Persian culture and English culture, which contradicts what was mentioned above regarding commonalities between women in two different societies. It seems that the distance between languages is not as small as it seems. It is not vast, either. That's why there are not many cases of addition. The message was conveyed without any need to employ the strategy of addition. The fact that only two cases of addition were found shows that there was no need for extra explanation. Although explicitation and expansion are said to be among universals of translation; in translating similes in this novel, not many cases were found of them. It has different reasons. It may be due to the rapid development in global communication which led to a greater familiarity with foreign cultures. Therefore, the audience did not need any explanation to receive the message of the text and communicate with the novel and its characters. The second reason is related to the triviality of the similes. As Delabastita (1993) pointed out deletion can be the opposite of addition, the small number of additions and the high number of deletions implies that these similes were not among the important parts of the text. So, there would be no harm in removing them. Therefore, their omission would not lead to an incomplete translation, and the message was transferred perfectly well without them.

Translation Strategies for Metaphors

That over half of the metaphors were translated into a metaphor indicates the familiarity the translator had with Persian and English literary texts. Having such a familiarity, translators can enjoy the freedom of choosing a metaphor in the target language which is considered as an appropriate and adequate rendering of the source text metaphors. Keeping the metaphors as metaphors can justify not translating them into similes. However, the small number of metaphors translated into similes indicates that the translator felt that more explanation was necessary. It also shows that the translator prioritized fluency over preserving figures of speech. However, by rendering a metaphor into a simile, she could easily resort to a figure of speech which was one level easier than metaphor. The meaning was preserved and although the figure of speech was changed, it was still a literary device.

There are several reasons for deleting a part of the source text and not transferring it to the target text. As stated above, the translator may feel that the deleted part was not important. In this case, the dedication page, written in metaphorical language, was deleted completely. The second reason is the feeling that the message was transferred without rendering that specific part of the language. It might be repeated in another part of the text using other words, so the translator did not need to translate both. The third reason can be related to the constraints imposed on the translator from the publisher such as limitation in the volume of books. Finally, it can be about censorship which is a policy in publications leading to deletion or manipulation of translated texts.

Finally, the high number of natural elements appearing in metaphors and similes in such a short novel shows the close relationship the author has with nature and natural elements. But not all of them can be translated into a natural element. Therefore, each case must be considered separately. The first step is to translate it into a natural element, provided that the result is appropriate. By translating a natural element into an unnatural one, the message would be transferred, but not the closeness with nature felt in the text.

As for metaphors and similes, while the latter does not make any problems for translators; they can be always translated into a simile, there are two most used strategies for the translation of metaphors; they might be translated into a metaphor if possible and if not, an explanation is used as the last resort.

It must be noted that due to the small corpus, only a short Persian novel, and its English translation and although it relatively has a lot of figures of speech, the results cannot be generalized. However, this model can be applied to a larger corpus and with different language pairs.

Works Cited:

Buckingham-Hatfield, S. (2005). Gender and environment. Routledge.

Cambridge dictionary. (2024). Retrieved March 21, 2024, from cambridge.org

Dancygier, B., & Sweetser, E. (2014). Figurative language. Cambridge University Press.

Delabastita, D. (1993). There's a double tongue: An investigation into the translation of Shakespeare's wordplay, with special reference to Hamlet. Rodopi.

Erdita, D. (2021). Translation strategies of similes in "Game of thrones" Novel. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, 4(4), 172–177.

Gioia, D., & Kennedy, X. J. (1995). An introduction to fiction, poetry, and drama. Kennedy Harper Collins College Publishers Inc.

Griffin, S. (2015). Woman and nature: The roaring inside her (2nd ed.). Open Road.

Guldin, R. (2020). Metaphorics. In M. Baker, & G. Saldanha (Eds.), Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies (3rd ed., pp. 324–329). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Halliday, M. A. (1994). An introduction to functional grammar (2nd ed.). Arnold.

Hart, C. (2010). Critical discourse analysis and cognitive science: New perspectives on immigration discourse. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kazemi, Z. (2016). Year of the tree. (C. Croskery, Trans.) Fog and Candle.

Knowles, M., & Moon, R. (2006). Introducing metaphor. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Larson, M. L. (1998). Meaning-based translation: A guide to cross-language equivalence. University Press of American.

Leech, G. N. (1991). A linguistic guide to English poetry. Longman.

Mellor, M. (1992). Eco-feminism and eco-socialism: Dilemmas of essentialism and materialism. Capitalism Nature Socialism, 3(2), 43–62.

Merchant, C. (1996). Earthcare: women and the environment. Routledge.

Newmark, P. (1998). A textbook of translation. Longman.

Newmark, P. (1998). The translation of metaphor. Babel, 26(2), 93–100.

Osimo, B. (2014). Delabastita, Torop. Retrieved January 16, 2023, from Logos: courses.logos.it

Pierini, P. (2007). Simile in English: From description to translation. Círculo de lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación (calc)(29), 21–43.

Sandilands, C. (1999). The good-natured feminist: Ecofeminism and the quest for democracy. University of Minnesota Press.

Şenel, N. (2015). An ecofeminist reading on Margaret Atwood's The handmaid's tale and Starhawk's The fifth sacred thing (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Kayseri, Turkey: Erciyes University.

Sturgeon, N. (1997). Ecofeminist natures. Routledge.

van den Broeck, R. (1981). The limits of translatability exemplified by metaphor translation. Translation Theory and Intercultural Relations, 2(4), 73–78.

Warren, K. J. (2001). Feminst theory: Ecofeminist and cultural feminist. In N. J. Smelser, & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), International encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences (pp. 5495–5499). Pergamon.

کاظمی، ض. (۱۳۹۲). سال درخت. نگاه.