


The Relation Between Age and Subject Field of Women Translators in Post-Islamic Revolution Iran

Afsaneh Mohammadi Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Faculty of Literature, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Islamic Azad University Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran

Shahrokhshadi* 

Mina Taheri  MA, Translation Studies, Department of English Language, Faculty of Literature, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Islamic Azad University Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

This study investigates the age of female translators in Iran from the Islamic Revolution (1979) to the year 2022, aiming to determine at which age women were most prolific in translation. The research analyzed 1,273 books translated by women during this period, categorizing the data into ten-year age intervals. The findings reveal that women aged thirty to forty were the most active in translation. Additionally, the study examined the subject of books translated by women in each age group, using the classification framework proposed by Farahzad, Mohammadi Shahrokh, and Ehteshami (2015). The results of the study revealed distinct patterns in the interests of female translators across different age ranges. Specifically, fiction emerged as the primary area of interest for women aged 31-40, with humanities being the second most translated genre for this group. In contrast, women aged 41-50 predominantly focused on translating works categorized under the general group. These findings illuminate the evolving preferences and concerns of female translators over time, reflecting broader shifts in their professional focus and interests.

Keywords: Age Range, Topics of Interest, Translation History, Woman Translators

*Corresponding author: af.shahrokh@srbiau.ac.ir

Cite this article: Mohammadi Shahrokhshadi, A. & Taheri, M. (2024). The relation between age and subject field of women translators in post-Islamic Revolution Iran. *Translation and Interpreting Research*, 1(3), 1-10. DOI: 10.22054/tir.2024.78753.1020

Publisher: ATU Press

Translation and Interpreting Research is the journal of Research Institute for Translation Studies (RITS), affiliated with Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Introduction

Translation has a long history in Iran; however, research on the role played by women as translators does not have a long tradition. For decades, the role of female translators has been ignored, the root of which might be their insignificant contribution before the Pahlavi era. However, even after the Pahlavi era, the lack of attention to female translators' role continued. As such, there are few researches available on this topic. In recent decades, women have shown a greater awareness and stronger presence in the field of translation, leading to their coming under the spotlight.

Generally speaking, historical research has been a marginal area of research. One of the primary problems that make researchers reluctant to do historical researches is that this type of research is time-consuming. The problem is doubled when there are not much previous data on a topic. Gender has indeed been an interesting topic in translation studies for a long time; however, most of the researches on the topic of gender focused on the differences between men's and women's translations. Therefore, historical studies on the gender of translators are not more than a handful. There have been few studies on the topics translated by women, their tone, their role in translation, and books that have been of interest to them. As such, there is not much research on the age of female translators and their topics of interest based on their age after the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

The aim here is to collect statistical data about the age of female translators and their topics of interest. Moreover, attempts have been made to speculate about the reasons, i.e. why women translators have been more prolific in certain ages and why they have chosen certain topics at certain ages. This study can help illuminate the way ahead for future historical researches. The most important contribution of this study is that the golden age in which women have been and are more prolific is identified which may, in turn, motivate talented female translators and provide interesting social data about the reasons behind it.

Literature Review

When it comes to the history of translation, we encounter two concepts: history and historiography. Lambert (1993) believes that history means the narration of historical events and historiography means the discourse of the historian. However, research on the history of translation is a rather recent topic. "The history of translation has received less attention than other types of research studies (Bandia & Bastin, 2006, p. 4). Ignoring the past and the weakness of the theoretical foundations on which historical research is based has caused a kind of delay in the field of translation studies compared to related fields which translation studies are now trying to get rid of (D'hulst, 2001).

Pym (1992), one of the leading thinkers in the field of translation studies, considers history and historiography as a single concept. Translation history or historiography includes a set of discourses that reflect the changes that have taken place in the field of translation or their occurrence has been prevented (Pym, 1992).

Regarding translation history in Iran, some researches have been carried out so far. Azarang (2015) provides a general history of translation in Iran from the early days to the contemporary times. He believes that writing the translation history of each country is not an easy task: it is a national project which is time-consuming and needs great interest. The translation history of Iran has experienced some movements, like movements in the Sassanid era, Samanid era, Qajar era, and decades 1320-1340 SH and after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Intellectual movements are triggered by social, political, cultural, and other factors or developmental movements that emphasize scientific, technical, economic, and managerial ideas and concepts; these factors strengthen and accelerate the translation process.

Amini (2013) focuses attention on the motives of translation in different historical periods. Regarding the Sassanid era, he concludes that translation in pre-Islamic times served to express government orders and religious teaching as well as communicating with other nations, transferring scientific achievements and meeting the needs of society. However, in the Pahlavi era, translations were carried out to spread political thoughts and ideologies. Amini (2013) believed that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, attention to translation and publication of religious texts expanded the scope of translation in various fields.

As for the history of women translators, few studies exist. One of them is carried out by Saeidian and Hosseini (2013) who believe that in the past two decades, women have had an outstanding growth in translating fictional literature. This unprecedented increase in the number of women translating literary works is a result of the general conditions prevailing in society, and the transition from traditional to modern society (Saeidian & Hosseini, 2013). They believe that women were largely absent from classical literature and much of contemporary literature, appearing mainly as fictional and passive characters. Only in a few works do we see women portrayed with independent and strong presence.

The most relevant study to the present one is the study of Farahzad, Mohammadi Shahrokhbabadi, and Ehteshami (2015) who claim that the contemporary history of women as translators can be divided into three periods. First, the hidden presence between 1900 and 1930 which coincides with the end of the Qajar dynasty. The first female translator, i.e. Taj Mah Afagh Al-Dawlah lived in this period. She was the first lady who started translating in Iran during the Qajar period and translated Nader Shah's play by Nariman Narimanov from Turkish into Persian (Saeidi, 2019). During the hidden presence period, the number of literate women was few because there were no schools (Mirza & Tehrani, 2019). The second period called the contested presence started in the 1940s and lasted until the Islamic Revolution of Iran (Farahzad et al., 2015). During this period, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became the king of Iran. More girls had the chance to go to school and the girls from the upper class went to bilingual schools (Mirza & Tehrani, 2019). In this period, most translators had a high social class or belonged to an aristocratic family. The third period, namely the professional presence period, began in 1979 and has lasted up to the present. In the third period, the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed.

The translation of books is not that significant in the 1280s, 1290s, 1300, and 1310, and the presence of one or two translators who belonged to a particular social class does not indicate the social presence of women, because the majority of society was not even literate and the number of translators was very few, regardless of gender. Findings of Farahzad et al. (2015) show that from 1981 to 2011, books which were translated by female translators reached 16648. By comparing these three decades with previous decades, Farahzad et al. (2015) showed that the number of women translators has increased significantly.

In the 1360s Hijri (1981), children's books had the highest frequency compared to other fields, and in the 1370s Hijri (1991), fiction was the most common field of translation (Farahzad et al., 2015). After that, natural and applied sciences with 450 books were among the areas of interest to women, and in the 1380s Hijri, women translators started translating in various fields. This diversity is a sign of the increase in the level of women's education.

This study tries to complement Farahzad et al.'s (2015) article by focusing on the third period. In the professional presence period, the number of literate women as well as the number of translated books increased significantly. In this article, attempts have been made to discover the age ranges of women translators, as well as the relation between age range and topics of the books.

Method

This study is based on library research and considered to be a historiography, based on Pym (1992) categorization of historical research on translation. Pym (1992) divides translation history into three areas:

1. Historical cataloging of translation: In this section, information is provided in the form of a list or catalog. In addition to preparing a list of translations and bibliographies, it includes gathering information about the lives of translators, publishers, publishing history, etc.
2. Historical criticism: Evaluates the role of translated texts in creating change or inhibition. In historical criticism, the position and role of translation should always be examined with regard to its time and the imposition of current beliefs on historical phenomena should be avoided.
3. Explanation: In this part, the translator tries to find the answer to the question, why translation occurred in a particular place and time? Explanation is one of the most important aspects of historical studies. Explanation requires paying attention to historical causality.

Pym (1998) believes that these three aspects are separate, but interrelated. In other words, although the preparation of lists is a separate process, it is always influenced by a certain amount of historical criticism and explanation, and in the same way, historical criticism always includes a level of explanation. According to Pym (1998), the weight of historical explanation and interpretation should be heavier than the other two, but unfortunately, most translation histories have not gone beyond the level of cataloging and historical criticism.

Translation history in Iran is no exception. The researches carried out so far mostly include cataloging and criticism, and rarely pay attention to explanation. As such, the present study sought to delve deeper in the history, and besides collecting data about the age range and topics, it tried to see why women translators had acted as they had.

Data Collection

The present study is a developmental research that deals with historical analysis and content analysis. The data has been gathered by referring to two databases: Book House and National Library and Archives of Iran, searching by the keyword 'translated'.

The search came up with 21000 books translated from 1978 to 2022, among which works translated by women were singled out. For more detailed information, the National Library and Archives of Iran was used. At first, ISBN was used to find accurate information, but when any problem was faced, the exact name of the book or the name of the publisher or the author was consulted.

In the first step, according to the purpose of the research, the year of publication of each book and the year of the birth of the translator were recorded. By using the collected data the exact age of the translator was calculated. The collected data were plotted using Excel sheets; however, some works did not include the translators' date of birth. In the second step, topics which were interesting for female translators in each age group were extracted and categorized based on Farahzad et al. (2015) categorization.

Results and Discussion

After collecting the data, the age ranges were classified at 10-year intervals, i.e. from 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80, 81-90, 91-100 and 101-110. Initially, the first (i.e. 1-10) and the last (i.e. 91-100, 101-110) intervals were not considered; however, after collecting the data, it became

clear that these ranges were also needed. The results of this study are provided in three parts: the frequency of translated works by age ranges, the topics chosen by female translators, and the relation between the two.

1. Frequency of Translated Works by Age Ranges

The frequency of translated works by female translators was calculated based on the gathered data. The chart below shows the Frequency of female translators in different age groups.

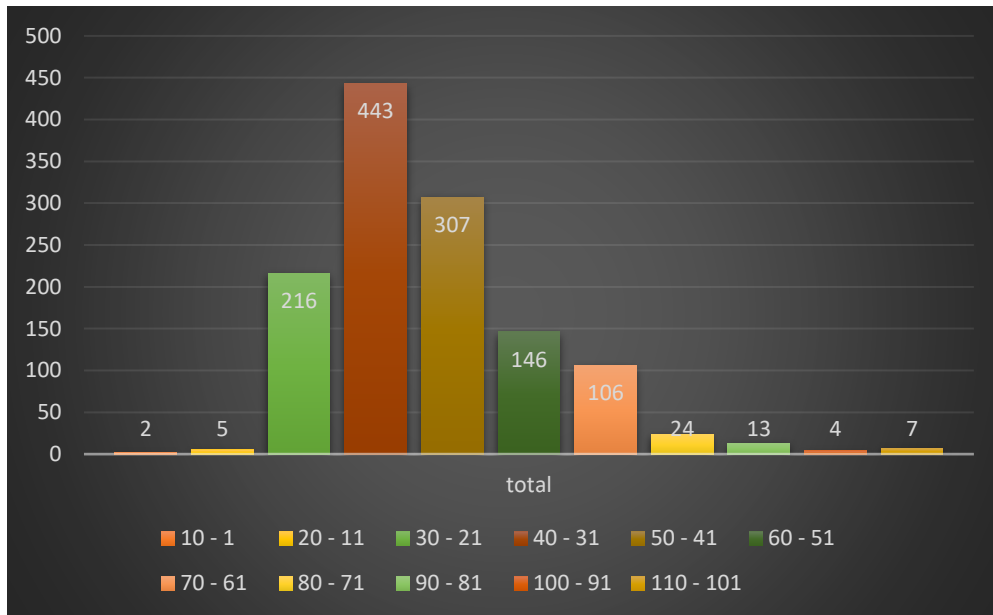


Figure 1. Age ranges of female translators and the number of books translated by them

As you can see in Figure 1, there are only two female translators who were less than 10 years, and only 5 translators who were between 11 and 20. There were 216 female translators in the age range of 21 to 30. The age range of 31 to 40 seems to be the busiest years of female translators' careers, with 443 female translators in this age range. The number of female translators in the 41-50 age range is the second-highest record in the chart with 307 female translators. From 51 to 60, there were 146 female translators, which is still a considerable number. It seems that many female translators cease working after the age of 61, as we have only 106 female translators in the age range of 61 to 70. This number keeps shrinking as female translators get older, with only 24 female translators between 71 to 80. As for the last three age ranges, there were only 13 female translators between 81-90, 4 translators between 91 to 100, and 7 translators who were older than 101 years, which can be indicative of their resolution to remain active in the social sphere.

It should be noted that in 98 books the translators' dates of birth were not mentioned, so it was impossible to find the translator's date of birth. Therefore, these 98 books were left out of the data and this group is not shown in the chart. Another point to note is that some works have more than one translator and this is why the number of books is not equal to the number of translators. As a final point, it must be mentioned that some names did not identify the gender of the translator; in these cases, attempts were made to find other information leading the researchers to the correct gender. If such information was unavailable, the translator was excluded.

2. Topics Chosen by Female Translators

The second step was investigating the topics of interest for women translators in different age groups. As mentioned above, the categorization of topics follows that of Farahzad et al. (2015) which divides topics into eight groups, i.e. 1. Women's literature; 2. Children's literature; 3. Fiction; 4. Humanities; 5. Applied sciences; 6. History; 7. Sports and arts; and 8. General group.

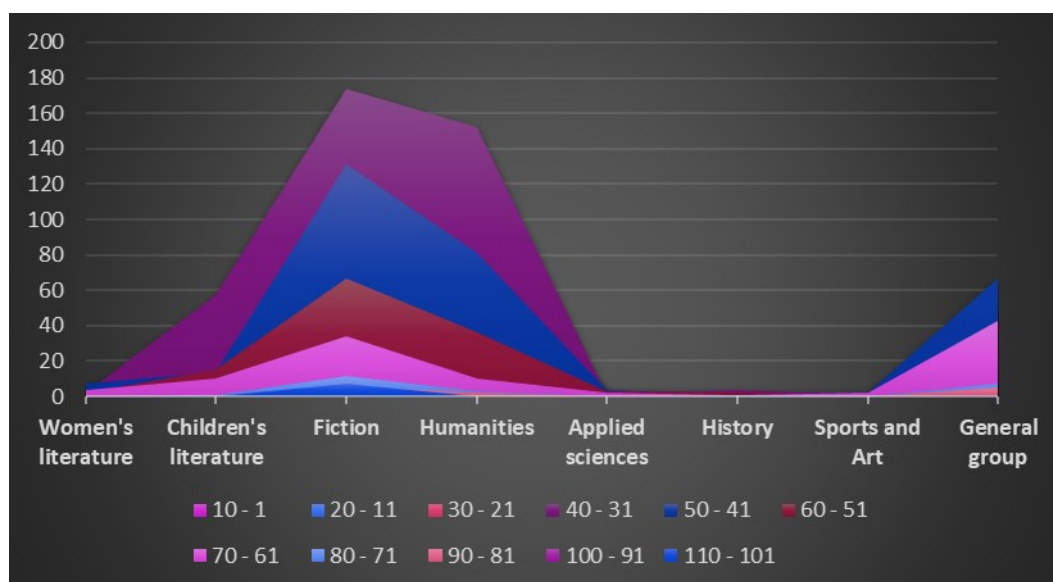


Figure 2. The Relation between age ranges and topics chosen by female translators

According to Figure 2, translated books in the field of fiction had the first place with 507 books. The second place belonged to humanities with 369 books. The general group with 233 books got the third place. The fourth place was assigned to children's literature with 116 books. Women's literature stood in the fifth place with 20 books. The last three places belonged to applied science, history, and art with 12, 10, and 6 translated books respectively.

In the field of fiction which is the most translated field, there was no female translator younger than 10 years, and there were only 4 translators who were between 11 to 20. There were 69 female translators in the age range of 21 to 30 in the fiction category. The age range of 31 to 40 seems to witness the female translators' high interest in translating fiction, with 174 female translators in this age range. The number of female translators in the 41-50 age range was the second-highest record in the chart with 131 female translators. From 51 to 60, there were 67 female translators translating fiction. We had only 34 female translators in the age range of 61 to 70 and only 12 female translators between 71 to 80. There were only 6 female translators between 81-90, 3 translators between 91 to 100, and all 7 translators active at the ages older than 101 years translated fiction, and we don't see any translator in this age range translating other fields.

Humanity is the second most translated topic. There was only one female translator who had less than 10 years, and no translator between 11 to 20. There were 84 female translators in the age range of 21 to 30. The age range of 31 to 40 seems to be the most active years of female translators' careers in the field of humanities, with 152 female translators in this age range. The number of female translators in the 41-50 age range was 81 female translators. From 51 to 60, there were 36 female translators. It seems that most female translators cease to work after the age of 61, as we had only 10 female translators in the age range of 61 to 70. This number decreased in later ranges, with only 3 female translators between 71 to 80 and no female translators in the last two age ranges.

In the general group, as the above chart shows, there was only one female translator who had less than 10 years and one female translator between 11 to 20. There were 36 female translators in the age range of 21 to 30. The age range of 31 to 40 took the second place with 52 female translators. The number of female translators in the 41-50 age range was the first high record in the chart with 67 female translators. From 51 to 60, there were 20 female translators. Surprisingly the number went up as we had 43 female translators in the age range of 61 to 70, almost double in number in comparison to the previous age range. This number went down as female translators aged, with only 7 female translators between 71 and 80, 5 female translators between 81-90, and only 1 between 91 and 100, and no female translator in the last age range.

To avoid repetition, it must be noted that there are no female translator under the age of 20 in the remaining topics, that is to say, there was no female translator in the first two age ranges in the fields of children's literature, women's literature, applied sciences, history, and sports and arts. This is quite surprising, as younger ages are expected to translate children's literature more than other topics.

In the field of children's literature, there were 19 female translators in the age range of 21 to 30. The age range of 31 to 40 had the first place, with 57 female translators in this age range. The number of female translators in the age range of 41-50 was 14. The age range 51 to 60 had 15 female translators. We had only 10 female translators in the age range of 61 to 70. There was only 1 female translator between 71-80. No books were translated by translators in the last three age ranges.

In the age range of 21-30, only 5 female translators chose women's literature. There were only 2 female translators in the age range of 31 to 40. The age range of 41 to 50 had 7 female translators. The number of female translators in the 51-60 age range was only 2. 4 female translators worked in this field in the age range of 61-70. There weren't any books translated by women in the last four age ranges in women's literature's field.

Only 2 female translators were active in translating applied sciences in the age range of 21-30. There was only 1 female translator in the age range of 31 to 40 and 4 female translators in the age range of 41 to 50. The number of female translators in the 51-60 age range was only 3. Two female translators worked in the age range of 61-70. There weren't any books translated by women in the last four age ranges.

We see only 1 female translator choosing history for translation in the third age range, i.e. 21-30. There were 4 female translators in the age range of 31 to 40 and 1 female translator in the age range of 41 to 50. The number of female translators in the 51-60 age range was 2 and there was only 1 female translator in the age range of 61-70. Like the previous age range, only 1 female translator worked in the age range of 71-80. There weren't any books translated by women in the last three age ranges.

The chart indicates that in the field of sports and art, no book was translated in the first three age ranges. In the age range of 31-40, we had only 1 female translator. There were 2 female translators in the age range of 41 to 50 and 1 female translator in the age range of 51 to 60. The number of female translators in the 51-60 age range was 2. There weren't any translated books in the last four age ranges.

3. The Relation Between Topic Preference and Age Range

The topic priority for translation in different age groups by women was different, and for this reason, different topics of interest to women in ten-year age ranges have been investigated to obtain the level of interest of women in translating a specific topic in different age ranges.

The data showed that fiction had been translated more by women and got the first place by 507 translated books. Female translators between 31 and 40 had shown more interest in translating fiction, that is to say, 174 female translators in this age range translated fiction. The number of female

translators in the 41-50 age range was the second highest record with 131 female translators. The third place was for the age range of 21 to 30 with 69 female translators.

The second topic priority for women was humanities by 369 translated books. The age range of 31 to 40 seems to be the most active years of female translators' careers in the field of humanities, with 152 female translators in this age range with 41 percent. The second high record was the age range of 21 to 30 with 84 female translators. The third place with a slight difference was the age range of 41 to 50 with 81 female translators.

Women's third topic priority was the general group with 233 translated books. The first high record was in the age range of 41 to 50 with 67 female translators including 29 percent of the total. The age range of 31 to 40 took the second place with 52 female translators. Surprisingly the age range of 61 to 70 had 43 female translators which is a considerable number.

The fourth topic priority focused on children's literature with 116 translated books. The age range of 31 to 40 had the first place, with 57 female translators in this age range which consisted 49 percent of the total amount. The number of female translators in the 21 to 30 age range was the second highest record with 19 female translators. The third place with a bit of difference was in the age range of 51 to 60 with 15 female translators.

Women's fifth topic priority was women's literature with 20 translated books. The first place was for the age range of 41 to 50 with 7 female translators which formed 35 percent of the total numbers. In the age range of 21-30, only 5 female translators worked. 4 female translators worked in the age range of 61-70.

The sixth topic priority for women was the field of applied sciences by 12 translated books. Due to the small number of translated books in this field, the first place with four translated books in the age range of 41 to 50 illustrated the lack of attention and interest of female translators.

The last two topic priorities of female translators were history with 10 translated books and sports and art with only 6 books. The first place was in the age range of 31 to 40 with 4 translated books and the other with 2 translated books in both the age ranges of 21 to 50 and 61 to 70.

Conclusion

The result of reviewing 21000 works showed that only 1273 books were translated by women without considering reprints. In comparison to the works that were translated by men, the number of female translators is not impressive. The results also indicated that women in their 30s and 40s were more interested in translation. The number of female translators in the age range of 31 to 40 years was the highest, which included 443 translators. This age range equals the time that most women complete university education, form a family, and settle down, and in many cases, their children reach a certain age (based on Civil Status Registration Organization's statistics, the average age of marriage for women is 24.8, which can be a proof of what was claimed above). So, they find some time of their own, to follow what they have dreamed of, or to have a more prominent position in society.

The age range of 41 to 50 years ranked second, having 307 female translators. Completing education and raising children can still be one of the reasons for the large number of female translators in this group; however, it seems that there are other problems in this age range, preventing women from being as prolific as the previous age range: having a permanent job, loss of interest, having a busy lifestyle due to new concerns (such as the marriage of children or even raising grandchildren), or decline in physical and mental abilities which lead to lesser contribution of women to the field of translation.

The age range of 21 to 30 years with 216 translators ranked third, with a slight difference compared to the age group of 41 to 50 years. At this age range, women are more energetic and ambitious. Many are passing their university education and are making themselves ready for entering the market, strengthening their resumes. These might be the reasons of their interest in translation. On the other hand, many women are just getting married or raising their children which leads to a shortage of time, and this might be a reason for their limited number of works.

There were 146 female translators between 51 to 60 years and 106 translators in the age range of 61 to 70 years. 24 women translators were found between 71 to 80 and only 13 between 81 to 90. These declining numbers seem to show that as women get older, they lose interest or ability to translate, as it is a highly energy-consuming task, requiring great mental power.

There are also 4 female translators in the age range of 91 to 100. It is quite interesting to find translators in this age range. This age range, which naturally equals retirement, is the age of activity for some, maybe to prove that they are still competent and active in the social arena. Observing 7 female translators in the age range of 101-110, this comes to mind that age is not a criterion in translation.

There were 5 female translators in the age range of 11-20. Initially, the age range of 1 to 10 years was not considered in the chart, but after encountering 2 translators, the statistic was added to the chart. The researcher concluded that we might be dealing with a bilingual child.

We have two female translators aged below 10. One of them was Zahra Javadi. She was born in 2009 and translated her book in 2015; therefore, she was 6 years old when translating, and information about the second one was not available.

In general, female translators were not keen to translate books which were related to applied sciences, history, sports, and art in any of the age ranges. The age range of 21 to 30 showed that female translators preferred to translate in the fields of humanities and fiction respectively. Fiction and humanity were at the center of female translators' attention in the age range of 31 to 40, 41 to 50, and 51 to 60 but the number of female translators shrank as they got older. Female translator of the age range of 61 to 70 had made fiction the priority of their translation too; however, humanity and children's literature had nearly the same numbers. The age ranges of 71 to 80 and 81 to 90 showed that female translators were interested in translating fiction and general group respectively. The number of translated books in the other age ranges is not considerable. The age range of 31 to 40 had the highest number of translating books dealing with children's literature. Female translators of all age ranges paid very little attention to history by translating only 10 books.

This research offers a new perspective to those who are interested in history as historical researches raise public awareness; people who do not know their history, will not be able to know themselves. It may offer useful information to those who have concerns about female issues; it can help the researchers find motivated and talented female translators, and it can also help them to have a better understanding of what goes on in their minds. It might show a way for those who care about social issues to help them raise awareness about females' issues.

References

- Amini, R. (2013). Motivations and goals of translation in Iran: A historical perspective. *Iranian Journal of Translation Studies*, 12(45), 7-30.
- Azarang, A. H. (2015). *History of translation in Iran from ancient times to the end of Qajar era*. Tehran: Ghoghnoos.

- Bandia, P. F., & Bastin, G. L. (Eds.) (2006). *Charting the future of translation history: Current discourses and methodology*. University of Ottawa Press.
- D'hulst, L. (2001). Why and how to write translation histories? In J. Milton (Ed.), *Emerging views on translation history in Brazil* (pp. 21-32). Sao Paulo: Humanities.
- Farahzad, F., Mohammadi Shahrokhbabadi, A. , & Ehteshami, S. (2015). Women translator in contemporary Iran. *Translation Studies, 13*, 57-74.
- Lambert, J. (1993). History, historiography, and the discipline: A programme. In Y. Gambier, & J. Tommola (Eds.), *Translation and Knowledge: SSOTT IV (Scandinavian Symposium on Translation Theory)* (pp. 3-26). Turku: University of Turku.
- Mirza, F., & Tehrani, E. (2019). The role of women translations in the history of translation in Iran. *Recherches en Langue et Littérature Françaises, 13*(23), 249-260.
- Pym, A. (1992). Shortcomings in the historiography of translation. *Babel, 4*, 221-235.
- Pym, A. (1998). *Methods in translation history*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Saeidi, H. (2019). Women in contemporary Iran. *Electronic Journal of Women, 5*. Retrieved from http://www.iichs.org/index.asp?id=839&doc_cat=9 website:
- Saeidian, S., & Hosseini, S. (2013). A sociological study of Iranian women's role in fictional literature in the recent two decades. *International Journal of Women's Research, 2*, 59-72.