

***TRANSLATING SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S THE SECOND SEX: TRANSNATIONAL FRAMING, INTERPRETATION, AND IMPACT* EDITED BY JULIA C. BULLOCK AND PAULINE HENRY-TIERNEY**

Translating Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: Transnational Framing, Interpretation, and Impact, Julia C. Bullock and Pauline Henry-Tierney (eds.), New York & London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2023. Hardback: £125. ISBN 9781032426785

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An inaccurate translation can profoundly alter, distort, and eventually completely change the meaning of an original text, this is what Julia C. Bullock and Pauline Henry-Tierney demonstrate through a transnational journey among the different translations of *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*), a foundational text by Simone de Beauvoir which was originally published in French in 1949. Translating Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is a true exegesis of the source text and its translations, while its vast bibliography is irrefutable proof of methodical and scrupulous work. The contributors' aim is to fill a void in translation studies regarding *The Second Sex* (hereby *TSS*), by analysing objectively the different ways in which the text has changed in its various translations, a topic on which very little research has been done.

In the introduction, Bullock and Henry-Tierney set out to discuss one of the main problems of translating *TSS* into languages other than English by highlighting the fact that multiple translations were made from Howard Parshley's first English translation (1953), which has been criticised for the philosophical losses and errors of meaning it contained (2). Thus, the omissions, as well as the subjectivity and personal interpretation of the translator were reiterated in the target languages. *Translating Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: Transnational Framing, Interpretation, and Impact* examines the semantic and philosophical variations of *TSS* in different vernacular spaces of the world such as Spain, Hungary, Poland, and China, to name just a few. Bullock and Henry-Tierney present and explain the tripartite structure of the study. The first part titled 'Framing *Le Deuxième Sexe*: Contexts, Paratexts, and Practice', analyses the zeitgeists in which the translations emerge by drawing parallels between the motivations behind the choice of translation and the reception of the text. The second part titled '(Mis)interpreting Beauvoir: Philosophical and Ideological Framing of the Text', deals with the constraints translation is subject to when it comes up against ideologies and censorship in the target languages, while the third part outlines the global impact of *TSS* and its consequences, as well as the problem of 'untranslatability'.

The question of 'untranslatability' acquires specific weight in *TSS*: was Beauvoir, in her examples of submission of foreign women, capable of translating accurately these contexts, or was her Francocentric vision an impediment to her interpretation of alterity? In Chapter 11, Penelope Deutscher exposes the critiques that *TSS* faced regarding the untranslatability of a culture or of a mindset, especially when this translation comes from an author who did not embrace Otherness, but depicted it through her own lens, by projecting on the Other her own vision of reality (205). Beyond making space to establish new and renewed readings of *TSS*, Deutscher's approach problematises the authority that Beauvoir's work has gained, opening it up to debate and allowing the reader to reflect beyond the confines of Beauvoirian thought. This digression brings us to the volume's cyclical frame which ends with an Epilogue by the editors, returning to the Introduction, as it presents the frameworks of the project from its postulates to its outcome.

The opening and conclusion of this collective volume are built around four terms which are considered the cornerstones of the Beauvoirian philosophy: 'situation', 'future',

‘woman’, and ‘sex’. In an extraordinary mix, where each author presents the difficulties of translating these concepts into their specialist language, the editors weave a network of translations of *TSS*, outlining the aspects and the target languages treated, and propose a continuation of this research, by invoking the need to extend the discussion to more languages. It is interesting to note the parallel with linguistic evolution, which highlights the limits specific to the time of Beauvoir, comparatively to the lexical possibilities that the present time offers *hic et nunc*, as for example nowadays certain languages, including French, differentiate between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ (235).

Through the problems of translation of this work we discover the growing relevance of these challenges in our contemporary societies. In the Hungarian translation for example, *TSS* was modeled on political dogmatism and therefore supported the prevailing ideology of the target culture instead of maintaining its liberating and emancipatory tone. This is underlined by Ursula Hurley and Szilvia Naray-Davey in their discussion of Victor Orbán’s anti-LGBT policy (88). In a detailed and concise manner, the authors explain the import of a deliberately erroneous *TSS* of which the single translation dating from 1969 was and is (in)sufficient to convey Beauvoir’s thoughts (93). In this context the authors express the need for a new translation in a society alienated by a socialist model based on the reminiscences of a totalitarian past that haunts the present.

Almost each chapter analyses the major importance of the paratext, by focusing on the invalid message that *TSS* ends up conveying through misleading paratexts in different translations. The paratext is divided, according to Gerard Genette’s theory, into peritext (every detail outside the body of the text such as preface, title, cover etc.) and epitext (every element outside the text, such as interviews of the author, reviews etc.). Although it might often seem unimportant when choosing a book, in this volume it is analysed and presented as crucial for a book’s identity. This is because readers tend to choose unconsciously a book by its cover and to mentally categorise it in a certain field according to what the paratext is transmitting, ignoring most of the time the capital impact that the latter might have. *TSS* has been pulled in various directions as a consequence of publishing choices. For example, in one of the Chinese translations the word ‘woman’ was added in the title in order to correspond to the target language (29), or in the first Arabic translation there were no footnotes or endnotes and the translation was anonymous (which might make the reader believe that Arabic was the source language). However, what the author omits is the fact that *TSS* is not an exception but reflects a common practice in Arabic translation as pointed out in studies such as ‘Lost in (Mis)Translation: Paratextual Framing in Selected Arabic Translations of Orwell’s *Animal Farm*’ (2023), by Mai Mowafy and Talaat Farouq Mohamed. The second Arabic translation exhibited a cover with a woman secluded from society as well as a list of literary publications of Beauvoir, luring the readers into believing that they are facing a book of fiction (41). All these numerous ways of altering a book, stretching it so it would encompass a certain ideology which is absent from the book itself, are very well expressed and researched in *Translating Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex*, a study which raises awareness about the complexity of the process of translation.

This remarkable volume sheds light on the complexity of translation from one language to another, from one space to another, and especially from one concept to another. It explores the barriers and limitations of translation and the virtual impossibility of producing an exact copy of the source text in another language and culture. For example, as the chapter about the two English translations indicates, it is impossible to find the ‘right way’ of translating the French reflexive verbs that Beauvoir uses into English where a choice must be made between the passive and active voice (166). Yet, even this example fails to express the quandaries that translating *TSS* into a non-Indo-European language presents, languages such

as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic or Hungarian, which other chapters explore in a punctilious manner, contributing to the overall harmonious ensemble of the book.

The edited volume under discussion is a salient model of a soft power case study, useful for students of political sciences, as it provides information on manipulation of the masses and appropriation of authorial discourse to the ideologies promoted by the systems in place. It is undoubtedly an essential tool for students of Comparative Literature, due to its capacity to present the complexity of the genesis of a book, from its publication to its most recent translations. The book opens up new avenues of research and reflection by highlighting the need for a new translation with a tailor-made language, as spoken languages (including French itself) turn out to be far too connoted and patriarchally oriented to do justice to the Beauvoirian philosophy (234). One would also need to question how this philosophy has been shaped by translations, and despite the lack of explicit political engagement of the authors, we could extend the topic to thinking of the impact that *TSS*, under its different forms, has on current feminist ideologies.

In conclusion, this study is accessible to a wider and non-specialised audience due to its in-depth analysis and disambiguating style. Moreover, it allows rapid comprehension which helps a neophyte audience understand the dangers of an erroneous translation. Although an academic study, *Translating Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex* transcends its own environment in order to address a heterogeneous public by virtue of, on one hand, its topicality, and on the other hand, its subject of societal scope.