



Translation Competence and Professional Habitus in the 2009 English Retranslation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*

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This article explores the controversy surrounding the 2009 publication of the second English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. It had long been widely agreed that Howard Parshley's initial 1953 translation of Beauvoir's classic study of womanhood was inadequate and the new translation was keenly anticipated in feminist circles. However, its publication sparked a heated debate, conducted largely on the letters page of the *London Review of Books*, with academics, professional translators, readers, the French publisher and Borde and Malovany-Chevallier themselves all weighing in to critique or defend the translation.

The article takes as its starting point the notion of translation competence as defined by the PACTE group at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, studying the translation's epitext, particularly the debate in the *LRB* and the translators' own comments on their work in articles and interviews, for evidence of their mastery of the full range of translation competences. The article posits that such mastery can be equated with a professional translatorial habitus. It concludes that the translation itself is problematic on several levels: a number of translation errors and the nature of the translators' epitextual commentary hints at a shortfall in translation competence that reflects an incomplete acquisition of professional habitus. This situation, symptomatic of the low professional status of translation more broadly, reflects the extent to which, in the field of editorial translation, value is unequally distributed among the various forms of capital that play into the professional translational habitus, with the social capital of the translators playing in this instance a disproportionate role in the translators' career trajectories.

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In the opening lines of *Le Deuxième sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir writes “La querelle du féminisme a fait couler assez d'encre” (Beauvoir [1949] 1976, I, 13). Vast quantities of ink have in turn been spilled over both translations of *Le deuxième sexe*, the first by the American zoologist Howard Parshley published by Knopf in 1953, the second by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, two American teachers of English, published in 2009 by Jonathan Cape in London and in 2010 by Knopf in New York. While critics were generally agreed on the inadequacies of the former, particularly following Simons (1983), the debate over the second has proved bitterly vituperative, with accusations of the translators' incompetence being countered with insinuations of professional jealousy on the part of reviewers, particularly in an angry exchange of letters over the course of several issues of the *London Review of Books* in early 2010.¹ This situation is somewhat unusual in that retranslation is typically framed as a “positive phenomenon” (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2019, 485); while the Parshley translation indeed followed Gambier's model which posits that “[d]riven by cultural and editorial considerations, first translations are assumed to suppress the alterity of the translated text and to feature cuts and changes that are motivated by a concern for higher levels of readability” (quoted in Tahir-Gürçağlar 2019, 485), it is debatable whether the Borde and Malovany-Chevallier version fulfilled the expectation that subsequent translations would “pay more attention to the letter and style of the source text” (485). The present case study is more in line with recent critiques of the teleological nature of this model, reflecting rather an ideological shift in the target culture (486), ironically implemented in this instance in no small part by the reception of the first, inadequate translation that did much to anchor feminism as a field of study in the Anglosphere.

The initial negative responses to the 2009 retranslation were largely from philosophy scholars and Beauvoir specialists with little or no background in Translation Studies. This trend has begun to be reversed as Translation Studies scholars have started to take an interest in the retranslation as part of a broad re-evaluation of the place of social science and philosophy translation within the discipline, with a number of conferences, seminars and publications on the topic in recent years (Large 2014, Rawling and Wilson 2018, Wrobel 2018, Bada forthcoming). The retranslation has been studied most notably by Bichet (2016), who explores the work largely from the point of view of comparative linguistics, and Henry-Tierney (2017), focusing on a micro-analysis of the translation of Beauvoir's “mauvaise foi”. The German retranslation of 1992 has similarly been a focus of study (Beese 2015). This article builds on the work of these scholars and on the earlier debate by adopting a sociological approach, offering an initial response to a series of questions framed by Luise von Flotow in 2000, well before the publication of the second translation of *Le deuxième sexe*: “Beauvoir's oeuvre in English would doubtless benefit from a thorough contextualising and analysis: who translated her? When? For what reasons? Into what type of cultural setting? And who commissioned and financed the translations?” (von Flotow 2000, 15).

To answer these questions, I draw on the influential model of translation competence developed by the PACTE (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) research group at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (PACTE 2003), presented in detail in the second part of the article. In comparison with a more minimalist approach to translation competence such as that

¹ The full exchange can be consulted here: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n03/toril-moi/the-adulteress-wife> (last accessed 11 September 2019).

sketched out by Pym (2003), the PACTE model offers a detailed categorisation of the various strands that go into making up overall translation competence, making it useful for a fine-grained analysis of translation as a professional practice and allowing for a nuanced picture of a translator's professional socialisation. I study both the 2010 debate as conducted in reviews and reader responses to them and on the translators' own statements for evidence of their mastery of the various strands that make up overall translation competence. Positing that achieving such mastery can be equated with the acquisition of a professional translatorial habitus, I will seek to measure the translators' acquisition of professional habitus and explore the extent to which various forms of capital play into it. The article thus falls into three parts: a brief look back at the history of the two translations, followed by an exploration of issues of translation competence raised by the retranslation, and a study of how such issues reflect the acquisition or otherwise of a professional habitus by the two translators. Above and beyond the specific issue of the competence of the two translators in question, the aim is to explore the role of social capital in determining how translators enter and maintain their position in the translation field and to shed some light on an issue raised in a recent article by Jean-Pierre Cléro, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Rouen and himself a translator of David Hume and Jeremy Bentham: "Qu'est-ce qui est susceptible de manquer au linguiste pour que, compétent pour traduire un grand nombre de textes de la langue dont il est spécialiste, il ne le soit pas toujours, aux yeux du philosophe, quand il s'agit de la philosophie?" (Cléro 2018, 43). However, it should be noted that entrusting translations to trained philosophers is not unproblematic either: lacking communicative competence, they simply make different types of mistakes. Stephen Noble has discussed the impact of erroneous translations in the English version of Merleau-Ponty's *Structure du comportement*, focusing on the mistranslation of "interrogation" [questioning] as "interrogation", a false cognate insofar as the English "interrogation" has a far narrower range of acceptable collocations than the French – an error which has prompted a number of articles on the "philosophy of interrogation" in the work of Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault (Noble 2019, unpaginated). Noble's assessment of the translator's shortcomings is pitiless: "For example (and the list is not exhaustive): first of all, awkward word-for-word translations, as well as the unnecessary invention of English words; secondly, confusion of the conditional mood with the future tense, as well as clear grammatical errors; and, thirdly, even basic mistakes in punctuation – all of this before the first paragraph of Chapter One has come to an end" (Noble 2019, unpaginated). Noble does not expand on the translator's identity, naming him only briefly in an endnote. A brief biography makes it clear, however, that the skill set of the translator, Alden Fisher, lay primarily in philosophy rather than language scholarship: he studied for an MA in Philosophy at St Louis University, then a PhD in psychology in Belgium before returning to the United States for an academic career spanning the two fields (Kugelman 2011, 327), placing his habitus in academic philosophy rather than in professional translation. The question of who is best placed to translate philosophy thus remains open.

A brief history of the two translations

The publishing history of *Le deuxième sexe* in both English translations has been amply researched (Gillman 1988, Bogic 2009, Moi 2002, Glazer 2004, Grosholz 2017). Accordingly, the following merely provides a brief outline. *Le deuxième sexe* was first translated by Howard Parshley, a retired professor of Zoology at Smith College with

high-school French and no philosophical training or translation experience. This lack of experience, combined with time pressure – Parshley produced his translation in just one year – led to egregious errors of meaning, such as the notorious mistranslation of “Il faut ajouter que *faute de* crèches, de jardins d’enfants convenablement organisés, il suffit d’un enfant pour paralyser entièrement l’activité de la femme” (Beauvoir 1976, II, 618, emphasis added) as “It must be said in addition that *in spite of* convenient day nurseries and kindergartens, having a child is enough to paralyze a woman’s activity entirely” (Beauvoir tr. Parshley 1953, 696-697, emphasis added). In 1983, philosophy professor Margaret Simons published an article entitled “The silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: guess what’s missing from *The Second Sex*”, which pointed out the numerous cuts made to the original text in translation – some fifteen percent overall – and explored their impact in marginalising the female experience. It should be noted that Gillman (2008) and Bogic (2009) rehabilitate Parshley to a certain extent by placing his work in its socio-historical context, demonstrating that many of the cuts attributed to Parshley were in fact due to Knopf’s editorial intervention: recent approaches to what has now come to be called Translator Studies (Chesterman 2009) have indeed stressed the need to question “the very definition of translation as a distinctive, unified category, by effectively bringing a set of collateral textual and social practices to the fore (such as proof-reading, giving directions on translating strategies, advice on publication etc.), practices which ultimately explode the myth of translators as the sole directive agents in textual formation” (Agorni 2005, 819).

Building on Simons’s 1983 article, scholars of feminist philosophy including Toril Moi, Nancy Bauer and Elizabeth Fallaize repeatedly made the case for a new translation but met with refusal from the rights holders Knopf, for whom the Parshley translation had sold over a million copies by the mid-1980s (Malingre 2009): senior editor Ashbel Green told Toril Moi in 1988 that “Our feeling is that the impact of Beauvoir’s thesis is in no way diluted by the abridgement [...] it’s a very successful book that we want to continue publishing” (Moi 2010). In 1999, a conference was held to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the French publication. Two of the attendees, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, learning of the inadequacy of Parshley’s version, were eager to retranslate the work. The two women – English instructors at the Institut des Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris since the 1970s – contacted Anne-Solange Noble, head of foreign rights at Gallimard, who negotiated a retranslation with Ellah Allfray, a senior editor at Jonathan Cape in London, thereby forcing Knopf’s hand. The second translation came out in 2009 in London and 2010 in New York.

Opinion on the new translation was divided. While some reviewers (Elfenbein 2010, Altman 2010) welcomed the new version, others were less convinced (du Plessix-Gray 2010). Most prominent of the latter was Toril Moi, who penned a devastating critique in the *London Review of Books*, concluding that its “obsessive literalism and countless errors make it no more reliable, and far less readable than Parshley” (Moi 2010). This led to an ill-tempered exchange of views on the journal’s letters page, with the translators, readers, and the French publisher all weighing in on the merits or otherwise of the new translation.

In addition to a “translators’ note” in the published work outlining their translation practice, the translators have further published a number of para- and epitextual comments in venues such as *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* and *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* and given numerous interviews and talks about their experience. I

will draw on all these sources for evidence of the two translators' awareness and mastery of the various strands of translation competence whose acquisition is, I posit, vital in developing a professional translatorial habitus.

Issues of translation competence

This section draws on PACTE (2003), which identifies six separate strands of translation competence:

- communicative competence (knowledge of source and target languages, appropriate linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discursive knowledge);
- extralinguistic competence: real-world knowledge and subject area expertise;
- instrumental and professional competence: knowledge of professional tools and practices;
- transfer competence: ability to understand the source text and transform it into a target text taking account of text and audience characteristics;
- strategic competence: the ability to solve translation problems
- psycho-physiological competence: memory, concentration span, creativity, logic, curiosity, perseverance, rigour, self-criticism, and self-confidence.

Of these six strands, the negative reviews focused on what was deemed the translators' inadequate mastery of communicative, extralinguistic, and transfer competence. Toril Moi critiques the translation on three key grounds: "a mishandling of key terms for gender and sexuality, an inconsistent use of tenses, and the mangling of syntax, sentence structure and punctuation" (Moi 2010). The first of these three indicates inadequate source language competence and subject-area expertise, the second insufficient discursive knowledge and transfer and professional competence, and the third a lack of target language competence. Similarly, Bichet (2016) critiques the translation under the headings syntax, tense, lexicology, and intertextuality, indicating the same range of issues, including professional competence in terms of their divergence from usual translatorial practice in handling citations.

The mishandling of subject-area expertise in terms of philosophical vocabulary is particularly problematic given the potential for orienting subsequent research based on the reception of particular notions in translation. Stephen Noble writes,

One of the fundamental difficulties that philosophical texts present to a translator [...] is, very precisely, the decisive manner in which philosophy attempts to ally, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, a concern for the concrete world of experience with the level of conceptual abstraction normally reserved for the ideality of truth. The language of philosophy is determined to wring from the experience of the concrete particular abstract truths that apply universally; and it is this concern for two distinct realms, and the use of an often very carefully chosen vocabulary of terms appropriate to *both* realms, that can create such considerable difficulties for even the most seasoned translator, who must attempt to find the words in another language with similar scope and connotations as those in the original. (Noble 2018, 133)

Further to the discussion in *Moi* (2009) of Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's lack of extralinguistic knowledge in their treatment of such deceptive cognates as *féminin* and *viril* and their misidentification of terms such as *s'accomplir* as specialist terminology, the role of both the Parshley and Malovany-Chevallier and Borde translations in disseminating Beauvoir's philosophical thought was the topic of a panel at the conference "*Le Deuxième Sexe* Seventy Years On: Reading Beauvoir around the World" held at Emory University in October 2019. Pauline Henry-Tierney focused on the diachronic reception of the concept "mauvaise foi" / "bad faith", identifying specific shifts in how the term was translated to consider the impact on the transgenerational reception of the text; Jennifer McWeeny studied the inconsistent and erroneous handling of the structure "se faire", arguing that both translations obscure the structure's ontological significance by rendering it with passive and non-reflexive constructions such as "to become" and "being made", thereby missing Beauvoir's considered adaptation of Sartre's "se faire être" and downplaying the tensions between activity and passivity, agency and construction, crucial in Beauvoir's philosophy. Ellie Anderson argued that Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's muting of Beauvoir's lyricism is problematic for the understanding of romantic love, as Beauvoir's original syntax performs the essential play between separation and union.

Borde and Malovany-Chevallier defend themselves against *Moi*'s onslaught by claiming that "a few mistakes [...] got past us all in this first edition" (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2010). Their quantification of "a few mistakes" suggests they misidentify the source of their errors, which are not solely localised problems of terminology: some mistranslations are grounded in syntax and therefore recur regularly (Spilka 1984, in Tolosa Igualada 2013). A close-grained comparison of the French and English indeed indicates an issue with communicative (source language) competence, particularly in terms of the pervasive presence of relatively elementary errors such as erroneously interpreting the aspecto-temporal value of the adverb "toujours", misidentifying epistemic modality in the French conditional, misapprehending fossilised French structures that omit the definite article (a particularly sensitive issue in the iconic sentence "on ne naît pas femme"), and failing to grasp the range of subject / object relationships covered by the French "de". There are likewise issues with target language, linguistic and discursive knowledge in terms of tense usage, particularly the translation of the *présent historique* (Bichet 2016). The following table presents a range of typical errors gleaned from a close comparison of the first sixty pages of the source and target texts, together with a number of errors discussed in Bichet (2016).

Source text (volume and pagination)	Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translation (pagination)
être pétrifié en chose (II, 15)	Be petrified in thing (294)
il se blottit dans les bras de sa mère (II, 15)	he crushes himself in his mother's arms (295)
Depuis lors, chaque moitié cherche à rejoindre sa moitié complémentaire (I, 40)	ever since then each half seeks to recover its other half (23)
La description de Hegel dégage une très importante signification de la sexualité : mais son erreur est toujours de faire de signification raison (I, 41)	Hegel's description brings out a very important significance of sexuality: but he always makes the same error of equating significance with reason (24)

Le gamète mâle ne serait pas nécessaire à la génération, il serait tout au plus un ferment (I, 44)	The male gamete was not necessary for generation; it would be at most a ferment (26)
Chez l'araignée géante, la femelle porte ses œufs dans un sac (I, 55)	The female giant spider carries her eggs in a bag (33)
elle sera jusqu'à nos jours soumise à la volonté des hommes (I, 137)*	until our times she will be subordinated to men's will (92)
On ne saurait poser la primauté d'un des sexes (I, 78)*	It would not be possible to posit the primacy of one sex (48)
Ce n'est pas elle-même, c'est la Beauté que Cécile Sorel défendait quand elle brisa le verre de la caricature de Bib (II, 529)	There is a reference to Cécile Sorel breaking the caricature of Bib (Translators' foreword, xxiii)

Table 1. Translation errors in the Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translation of *The Second Sex*. Examples marked with an asterisk are discussed in depth in Bichet (2016)

The last example in the table above is particularly telling. While the other examples are perhaps excusable when embedded in a work of such length and complexity, this one was chosen by the translators to feature in their foreword. It is striking that they do not seem to have considered the correct, and equally obvious, interpretation of the “de” relationship in such a paratextually sensitive foregrounding (this is corrected in later editions). Further, their reading makes little sense in the context of the section from which it is taken, “La narcissiste”, which describes how Sorel saw herself as a generous Venus figure sharing her beauty with the world, making her unlikely to appreciate a caricature of herself; it also displays a lack of instrumental competence in using the appropriate research tools to identify Bib as a relatively well-known early-twentieth-century caricaturist.

The translators' own discourse on their translation practice further suggests potential issues with other strands of translation competence. In their 2007 interview with Sarah Glazer, the two translators expressed surprise at concerns about their lack of philosophical training, suggesting a potential issue with transfer competence, one of the key components of which Colina defines as “awareness of the proficiency requirements for a particular translation job in relation to one's skills” (2015, 32). This point is made forcefully by one reader of *Moi's* review in an unpublished letter to the *London Review of Books*:

During the period I was a translator (about 8 years, though I continue to translate some), I translated roughly a half-million words a year. This was mostly technical documents, though I translated a dozen books about art, tourism and history, as well as a number of “samples” of fiction for French publishers. Never – I repeat, never – would I have accepted a translation of a book as iconic as Beauvoir's without having the requisite background; not only a complete understanding of the French text and its context, but, especially, the vocabulary and jargon used for this subject in English. The hubris of these translators is stunning, and, for me, borders on the unethical. [...] No good professional translator I know would undertake the

translation of a book of this importance without full competence; many mediocre translators would, indeed, try and do so. (McElhearn 2010)²

It is fair to say that Borde and Malovany-Chevallier were aware of their initial lack of extralinguistic competence, but they do not seem to have considered it problematic. Rather, they implicitly framed the issue in more positive terms, foregrounding their research skills to make up for a lack of direct subject area competence. They claimed in interviews to have conducted extensive research themselves (Zuckerman 2011) and to have “outsourced” this aspect of the translation to subject area specialists who checked their work: “They said they are consulting with philosophers [...] they’ve sought out a biologist to critique the chapter on the biology of sex; a friend with analytic training to go over the psychoanalysis chapter, and a medievalist to decipher the Old French quotations” (Glazer 2007).

Where the two do refer to their translation practice, their approach is somewhat naïve, as indicated by their contradictory discussion of the translator’s subjectivity: “La traduction oblige nécessairement à choisir un mot plutôt qu’un autre, ce choix est celui du traducteur : il est nécessairement subjectif et fonction de sa culture. Or, nous nous étions imposées de rester le plus neutres possible, de ne pas nous interposer entre l’auteure et son public” (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2011, 276). Elsewhere, they provide evidence of their departure from neutrality in their translation practice, without seeming to be aware of the contradiction raised thereby:

Another term that presented translation problems is “l’esprit de sérieux.” We debated for a long time as to whether we should use the meaning of the phrase, i.e. a spirit of conventionality or conventional thinking, or translate it as “the spirit of seriousness.” We opted for the latter, as it corresponds to the same level of language in both English and French. We consulted many scholarly works and here, as elsewhere, there is no ONE answer. (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2008-2009, 11, capitals in the original)

A further example of their relative lack of metatranslational knowledge is their handling of the French approach to grammatical vs. semantic gender, making the assumption that it can be unproblematically mapped onto English: “There are examples where the word ‘individual’ clearly refers to a woman, but Beauvoir, because of French rules of grammar, uses the masculine pronoun. We **therefore** do the same in English” (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier in Beauvoir 2009, xxii, emphasis added).

Likewise, their approach to translation strategy is somewhat unsystematic: they seem to be espousing a foreignising strategy, without naming it as such but alluding admiringly to the Pevear-Volokhonsky Tolstoy translations (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2008-2009, 8), widely discussed for their controversial foreignising stance. However, they do so inconsistently, altering sentence structure where it was felt to be “awkward” (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2008-2009, 7) and providing glosses for texts quoted by Beauvoir in Latin (Bichet 2016, 234).

This leads to a problematically ambiguous skopos for the English translation. Borde and Malovany-Chevallier claim that their translation strategy was dictated by their aim to reclaim Beauvoir as a philosopher, as this was “one of the most serious

² My thanks to Elizabeth Garver, French and Italian Collections Research Associate at the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, for providing me with copies of unpublished material from the *London Review of Books* archive.

absences in the first translation” (Beauvoir 2009, xxiii). Further, a 2010 Vintage edition was marketed as “Philosophy / Women’s Studies” and described as a “philosophical treatise” on the back cover (Bichet 2016, 116). The foreignising translation arising from the translators’ reverential approach to Beauvoir’s syntax and punctuation was felt by some to present a challenge to readability for non-specialists, giving a text that was “chew[y] [with] a tendency to get stuck in your teeth” (Elfenbein 2010). Marilyn Yalom, responding to Francine du Plessix-Gray’s *New York Times* review, saw this aspect of the text as a clear and appropriate restriction of its accessibility:

Just as Gray reacts negatively to the content of “The Second Sex,” so, too, she finds fault with the new translation. It does not “flow as nicely” as the earlier one. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier produced a highly literal, complete translation, down to Beauvoir’s original punctuation. This sometimes makes for difficult reading, and well it should, since “The Second Sex” is — among other things — a philosophical text. Would anyone think of translating Heidegger so that he flows nicely, when he rarely does? (Yalom 2010)

Interestingly, Yalom, an academic specialising in gender research, is thanked in the translators’ acknowledgements (Beauvoir 2009, xxv) as one of the expert readers for the manuscript. This hints at a lack of clarity over the skopos established by the work’s commissioners, Anne-Solange Noble at Gallimard and Ellah Allfrey at Jonathan Cape. Allfrey reportedly did not want to “burden” the translators with a team of advisors “because the new edition and translation was (still) aimed at the general reader” (Glazer 2004), while Noble’s rebuttal of Moi’s 2010 review downplays the importance of the philosophical vocabulary on the grounds of accessibility:

For sure, academic conferences and round tables can be organised for decades to come to debate the subtleties of translating philosophical terms, but since few of the millions of readers (since 1949) of Beauvoir’s essay are philosophers or even university graduates, these debates will remain limited to restricted circles. (Noble 2010)

This overlooks a fundamental issue with the work’s skopos in English. Noble’s stated aim was to “let readers first discover this essay in English the way French readers discover it in French” (Noble 2010). However, this posits an equivalence of situational features between the two readerships that is open to question. Leaving aside the question of whether Beauvoir’s text is as “chewy” in French as it is in English, the first edition of *Le deuxième sexe* was indeed published by a trade publisher rather than a university press, but in a highly prestigious editorial collection that lent it significant cultural and intellectual capital from the outset. The paratextual framing of the new translation is not comparable from this point of view: the introduction to the American edition, for example, was penned Judith Thurman, a staff writer at the *New Yorker*, whose opening was described as “breezy and patronizing [...] aimed at a popular audience” (Altman 2010, 4). Furthermore, the French general reader cannot be unproblematically equated with those in the Anglosphere, since an average French reader having come through the French education system will have studied two years of philosophy at lycée, whereas an average English-language reader will have little to no background knowledge of the subject. Furthermore, the “general reader” in the Anglosphere is in fact frequently a budding specialist: in 2004, forty percent of the thirteen thousand or so copies sold annually were for college courses, according to Russell Perreault, director of publicity at Vintage (Glazer 2004).

In the end, reader reactions have been mixed. Some Amazon reviewers have praised the new translation, with one commenting that “[Beauvoir’s] words are truly eloquent and poetic, too, made all the more so in this new edition and translation [...] a huge debt of appreciation and gratitude is owed to [the translators]” (“Carlos Romero natural cinephile” 2017). Others have been less appreciative: “This translation conveys the same message as the first translation, but is unnecessarily wordy, uses longer complicated sentence structure and is a struggle to get through. It seems to be a literal translation and also uses French terminology with no footnotes to explain their [sic] meaning” (“Dr. Big” 2011). Broadly, however, the reaction has been positive, with 64 percent of five-star reviews and an overall score of 4.2 on Amazon.com: while the majority of reviews do not allude specifically to the quality of the translation, this suggests that any problems with the translation have gone largely unnoticed by the readership.

Translation competence as evidence of professional habitus

Such issues call into question the nature of the translators’ professional habitus. Their epitextual commentary displays little awareness of the specificities of translation competence, particularly its professional dimension. Rather, their commentaries foreground their teaching, linguistic and cross-cultural competence:

We both have devoted our professional careers over the past forty years to teaching literature and American civilisation in French universities and to writing English grammar and other books for French speakers. This focus has provided us with knowledge of the interaction of the two languages and understanding of the culture, in all senses of the word, that gave birth to this book. (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2008-2009, 5)

They also point to their credentials as politically active feminists (Glazer 2007). Interestingly, they do not allude at this point to their prior translation experience, though the biographical note at the end of the article records that “[t]hroughout the time of their collaboration, they have been translating works dealing with social science, art, and feminism from French into English” (Borde and Malovany-Chevallier 2008-2009, 12). Their translation experience thus appears to be somewhat more extensive than Toril Moi’s review claims: “Their track record in translation from French to English, however, appears to be slim (I have found only two catalogue essays for art exhibitions in Paris, both translated by Malovany-Chevallier)” (Moi 2010). It is, however, fair to say that based on the translations attributed to them in national library catalogues, their presence in the field seems to have been sporadic at best. Malovany-Chevallier has some documented background in translation, with five art and architecture translations and co-translations since the 1970s, mainly into French. A detailed biographical sketch of Malovany-Chevallier and her husband further suggests translation forms a minor part of her professional and personal identity: it is mentioned in one sentence of a thirteen-page portrait that devotes several pages to her teaching career (Chaix 2005, 40). Constance Borde is not recorded as a translator in the French, American and British national library catalogues, though this does not preclude her having translated shorter pieces.

Borde and Malovany-Chevallier’s foregrounding of their linguistic, teaching, and writing experience over their previous translation practice suggests that they define translation as a matter primarily of source and target language and extralinguistic

cultural knowledge, with little evidence of awareness of the other strands of translation competence. Indeed, they put forward their teaching habitus as evidence of competence in the tangentially related field of translation. This elision of competences specific to translation is similarly apparent in the defence of their translation practice by their supporters: Michelle Sommers, herself an EFL teacher, writer, and publisher based in France, ironically defends them as “mere English teachers at Sciences Po, one of the most prestigious French universities” (Sommers 2010); Carlin Romano, who teaches philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, critiques Moi for “upbraiding two lifelong Parisians on the proprieties of French usage” (Romano 2010). Both Sommers and Romano presume that language and teaching competence can be unproblematically overlain on translation competence.

Interestingly, responses to the text by professional translators were broadly negative. The marginalisation of specific translational competence by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier’s defenders was challenged by correspondents with a professional translatorial habitus, most forcefully by Kirk McElhearn, as has been seen. Timothy Johnston, a lawyer-linguist and legal translator at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, responded in a similar, albeit less heated, vein: “In the various international institutions where I have spent my working career, we give applicants for translation posts somewhat shorter shrift. One glance at any of the paragraphs quoted by Moi, and the test script would go straight to the reject pile” (Johnston 2010). The Polish literary translator Marta Uminska wrote “the errors quoted in Toril Moi’s review, such as translating *viril* as *virile* or *féminin* as *feminine*, can be recognised as howlers by anyone who’s done even quite humble translation work” (Uminska 2010).

The question of competence was implicitly raised during the translation process, when Toril Moi wrote in *The Guardian* that “the translators [...] are best known as cookery book writers. Let’s hope they do justice to Beauvoir’s masterpiece” (Moi 2008). This brings me back to Luise von Flotow’s questions which opened this paper. How did two translators with such marginal presence in both the translational and philosophical fields end up signing a contract for such an impatiently awaited philosophy translation? Toril Moi pointed in 2010 to several experienced translators whose skill set would, on the face of it, seem to be more commensurate with the project in terms of subject area expertise and professional habitus, including Carol Cosman, Lydia Davis, and Richard Sieburth. Indeed, at this time, the University of Illinois had a team of translators working on several of Beauvoir’s other works under the editorship of Margaret Simons, including Barbara Klaw, professor of French literature at Northern Kentucky University and author of a PhD on Beauvoir, and Anne D. Cordero, Professor Emerita of French and director of the graduate certificate program in Translation at George Mason University. The question I want to explore briefly in conclusion is the role of social capital in answering two of Luise von Flotow’s questions: who translated her, and who commissioned the translation.

According to Sarah Glazer’s 2007 interview, once the translators became interested in the project, Sheila Malovany-Chevallier rang Anne-Solange Noble, her former student at Sciences Po, who set up a meeting with Judith Jones at Knopf (Glazer 2007). This is evidence of an unusually high degree of agency for two individuals with a marginal presence in the translatorial field, particularly for women, whose gender tends to correlate with lower agency (Pickford 2012). When that meeting with Knopf came to nothing, Noble told Ellah Allfrey at Jonathan Cape that she had the perfect translators lined up. In her 2010 correspondence with the *London Review of Books*, Noble

contradicts Glazer's claim that she was a former student of the translators. Whatever the truth of it, the three certainly overlapped at Sciences Po, where Noble studied International Relations from 1979 at a time when Borde and Malovany-Chevallier were teaching at the institution. Whether or not they shared a classroom, as respectively staff members and alumna of Sciences Po, the three shared a degree of social capital that in this instance seems to have substituted for a fully-fledged professional translatorial habitus. It is perhaps symptomatic of the relevance of social capital in determining the translators' atypically high degree of agency in initiating the project that a launch party for the book was held at the London home of the architect Richard Rogers, a friend of Constance Borde (Malingre 2009).

This situation is symptomatic of the low degree of recognition of the specific nature of translation competence. It also reflects the extent to which, in the field of editorial translation, value is unequally distributed among the various forms of capital that play into the professional translatorial habitus. In this instance, social capital seems to have played a role equal to linguistic capital, framed as source and target language competence, and greater than cultural capital, framed here as subject area expertise. Interestingly, in this instance, a project that might reasonably have been expected to be entrusted to players with a firmly rooted professional habitus turned out to provide a means for two new entrants to parlay their experience into a more central place in the social science translation field. Beauvoir's intellectual and cultural capital meant Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's translation was widely reviewed in academic and general literary venues alike, and following the book's publication, the pair received numerous invitations to present their work in lectures, conferences, and panels in cities and universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and India. They have since more firmly anchored their position in the social science translation field by translating a work by another star of French feminist philosophy, Julia Kristeva's *Passions of our Time*, for Columbia University Press (2019), in which they are given the unusual honour for social science translators of a brief biography on the book jacket's inside flap that now describes them not as teachers and writers, but as "the translators of *The Second Sex*". This is evidence that Borde and Malovany-Chevallier have successfully managed to translate their own social capital into significant cultural and intellectual capital of their own, inherited in large part from the author they translated. Above and beyond the question of whether translators or philosophers are best placed to translate works of philosophy, and indeed whether women are best placed to translate feminist thought (Shread 2018, 324), this article has sought to contextualise the translation of Beauvoir's best-known work by foregrounding the sheer range of competences required for successful translation, raising significant threads for future investigation into the role of translatorial agency in the reception of works of philosophy in translation.

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