

# Translating Simone de Beauvoir's the Second Sex into Malay: Methodological and Linguistic Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex challenges involved in translating Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist text *The Second Sex* into Malay (*Jantina Kedua*), focusing on the interplay between language, ideology, and sociocultural context. Drawing on key theories from Holmes, Nida, Vinay and Darbelnet, and Catford, the study explores how the translator navigates issues of cultural sensitivity, syntactic and lexical disparity, untranslatability, and ideological nuance. Particular attention is given to strategies used to handle culturally sensitive content, metaphorical language, and philosophical terminology. The analysis demonstrates that translation in this context is not merely a linguistic exercise but a deeply interpretative act shaped by the translator's agency and cultural mediation. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of balancing fidelity to the source text with readability and resonance for the target audience in the translation of feminist philosophical works.

**Keywords:** Literary translation, Simone de Beauvoir, Malay translation, Cultural sensitivity, Translation strategies

## INTRODUCTION

The title of the book chosen is *The Second Sex* written by Simone de Beauvoir. The original work was in French. *Le Deuxième Sexe* was later translated and edited into English version by H. M. Parshley for non-francophone readers. This translated piece was published in 1953 by Vintage Classics. *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir is piece of work that portrays on the hunger for equality that is not fully relies on the domination of the men. Women were seen to be beneath status men and was believed to have a restrict rights back in twentieth century. The book emphasises the crucial view that women are just different from men, rather than feel inferior to them. Women are still considered successful than men in various fields of life. Throughout the history, men and women have been always differentiated in every range of life that make each gender unique. For example, from the natural inclinations to the psychological traits. As a result, women are often left in the shadows while men being considered as an absolute power in prevalent gender. The gender gap in this society have affected these two genders in family and professional life. This book consists of 762 pages long that taps the development of women as a human being from the beginning of time to the present and shows how society cast a bad shadow over them that persists to this day.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach grounded in the discipline of Translation Studies. The research focuses on the translation of culturally and technically complex excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* from English into Malay. The objective is to examine the challenges that emerge in translating texts laden with domain-specific terminology, syntactic intricacies, and culture-specific items (CSIs), and to critically reflect on the strategies employed to navigate these issues. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is drawn from Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model of translation procedures, supplemented by insights from scholars such as Nida (2000), Ranzato (2016), and Ghazala (2008), with additional reference to sociolinguistic and cultural translation theory.

The selection of the source text (ST) was selected as it offers substantial translational challenges, particularly due to its intersection of scientific discourse, feminist theory, and cultural critique. The chapter "The Data of Biology" was selected for in-depth translation and analysis due to its high density of biological and scientific terminology. Selection criteria included the frequency of technical terms, the presence of stylistic complexity, and the existence of ideologically or culturally sensitive content. These features make the text a suitable corpus for examining both linguistic and cultural translation issues.

Prior to engaging in the translation, a preliminary reading of the source text twice has been conducted. This familiarization phase was essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the text's rhetorical structure, conceptual flow, and stylistic tone. The pre-translation stage also allowed for the early identification of potential translation difficulties, including grammatical complexity, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded phrases. This preparatory phase aimed to ensure an informed and reflective approach to the translation process.

The actual translation process was undertaken manually with limited reliance on computer-assisted tools, specifically Google Translate, primarily as a lexical reference. However, due to the inadequacy of automated translation tools in capturing contextual nuance, cultural references, and stylistic elements, the output from Google Translate was critically evaluated and significantly revised. The primary translation strategies employed were guided by Vinay and Darbelnet's dichotomy of direct and oblique translation methods. Literal translation and borrowing were used in instances where equivalence could be maintained without compromising clarity or accuracy, particularly for technical terms. In contrast, oblique strategies such as transposition and modulation were employed to restructure grammatical forms and adjust expressions for cultural and linguistic coherence in the target language (TL).

Special attention was paid to challenges that arose during the translation process. These were categorized into four main domains: grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and cultural. Grammatical challenges included the restructuring of passive constructions and SL-specific syntactic patterns that were not directly transferable into Malay. Lexical difficulties emerged from idioms and polysemous terms, especially those with technical or cultural connotations. Syntactic problems such as fronting, parallelism, and ambiguity required careful handling to preserve the intended meaning of the source text. Cultural and ethical issues were particularly prominent, especially in translating racially and sexually sensitive terms such as "Negro," "dirty nigger," and "bitch in heat." These terms necessitated a delicate balance between preserving the semantic force of the original and respecting the sociocultural norms of the target audience.

In dealing with offensive or potentially inappropriate content, this study applied the principle of constructive censorship, as conceptualized by Ranzato (2016). Rather than omitting such content, the translation process sought to re-contextualize problematic terms through paraphrasing or culturally appropriate substitution. The fidelity is maintained to the source text while mitigating the risk of alienating the TL audience. For instance, the word "Negro" was translated descriptively as "penduduk asli berkulit hitam di Afrika" to avoid racial insensitivity, while still conveying the referent. Similarly, "the bitch in heat" was rendered as "anjing betina yang dalam keadaan mengawan" to reflect the biological context rather than a literal, potentially offensive, translation.

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the translation process. Given the cultural and ideological implications of certain expressions in *The Second Sex*, the translator's responsibility extended beyond linguistic

fidelity to include cultural and ethical accountability. As stated by Jayasinghe (2019) and Fromkin (2014), translation is inherently an act of cultural mediation, where the translator must navigate differences in norms, values, and socio-political sensitivities between source and target cultures. Therefore, sociocultural awareness was fundamental in shaping the translation decisions made in this study.

Despite rigorous efforts, the research acknowledges several limitations. The translator’s limited expertise in the field of biology posed a challenge in accurately rendering technical terms, often resulting in an overly literal translation in sections dense with scientific information. Time constraints and limited access to advanced terminology databases further restricted the depth of terminological research. Additionally, reliance on a generalpurpose machine translation tool limited the scope for stylistic variation and deeper semantic analysis.

In sum, this methodology integrates textual analysis, translation practice, and theoretical application to provide a systematic account of the translation process. It underscores the complex interplay between language, culture, and ethics in literary translation, particularly when dealing with texts that are ideologically charged and linguistically sophisticated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Syntactic Problems

Syntactic Problems is the style of the source text posed problems in the translating process. The use of syntactic are important and strongly relevant to meaning. Fronting is where the author put a clause at the beginning of a sentence in an unusual way (e.g., “Quite evidently this problem would be significance if...”, instead of: “This problem would be significantly quite evidently if...”. Such fronting is done on purpose by the author to achieve a stylistic function of some kind. Which is to emphasis of the fronted word or drawing attention to its special importance to the meaning of the sentence.

For example:

ST	TT
Quite evidently this problem would be significance if we were to believe that woman’s destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, or economic forces. (p.29)	Jelas sekali masalah ini akan menjadi penting jika kita percaya bahawa takdir wanita pasti ditentukan oleh kuasa fisiologi atau ekonomi.

In the course of translation, the used of Google Translate as a technology-assisted tool have been made. This was particularly the case in the chapter The Data of Biology, where the complexity of scientific terminology and limited time for thorough research necessitated its use. However, reliance on such tools raises ethical concerns, as machine translation often produces inaccuracies that may compromise both precision and the overall quality of the final work.

### Taboo Words

Traditions, morals, and social norms vary from society to society. Therefore, in addition to reflecting word changes, translations must also account for cultural variations. According to Jayasinghe (2019), translators are unable to escape culture when translating. However, the translator can choose the best cultural translation approach by determining the Source and Target cultures as well as the target audience. Cultural sensitivity is essential when translating.

Throughout the process of translation, the awareness of the ethnicity matters. This can be found in the text, written, or spoken intercultural communication as if there is bias statement occurs and the cultures evolution. “Taboo words are the words that is often considered offensive, shocking or rude because they refer to sex, the body or race.” (Fromkin, 2014).



**Example 1 :**

ST	Sex
TT	Jantina

In Malay context, the word “sex” can have more than one meaning. The first meaning would be “persetubuhan” and the second one is “jantina”. Malay is more familiar with sex = persetubuhan and gender = jantina. Analysing back with the cultural background of ST, American is familiarise with referring sex as gender.

**Example 2:**

ST	Negro (p.17)
TT	Penduduk asli berkulit hitam di Afrika

The word “negro” is rather offensive when people that are non-black pronounce it, but this sensitivity only occurs during present times as back then, the use of “negro” is commonly used to identify as black people. In this context, in order to refrain from being offensive, the explanation definition of ST in TT is used.

**Example 3:**

ST	Dirty nigger (p.24)
TT	Lelaki berkulit hitam yang comot

This is another example of offensive use word in ST. It is a contemptuous term for black skin. Its degree of offensiveness has increased markedly in recent years. Since Malay is rich of politeness to match the setting in ST, the translate version in TT consist of non-offensive phrase.

**Example 4:**

ST	The bitch in the heat runs through the alleys, trailing behind her a wake of depraved odours; (p. 35)
TT	Anjing betina yang dalam keadaan mengawan berjalan melalui lorong-lorong, di belakangnya dipaliti oleh bau busuk;

If the reader read only “bitch” this could lead a different meaning in translating the text but “bitch in the heat” means a female dog that is ready to mate. This is one of the problems in translating process as the translation could be 1) the bitch = betina sundal itu or 2) the bitch in the heat = anjing betina yang dalam keadaan mengawan. The direct translation can be resulted to first option but to fit in the context, the second option is the correct in interpreting the meaning in ST.

According to Ranzato (2016), The concept of censorship adds a constructive aspect to the negative ideological manipulation. The government censorship machinery does more than merely repress information. It also takes a firm stand on how to deal with the moral behavior, political sympathies, and sexual orientations shown in the original text.

Hence the strategy used to overcome this problem is censorship. The word ‘negro’ and ‘dirty nigger’ in TT is omitted. Even though, the word replacement translation in TT does not express annoyance and the sexual connotation contain in the ST.

Challenges posed in between maintaining fidelity and not offending the reader. The retention of the English language embedded in a literary text. The end product of translation is too literal and ambiguous because of the use in literal translation. The text that I chose heavy with CSI which is beyond my ability and understanding. The lack in both is resulted to the literal translation work.



## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the multifaceted challenges and strategies involved in translating Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is a text that is lexically dense, ideologically charged, and culturally nuanced into Malay. The translation process revealed significant difficulties across linguistic, syntactic, lexical, and cultural dimensions, underscoring the complexity of literary translation in contexts where both technical and cultural specificity intersect. In particular, the chapter “The Data of Biology” exemplified the translator’s struggle to render scientific terminology accurately while maintaining fluency and cultural appropriateness in the target language.

One of the central findings of this study is the tension between maintaining fidelity to the source text and ensuring acceptability within the target culture. Literal translation, while useful in dealing with technical vocabulary, often resulted in ambiguous or unnatural expressions when applied to stylistic or ideologically sensitive content. The presence of culture-specific items (CSIs), taboo language, and racially offensive terms further complicated the translation process, demanding not only linguistic expertise but also ethical sensitivity and cultural awareness. These findings validate the assertion that translation is not merely a linguistic act but a complex negotiation of meaning, ideology, and audience expectations.

To navigate these challenges, the study employed a range of strategies drawn from Vinay and Darbelnet's model, including both direct and oblique translation procedures. Literal translation and borrowing were used selectively for scientific accuracy, while modulation, transposition, and cultural substitution were necessary to preserve contextual integrity and reader engagement. The ethical strategy of constructive censorship was also adopted to deal with racially or sexually explicit content, striking a balance between transparency and social responsibility.

Furthermore, the study highlights the limitations inherent in the translation process, including the translator's limited subject-matter knowledge in biology and time constraints that led to partial reliance on machine translation. These limitations, while acknowledged, do not undermine the study's contribution. They underscore the importance of interdisciplinary competence and critical self-awareness in translation practice.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the growing body of scholarship on literary and cultural translation by providing a reflective, process-oriented analysis of a translation task situated at the intersection of science, gender discourse, and cultural sensitivity. It affirms that effective translation extends beyond the mastery of languages to include ethical judgment, cultural intelligence, and critical engagement with the text. Future research could expand this inquiry by incorporating comparative analyses with other translations of the same text, exploring reader reception, or engaging with professional translators working in similar domains. Ultimately, this study reinforces the translator's role as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural negotiator in a globalized and ideologically diverse world.

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