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Difference/derivation: feminist translation under review

Kim Wallmach

Difference/derivation: feminist translation under review

by

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submitted to the Faculty of Arts in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Ph.D. (Translation)
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
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Abstract

In translating Québécois feminist texts, which make extensive use of linguistic wordplay in their concern to explore language as a sign of difference, Canadian feminist translators such as Barbara Godard claim that translating for the signifier is clearly preferable to conventional translation practice, allowing the feminist translator to use innovative translation strategies, to affirm "her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing and [to flaunt] the signs of her manipulation of the text." (Godard in Homel and Simon 1988: 57)

The present research examines the basis upon which feminist translation rests: that a feminist translation is a deliberate miss-translation and extension of the source text and therefore, unlike conventional translation, constitutes difference and not derivation. My hypothesis is that the meta-textual claims by the feminist translators are not substantiated by the textual evidence of the translations themselves. This discrepancy will only be revealed by a comparative analysis of the texts and their translations according to a broad descriptive and systemic framework. The empirical material for the analysis consists of the source texts and translations of four Québécois feminist prose texts written by Nicole Brossard, two translated by Barbara Godard and two translated by Patricia Claxton. Aspects of text linguistics are drawn upon to account for the particular type of text connectivity evident in feminist deconstructive texts and their translations. The categories used to trace the networks of signifiers in the source and target texts are based on Hoey's (1991) model for cohesive relations in text. Thereafter, the creativity of the translation strategies used is determined.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work, submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Ph.D. in Translation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Kim Wallmach

Signed at Johannesburg this 4th day of December 1998

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To my family, friends and colleagues - but most of all, to my husband Thomas, and to my supervisor, Dr Libby Meintjes.

I hereby acknowledge the financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development of the Human Sciences Research Council towards this research. Opinions expressed in this project and conclusions arrived at do not, however, purport to be those of the Centre for Science Development or the Human Sciences Research Council.

List of abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used:

DTS: Descriptive Translation Studies

CTS: Corpus Translation Studies

ST: Source Text

TT: Target Text

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Translating in an 'era of feminism', in an era powerfully influenced by feminist thought, to use Luise von Flotow's terms (1997: 14), has had an appreciable effect on translation practice. Translators in general have become more gender aware, posing questions about the politics of identity, language and culture, and about the ethics of intervention and censorship in translation. Women have also begun translating contemporary and historical women's writing into their own cultures, thereby creating new intellectual and cultural spaces. In the 1980s the idea of feminist translation emerged within the specific context of Canada and the translation of experimental Québécois feminist works into English.

1.1 Identifying the research problem: Is a feminist translation a translation or a text?

Feminist translators are so called not only because they translate feminist works but also because they wish to *incorporate the French feminist theory of the text as critical* transformation into their English translations. Often approaching their work in collaboration with their authors and professing to utilise innovative translation strategies to destabilise the notion of gendered positions within texts, they claim to produce "an extremely discontinuous textuality in which the author inventively joins in the production of meaning, undermining *conventional representations* that not only subordinate *translator* to author, but also metaphorise authorship as male and translation as female." (Venuti 1992: 12) According to Barbara Godard, for instance:

> The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable rereading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. Womanhandling the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning who advances a conditional analysis. Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature *in italics*, in footnotes - even in a preface. (Godard in Bassnett & Lefevere 1990: 94)

This approach clearly impacts on various aspects of conventional translation discourse such

as the absolute sovereignty of the original; the necessity for faithfulness to the original; the idea that translation preserves meaning across languages; and the necessity for the translator *to remain invisible in the translation process. It is precisely because of their explicit rejection* of traditional views on fidelity and their emphasis on the individualistic and creative nature of translation that feminist translators' work is seen as a threat to traditional translation discourse. Equally, it is for precisely these reasons that feminist translators may make a contribution to contemporary translation studies, should their claims be substantiated in *practice. Feminist* translators also claim to have devised innovative translation techniques to solve translation problems associated with feminist texts (which could also apply to the broader category of postmodern texts). These insights may prove valuable in solving problems associated with the translation of postmodernist texts in general.

The rationale and relevance of any research in a particular domain is put into sharper relief if viewed in context. In the next section, therefore, the research problem is contextualised within a broader translation-theoretical framework.

1.2 The research problem in context: translation/transformation as 'difference'

Translation theorists have always grappled with one specific problem in translation - the fact that translations are not the same as their originals and can never be the same. This is clearly reflected in their theories, which, despite different approaches, have all depended on some notion of equivalence (*whether aesthetic, formal, dynamic, functional or cultural*). *As Gentzler* (1993: 144) puts it: "To date, all translation theories have made rigid distinctions between original texts and their translations, distinctions which determine subsequent claims about the nature of translation." But the advent of deconstruction has changed all this, resulting in a radical redrawing of the questions upon which translation theory is founded.

Deconstructing a discourse implies demonstrating how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key premise (Culler 1983: 86). While not offering a specific 'translation theory' of its own, deconstruction is a useful tool not because it necessarily defines another approach, but because it deepens and broadens the

conceptual framework by which the very field itself is defined. Deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida use translation to challenge the limits of language, writing and reading as well as suggesting that it is in the process of *translating texts where one comes as close as is possible* to that elusive notion or experience of *différance* (meaning both 'difference' and 'deferral') which underpins their entire philosophic enterprise. The act of 'de-constructing' or interpreting a text is not seen as recovering some deeper 'given' objective meaning which controls and unifies the text's structure, but as exposing what is usually suppressed, namely the infinite *possibilities, the 'free play' of meanings. Each deconstruction*, each interpretation, opens itself to further deconstruction. In other words, what Derrida suggests is not to look at the original message, or its codification, but the multiple forms and interconnections through which it must pass. Derrida challenges the reader and the translator to think and rethink every moment a translation solution is posed, an item named, an identity fixed, or a sentence inscribed. With each naming gesture, Derrida suggests a footnote, a note in the margin, or a preface, in order to retrieve those subtle differing supplementary meanings and tangential notions lost in the process of transcription. Thus, both writing and translation are seen as "the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language *and places it for ever beyond the reach* of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge." (Norris 1982. 29)

This of course means that, instead of being seen as reproductions of an exact meaning, translations are seen as texts in their own right which are always in the process of modifying, deferring *and displacing the original*. The translation process itself can be conceived of as an action in which the movement along the surface of language is made visible, and the limits of language and intertextuality explored. Thus the term 'difference' in translation, traditionally a negative term signifying distortion or deviation, is seen in a new light under the influence of deconstruction, causing translation itself to be reassessed:

> Within the limits of its possibility or its *apparent* possibility, translation practises the difference between signified and signifier. But, if this difference is never pure, translation is even less so, and a notion of transformation must be substituted for the notion of translation: a regulated transformation of one *language* by another, of one text by another. We shall not have and never have had to deal with some 'transfer' of pure signifieds that the signifying instrument - or 'vehicle' - would leave virgin and intact (Derrida in Graham 1985: 150)

In recent years, feminist writers (and *particularly Québécois writers) have appropriated*

Derrida's concept of transformation and translation has become "a metaphor used by women writers to describe their experience; like translated texts they can be betrayed, transformed, invented and created" (Harwood in Homel and Simon 1988: 49). This is evident in these writers' awareness and exploitation of intertextuality, in their concern to deconstruct the dominant discourse, and in particular in their use of wordplay to explore language as a sign of difference. The radical feminist texts of Nicole Brossard are an excellent example of this trend. She herself characterises her most recent writing as:

> an *écriture de dérive* (a writing that is both *derived from* and *adrift*) somewhere at the border between what's real and what's fictive, between what seems possible to say, to write, but which proves to be, at the moment of writing, unthinkable, and that which seems obvious but appears, at the last second, inexpressible." (Brossard in Gould 1990: 89).

My interest in Brossard and in the translations of her work by feminist translators is explained by the fact that it can be said about feminist translators as much as their authors that:

> they work words in different ways, in subversive ways, disrupting the linearity of conventional discourse, deconstructing grammar, sabotaging the symbolism of patriarchy, stripping words to their bare meanings and breaking open language to let it say what is unsaid and unsayable in the language of patriarchy. Through these linguistic transgressions, they expand cultural space to liberate territory for women's expression. (Scott 1989: preface to *Lair)*

In other words, feminist translators are so called not only because they translate feminist works, but also because they wish to imitate the original authors' innovative writing processes *as part of the translation process.* Where Québécois feminist writers such as Nicole Brossard use language as a metaphor for feminist struggle, feminist translators aim to use translation as a metaphor for struggle. In doing so, as previously mentioned, not only do they claim to utilise innovative translation strategies, but they also claim to have exploded certain conventional views on translation. Barbara Godard, the most prolific of the feminist translators, was the first to point out the implications of this new poetics for translation theory. In her view, the concept of translation as transformation broadens the whole concept of translation, allowing the feminist translator to affirm "her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing and [to flaunt] the signs of her manipulation of the text." (Godard in Homel and Simon 1988: 57)

But are these claims really justified? The English translations of texts by Nicole Brossard have generally been read "with silent awe at Brossard's intellectual achievements and the virtual linguistic manipulation of the translator, in an atmosphere that evinced uncritical admiration of this challenging literary material." (Von Flotow 1997: 80) Lawrence Venuti, for one, expresses his admiration of both Brossard's writing and Godard's translations

> Both the Quebec writer Nicole Brossard and her translator Barbara Godard .. aim to combat the hierarchical construction of gender identities in patriarchal ideology by developing a kind of writing that is 'working (in) the in-between,' *pursuing 'a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and* transformation of the same into the other and into the in-between. (Venuti 1992: 12)

However, there has been some criticism of Canadian feminist translations. charges of "theoretical incoherence" and "opportunism" by Rosemary Arrojo (1994), and of "elitism" and "cultural inappropriateness" by Canadian Robyn Gillam (1995). Simon (1996: 28) comments on Arrojo's criticism as follows:

> It is not surprising that the ideas and practices of feminist translators have met *with some opposition*. It is perhaps surprising, however, that one of the most cogent critiques of feminist translation has come from the point of view of radical deconstructionism.

Arrojo's first criticism, that of opportunism on the part of feminist translators, as Simon (1996: 28) explains, rests on the fact that feminist translators criticise male translation theorists for *their "violent" and "appropriative" models (Arrojo in Simon 1996: 28), while at the same time* praising interventionist techniques by feminist translators as being something positive and desirable. But her main point of criticism is that feminist translators' claims of subversive fidelity are not theoretically coherent with their appropriation of certain poststructuralist and deconstructivist ideas. She explains that according to Derrida, "no meaning can ever be 'reproduced' or 'recovered', but is always already created, or recreated, anew" (Arrojo 1994: 158), and thus it is theoretically incoherent and inappropriate for feminist writers/ translators to claim to recreate meaning, anew. Recent deconstructive theory has *"not, by any means,* 'endowed' the female translator with *'the right and even the duty to 'abuse' the source text"* (Arrojo 1994: 157). In Arrojo's view, "the forceful, interventionist, creative approaches that have come to define feminist work in translation are a mere mirage, there can be no agency."

(Von Flotow 1997: 83) This orthodox Derridean approach thus cancels out women's optimistic assumption that they can act upon a text independently. Von Flotow (1997: 83) criticises Arrojo's point of view as follows:

> This is a position that is diametrically opposed to ideas about language as a vehicle for social change; it also ignores the fact that feminists have consistently selected theories or bits of theory they find useful to apply to their particular projects.

For Arrojo, this tactical application of theory is incoherent; for others such as Von Flotow it is strategic.

Gillam's (1995) criticism of elitism[1] rests on the contention that Brossard's deconstructive wordplays, obscure for the French reader, are incomprehensible for the reader of certain English translations, particularly those translations that attempt to extend already complex wordplays into the English text by privileging sound associations over meaning and sometimes through deliberate mistranslation. Gillam (1995: 12) suggests that these translations can only be addressed to those bilingual academics able to understand the word-games played in both source and target texts. She also maintains that the English translations of Brossard's work are culturally inappropriate, that Brossard's deconstructive language games mean something different in a text in Quebec than they do in English-speaking Canada. Since the Québécois' focus on language has little in common with forms of political activism in English-Canadian culture, she maintains that feminists are "at a loss to translate either [Brossard's] texts or her ideas into their own culture" (Gillam 1995: 12)

These criticisms are certainly thought-provoking. But, in my view, none of these critics really questions the basis upon which feminist translation rests: the contention that a feminist translation is a deliberate miss-translation and extension of the source text, that feminist translation, unlike conventional translation, constitutes difference and not derivation. In general, critics examine the notion of feminist translation in terms of the meta-textual commentary of feminist translators and academics and not according to the actual translations themselves. Where reference is made to the translations, only isolated examples of feminist

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[1] The charge of elitism is supported to some degree by Von Flotow (1991a: 2 and 1997: 79).

translators' prowess in deliberately mistranslating and overstating the original are mentioned. The implications of such a stance for translation theory are discussed without attempting to examine and compare feminist translations with their originals on a less piecemeal basis. Cultural and theoretical (in)appropriateness aside, my contention is that there is a gap between meta-textual claims by certain feminist translators and the actual facts of the translations themselves.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The purpose of this research is therefore to examine the specific relationship which exists between certain feminist texts and their feminist translations in order to determine whether feminist translation theory is substantiated by feminist translation practice. A further aim of this thesis is to investigate to what extent feminist translation theory is a reaction against the discourse underpinning received translation theory and what the implications might be for translation studies in general. My research question can be formulated as follows:

> *Are the meta-textual claims made by feminist translators substantiated by the textual evidence of their feminist translations?*

Related questions will also be discussed, such as: What is the nature of the translation techniques that feminist translators claim to use? Are these techniques present in their translations? Or only in meta-texts? Are the translation strategies used really innovative? What are the linguistic and contextual constraints operational in the course of the translation process for these types of texts?

My hypothesis is that it is the linguistic constraints of the source texts investigated (e.g. problems in transferring French wordplay to English) rather than feminist/ deconstructionist systemic norms and conventions which explain translational choices. This hypothesis is therefore in direct contrast to the opinions expressed in the various meta-texts, which emphasise the influence of systemic factors. My view is that there is in fact a discrepancy between the meta-textual claims by the feminist translators and the textual evidence of the translations themselves. In other words, despite statements to the contrary, the feminist translations examined remain conventional translations. This discrepancy is only revealed by

a comparative analysis of the texts and their translations according to a broad descriptive and systemic framework. My intention is not to evaluate the quality of the translations but to assess the theoretical implications of the translational choices made. In other words, I will investigate how feminist translation impacts on the discourse of translation theory.

I have drawn my corpus from Nicole Brossard's prose works and their feminist translations, partly because Nicole Brossard is the best-known Québécois feminist writer, and also because her work has been translated by several different feminist translators, some of whom have written extensively about their translations. I have chosen to analyse the translations of two different translators of Brossard's work, Barbara Godard and Patricia Claxton. Whereas Godard is the most outspoken and prolific of the feminist translators of Brossard, the first to point out the theoretical implications of feminist translation for translation theory, Claxton's attitude to translation as expressed in prefaces would seem to be more conventional. The empirical material for the analysis of feminist translation techniques consists of the source texts and translations of four feminist prose texts written by Nicole Brossard between 1973 and 1982, and translated between 1976 and 1989:

Sold-out: étreinte/ illustration (1973, 1980), translated by Patricia Claxton as: *Turn of a Pang* (1976);
French Kiss: étreinte-exploration (1974, 1980), translated by Patricia Claxton as *French Kiss Or: A Pang's Progress* (1986);
L'Amèr ou le chapitre effrité (1977, 1988), translated by Barbara Godard as: *These our mothers or: the disintegrating chapter* (1983);
Picture Theory (1982, 1989), translated by Barbara Godard as: *Picture Theory* (1991).

1.4 Rationale

Gentzler (1993:146) points out that deconstruction is not an approach normally associated with translation theory in Anglo-American circles, but also makes the following comment:

> I suggest that the shift to a more philosophic stance from which the entire problematic of translation can be better viewed may not only be beneficial for translation theory, but that after such a confrontation, the discourse which has limited the development of translation theory will invariably undergo a

> transformation, allowing new insights and fresh interdisciplinary approaches, breaking, *if you will*, a logjam of stagnated terms and notions. (Gentzler 1993: 145)

The analysis of feminist texts is interesting because it provides a vehicle for the concrete examination of the work of a group of translators who claim to have broken the "logjam of stagnated terms and notions" in their application of deconstructive and feminist principles, found in the feminist texts they translate, to their translations. In their meta-texts feminist *translators have indicated* both their intention to examine translation theory itself as discourse as well as their intention to use translation to contest the self-evident legitimacy of a discourse and its producers. Barbara Godard has been particularly vocal in this regard and is quoted as saying:

> To raise the issue of the [translation of French feminist texts] in the framework of language, gender and ideology is to ask about the theories of discourse advanced in these texts and the theories of translation which have produced the English version. (Godard in Bassnett & Lefevere 1990: 91)

This study therefore provides a useful framework for the practical description and criticism of feminist translations and a vehicle for a systemic examination of translation theory itself. *In the context of transformation/ translation, it also offers an opportunity to go beyond the* translation product and examine the meta-text (as rewriting of the translation). In this thesis I analyse not only source texts, their translations and intertextual references made in both types of text, but also prefaces and other meta-texts such as periodical articles written about the translations and about feminist translation in general. I also examine translation as metaphor and try to sketch out some of the ways *in which translation has been and still is used for* purposes other than the one traditionally taken to be central, namely the transmission of what is in the original text (however that is defined), in order to build up a picture of what constitutes feminist translation discourse in Canada.

This view of translation theory as an act of discourse, and *therefore necessarily* requiring a discursive perspective, is one which is often overlooked, but which is useful in that it highlights the fact that theories of translation (and not only translation practice) are attached *to and dependent on a general theory* of discourse which frames them. This fact aligns

translation theory with translation proper as a *practice*, both of which are seen as being subject to differing circumstances of production and reception. By refusing to grant theories of translation special and privileged status with respect to the practice of translation or vice versa, I believe our understanding of translation can be enriched.

1.5 Method of research: discourse as a domain of study

Discourse provides a privileged entry into the poststructuralist mode of analysis precisely because it studies the organised and regulated functions of language, as well as the regulating and constituting functions of language. Its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought. (Bové 1992: 7)

It is my contention that discourse of any kind - text as a suprasentential unit of meaning, an extension of the syntactic and logical structuring of a sentence - is a site of struggle. It is a dynamic linguistic, and, above all, semantic space in which social meanings are produced and challenged. This is clearly the case with feminist discourse, since the exposure of the collusion between ideology and cultural practices is an avowed feminist aim. Similarly, it is difficult to think of translational activity as unmediated by the dialectics and tensions of the cultures involved. Chellapan (1995: 91) agrees with Kathy Mezei that

> there is more to the translation process than the hermeneutic encoding and decoding Steiner speaks of; we must consider as well the factors which influence the production of meaning in the source text and target text; we must consider the function of both source and target texts. That is, the translator must consider three referential systems - the particular system of the text, the system of the culture out of which the text has sprung, and the cultural system in which the metatext will be created.

This approach to translation falls squarely within the acknowledged methodology of **descriptive translation studies.** Using descriptive translation studies (DTS) to inform the analysis of translated feminist texts ensures that

> instead of providing guidelines for the next translation to be made and passing judgement on any number of existing ones, (...) the translated text [is taken] as it is and [an attempt is made] to determine the various factors that may account for its particular nature. This position implies that the researcher has to work without preconceived notions of what actually constitutes 'translation' or where

> exactly the dividing line between translation and non-translation is to be drawn, for such notions would inevitably reveal themselves to be normative and restrictive. (Hermans 1985a: 13)

DTS is a 'target-oriented' approach which refuses to grant a self-evident superiority or centrality to the 'original' or to the inferred intentions of an individual author-translator-subject. Instead, attention is focused on the completed translations and the relationship between translational solutions and the conventions of the receiving system. As Toury (1995: 13) points out:

> It is not translations alone (as products, that is) whose position in the hosting culture varies. Translating itself, as a type of text-generating activity, may well vary in its position too, in terms of e.g. centrality vs peripherality, prevalence vs rarity, or high vs low prestige. This variability and its possible ramifications, e.g. in terms of texts pertaining to different types, or translation activities performed in different cultural groups, is again intimately connected with the strategies adopted by translators, and hence with the make-up of translated texts and their relationships to their sources.

The rise of descriptive translation studies, under the influence of polysystem theory[2], has meant that traditional evaluative comparisons between one source text and its translation are no longer a focus; corpus projects of various kinds are encouraged because they facilitate comparisons of series of texts or translation problems, for example several translations of one source, different stages in the translation of a text, entire productions of individual translators, schools of translators, and above all of translations with corpora of TL originals. It is an approach that allows room for micro-level textual studies, but also stresses the importance of macro-level, sociological expansions of the field. In this way one hopes to gain insight into many factors that characterise and determine the translation product.

In a broad systemic framework the method of comparison between source text(s) and target text(s) has to take into account a complex network of relations between the source text(s) and the political, social, cultural, literary and textual norms and conventions of the source system, as well as the target text(s) and the political, social, cultural, literary and textual norms and conventions of the target system. In this regard, the diagrammatic representation of the networks of relations in comparative analysis supplied by Kruger and Wallmach (1997: 123)

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2 The term 'polysystem' was coined by the Israeli cultural theorist Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s.

has been refined as follows for the present thesis:

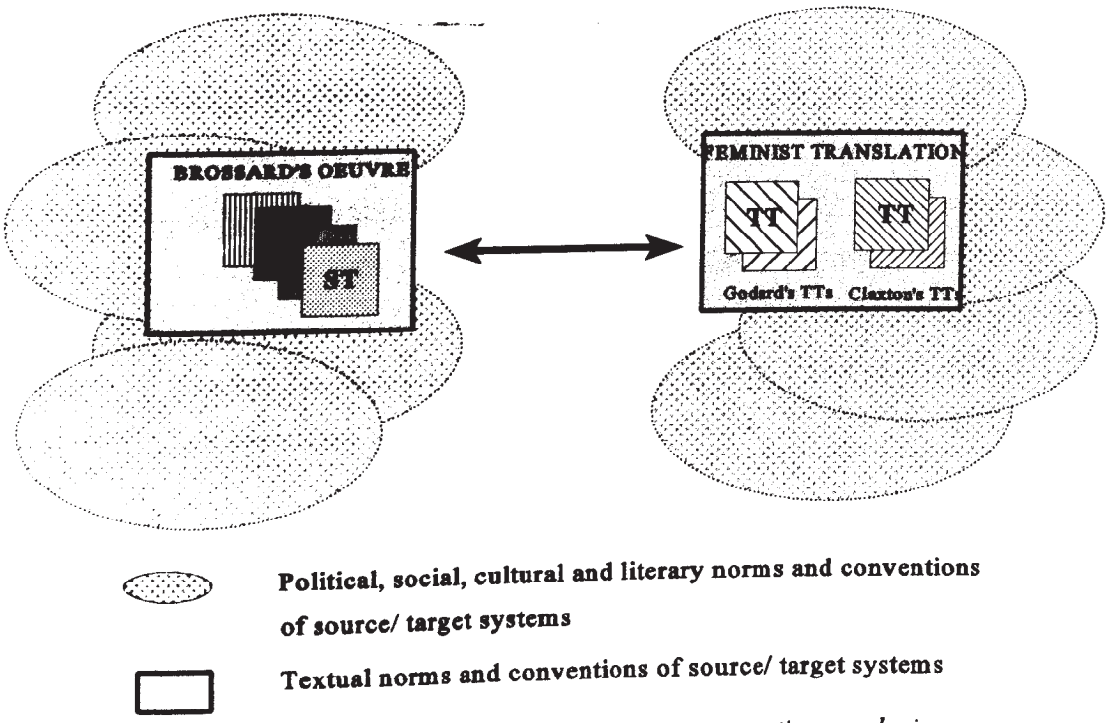

Figure 1: *Networks of relations in comparative analysis*

Where my thesis takes descriptive translation studies a step further is in advocating that translation and feminism themselves should be examined in terms of discourse. In other words, feminist texts and translations should be studied not only in terms of the texts themselves, but also according to the systems underpinning the production of those texts, the 'real' (written but non-literary) discourse of feminists, their attitudes to society, etc. as well as discourse about

translation, the so-called 'theories' of translation[3]. In this study, therefore, an attempt has been made to examine both feminist discourse and translation discourse as they pertain to feminist translation.

Since 'cultures' and 'literatures' are only specific types of discursive practices, there is no reason to restrict the concept of translation to the transfer of texts and textual elements between languages (cultures, literatures). So translation can be redefined as the migration and transformation of discursive elements between different discourses. Each of those discourses can be described as occupying a position in a larger system, and forming a system in itself (see Lambert and Robyns 1992 and Even-Zohar 1981). Most importantly, this means that translation cannot be seen separately from non-translation. Both the exclusion of alien elements and their acceptance in their original form, both the 'faithful' translation and the complete transformation of a text or textual element have to be seen as translation strategies. Translation must be seen as anything between literal repetition (which, in practice, does not exist) and intertextuality in the largest sense. (Robyns 1994: 3)

The elaboration of a framework with a broad definition of what constitutes translation is vital to the analysis of feminist texts and their translations. In texts such as those written by Nicole Brossard, textual meaning as we know it is deconstructed, and the only 'meaning' residing in a text is reflected by wordplay, by lexical connections. The same applies to feminist translations of these texts, which aim to create a 'different' chain of signifiers via translation as well as to translate for form, for the 'signifier', instead of translating for meaning, for the 'signified', as is usual in translation. It is clearly impossible to carry out a conventional comparative analysis of the meaning transfer between source and target texts which are conceived of in this way. I therefore draw upon aspects of text linguistics to account for the particular type of text connectivity evident in feminist/ deconstructive texts and their translations and upon contrastive linguistics in order to analyse the creativity of the feminist translation strategies utilised.

Thus I adopt an interdisciplinary approach in this thesis, drawing upon discourse as a bridging

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[3] The suggestion that translation should be examined as discourse has been made by Clem Robyns (1994: 2).

point between feminism and translation, aiming to promote reflection on the interaction between dominant and peripheral discursive systems in these fields as well as to devise a way of examining texts and translations which fall within this paradigm.

1.6 Organisation of the study

In this chapter, the research problem which forms the focus of the enquiry in this thesis is examined and contextualised within a broader theoretical and empirical framework, and the objectives, hypotheses and research approach identified. The remainder of the thesis is structured in the following way.

Given that the concept of discourse is pivotal to the present study, a more detailed discussion of this concept is clearly required. Chapter 2 therefore provides an overview and review of the literature relating to the notion of discourse and the various types of discourse analysis, before providing some background on the particular theories informing the analysis of discourse and the theories informing the analysis of text in this thesis.

In Chapter 3, translation studies is analysed in the context of discourse, in terms of dominant and peripheral discourses on translation, and with a focus on the origin of metaphors of resistance and difference in the cultural studies paradigm. In Chapter 4, I examine the notion of language as an inscription of 'difference' in Canadian discourse and how the metaphor of 'difference' informs both English-Canadian and Québécois literature. I then discuss the position and function of the concept of translation as 'difference' in the various subdiscourses of the Canadian discursive system, as well as the rhetorical devices used to characterise it. I go on to discuss feminist discourse in Canada, which is ideologically positioned between the French and Anglo-American feminist schools, and how this affects Canadian feminist writing in general, and Nicole Brossard in particular. I also examine the theoretical concerns of feminist translators as expressed in meta-texts as well as metatextual commentary on feminist translation strategies.

Chapter 5 constitutes the analytical framework used in the study. A discussion of the linguistic, translational, normative and textual constraints operational in the course of the translation process is followed by the elaboration of a methodology for the comparison of feminist texts and translations. Firstly, Hoey's (1991) model for the study of patterns of lexis in text is

discussed and adapted for use in tracing the differences and similarities between the networks of signifiers in feminist texts and their translations. Secondly, the categories used by Delabastita (1993) and Vinay and Darbelnet ([1958], 1995) for the examination of translation strategies are discussed and refined in order to analyse the feminist translation strategies utilised in the four translations.

In Chapter 6, extracts from the four texts and the four translations are examined according to the analytical framework elaborated in the previous chapter and the findings discussed. Chapter 7 constitutes the conclusion to the study and attempts to provide a synthesis of the contribution of the study in terms of the research issues on which the study focused and the findings of the text analyses undertaken. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for translation theory and for feminist translation.

1.7 A final note

This study follows the tenets of DTS and polysystem theory, except as regards my attitude towards the observability of science and the possibility of closure, where it is more in accord with feminism and deconstruction. Descriptive translation theorists believe it is possible to analyse translations objectively and then to draw specific, though non-judgemental, conclusions about their analysis. For instance, Toury, in proposing DTS as a viable alternative to prescriptive translation theories, makes the following remark:

> What constitutes the subject matter of a proper discipline of Translation Studies is (observable or reconstructable) facts of real life rather than merely speculative entities resulting from preconceived hypotheses and theoretical models. (Toury 1994: 1)

In contrast, both deconstructionists and feminists resist the idea that the world consists of independently existing objects whose concrete features can be perceived clearly and whose nature can be classified accordingly. Not only is each perceiver's view seen as containing an inherent bias, but it is also impossible to 'pin down' texts themselves, since they continually displace one another in an endless displacement of meaning .

Thus, the structure of this thesis may suggest that there are various central ideas pertaining to feminist translation in Canada and that once having read the thesis, the reader will know all

there is to know about feminist translation and translation discourse. On the contrary; this is just the moment of entry into a full, contradictory, argumentative realm of discussion. In discussing specific feminist works and their translations in terms of a linguistic analysis, I have taken the chance of inviting closure and of presenting a false sense of control over the material. But in fact, I have closed off the free play of meaning only temporarily in a 'freeze-frame' linguistic analysis so as to pinpoint the translation strategies used. Ultimately, what counts is the positioning of feminist translation within a specific discourse system which operates with its own set of rules in a dynamic relationship with other discourses. There is no closure, no absolute control. There is always more than one possible reading of a text.

Chapter 2

Discourse: theoretical framework

> To suppose that the study of the discursive forms in which ideology is expressed could be detached from the social-historical conditions of discursive production would be to lose sight of the relations of domination in virtue of which discourse is ideological. (Thompson 1984: 134)

2.1 Introduction

Although discourse analysis is an increasingly popular and important area of study - both on its own and for what it can tell us about language, society, culture and thought - it remains a field which is somewhat amorphous. This chapter does not aim to provide an overview of all the approaches to discourse analysis[1], but only those relevant to translation studies in general and the corpus of texts under examination in particular. The concept of discourse and the various frameworks, concepts and methods which could be used for the analysis of discourse within translation studies is discussed, followed by an examination of the theoretical text-linguistic framework for the comparative analysis of texts in this study.

2.2 Definitions of discourse and discourse analysis

According to the *Dictionary of Stylistics* (Wales 1990: 129), the word **discourse** "generally seems to be used for all those senses of language which, in the words of Bakhtin, emphasise its 'concrete living totality' (1981); the term 'language' itself being orientated more towards a linguistic system." Here it is important to note that a distinction has often been made between **discourse** and **text**, linguists often using 'discourse' only for spoken forms of language in real communicative situations, and 'text' for written forms of language. In this study, however, the term **discourse** is used not as sociolinguists use it, taking discourse to mean, roughly, any extended piece of language, but as an overarching concept which refers to the use of language (whether spoken or written) as social action, whereas **text** refers to the structure of written language only. Discourse is not text, but any discourse contains a number of specific

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[1] For an overview of discourse analysis, see Schiffrin (1997), Cook (1990) and McCarthy (1991).

constraints on what kinds of meanings can be made in texts, what kinds of lexicogrammatical features may be selected in texts. As Kress (in Geslin 1996: 54) puts it, discourse is "a category that belongs to and derives from the social domain [whereas] text is a category that belongs to and derives from the linguistic domain...Any one text may be the expression or realisation of a number of sometimes competing and contradictory discourses."

But what exactly is discourse? This seems to be a question asked variously by literary theorists, discourse analysts, deconstructionists, sociologists, psychologists and stylisticians. Discourse analysis is a field which is widely recognised as one of the least defined areas in linguistics - one reason for this being that our understanding of discourse is based on scholarship from a number of widely differing academic disciplines. Included are not just disciplines in which models for understanding and analysing discourse first developed (linguistics, anthropology, sociology, philosophy), but also disciplines that have applied these models to problems within specific domains (e.g. communication, social psychology and artificial intelligence) (Schiffrin 1997: 5).

According to Thompson (1984: 98-9), **discourse analysis** covers three basic areas: firstly, the study of naturally occurring instances of expression; secondly, the examination of linguistic units that exceed the limits of a single sentence; and thirdly, the interest in the relations between linguistic and non-linguistic activity. Thus, discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used.

At a time when linguistics was largely concerned with the analysis of single sentences[2] outside a communicative context, it was Zellig Harris, himself a sentence linguist, who in 1952 coined the term 'discourse analysis' and initiated a search for language rules which would explain how sentences were connected within a text by a kind of extended grammar (Cook 1989: 5). He

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2 Until about the 1960s, mainstream linguistics in the Western world focused on the formal structural component of language and the characterisation of well-formed versus deviant sentences. Connected sequences of linguistic units such as occur in written discourse and actual speech were considered to be too variable and open-ended to be amenable to rigorous scientific investigation. By viewing language as structure and by carefully circumscribing the data base, formal linguistics abstracted language away from its socio-communicative matrix.