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Retranslating *The Second Sex* into Finnish: Choices, Practices, and Ideas

Erika Ruonakoski

Introduction: The Story of the Two Finnish Translations of *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*, *Toinen sukupuoli*)

The first Finnish translation of *The Second Sex* was published more than three decades after the original, in 1980. It was translated by Annikki Suni, who had proposed the work to be included in the publishing program of the Kirjayhtymä publishing house.

At that point, the aim was to provide material for use by the feminist movement rather than to produce a philosophically pedantic translation. After all Beauvoir’s work was considered to be sociological rather than philosophical—it was supposed to discuss gender roles. The publisher thought it more economically sound to publish only an abridged version of the text, which is why the abridged Swedish translation (1973) was adopted as the structural model.¹

These translations truly deserve the epithet “abridged,” for they contain little more than half of the original material, whereas the infamous English translation by H. M. Parshley has by far fewer omissions. Willing to make her work accessible to a new generation of women, Beauvoir had readily accepted the shortening of her work.²

The first Finnish translation of *The Second Sex* was well received and prompted a lot of discussion. The fact that it the book was abridged aroused some criticism but did not produce a scandal. In the 1990's, however, Margaret Simons's analysis of the omissions in Parshley's translation became known also in Finnish academic circles, especially through Sara Heinämaa's teaching and research on Beauvoir. Since then, there was an awareness that an unabridged translation would be needed also in Finnish, but only in 2008 did the interests of the French and Finnish publishing houses and those of feminist philosophers meet.

The second, unabridged Finnish version of *The Second Sex* was published by Tammi Publishers, with which Kirjayhtymä had merged. The original intention had been to reprint the abridged translation with a preface from Heinämaa. Heinämaa had argued, however, that it would be preferable to make a new, unabridged translation—after all Beauvoir research had taken giant leaps after the publication of the abridged version and new unabridged English and German translations were already on the way. The cautious enthusiasm in Tammi turned into a publishing decision after Gallimard agreed to grant rights only to an unabridged version.

Following Heinämaa's advice, Tammi hired three of her then current and former students, Iina Koskinen, Hanna Lukkari and myself, for the translation job. Heinämaa would write the introduction and comment on the translation drafts. This chapter describes the genesis of the second, unabridged Finnish translation, the choices we made as well as the philosophical interpretations motivating those choices. As Finnish is a language without articles, translating the key sentence seemed fairly unproblematic, whereas other problems arose.

Translation as Problem Solving

Translating Beauvoir's *magnum opus* posed quite a challenge to our group, for we were philosophers, not professional translators.³ Our translation would certainly be compared to the old one, which was, in terms of style, fairly impressive. During her career, Suni (1941–2012) received several national prizes for her work as a translator as well as the knight's *médaille* from the *Ordre des Arts et Lettres* of the French government, while our credentials were nothing of the sort.

Yet we felt fairly confident about being able to produce a competent translation, for not only had we specialized in the existentialist-phenomenological tradition of philosophy, but the group members had some background also in Romance philology, communications theory, and translating (Beauvoir 2007). Besides, Heinämaa and our other colleagues could be consulted if there were problems pertaining to, for instance, how to translate a particular reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, or G. W. F. Hegel.

From the very beginning the idea was to make not only an unabridged translation of Beauvoir's *magnum opus*, but also to make a translation that would be as philosophically precise as possible. However, there was no clear model of how to translate texts of existentialist philosophy into Finnish. Apart from the literary works of Sartre, Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, there were few Finnish translations of existentialism, and many of them were quite old. Due to this, our work started with mapping out the central concepts and agreeing upon what would be the ideal translations

for them. To find the best possible solutions, we discussed the pros and cons of different alternatives, often also with other philosophers.

Another central source of difficulties in our translation work lay in the structural differences between French and Finnish, which is a Finno-Ugric language. I will mention only a few examples among an abundance of such differences. For instance, French clauses often need to be translated by shortened Finnish clauses, and vice versa. In addition, while some negative adjectives such as “*irréductible*” (irreducible) do have their Finnish equivalents, sticking to the adjective form may produce awkward Finnish sentences. For that reason such structures are often translated with negative verb structures like “*ei voi palauttaa*” (cannot be reduced).

As for the title of the book, *Le deuxième sexe*, we translated this as *Toinen sukupuoli* (The second sex), just like Suni had done. This appeared to be the only viable option, as “*le deuxième*” (the second) is in Finnish “*toinen*” and “*sexe*” (sex) is, in this context, “*sukupuoli*”. However, “*toinen*” also means “other”, so the Finnish title has the double meaning “the second/other sex”. Therefore, the hierarchical distinction introduced in the French title is less evident in the Finnish one—and, in fact, also in some other translation titles, such as the Swedish *Det andra könet* and the German *Das andere Geschlecht*. Interestingly, though, Beauvoir’s hesitation between “the other” and “the second” can be seen in her initial ideas for the title, namely “*L’autre*” (The other), “*La seconde*” (The second), and “*L’autre sexe*” (The other sex). Yet it was the title proposed by Jacques-Laurent Bost, *Le deuxième sexe*, which she chose. (Beauvoir 1963, 185; 1978, 178). In any case, the more ambiguous Finnish title hardly misrepresents the general idea

of the book, especially if we take into account that the otherness of women was Beauvoir's central theme.

In some more problematic instances, however, it was the Finnish equivalent of a French word that had a more specified meaning. For instance, each time Beauvoir used the word "*l'homme*" (man), we needed to decide, whether she speaks of men as male human beings or of Man in the meaning of all human beings. This was because the Finnish word "*ihminen*" refers to "the human being," including both women and men, whereas the word "*mies*" refers only to "man" in the sense of "the male human being."⁴ Usually it was not too hard to make out which Beauvoir meant. In a passage I will later analyze in more detail, Beauvoir clearly uses the word "*l'homme*" in two meanings: "*Comme l'a dit très justement Merleau-Ponty, l'homme n'est pas une espèce naturelle: c'est une idée historique. La femme n'est pas une réalité figée, mais un devenir; c'est dans son devenir qu'il faudrait la confronter à l'homme*" (Beauvoir 2008b, 75.). Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier translate: "As Merleau-Ponty rightly said, man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea. Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming" (Beauvoir 2010, 45). When Beauvoir refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of man, she would appear to speak of the human being, or *Man*. In the next phrase, however, when she argues that woman "has to be compared with man in her becoming," she seems to speak of male human beings, men, for surely woman need not be compared here with all human beings but only with the male ones.

Nevertheless, some instances of "*l'homme*" were more difficult to decipher. For instance, in the chapter "The Point of View of Historical Materialism," Beauvoir writes:

“dès les plus anciens documents de la préhistoire, l’homme nous apparaît toujours comme armé” (2008b, 98–99) [“from prehistory’s earliest documents, man is always seen as armed” (2010, 62)]. We translated “l’homme” here as “ihminen,” the human being (Beauvoir 2009, 122), but as the paragraph in question includes also explicit comparisons between the sexes, both translation options (“ihminen” and “mies,” “the human being” and “man”) are possible. In fact, there are numerous examples of this type in the chapter in question. Sometimes Beauvoir appears to strive for clarity by using alternative words such as “l’humanité” (humanity), “l’être humain” (the human being), and “le male” (the male), but as she still occasionally uses the word “l’homme” in the sense of the human being, the problem remains unresolved.

On the other hand, we had to use the Finnish words “nainen” (woman) and “mies” (man) sometimes even when Beauvoir did not use them. This owes to the fact that there is only one third-person singular pronoun referring to humans in the Finnish literary language, namely “hän” (she/he).⁵ When the French pronouns “elle” (she) and “il” (he) are used in close proximity (i.e., in the same sentence) a direct translation into Finnish produces confusions. For instance, when Beauvoir describes power relations between the lovers in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, she writes: “le temps qu’il passé avec elle, il le lui donne; elle le prend” (2008b, 402). Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translate this, unproblematically, as: “he gives her the time he spends with her; she takes it” (Beauvoir 2010, 270). But when one has only one third-person singular pronoun to use, a problem arises: how to make the difference between her and him? After all a sentence of the following type would not make much sense, “x” denoting the personal pronoun “hän” of Finnish: “x gives x the time x spends with x; x takes it”.

This dilemma, however, is familiar to all translators who translate from Indo-European languages into Finnish. The problem is usually solved by either using nouns that reveal the gender of the subject, such as “*nainen*” (woman), “*tyttö*” (girl), “*mies*” (man), or “*poika*” (boy), or by repeating the name of the agent.⁶ We translated the passage as follows: “*mies antaa naiselle ajan, jonka viettää tämän kanssa, nainen taas ottaa sen*” (Beauvoir 2009, 433). It is almost as impossible to translate this Finnish phrase into English without using the personal pronouns “he” and “she” as it is to translate the original phrase into Finnish without introducing extra nouns such as “woman” and “man,” but the meaning of the phrase is roughly this: “the man *gives* the woman the time [he] spends with [her/that], while the woman takes it.” Even though this phrase may make a native English-speaker writhe in agony, the Finnish phrase is not too bad in terms of style.

As for the French word “*féminin*,” I agree with Marybeth Timmermann’s analysis that in many cases it is best translated as a genitive and not as an adjective,⁷ and this applies to both English and Finnish translations. She rightly points out that Beauvoir’s criticism of the traditional notion of femininity makes a description of literature (*la littérature féminine*) in terms of femininity unlikely.⁸ Beauvoir by no means denies that there are differences between women and men, but it is difficult to detect a *positive* theory of femininity in *The Second Sex*. Instead femininity is described as a myth, a mystification, as a ruse that serves only to keep both women and men in the state of inauthenticity. To exist as a woman is to exist as a human being, as an opening toward the future, as an orientation toward a world of possibilities, and for this reason Beauvoir

does not define a particular feminine way of existing, even though she does discuss the bodily peculiarities in women's existence.⁹

Hence, I believe Timmerman is right when she argues that "*la littérature féminine*," for instance, should be translated as "women's literature," not "feminine literature." As regards the Finnish translation, we translated "*féminin*" as "*naisten*" ("women's" or "of women"), when the word was accompanying a noun (as an attributive adjective), and when it was clear that Beauvoir was not referring to the myth of femininity. This was a solution I came upon already before the translation project of *Le deuxième sexe*, when I was translating "La condition féminine" (The condition of women) into Finnish (in Beauvoir 2007). Surely this title does not refer to some obscure "feminine" condition but precisely to the condition of women, as also Timmermann points out. Similarly, we translated *les forces féminines* (Beauvoir 2008b, 99) as "*naisten voimat*"—that is, "women's strength," not "feminine strength" (Beauvoir 2009, 123; cf. Beauvoir 2010, 63)—and "*existence féminine*" (Beauvoir 2008c, 9) as "*naisen olemassaolo*"; in other words, as "woman's existence," not as "feminine existence" (Beauvoir 2011b, 343; cf. Beauvoir 2010, 279).

One More Time: Becoming a Woman and Women's Becoming

As can be read in Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's contribution to this book, their decision to omit the indefinite article from the new English translation of the key sentence was not light-minded but was based on their interpretation of "*la femme*" as "an institution" or "a construct" (this volume, 281). On the other hand, H. M. Parshley's

translation, according to which one becomes *a* woman, can be defended on the basis that “Lived Experience” is, to a large extent, a description of the different ways in which girls come to live their bodies, of how each of them becomes *a* woman in her own way. As Timmermann points out, it may be impossible to prove that one way of translating the sentence is better than the other. Yet, for the sake of simplicity and because my own interpretation of “Lived Experience” emphasizes the individuality of girls and women, I will from now on use the indefinite article when translating “*devenir femme*” (to become a woman) into English.

When working on the new Finnish translation, however, the use of the article was not an issue. The reason for this is simple: there are no articles in the Finnish language. Accordingly, our choices regarding how to translate “*on ne naît pas femme: on le devient*” (one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman) had to do with style rather than content. As it happened, we chose to stick to the version Suni had used in her translation (Beauvoir 1980, 154; 2011b, 19):

Naiseksi	ei synnytä,	naiseksi	tullaan
A woman	One is not born,	a woman (translative case)	one becomes

We did discuss the possibility of making the translation of the phrase more compact, “*naiseksi ei synnytä vaan tullaan*” (a woman one is not born but one becomes). Both versions were stylistically and philosophically just as good, but as Suni’s version

was already well known, there appeared to be no reason to confuse the readers by changing the key sentence.

There are thirteen grammatical cases in Finnish. “*Naiseksi*” is the translative case of the word “*nainen*” (woman). One derives this case in the singular by using the genitive stem of the word “*nainen*,” and the ending “*-ksi*.”¹⁰ The translative case indicates becoming something or changing *into* something. For instance, in English one “turns *into* a wicked person”, and Finnish one “*muuttuu ilkeäksi ihmiseksi*.” Again, in English one “becomes happy,” in Finnish one “*tulee onnelliseksi*”.

“*Ei synnytä*” (one is not born) is a negative passive form of the verb “*syntyä*” (to be born). The translative case “*naiseksi*” ([into a] woman) is repeated after the comma, and the word is followed by a positive passive predicate, “*tullaan*” (one becomes), from the verb “*tulla*” (to become). The French expression “*on devient*” (one becomes) can be translated fairly unambiguously into Finnish with this word, even though the passive is formed in a different manner: the verb itself has a passive form and does not require any agent such as “*on*” of French or “one” of English.

In Finnish translations of philosophical texts the verb “*devenir*” (to become) is often problematic, because there is only one word, “*tulla*,” to translate both the verbs “*devenir*” (to become) and “*venir*” (to come). In some cases there is a threat of unwanted sexual innuendos, as the word “*tulla*” has also the meaning “to have an orgasm,” just like “to come” has in English. Beauvoir’s key sentence, “*on ne naît pas femme: on le devient*” does not present such problems, however. This is because the translative case of “*nainen*,” namely “*naiseksi*”, indicates that “*tulla*” (to become, to come) is used in the sense of “to become”.

Owing to the fact that the passive voice is formed in a different way in Finnish than in French and English, the word order is different, too: one cannot start with the passive predicate when one refers to becoming something, which is why the word referring to “woman” has to come first. The different word order gives the whole phrase a slightly different emphasis: what one becomes—a woman—is more accentuated. The repetition of the word “*nainen*” (woman) reinforces the same accentuation. These kinds of differences in nuance do not direct the reader’s interpretation of what is meant by “*nainen*” (woman), however: a culturally constructed role, or existence as a singular and free female individual, living in a culturally constrained situation. There is no way of hinting at such a difference by means of Finnish grammar, and basically the ambiguity of the French original is present also in the Finnish translation.

As for the verb “*naître*” (to be born), the Finnish equivalent “*syntyä*” refers to the activity of the one who is born, just like the French verb does: in both languages that person is the subject rather than an object of the birth, whereas in English (is born) and German (*wird geboren*) they are objects of birth (see Baumeister, chapter 15, in this book). However, the Finnish translation does not convey the possible wordplay between the similarly pronounced “*n’est*” (is not) and “*naît*” (is born) any more than do the English and German translations (see Baumeister).

Even though the nature of Finnish grammar made translating the key sentence fairly unproblematic, this does not mean that we, the translators, did not discuss the meaning of the sentence. We were certainly heavily influenced by Heinämaa’s interpretation of *The Second Sex*, especially in the following issues: that the phenomenological notion of the lived body was one of Beauvoir’s most crucial starting

points, and that explaining Beauvoir's conception of embodiment in terms of the sex–gender distinction does not do it justice (e.g., Heinämaa 1996; 1997). As Heinämaa puts it in her introduction to the new Finnish translation, every human being “lives in the junction of immanence and transcendence, is oriented toward the world and the future from the point of departure of her own self, her present moment, and her past life” (Heinämaa 2009, 21; see also Beauvoir 1945, 363; 2004, 159).¹¹ Thus to become a woman is not merely taking on a performance of a woman or “choosing a gender,”¹² but orienting oneself toward the future from one's specific embodied and historical situation, responding to the constraints these pose.

Nevertheless, Beauvoir later describes the argument proposed in *The Second Sex* in a way that seems to justify explaining her views in terms of the sex–gender distinction. In *Force of Circumstance* she curtly states that the dissimilarities between men and women are “of a cultural and not of a natural order” (1963, 204; 1978, 196). Also after the key sentence in “Lived Experience” she emphasizes the mediation of culturally situated others in the process that constitutes an individual as an Other. In other words, becoming a woman seems to imply becoming a subject that is culturally defined as the Other, an unessential and secondary mode of human existence. In point of fact, she calls the outcome of the process “*produit*” (product):

One is not born, but rather becomes, [a] woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (Beauvoir 2010, 283.)

On ne naît pas femme: on le devient. Aucun destin biologique, psychique, économique ne définit la figure que revêt au sein de la société la femelle humaine ; c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit

intermédiaire entre le mâle et le castrat qu'on qualifie de féminin.
(Beauvoir 2008c, 13.)

Yet this does not mean that exterior forces shape the passive girl into a woman. While there are exterior constraints to a girl's existence, she is also an active subject, who has to find her way through these constraints. Later in the text Beauvoir shows how each girl comes to live her body in her own way, not only according to her culture broadly speaking but also according to the specificities of her body, her domestic situation, and her temperament (Beauvoir 2008c, 14–215; 2010, 284–436; see Koskinen, Lukkari, and Ruonakoski 2010, 208; Lukkari and Ruonakoski 2015; Ruonakoski 2015).

It is worth noticing that the key sentence opens the chapter that is titled “*Enfance*” (Childhood). In this context, it may not be totally out of the question—even though, in view of the recent debates, perhaps outrageous—to suggest that Beauvoir might be using the expression “*devenir femme*” in a manner that is, up to a point, nontheoretical: after all “*devenir femme*” has also the meaning “to grow into a woman.” Similarly, “*devenir homme*” can be translated as “to grow into a man.” This kind of interpretation is still compatible with the idea that *how* one grows into a woman is structured by the society. However, knowing Beauvoir's familiarity with the concept of becoming, it may well be that she was playing on the different connotations of the word.¹³

Interestingly, there appears to be some ambivalence between the ways Beauvoir uses the verb “*devenir*” (to become) in the phrase “*on ne naît pas femme: on le devient*” (2008c, 13) and the noun “*devenir*” in another central sentence, “*la femme n'est pas une réalité figée, mais un devenir*” (2008b, 75), rendered by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier as “woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming” (2010, 45). In the latter phrase, which

can be found in the chapter “Biological Data” of the first volume, becoming has a positive ring: women should be seen in reference to their possibilities rather than through their accomplishments in a patriarchal society. In the former phrase the connotation is more negative: girls become women, and when that happens within a patriarchal society, they are confined to otherness. Here becoming seems to have an end point (womanhood) whereas the other phrase in its broader context emphasizes the openendedness of becoming:

Only within a human perspective can the female and the male be compared in the human species. But the definition of man is that he is a being who is not given, who makes himself what he is. As Merleau-Ponty rightly said, man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea.¹⁴ Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her possibilities have to be defined: what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities. (Beauvoir 2010, 45.)

C'est seulement dans une perspective humaine qu'on peut comparer dans l'espèce humaine la femelle et le mâle. Mais la définition de l'homme, c'est qu'il est un être qui n'est pas donné, qui se fait être ce qu'il est. Comme l'a dit très justement Merleau-Ponty, l'homme n'est pas une espèce naturelle : c'est une idée historique. La femme n'est pas une réalité figée, mais un devenir ; c'est dans son devenir qu'il faudrait la confronter à l'homme, c'est-à-dire qu'il faudrait définir ses possibilités : ce qui fausse tant de débats c'est qu'on veut la réduire à ce qu'elle a été, à ce qu'elle est aujourd'hui, cependant qu'on pose la question de ses capacités. (Beauvoir 2008b, 75.)

This passage can be interpreted within a number of theoretical frameworks from Husserlian phenomenology to Hegel's philosophy and historical materialism. All of these philosophies emphasize the openness of human existence toward the possible.¹⁵ Eva Gothlin points out that Heidegger describes *Dasein* as a structure of possibilities—it transcends the given toward the possible and is always “more than it is” (Gothlin 2003, 53; Heidegger 1996, e.g., 138–139). Edmund Husserl has a similar point when he argues

that human beings can examine their actions and the events in their surrounding world from the point of view of infinite possibilities (2006, 86). Merleau-Ponty likewise suggests in *Phenomenology of Perception* that in nonpathological cases a human individual orients toward the world within the aspect of possibilities (1998, 127). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre, for his part, argues that the human reality is a being that is what-it-is-not and comes into being as a lack of self-identity with itself. It is human reality that opens up possibilities in the world, when it projects itself beyond what-it-is (Sartre 1957, e.g., xli–xlii; 2001, e.g., 32–33).

As we can see, it is difficult to pinpoint any one source for or influence to Beauvoir's views. Rather, the idea of the openness of human existence was pervasive in the texts of the philosophers she was most interested in or worked with. Yet the question arises: What was the broader philosophical context of "becoming" for Beauvoir? In "Pyrrhus and Cineas" she distinguishes universal becoming from individual becoming, taking a critical stand on the Hegelian idea that one can find the accomplishment of one's project in universal becoming. According to her, it is impossible for human subjects to adopt such an attitude, for they are tied to the finiteness of their projects: even if each end can in principle be surpassed, it is not worth pursuing from a human perspective, if it is not first set as something that is not to be surpassed. As she puts it, a young person—in her example, a young man—does transcend himself and the given situation but he does not transcend himself *for* humanity. Instead, humanity transcends itself *through him* (Beauvoir 2004, 110–113). In this sense, the finite becoming of an individual would appear to participate in the infinite becoming of humanity, but not in an effortlessly

flowing manner: human beings are “irretrievably isolated by their subjectivity” and therefore the succession of free individuals in humanity is discontinuous (2004, 109).

Still we can ask if a transgenerational becoming plays any role in the sentence “woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming.” Beauvoir appears to refer to women also in their historical continuum when she writes: “what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities.” Apparently female individuals are seen here not only in terms of what they themselves have achieved so far but also in terms of what other women have achieved. Yet, if Beauvoir’s analysis in “Pyrrhus and Cineas” still holds here, it seems likely that her emphasis is on the individual becoming. As she puts it, “Hegel declares in vain that individuality is only a moment of the universal becoming” (Beauvoir 2004, 101).

To illuminate Beauvoir’s adoption and critique of Hegel further, it may be useful also to examine briefly Beauvoir’s definition of being and becoming in her discussion of the formation of inferiority in “Facts and Myths”:

But one should agree upon the scope of the word *to be*: bad faith consists of giving it a substantive value, but in reality it has a dynamic, Hegelian meaning: *to be* is to have become, to have been made as one manifests oneself. Yes, today women are, on the whole, inferior to men—in other words, their situation opens fewer possibilities to them. The question is, whether this state of affairs must be perpetuated. (My translation.)

[C]’est sur la portée du mot être qu’il faudrait s’entendre; la mauvaise foi consiste à lui donner une valeur substantielle alors qu’il a le sens dynamique hégélien: être c’est être devenu, c’est avoir été fait tel qu’on se manifeste; oui, les femmes dans l’ensemble sont aujourd’hui inférieures aux hommes, c’est-à-dire que leur situation leur ouvre de moindres possibilités: le problème c’est de savoir si cet état de choses doit se perpétuer. (Beauvoir 2008b, 27.)

On the basis of this passage, she does draw from Hegel, when she speaks of being and becoming. In this sense, there is no contradiction between the sentences “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” and “woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming.” To be a woman is *to have become* and *to have been made a woman*, but what one has become is yet another point of departure for further becoming. On the other hand, this passage shows that she seems to include “being made” within becoming. In other words, becoming is not only activity and choice but also living within the constraints and possibilities of given situations. A similar idea is present in Beauvoir’s discussion on the absence of women geniuses: “one is not born, but becomes, a genius” (*on ne naît pas génie: on le devient*; 2008b, 228; 2010, 152). Again, Beauvoir refers to the condition of women, which until now has made this becoming impossible (2008b, 228; 2010, 152). One becomes a woman within a given bodily, psychological and sociohistorical situation, and if that situation includes the right kinds of possibilities, one may become a woman genius. In other words, one’s becoming may include both becoming a woman and becoming a genius, which is not to say that one would not be able to relate to these things in bad faith, making them essences.

To summarize, I have suggested here that becoming a woman, for Beauvoir, is growing into a woman in a manifold situation in one’s singular and yet socially constrained manner. While this becoming is not as such destructive for the subject, it can gain harmful dimensions within a social system that reinforces sexual hierarchies. On the other hand, the concept of becoming has a Hegelian underpinning, for Beauvoir describes it as the moment that precedes *being* something: to be is to have become. Being a woman is being a human, and while the female body still structures one’s possibilities and

experiences in a number of ways, Beauvoir sees both women and men as becoming and transcendence, as fundamentally free.

Enabling Communication

After this all but exhaustive consideration of the meanings of “*devenir*,” it is possible to return to the more practical question of choices and styles of translating. In fact, we, the translators of the new Finnish version of *The Second Sex*, did not much discuss translation theories as such.¹⁶ Yet we did have implicit ideals that guided our work: precision and fluency. For us, the ideal of precision meant reverence for the cultural and philosophical specificity of the work, whereas the ideal of fluency meant a particular relationship to language: we did our best to write clear and expressive Finnish, just like Beauvoir wrote clear and expressive French. We wanted to have Beauvoir’s own voice as clearly audible as possible so that the translation did not come between the reader and the writer but could be read as if the writer spoke to you directly.

From a theoretical point of view such as Lawrence Venuti’s this kind of relationship to the source text is deluded. He also presents the ideals of precision and fluency as practically incompatible, fluency being the ideal of the domesticating translation and precision that of the foreignizing translation. What is more, he argues that domesticating translations, which advocate the transparency of the translation and invisibility of the translator, and pose as the texts of the original writer rather than as the new texts they are, are in some ways “imperialist” and do violence to the source text. Translators who practice domestication valorize a purely instrumental use of language,

add extra words to sentences in the name of fluency, cultivate anachronisms to shun all foreignness, and neglect the imitation of form and manner in favor of the content—all this to produce easily marketable products for which translators themselves gain hardly anything (Venuti 2004, e.g., 1–6, 15–16; see also Baumeister in this collection).

Venuti is right to call attention to the ideological choices of translation, but his way of lumping together the fluency of the translation and all the above-listed evils is problematic. He fails to explain why the ideal of fluency could not be in harmony with the avoidance of anachronisms and an attentive rendering of the writer's style into the target language.

It is true that every translation takes place in a socioeconomic situation and between cultures. Yet it is rather arrogant to reduce the idea of transparency in translation to the xenophobic and imperialist tendencies of the American culture.¹⁷ Even if Venuti were right when he argues that the ideal of the translator's "invisibility" contributes to the economic exploitation of translators, it is difficult to prove that it is the capitalist system that produces that ideal. Metaphors such as "actor" and "invisible" in reference to the translator, and "transparent" or "a pane of glass" in reference to a "good" translation, may not spring solely from the soil of the capitalist, imperialist American culture, but there may very well be something in the work and practices of translating itself that tends to bring about similar experiences, regardless of whether the translator translates into a widely spoken language or into a "small" one.

I do not try to defend the extreme cases of either the domesticating translation or the foreignizing translation; besides, in some cases it may even be difficult to define whether a terminological choice, for instance, should belong to one category or the

other.¹⁸ When a translation is done with patience and subtlety, many different translation choices can produce a good result. However, to counterbalance Venuti's critique of domestication and to show what kind of foreignization I have wanted to avoid in my own translations, I will point out the problems I find most disturbing in some foreignizing translations.

These problems may arise either from the incompetence, inexperience, and haste of the translator or from his or her persistence to stay loyal to the source language and even its structures. In any case, the result is a translation that makes the ideas of the writer difficult to understand, thus alienating the reader. The translator may not have had the time to dwell on the meaning of the source text and therefore fails to detach oneself from its words—or perhaps does not even want to do this. Therefore the translator remains prisoner of the peculiarities of the source language, sticks to the surface level of the text, and never takes the risk to truly interpret it in one's own language.

For others, a detachment from the words of the source text is where the most creative part of translating begins. Following Michele H. Jones, Timmermann calls this detachment “navigat[ion] in a world of pure thought” (this volume, 288). While it may not be necessary to presuppose the existence of such a world, I find this detachment real and the more easily accessible the more one translates. Yet it does not mean leaving the source language altogether, but rather loosening the tie to it in such a way that one is able to be, at the same time, oriented toward the target language and its idioms and rhythms. That in-between space allows one to express the content of the source text in a way that feels natural for the target language. This procedure does not automatically produce finalized and good translations though: the hard work of the translator consists also of

numerous corrections, reformulations, and reinterpretations, the aim of which is—or can be, if the translator wishes it—to make the translation both precise and fluent.

Certainly the ideals of translators may also differ according to how they see literature: for some it is primarily text, for others it is primarily communication. Those for whom the work of the translator deals primarily with text and with language may find the idea that there would indeed be someone who speaks in the text and whose message should be delivered ridiculous. Other translators strive to enable communication between the author and the reader of the target language.

For Beauvoir herself, literature was first and foremost communication, “a privileged field of intersubjectivity.” For this reason, she was most critical of novelists who wrote novels that “signify nothing” and instead of storytelling concentrate on language itself. In her opinion, such novels can be of interest for critics, but they cannot fulfill the needs of those authors and readers who wish for communication (Beauvoir 2011a, 290).

According to Beauvoir, a subject is able to break away from her existential solitude and to truly live in the other’s world precisely in the reading experience (1979, 456–457; 2011a, 296–297; see also Ruonakoski 2012). Beauvoir writes:

Literature—if it is authentic—is a way of surpassing the separation by affirming it. It affirms the separation because when I read a book—a book that counts for me—someone is speaking to me; the author is part of his book. Literature only starts when I hear a singular voice. (Beauvoir 2011a, 200)¹⁹

As I see it, translators are keepers of the dialogue between the reader and the author. In some ways, they serve the aspect of communication best by not making the language

itself a source of constant puzzlement: if one finds oneself repeatedly wondering what might have been the original version of a given expression or sentence, the translation is hardly enabling an effortless communication between the author and the reader.

Of course, fluency and the task of enabling communication should not prevent the translator from striving for accuracy in questions of both content and style. After all, if one starts to invent instead of translating, one is no longer enabling communication between the author and the reader. What is more, the ideal of fluency is quite compatible with a concern for stylistic issues. In our translation of *The Second Sex*, we tried to convey the meaning of the poems cited by Beauvoir by paying attention also to their rhythmic and sensual qualities, and, for instance, to alliteration and rhyme. Also when I translated quotations from Marquis de Sade for the Finnish translation of Beauvoir's "Must We Burn Sade?" I chose a style that was distinctly different from how I translated Beauvoir—and this was not difficult, for each author's words allow and demand the translator to temporarily take the author's place and to see the world as if through the author's eyes. In this sense the parallel between the translator and the actor is fairly accurate, despite Venuti's critique (2004, 7). To put it in the words of phenomenology of the body, the translator adopts the author's embodied style as it appears in the text and produces the linguistic gestures of the author in the target language. Those gestures always have their affective and rhythmic qualities, and it is the task of the translator to give these a new life in the translation.

However, taking the author's position and reproducing their gestures and attitudes in the target language may also involve reexpressing their politically questionable expressions and attitudes. For instance, we did not modify Beauvoir's outdated concepts

such as “*hermaphrodite*” (hermaphrodite; 2008b, e.g., 64; 2010, e.g., 38) or “*négresses*” (negro women) to fit the ideals of political correctness of our days. In this sense our translation came out less domesticated than that of Borde’s and Malovany-Chevallier’s, in which “*négresses*” is rendered as “African women” (2010, 178).

In point of fact, making some modernizing word choices would not have been enough to make the translation unoffending. Among other things, Beauvoir does not hesitate to call the Muslim woman “a kind of slave” (2010, 92; *une sorte d’esclave*, 2008b, 141). Even though Beauvoir hardly intended to be arrogant toward any religious or ethnic groups, it would have been somewhat anachronistic to knowingly choose “politically correct” Finnish words in the translation, as if to mimic her unoffending intention. Besides, even if she did not *intend* to be arrogant, she certainly made sweeping—and from today’s perspective deeply problematic—generalizations about numerous ethnic groups. As Finnish women we were stupefied to read that Nordic women (*les scandinaves*)²⁰ are “*saines, robustes et froides*” (Beauvoir 2008c, 155)—that is, healthy, robust, and cold—apparently because we consume our energy in sports rather than in sex. Even so we also translated this bewildering idea as faithfully as we could, without trying to moderate it by word choices. This choice not to domesticate the text in terms of political correctness can, perhaps, be compared to the choice of Timmermann’s team to use the outdated masculine-generic pronoun “he” to reflect Beauvoir’s use of “*il*,” and, as Timmermann puts it, to remind the reader of the historical context of the text.

What did we do, then, to advance our ideal of fluency? To give a few examples, we replaced the narrative first person plural (we, *nous*) by the first person singular, because the former is seldom used in Finnish. Neither did we save the innumerable

semicolons; instead we mercilessly chopped the long phrases into shorter ones, hence following the practice of the previous Finnish translation (1980), Parshley's English translation (1953), and *The Beauvoir Series*.²¹ In point of fact, we used Suni's and Parshley's translations, the new Swedish translation (2008a), and, in the case of the second volume, also Borde's and Malovany-Chevallier's translation (2010) to spot possible mistakes in our translation. Certainly there can never exist a perfect, "correct," flawless translation, especially of a book of this length, and I do not advocate copying the work of other translators, especially because it is not rare that translators copy each other's mistakes. Nevertheless, comparisons like this make it easier for the translator to notice if something has been overlooked, for instance, a pronoun, which may be a tiny word in French but can change the meaning of the sentence completely.

In our effort to make Beauvoir's argument as accessible as possible, we did not completely erase traces of ourselves from the work. In the translators' forewords we explained a number of concepts and our translation choices. These concepts included *l'ambiguïté*, *affirmer*, *Mitsein*, *le projet*, *l'autonomie*, *la reconnaissance*, *la médiation*, *la liberté négative*, and *l'homme*, among others. In the footnotes we gave short explanations of even more concepts, discussed the discrepancies between some of Beauvoir's quotations and the original texts, and provided information on persons and books mentioned by Beauvoir that were well known in the France of her time while they were less familiar to Finnish readers of our days.

We did not confine ourselves to discussing the text with other philosophers, but, to get the terminology of other fields right, we asked for advice from specialists of those fields. A zoologist read through and commented on our translation of the chapter

“Biological Facts,” whereas a philosopher with a psychoanalytic training commented on the chapter “The Psychoanalytical Point of View,” helping us to find the most appropriate Finnish versions for the psychoanalytic concepts used by Beauvoir.

Our translation of the second part of the first volume, “History,” was checked by an expert in women’s history. We also consulted experts in Greek and Latin, for the French versions of Greek and Roman concepts had to be changed into ones used in Finnish classical scholarship. The latter were typically closer to or identical with the original ones. In this process, “*le gynécée*” became “*gynakeion*,” “*La loi Oppia*” got the form “*Lex Oppia*,” and “*l’office viril*” transformed into “*officia virilia*.”

There were yet other people who helped us to translate Montaigne quotations, to name enigmatic kitchen utensils, and to understand the physiology of menstruation. With this massive backup, we struggled to find the right words for the multitude of ideas that Beauvoir discussed in her work, and wrote numerous clarifying footnotes. In this sense the translation was a joint adventure of not only the three of us and Heinämaa but of a great number of people who offered their time and patience so that we could make the translation better than we could have done, had we had only our own expertise and imagination to rely on.²²

The unabridged Finnish translation of *Le deuxième sexe* was published in two volumes just like the original: *Toinen sukupuoli I: Tosiasiat ja myytit* [“The Second Sex I: Facts and Myths”] came out in 2009, when *Le deuxième sexe* turned sixty years of age, and *Toinen sukupuoli II: Eletty kokemus* [“The Second Sex II: Lived Experience”] came out in 2011. The response of the critics was favorable. This said, it must be remembered that our translation did not face a wide audience consisting of Beauvoir experts, so the

reactions toward it are not strictly comparable to the reactions to the English translations. Some of the Finnish critics were feminist philosophers, some were other scholars, but as far as I know, none had specialized in Beauvoir's thinking.

Even if some critics found some of Beauvoir's ideas, such as her treatment of motherhood, outdated, many stated that they found the publishing of the unabridged translation important, and the translation itself was called, among other things "diligent," "enjoyable," and "brilliant."²³ The most flattering, perhaps, was the assessment of a prominent Finnish essayist, Antti Nylén, in the biggest newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, February 12, 2012. According to him, Finns now have a *Second Sex* that is as good as the French one—"if not better," thanks to all the clarifications given in the footnotes. While this may be just slightly over-the-top, we were particularly happy about his statement that the translation appeared consistent, as if it was written "with the same keyboard." After all, that was one of the things we had worked very hard to attain, commenting on each other's translations repeatedly. Critics also commended Heinämaa's introduction, which elucidated the historical and intellectual context of the book, Beauvoir's argument on the subjection of women, and the differences between Beauvoir's and Sartre's conceptions of freedom and morality.

Despite all this positive feedback, it is clear that our translation, as any other, remains incomplete. In retrospect, when one reads one's own translation, one is likely to find sentences which could have been worded better than they were, or even outright mistranslations, despite all the efforts one has put in the text. This is due to the elusive nature of language, the disparities between the source language and the target language, the differences between the author's social and historical situation and one's own, and the

fact that the process of interpretation goes on as long as one lives, following the hermeneutic circle; a more comprehensive understanding is always yet to be achieved (see Gadamer 2013, 278–279, 304–305; Heidegger 1996, 143–144, and López Sáenz, chapter 10, this volume). This is true also for our translation of *The Second Sex*: we would probably make some different choices, were we to translate the work now.

In the field of philosophy, it is not uncommon that the same people who do academic research also translate. Both tasks involve, in different proportions, a minute examination of concepts and interpretation, but there are also important differences between them. In the scholar's role, one can focus on some parts of a text and spend weeks or months analyzing, for instance, the different ways in which Beauvoir uses the word "*la femme*" or "*l'homme*." By contrast, as a translator one is concerned with the text as a whole—that is, with every sentence of the text separately and with the totality of the sentences—and has therefore less time to dwell on the meaning of an individual word. Each sentence poses a new challenge, and even if one may leave some questions open in the first draft, decisions have to be made at some point. To be able to produce a readable and a fairly reliable translation within the given time limit, the translator has to choose what to express and to come to terms with the fact that some nuances and connotations are washed away in the process.

A translation always only approximates to the original text. To get a more precise view of what the author said, one needs to go back to the original.

Notes

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- ¹ The description of the phases of the first Finnish translation is based on the personal communication from the publishing editor of that translation, Anna-Kristiina Kervinen. I wish to thank Kervinen for sharing her views, as well as Sara Heinämaa, Iina Koskinen, and Hanna Lukkari for reading an early version of this article.
- ² Beauvoir's acceptance is, in fact, stated explicitly also in the publication data of the abridged Swedish translation: "The Swedish translation is shortened with the writer's permission" ["Det svenska översättningen är förkortad med författarens samtycke"] (Beauvoir 1999, 4).
- ³ In this sense our situation was opposed to that of Beauvoir translator Marybeth Timmermann, who had qualifications in translating but not in philosophy. See Timmermann's contribution to this work.
- ⁴ Mila Engelberg has argued, however, that the noun "*ihminen*" and the pronoun "*hän*" are not, in reality, gender-neutral. According to her, adult Finnish-speakers tend to think of a male person rather than a female, when the context does not reveal the gender of the person. (Engelberg 2011.) Such a "hidden" gender bias is equivalent to the one that could be discovered by examining the ways in which English-speaking women and men understand the word *human being*. There are, however, idioms and proverbs, in which "*mies*" (man) is used as if it referred to all human beings (See Engelberg 2001; 2011).
- ⁵ In spoken language, however, the pronoun "*se*" (it) is used to refer to humans, nonhuman animals, and inanimate objects. Lea Laitinen has argued that the normative use of the word "*hän*" in standard Finnish as referring to humans only is, in fact, artificial. According to her, this pronoun was originally and is still used to refer to both humans and nonhuman animals, when their supposed experience is narrated. The pronoun "*se*", on the other hand, refers to the subject in other instances, and to humans, nonhuman animals, inanimate beings, and states of affairs (Laitinen 2005; 2009; 2012).
- ⁶ Leevi Lehto, who recently made a new translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, departed from this norm by introducing a new personal pronoun, "*hen*," to complement the old "*hän*." This neologism was designed to indicate the female, unsurprisingly leaving the word normally used in Finnish to describe *all human beings* to indicate the male. This choice was questioned by some critics (e.g., Kantola 2012) while others deemed it as justified by its context (e.g., Nuoranne 2012). The idea of introducing a new third person singular pronoun to refer to women comes up every now and then, always through the initiative of men (see Engelberg 2011).
- ⁷ See Marybeth Timmermann's contribution in this volume. In fact, Toril Moi (chapter 5, this volume) expresses a similar point in her review of Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's translation.
- ⁸ In her later years Beauvoir explicitly distanced herself from *l'écriture féminine* by stating that "it falls again into the masculine trap of wanting to enclose us in our differences" and that everybody "can be happy with their body, but, even so, one

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- should not make this body the center of the world” (Benjamin and Simons 1999, 18).
- ⁹ For a discussion of an open-ended feminine style, however, see Heinämaa (2003, 83–84; 2006, 30).
- ¹⁰ The genitive case of “*nainen*” (woman) is “*naisen*” (woman’s), and the genitive stem is “*naise-*.” When one combines “*naise-*” and the translative ending “*-ksi*,” one gets “*naiseksi*.” This may sound complicated but a native Finnish-speaker does not really have to think about which stem to use.
- ¹¹ My translation. “*Jokainen ihminen elää immanenssin ja transdenssin risteyksessä, suuntautuu maailmaan ja tulevaisuuteen lähtökohtanaan oma itsensä, läsnäoleva nykyisyys ja mennyt elämä.*”
- ¹² For a critique of Judith Butler’s interpretation of *The Second Sex*, see Heinämaa (1996; 1997). Butler’s way of describing becoming a woman in terms of choosing one’s gender sounds fairly voluntaristic. Nevertheless, Butler defines what she interprets to be for Beauvoir the choice of one’s gender as a *prereflective* choice—that is, as a tacit and spontaneous act (Butler 1998, 34). This makes her interpretation less voluntaristic than one might first presume.
- ¹³ The idea of becoming a woman or growing into a woman in “*Enfance*” (Childhood) is introduced within a larger section of the book, namely the part titled “*Formation*.” “*Formation*” means, among other things, “training,” “education,” and “development.” In other words, the French word has both active and passive connotations: the girl is the subject of her development, but she also receives an education and has to endure bodily changes that she does not choose. This dual character of the word “*formation*” does not translate well, and often translators have used several words to describe the content of the section in question. The translations of “*Formation*” include “The Formative Years” by H. M. Parshley, the slightly shorter “Formative Years” by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, the “*Utveckling*” (development) of the new Swedish translation by Adam Inczedy-Gombos and Åsa Moberg, and the “*Kvinnans utveckling*” (woman’s development) of the older Swedish translation by Inger Bjurström and Anna Pyk. For the abridged Finnish translation Suni appears to have translated, in fact, the chapter titles of the abridged Swedish translation rather than those of the French original, so the titles resemble remarkably the Swedish ones. Hence, she translated “*Formation*” as “*Naisen kehitys*” (woman’s development), while we decided on the title “*Naiseksi kasvaminen*” (growing into a woman). This choice, which we made with hesitation, was motivated by our will to make explicit the idea that the girl both grows up and is educated, is both a subject and object of her shaping as a woman.
- ¹⁴ In the beginning of the chapter “The Point of View of Historical Materialism,” Beauvoir attributes a similar idea to historical materialism: “The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some very important truths. Humanity is not an animal species: it is a historical reality” (Beauvoir 2010, 62).
- ¹⁵ Heinämaa (2003, 84) rejects the idea that the question of becoming would boil down to the claim that women are historical beings. I agree with her that Beauvoir underlines the openness of human existence with the term of becoming.

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- ¹⁶ Nevertheless, I had participated in the discussion on how to translate philosophy in the Finnish philosophical journal *niin & näin* (Ruonakoski 2006) before the publication of my first Beauvoir translation, arguing along the same lines I will do here.
- ¹⁷ Venuti writes: “The translator’s invisibility is symptomatic of a complacency in Anglo-American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be described—without too much exaggeration—as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home” (1998, 17).
- ¹⁸ For instance, Venuti presents the neologism “parapraxis” in a Freud translation as an example of domestication, on the basis that it mirrors the positivism of American psychiatry rather than that of Freud’s thinking (2004, 27). Yet, if domestication equals fluency, one might think that domestication would require translating the word “*Fehlleistung*” with an equally easily understandable English expression, such as “faulty achievement” mentioned by Venuti.
- ¹⁹ It is possible to criticize Beauvoir’s view of the interlocutor in the text as simplistic, but even so her discussion of the reading experience is valuable. I deal with this question in more detail in *Human and Animal in Ancient Greece: Empathy and Encounter in Classical Literature* (Korhonen and Ruonakoski, 2017).
- ²⁰ In the strictest sense, Scandinavia (in French *La Scandinavie*) refers only to Norway and Sweden, but often the word is used in a broader sense, to refer to all the Nordic countries (including also Denmark, Iceland and Finland). As Beauvoir was contrasting Southern European women to “*les scandinaves*,” it made sense to translate the expression as “*pohjoismaalaiset naiset*” (Nordic women; Beauvoir 2011, 165).
- ²¹ Timmermann tells us that the translators of *The Beauvoir Series* “would divide one of Beauvoir’s sentences into several shorter sentences” for their readers’ ease.
- ²² In addition to Heinämaa, the experts helping us were, in alphabetical order, Tiina Arppe, Jussi Backman, Jenny Blomroos, Hilja Halla-aho, Timo Kaartinen, Timo Kaitaro, Kristian Klockars, Tua Korhonen, Jussi Kotkavirta, Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, Susanna Lindberg, Timo Miettinen, Valentina Oroza, Pauliina Remes, Renja Salminen, Liisa Savunen, Erkki Sirola, Sami Suhonen, Miira Tuomaala, and Jussi Viitala.
- ²³ See, e.g., Virpi Lehtinen 2012, Antti Nylén 2012, and Joonas Sääntti 2012.

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