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COMPARING THE HUMAN AND DEEPL ENGLISH  
TRANSLATIONS OF NICOLE BROSSARD'S *DÉSERT  
MAUVE*: THE APPLICATION OF LARSON'S  
TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT MODEL

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### Abstract

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and the proliferation of automatic translation tools have generated questions about the quality of AI-generated literary translation. This study set out to apply Larson's (1984) model to compare the human and DeepL translations of Nicole Brossard's *Desert mauve*, to judge the accuracy, clarity, and naturalness of each version and to determine which is precise. After analysing twenty purposively selected excerpts, the study revealed that on one hand, the human translator was constrained by sociological and the communicative realities of her recipients, which made just 50% of her excerpts accurate, for she sometimes over translated or under translated. Since DeepL, on the other hand, did not function under such constraints, it produced 75% accurate renderings. It thus concluded that the human translator was not accurate and failed to precisely convey the source text author's intention to target readers because she lacked a framework for literary analysis other than metatexts, which made her assume the author's intention. The study resolved that DeepL is accurate for rendering literary texts, although the translations it produces must be post-edited for them to be completely exact, clear and natural.

### Keywords:

*Literary Translation, Human Translation, DeepL Translation, Translation Accuracy, Automatic Translation, Larson's Quality Assessment Model, Désert mauve.*

### Résumé

*L'avènement de l'intelligence artificielle (IA) et la multiplication des outils de traduction automatique ont favorisé moult études sur la qualité des traductions littéraires générées par l'IA. Le présent travail vise à établir une comparaison entre la traduction humaine et celle de l'outil automatique DeepL. Il s'appuie sur *Désert mauve* de Nicole Brossard. Les deux rendus sont appréciés dans une perspective comparative à l'effet de mettre en évidence leur exactitude, leur clarté et leur naturalité, voir leur*



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*précision par rapport au texte source. Vingt extraits du roman sélectionné à dessein ont servi à cet effet. Les résultats obtenus révèlent que, d'une part, la traductrice a fait face aux contraintes d'ordre sociologique et communicatif. Sa traduction présente une exactitude de 50 %. L'outil DeepL, par contre, n'étant pas soumis à de telles contraintes, a produit 75 % d'extraits exacts. La traduction humaine reste moins précise et ne parvient pas à transmettre l'intention exacte de l'auteur du texte source aux lecteurs cibles, puisque la traductrice ne dispose pas d'un cadre d'analyse littéraire autre que celui des métatextes, ce qui l'a amenée à supposer l'intention de l'auteur. En conclusion, l'outil de traduction automatique DeepL est capable de réaliser des traductions littéraires acceptables. Toutefois, ces traductions restent sujettes à la post-édition pour qu'elles soient plus exactes, claires et naturelles.*

**Mots clés :** *Traduction littéraire, traduction humaine, outil de traduction automatique DeepL, précision en traductologie, traduction automatique, modèle d'évaluation de la qualité de Larson, Désert mauve.*

## **Introduction**

Translation has metamorphosised through five periods in its history, from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance and Reformation, through the Romantic period up to the present era (Delisle & Woodsworth 1999: 39-42). From the first era (Antiquity), translation was more about producing slavish renderings, emphasising on transferring the linguistic rather than the communicative components of the source language text into the target language. In those early days of translation practice, the foci of translators were not on producing translations that would appear as originals to target language readers, or on producing texts that were culturally relevant to these readers. Their aim was to produce linguistic translations, which birthed target texts that prioritised language-based equivalence over cultural relevance. Nowadays, the perspective of translation studies has shifted, such that scholars now focus on the social, cultural, political, ethical, and ideological aspects of translation (House 2015:2). Arguments about the precedence of language over context have been resolved by scholars such as Lefevere (1992), who holds that during the translation process, if linguistic considerations conflict with ideological and/or poetic considerations, ideological considerations should prevail.

Indeed, with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), which has ushered in the ubiquity of automated translation tools, questions have cropped up about the quality of translation effected with the use of AI. In fact, a key concern of translation studies is about the quality of translations produced using artificial intelligence, especially concerning the accuracy, clarity and naturalness of these translations. Like many other professional activities, the general agreement is that translation conducted with these tools must respect clear standards, while professionals who produce translations with automated tools should have relevant professional qualifications. Hence, current research is focused on defining what should be described as high-quality, accurate, and standard translations. Regulatory bodies, on their part, recognise that they need to set standards for good automatic translation, even though there are no clear criteria for what could be considered as the “prescribed” standards for decent automatic translations. This justifies the growing need for quality assessment of AI-based translation to ensure that it adheres to the right quality assurance standards.

Admittedly, national and international translation standards exist, although there are no generally accepted exigencies about the criteria that automatic translations must meet for them to pass quality assurance tests (which is not the case with other professions). Although there is consensus among stakeholders of translation (that is, professional translators, consumers of translations, researchers, trainee translators, etc.) that translation must be “good” before it can be judged as acceptable, there is neither a clear definition of what an acceptable AI-based translation ought to be, nor are there objective criteria that should be applied to evaluate the quality of translations effected with the use of AI.

In the context of increased technologization of the profession, therefore, there is consensus among stakeholders that it is important to produce and disseminate good quality AI-based translations. As such, several frameworks have been developed for translation quality assessment, including House’s (2015) and Larson’s (1984) frameworks. This study seeks to evaluate the quality of two translations of the same text: the first translation is produced by a human translator, while the other is an automated translation by the machine translation tool, DeepL. The study sets out to evaluate the accuracy, clarity and naturalness of both translations, by judging the quality of translation produced by DeepL translation tool against that which is produced by a human translator.

### **Definition of Key Concepts**

Some main concepts that underpin this study, namely, translation, translation quality assessment, and DeepL translation, are defined below.

#### **Translation**

Translation is a broad and polysemous notion. It can be defined as a process, product, or an activity, with sub types such as literary, technical and machine translation as well as subtitling. In its multiple definitions, the concept englobes computer treatment and computerised treatment of language to analyse its sense and determine the forms of usage in another language (Hatim and Munday 2004: 3-4).

House (2015:2) defines translation as:

*... the result of a linguistic-textual operation in which a text in one language is re-contextualised in another language. As a linguistic-textual operation, translation is, however, subject to, and substantially influenced by, a variety of extra-linguistic factors and conditions.*

According to the above definition, while translation is a linguistic activity, it is also influenced by other factors such as the nature of the language, rules of the two languages involved, ergonomics, the translator’s knowledge, etc.

Translation is also defined as a procedure through which an original text (source text) is replaced by a new text (target text) in a different language. It involves two phases, the first of which entails understanding and interpreting the source text, and the second, which involves rendering this interpretation in the target language (House (2018: 9-10). Like the first definition, which talks about the importance of context, her second definition

claims that it is important to understand and interpret the utterance, which still depends on the context of the text.

Furthermore, according to Larson (1984:51):

*Translation is basically a change of form, the form of a language is the actual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, etc, which are spoken or written.*

By this definition, during translation the source language form is replaced by the target language form. At the same time, meaning that is transferred from the source language into the receptor language must be kept constant. Larson's definition focuses on language. It does not pay attention to the situation under which the text is produced. Hence, in this work, the above two definitions of translation by House (2018: 9 – 10 and 2015) have been retained.

### **DeepL Translator**

DeepL Translator is a neural machine translation platform owned by DeepL SE, based in Cologne – Germany. It was first developed by Jarosław Kutylowski in 2016 as part of Linguee and launched as DeepL on 28 August 2017. At the time it was created, DeepL Translator could translate in seven European languages. Now in 2025, the number of languages has increased to thirty-three (Heiss and Soffritti 2018). According to its developers, the service algorithm uses transformer architecture, a newer improved architecture of neural networks, which results in a more natural translations than those produced by competitors such as Google Translate. DeepL translation is generated using a supercomputer that reaches 5.1 petaflops, operated in Iceland with hydroelectric power.

DeepL Translate has a freeware as well as a paid version. The freeware can be used to translate texts lengths within the limit of 1 500 characters per translation. It is compatible with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint files for the Office package and can also translate Open XML file formats (.docx and .pptx) as well as PDF files of up to 5MB in size. The paid version, called DeepL Pro, which can be acquired by paying monthly, has been available since March 2018. It comes with a default quantity of text. This version has no character limits but after the ceiling is attained, texts that are to be translated which are above the initial upper limit are computed according to the number of characters translated. DeepL Translate has access to application programming interfaces and a software plug-in for computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, including SDL Trados Studio. Texts translated using DeepL Pro are not saved on the server, unlike those rendered using the free version, which are stored on a server.

### **Translation Quality Assessment**

Translation quality assessment can be defined as the systematic evaluation of translated content to gauge its accuracy, acceptability, and readability in comparison to the source material. According to House (2015:37), translation quality assessment requires source text and target text analyses and comparison at the level of language/text, register and genre. It requires judging the quality of translation through what she terms “a model for situational-functional text analysis and assessment.” Register and genre point to the

“situational dimensions” of the source text and its translation. House (2015: 27-28) conceives the model by which she analyses translation from dimensions of language users (such as geographical origin, social class and time) and dimensions of language use (medium, participation, social role relationship, social attitude, province).

### **Larson’s Model of Translation Quality Assessment**

According to Larson’s (1984) model of translation quality assessment, a good translation should be evaluated based on three key criteria: accuracy, clarity (readability), and naturalness (acceptability), meaning the translation should be faithful to the source text, easy to understand in the target language, and sound natural to native speakers of the target language. The key point of Larson’s (1984) model of translation quality assessment is that it emphasises on the importance of context. To her, a good translator must consider context when making decisions about how to render the meaning during translation.

The attributes of Larson’s (1984) framework for translation quality assessment focus on assessing translation to determine if it is accurate, clear, and natural. Accurate translation, according to this model, refers to translation whose wordings precisely, concisely, and clearly communicate the meaning and context of the source text and do not engender confusion. For instance, it is translation that is free of grammatical errors, uses proper rules of writing (e.g.: writing element such as measurements, dates, addresses, etc., correctly). In fact, its most important attribute is exactitude and precision.

Clear translation is translation that is readable and conveys the information in the target language in a manner that is easy to understand, whose language is concise and expresses ideas in a direct manner. Natural translation is one that is acceptable, fluent and easy to understand, and not literal (or word-for-word). It lays emphasis on the target text meaning rather than on words. The target language rendering is idiomatic and sounds as if it were in the original language of the text. It focuses on making the target language text as authentic as the source language text with no use of jerky and unnatural phrases. Lastly, it avoids source-culture bound clichés and phrases and considers the audience its priority, by leaning on the target language audience and cultural nuances.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this qualitative corpus-based research is exploratory. It is not a prescriptive study, for it does not set out to provide new translations for a text that has been accepted and acclaimed by the target reader community. Thus, the methodology of this study is a systematic application Larson’s (1984) model of translation quality assessment, which is applied to evaluate the two English translations in five out of the six steps. The sixth step, which entails proposing a translation for excerpts that are judged as inaccurate, is not relevant to this research.

Comparing the two translated texts and the original according to Larson’s (1984) model involves the use of content analysis for a side-by-side evaluation of the translated texts and the original, starting from the phrase to the sentence. It focuses on the context and the form (tone, diction, structure, etc.), as well as on the author’s intention. During this comparison, questions are asked such as “what is the essence of the source text? What information does the author seek to convey? Is the source text different from or like the first or the second target text? Etc.

Thereafter, the accuracy of both translations is assessed. It entails evaluating the two translations to determine if the facts therein are exact, whether the grammar is correct, if the language used is fluent, whether the intended meaning of the source text is transferred into the target text and if the tone and style are accurate and conveyed in a manner which can be termed linguistically and culturally correct.

Subsequently, the analysis goes on to evaluating clarity in the target texts. At this stage, the human and DeepL translations respectively are judged to ascertain if they are easy to understand and free of any ambiguities that are likely to frustrate the understanding of target language audiences.

Then, the translations are assessed to confirm if both are natural. This is done by verifying them to confirm that they flow naturally and do not make use of awkward or unnatural phrasing. The translations are categorised as natural when they are acceptable to target language readers. Acceptability means that the translations comply with the rules and structures of the target language, meet their primary goal which is to convey the meaning of the source text in the target language, increase the target text's readability and adapt the source text to the target language structure.

In addition, *Skopos* analysis is conducted on the source text, to investigate why the author is writing (the author's goal, audience and environment). Through *skopos* analysis, the context and purpose of each translation is assessed. Context here refers to the broader situation that surrounds the production of respective renderings, the environment, culture, social aspect of the texts' production and the macro-environment in which they were created. *Skopos* analysis is used to determine the *skopos* (purpose) of the translation (whether it is a legal text, a literary text, an informative text, a vocative text, etc.). The *skopos* influences the adequacy and or acceptability of choices made by the human translator.

Meanwhile, using critical discourse analysis, the purpose of each text is analysed. Critical discourse analysis is applied for confirming that they each translation still reflects the reason (intention) for which the author created the original. The last step is seeking feedback. It simply means seeking the opinion of target language readers to get wider insights about the quality of the two translations. It also means identifying areas in the translations that need to be improved for them to be acceptable. However, as earlier stated, this step has been left out, for it is not the intention of this research to prescribe new translations.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Human vs the DeepL English Translations of *Désert mauve***

This comparative micro-textual analysis is conducted on twenty English translations of the same excerpts. The first are Suzanne Lotbinière-Harwood's English rendering of *Désert mauve* on one hand, and the DeepL (automatic) translation of the same corpus on the other hand. The analytical framework applied to this comparison is Larson's (1984) translation quality assessment model.

### ***Synopsis of Desert Mauve***

*Desert Mauve* (1987) is a book about a supposed author, Laure Angstelle, who writes a book about the lives of four women living in a lesbian utopia near the Arizona Desert and a hypothetical translator, Maude Laures. Laures finds Angstelle's novel titled "Mauve Desert" and after reading it, is captivated by the book, so much so, that she sets out to translate it. Laures thus has an imaginary interview with Angstelle, during which she questions the sequence of events that led to the murder of a famous lesbian (Angela) and extrapolates these events in a pre-text prior to translating them.

The protagonist of *Desert Mauve* is Angela Parkins, a "geometrist." Parkins is a successful, professional lesbian woman who is depicted as strong, independent, and self-absorbed. She is an elemental woman who epitomises "grrl" power and embodies the characteristics of a mythical figure, an "ultimate presence" (131). In addition to Angela, Laure Angstelle recounts the adventures of a fifteen-year-old girl, Melanie, who lives in a feminine space, named the Mauve Motel. The motel is owned by Melanie's mother. Melanie's family is atypical, for she has two mothers: her biological mother (Lorna) and her mother's lesbian lover, Kathy Kerouac.

These four women do not lead ordinary lives. While Angela appears to have shattered the glass ceiling that hinders most women and, therefore, does not identify with the oppression that limits other women like Lorna and Kathy, Melanie still seeks subjectivity by driving into the Arizona Desert alone at night in her mother's car. On one of these trips into subjectivity in the desert, she meets the mysterious and infamous Angela Parkins at the Arrow Motel. Since she has apparently inherited her sexual orientation from her parents, she develops a sexual attraction for Angela at first sight. The closeness between the two women is disturbing because of the age difference (Angela is forty and Melanie is fifteen). It immediately sparks a controversy of the possible moral issue about a sexual relationship between an older mature woman and a minor. Before the two women can explore their attraction further, Melanie witnesses Angela's murder on the spot, immediately after the older woman invites the younger girl to embrace her sexuality and enjoy the erotic rewards of a same-sex relationship.

The murder of Angela Parkins takes place at the Arrow Motel because Angie makes the mistake of flaunting her attraction for Melanie within a space identified as a male sanctum. Thus, Angela's death could be interpreted as retribution and the lost hope for a lesbian utopia within a patriarchal reality. Angela is thus punished for her crime by "that man" (133). Similarly, her death, which is described as "reprobation" (132), could also be interpreted as the ultimate price to pay for her transgressions in the eyes of a male-controlled world that is characterised gratuitous sex, intolerance and violence.

### **Symbolism in *Désert mauve***

Symbolism is the main device used by Brossard to send across her message to readers of *Désert mauve*. Firstly, the iconic symbol of the patriarchal State as well as the threat posed by men to women in society in general and to lesbians in particular is represented by Longman, the central male character. The destructive male gaze, which epitomises the destruction caused by men in phallogocentric society, is represented by Longman's "impassive stare" (46); Longman uses his male gaze to consume pornography for his

sexual gratification: he stares at the genitals of women in a girlie magazine, which stands for male sexual exploitation and the objectification of women.

Secondly, Angela's plight at the Arrow Motel also symbolises the problems faced by older lesbian women in "tutoring" the next generation of lesbians (a somewhat endangered species) in the presence of societal censorship. Moreover, using the same "male" gaze, Longman murders Angela Parkins in an "explosion" of gunshot that is synonymous to the explosion of his ejaculation. This single event sparks the death of the myth that women can exist in utopia where men are absent and women are safe from the vicious male gaze.

Thirdly, the Mauve Motel represents a haven (or feminine space) that is far away from patriarchal male-dominated society. Standing as a direct foil to this idyllic feminine space is the Arrow Motel (the arrow is a phallic symbol of violent patriarchal society), where the looming threat of alcoholism and other substance abuse among lesbian women, as well as their inevitable extinction, is real.

### **About the Translator of *Désert mauve***

The translator of *Désert mauve*, Susanne Lotbinière-Harwood, is a writer and translator of Canadian feminist fiction and theory. She was propelled into translating by chance, when in 1979 she was asked to translate the lyrics of the Quebecois rock singer and poet, Lucien Francoeur. She is one of the forerunners of Canadian international feminist translation practice. She gives priority to the translation of *écritures féminines*, with the aim of making women visible in the textual world and creating a new space for women's expression. In line with this, she has translated several Quebecois writers into English. Lotbinière-Harwood's bi-directionality makes her quite a rarity in the professional translation milieu, where most would master and translate only into their first language. Her translation has earned her several awards, among which are the John Glassco Translation Award and the Félix-Antoine Savard Translation Award for *Mauve Desert* (1991). She has published a significant number of critical studies on feminist translation practice and translated numerous works.

### **Excerpt 1**

**Source Text:** «*Parle, sois flamme. Lèche, embrase pour que le mauve éveille en nous d'amples manières de songer. Allume en moi ce qui, peut-être un jour.*» (229)

Context of Production: Grazie urges Mélanie to tell her about Lorna's and Kathy's love.

Human Translation: Talk to me, be flame, lick, light up so that mauve will awaken in us wide-ranging ways of dreaming. Ignite in me that which, perhaps, some day. (185)

**DeepL Translation:** "Speak, be flame. Lick, kiss so that mauve awakens in us ample ways of thinking. Ignite in me that which, perhaps one day."

**Discussion:** There is a change of emphasis in the human translation when "parle" is rendered as "talk to me" instead of "speak." The DeepL translation is a more accurate rendering as it opts for "speak." Nevertheless, the choice of diction precisely conveys the source text intent in the target language and mirrors the original idea and emotions.

**Quality Assessment:** Both renderings are accurate. Also, they are natural and align with target language linguistic structures as well as the author’s individual expression (diction). Both versions are clearly stated.

### Excerpt 2

**Source Text:** *Mais voit-on vraiment l’aube quand on laisse à la nuit le soin de s’avancer dans nos vies à ce point que la lueur du jour s’effrite dans nos yeux comme un lendemain frileux ? Peut-on dire qu’on a vu l’aube lorsque c’est déjà matin et que dans le taxi blafard qui nous ramène à la maison, l’œil capte la longue forme colorée d’un travesti, le regard fou d’un junkie, des mains gercées, un pantalon taché d’urine ?* (179)

**Context of production:** Maude Laures ponders whether there can be hope for women in the phallogocentric postmodern society corrupted by substance abuse, debauchery and moral depravity.

Human Translation: But does one really see dawn when night is left to seep into our lives to a point where the glimmer of day disintegrates in our eyes like a chilly tomorrow? Can one claim to have seen dawn when it is morning already and in the pallid cab bringing us home, the eye catches the lone colourful shape of a transvestite, a junkie’s crazed gaze, chapped hands, urine-stained pants? (MD: 139).

**DeepL Translation:** But do we really see the dawn when we let night take over our lives to such an extent that the glow of daylight fades from our eyes like a cold tomorrow? Can we say we’ve seen the dawn when it’s already morning and, in the dim cab that takes us home, our eyes catch the long, colourful form of a transvestite, the crazed gaze of a junkie, chapped hands and urine-stained pants?

**Discussion:** The human translator renders *la longue forme colorée d’un travesti* as the lone colourful shape of a transvestite, while the machine translation renders the excerpt as the long, colorful form of a transvestite. Hence, the former is not accurate, for the translator does not share the same perspective as the author. This shifts the meaning from the physical form of the transvestite, whom the author describes to be “long,” referring to the freakishly tall physique of cross-dressers, who are biological males mimicking women in physical appearance. It rather emphasises loneliness, which is a miscarriage of the original text’s intention.

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL rendering is accurate, clear and natural. The language fits both the situational and cultural contexts of the author’s utterance, while the human translation is not accurate.

### Excerpt 3

**Source Text:** *Lorna Myher venait de terminer la réparation d’une courroie de transmission. Dans une demi-heure, elle aurait terminé sa journée. Il y avait maintenant deux mois qu’elle travaillait au garage Helljoy comme mécanicienne* (115).

**Context of production:** The narrator describes Lorna, Kathy’s lesbian lover and Mélanie’s “father-figure.”

**Human Translation:** Lorna Myher had just finished repairing a transmission belt. **Her work day would be over in half an hour.** She had been working as a mechanic at Helljoy Garage for two months now (85).

**DeepL Translation:** Lorna Myher had just finished repairing a drive belt. In half an hour, **she would be finished for the day.** She had now been working at Helljoy's garage as a mechanic for two months (DM: 115).

**Discussion:** The human translator translates *de terminer la réparation d'une courroie de transmission* as finished repairing a transmission belt, while the automated translation renders the excerpt as finished repairing a drive belt. Both translations are accurate, for both drive belt and transmission belt refer to the loop that transfers rotational energy from an engine's crankshaft to power the alternator, water pump, air conditioning compressor, etc.

**Quality Assessment:** Both the human and machine translations are accurate. They are clearly and naturally rendered.

#### Excerpt 4

**Source Text:** Il y avait maintenant près de vingt ans qu'Angela Parkins exerçait son métier de géomètre. La sécheresse et le soleil avaient depuis longtemps buriné son visage. Ses yeux vifs habitués à toutes perspectives étaient d'un noir capable d'atténuer les reflets trompeurs que la lumière blanche du désert déversait dans son regard calculateur (123).

**Context of production:** The narrator describes Angela Parkins, the epitome of an endangered liberated womanhood.

**Human Translation:** For almost twenty years now Angela Parkins had worked as a geometrist. Dryness and sun had long since detached her face. Her bright eyes accustomed to perspectives of all kinds were of a black capable of dimming the misleading reflections the desert's white light poured into her calculating gaze (MD: 93).

**DeepL Translation:** Angela Parkins had been a surveyor for almost twenty years. The drought and the sun had long since scratched her face. Her keen eyes, accustomed to all perspectives, were of a blackness capable of attenuating the deceptive reflections that the white light of the desert poured into her calculating gaze (DM: 123).

**Discussion:** Though a *geometrist* and a surveyor work with spatial data, the focus of a *geometrist* is on the theoretical principles of geometry in an academic/theoretical context, while a surveyor applies principles of geometry in practical/real world settings. Hence, the human translation is accurate while the machine translation is not accurate. This variation in the use of the central concept (*geometrist* vs surveyor) engenders a miscommunication in the target text.

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL rendering is accurate and uses clear and natural language to express the idea while the human translation is not accurate.

### Excerpt 5

**Source Text:** Son habitude de la précision en avait fait une femme déterminée, capable de représentation et ayant le sens du territoire, un grand territoire qui couvrait plusieurs états (123).

**Context of production:** The narrator extols Angela Parkins' professionalism as a geometer.

**Human Translation:** Her habit of precision had made her a determined woman, capable of representation and having a sense of territory, a large territory covering several states (MD: 93).

**DeepL Translation:** Her habit of precision had made her a determined woman, capable of representation and with a sense of territory, a large territory that covered several states.

### Discussion:

**Quality Assessment:** Both renderings are accurate, clear and naturally render the author's intention.

### Excerpt 6

**Source Text:** *Est-ce que tu crois qu'on puisse aimer autour du corps ? Qu'on puisse aimer sans odeur, sans saveur, sans que la langue n'aille chercher son sel sur la peau de l'aimée, sans le froissement des mains sur les cuisses, sans qu'il ne soit nécessaire de raffiner nos sens ? Crois-tu que tu aurais pu m'aimer en faisant abstraction de mon corps, si je n'avais été qu'une image au fond de tes yeux, s'il t'avait fallu contourner mon corps pour m'élire ?* (159)

**Context of production:** An intimate philosophical conversation between two lesbian lovers, Lorna and Kathy.

**Human Translation:** Do you think it possible to love around the body? To love without smells, without taste, without tongues seeking their salt on the beloved's skin, without the rustling of hands-on thighs, without needing to refine our senses? Do you think you could have loved me without considering my body, if I had been just an image at the back of your eyes, if you had had to leave out my body to choose me? (124)

**DeepL Translation:** Do you think it's possible to love around the body? That we can love without odor, without flavor, without the tongue seeking its salt on the skin of the beloved, without the rubbing of hands-on thighs, without the need to refine our senses? Do you think you could have loved me if you had ignored my body, if I had only been an image in the depths of your eyes, if you had had to go around my body to choose me? (159)

**Discussion:** The source text excerpt "*sans que la langue n'aille chercher son sel sur la peau de l'aimée,*" is rendered by the human translator as "without tongues seeking their salt on the beloved's skin," while the automatic translation reads "without the tongue seeking its salt on the skin of the beloved." The human translation changes the category from the

singular “la langue” to the plural “tongues.” The DeepL rendering it maintains the singular “tongue.”

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is not accurate and DeepL version is. However, both renderings are clear and natural.

#### Excerpt 7

**Source Text:** *Alors, je vais te dire. Je vais te dire pourquoi tu es morte aussi soudainement, absurdement. Tu es morte parce que tu as oublié de regarder autour de toi. Tu t'es trop vite affranchie et, parce que tu t'es crue libre, tu n'as plus voulue regarder autour de toi. Tu as oublié la réalité* (169).

**Context of production :** Maude Laures has an imaginary posthumous interview with Angela Parkins before she translates Laure Angstelle’s book.

**Human Translation:** I’ll try to tell you why you died so suddenly. Absurdly. You died because you forgot to look around you. You freed yourself too quickly and because you thought yourself free, you no longer wanted to look around you. You forgot about reality (MD: 132).

**DeepL Translation:** So, I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you why you died so suddenly, so absurdly. You died because you forgot to look around you. You freed yourself too quickly and, because you thought you were free, you didn’t want to look around you. You forgot reality.

**Discussion:** The source text excerpt “*Alors, je vais te dire. Je vais te dire pourquoi tu es morte aussi soudainement, absurdement.*” is rendered by the human translator as “I’ll try to tell you why you died so suddenly. Absurdly.” There is a deletion of “so I’ll tell you” and an addition of “try” in the human translation. Meanwhile, the DeepL translation captures this repetition succinctly and does not add anything to the rendering. Hence, it maintains the author’s emphasis by translating the excerpt as: “So I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you why you died so suddenly, so absurdly.”

**Quality Assessment:** The automatic translation is accurate while the human translation is not. In terms of naturalness and clarity, both renderings are in simple style with no lexical amendments.

#### Excerpt 8

**Source Text:** *Il n’y a pas d’ombre la nuit, quand le soleil est au zénith. Tout est évidence et la réalité nous transite* (MD : 212).

**Context of Production :** Mélanie muses about the nature of reality, which is fleeting.

**Human Translation:** There are no shadows at night, when the sun is at its zenith. Everything is matter of fact and reality chills us to the bone (169).

**DeepL Translation:** There are no shadows at night, when the sun is at its zenith. Everything is obvious and reality is transitory.

**Discussion:** Firstly, the source language utterance « *la réalité nous transit* » is rendered, on one hand, by the human translator as “reality chills us to the bone,” which is not an accurate reflection of the source text. On the other hand, DeepL renders the same excerpt as “reality is transitory.”

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is not accurate, while DeepL is a accurate rendering of the source text author’s meaning.

#### Excerpt 9

**Source Text :** *Mais la réalité est enfermement, petite tombe qui trompe le désir. La réalité est un feu de paille qui prétend* (212).

**Context of production :** Mélanie realises that reality is not always as it seems. Due to its pretentious nature, it can easily destroy a woman.

**Human Translation:** But reality is confinement, a little grave that misleads desire. Reality is a flash-fire that pretends (169).

**DeepL Translation:** But reality is confinement, a little tomb that deceives desire. Reality is a flash in the pan.

**Discussion:** The source text element of interest “*La réalité est un feu de paille qui pretend*” is rendered by the human translator as “Reality is a flash-fire that pretends.” The automatic DeepL translation of the same utterance reads “Reality is a flash in the pan.” *Feu de paille* refers to something that happens only once or happens for a fleeting time and is not repeated, or it can refer to sudden success which ephemeral. It is a French expression that translates into English as “flash in the pan,” by its functional equivalence. The human translator chooses to render the concept “*feu de paille*” as “flash fire,” which refers to intense fire, usually caused by a flammable substance such as gas, that often occurs in a confined space and spreads rapidly.

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL translation accurate while the human translation is not. The human translator, in trying to render the metaphor in the source text, changes the primal image embedded in the original and replaces it with an alternative image that is neither accurate, clear nor natural.

#### Excerpt 10

**Source Text:** *Les mères sont comme la civilisation, fragile devant leur téléviseur, oubliées comme un semoir ancien. Les mères sont de grands espaces* (216).

**Context of Production:** While driving around alone in the desert, Melanie listens to news over the radio about a disaster. The announcement, made by a man, makes the protagonist realise her mother is very fragile when left alone.

**Human Translation:** Mothers are like civilization, fragile in front of their television sets, forgotten like some ancient knowledge. Mothers are open spaces (MD: 174)

**DeepL Translation:** Mothers are like civilization, fragile in front of their TV sets, forgotten like an ancient seed drill. Mothers are wide open spaces.

**Discussion:** The source language utterance “... *fragile devant leur téléviseur, oubliées comme un semoir ancien,*” whose intention is to emphasise on women’s ability to lose value in the male-dominated world, is rendered by the human translator as “... fragile in front of their television sets, forgotten like some ancient knowledg,” while the automatic translation tool renders the same excerpt as “... fragile in front of their TV sets, forgotten like an ancient seed drill.” Through oblique translation, the human translator renders of the concept of “semoir ancien,” whose denotative meaning is “seeder” or “grain drill” as “old knowledge.” The semantic choice assumes that both machinery and knowledge are characteristics of civilisation, both sharing a common ability to become obsolete. The human rendering creates an alternative and unsuitable target language image which does not match the source language intention.

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is not accurate. Meanwhile, the DeepL translation is accurate, for it uses the accurate image “seed drill” in the rendering.

#### Excerpt 11

**Source Text:** *Il prend la revue, retourne vers le lit, tapote l'oreiller, s'installe confortablement. Il feuillette, il s'attarde ici, là, il attend que quelque chose arrive. « Maintenant nous sommes tous des chiens.» L'hom'oblong passe en revue les sexes. Pas de visages. Surtout pas de visages ! Les sexes font les cernes autour des images labiées. Puis les cernes explosent (221).*

**Context of Production:** The narrator describes how O'blongman uses the images of women in pornography magazines to masturbate.

**Human Translation:** He takes the magazine, goes back to the bed, **plumps** up the pillow, makes himself comfortable. He **leafs** through, stops here, there, he is waiting for something to happen. ‘Now we are all dogs.’ **O'blongman** reviews the sex parts. No faces, no faces especially. The genitals make dark circles around the labiate images. The circles explode (MD: 177).

**DeepL Translation:** He takes the magazine, returns to the bed, **pats** the pillow, makes himself comfortable. He **flips** through, lingers here, there, waiting for something to happen. “Now we're all dogs.” **The hom'oblong** reviews the sexes. No faces. Especially no faces! The sexes make the rings around the labiate images. Then the rings explode.

**Discussion:** The source text proper noun “*L'hom'oblong*” is rendered in the target language human translation as “O'blongman” while the automatic translation renders the name as “The hom'oblong.” The human translation is accurate for the translator understands the role played by the referent in the original text, while the machine fails to put it in context, given that it is not a word and thus has no meaning within or out of the context of its usage.

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL translation is neither accurate nor natural, while the human translation is accurate.

### Excerpt 12

**Source Text:** *A quinze ans, Lorna Myher en avait fini avec l'école. Elle passait maintenant la plupart de son temps au snack-bar de l'usine ou travaillait sa mère. En face, il y avait un garage que les jeunes motards utilisaient pour la réparation de leurs engins. Après plusieurs mises en garde et un combat dont elle sortit victorieuse, Lorna put circuler parmi les **outils et les moteurs** (117).*

**Context of production:** Before translating Angstelle's book, Laures profiles Lorna as well as all the other characters in the story.

**Human Translation:** At fifteen, Lorna Myher had finished school. She now spent most of her time in the snack-bar at the factory where her mother worked. Across the street was a garage young bikers used for repairing their machines. After several warnings and a fight from which she had emerged the winner, Lorna was allowed to circulate freely among the tools and motors (86).

**DeepL Translation:** At fifteen, Lorna Myher had finished school. She now spent most of her time at the factory snack bar where her mother worked. Across the road, there was a garage that young bikers used to repair their machines. After several warnings and a fight from which she emerged victorious, Lorna was able to move among the tools and engines.

**Discussion:** Motorcycles have engines that convert fuel into mechanical energy through combustion. They do not have motors (which convert electrical energy into mechanical energy). Hence, by rendering “*moteur*” as “*motor*” the human translator typically reduces the engine to an electric machine that converts electrical energy into mechanical energy, because an engine (such as that in a motorcycle) uses internal combustion engines to burn fuel to produce power.

**Quality Assessment:** Since there is a technical difference between the terms “engine” and “motor,” the human translator's rendering is not technically accurate while the DeepL translation is accurate.

### Excerpt 13

**Source Text:** *Cet homme existe. On pourrait le comparer à un fil de fer invisible qui tranche entre la réalité et la fiction. En t'approchant de Mélanie, tu as voulu franchir le seuil (169).*

**Context of production:** An imaginary conversation between Maude Laures and Angela Parkins about the stupidity of her forbidden love for Mélanie.

**Human Translation:** That man exists. He could be compared to the invisible wire that sections reality from fiction. In getting closer to Mélanie, you wanted to cross the threshold (MD: 133).

**DeepL Translation:** **This man exists.** He could be compared to an invisible wire that divides reality from fiction. When you approached Melanie, you wanted to cross the threshold.

**Discussion:** Although both “this” and “that” are demonstrative pronouns used to point out specific things, the former is used when the subject is close to the speaker, while the latter is used when the subject physically or contextually far from the speaker. Admittedly, “*cet*” in French could be rendered as “this” or “that” depending on the situation. Nevertheless, the human translator accurately renders “*cet*” by “that” because she understood the context of the utterance while the automated translation tool took “*cet*” literally and thus rendered it as “this.”

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is accurate while the DeepL translation is not.

#### Excerpt 14

**Source Text:** *Donne-moi une bouchée de liberté, disaient les hommes. Bouchonne-moi donc, répondaient les femmes. Ah, la liberté ce que ça fourvoyait le monde!* (230)

**Context of Production:** Mélanie, while driving to Albuquerque, recollects that where she grew up, there are two types of freedoms: one which liberates and another which threatens the former and leads astray.

**Human Translation:** Give me a bite of freedom, said the men, **give me a bit**, replied the women. Ah, freedom, how it **led people astray!** (185)

**DeepL Translation:** Give me a bite of freedom,” said the men. **Give me a bite,**” replied the women. Ah, freedom, how it **led the world astray!**

**Discussion:** The denotative meaning of “*bouchonner*” is to rub vigorously, referring to the grooming of horses using straw to relax them; its connotative meaning is “to caress” or “to hug.” The oblique translation of the concept by the human translator as “a bit” is a double entendre, since “a bit” could mean quantity (little) or a muzzle, literally used to keep horses from biting, or figuratively to keep women silenced. The rendering creates confusion because it does not differentiate between the two meanings. The DeepL translation also mistranslates “*bouchonner*” as “a bite” which creates confusion as well. Also, the source language reference to “*le monde*” is rendered by the human translator as “people” while the automated translation renders it by “the world.” Both choices are accurate, for they all refer to people.

**Quality Assessment:** Both renderings are accurate and clearly communicate the source text author’s intention.

#### Excerpt 15

**Source Text:** *La beauté est avant la réalité», d’une antériorité polysémique, impensable, trop pacifique pour nos yeux abrégés dans la distance, incapables au loin de penser sans coupure, fragment, histoire, différence. Le corps ballotté des femmes au loin, histoire, différence. La beauté précède le désir, son fragment, l’histoire, la coupe transversale de la réalité et de la fiction* (188).

**Context of production:** Maude Laures examines the dimensions of Laure Angstelle’s book as she sets out to translate the concept of beauty therein.

**Human Translation:** Beauty is before reality,’ a polysemic, unthinkable antecedence, too pacific for our eyes abridged in the distance, unable afar to think without seams, fragment,

history, difference. The body of women tossed about in the distance, history, difference. Beauty precedes desire, its fragment, history, the transection of reality and fiction (145).

**DeepL Translation:** “Beauty is before reality”, of a polysemous anteriority, unthinkable, too peaceful for our eyes abbreviated in distance, unable in the distance to think without cut, fragment, history, difference. Women's bodies tossed about in the distance, history, difference. Beauty precedes desire, its fragment, history, the cross-section of reality and fiction.

**Discussion:** The source text author describes beauty as an unthinkable concept with multiple meanings using the words “*d’une antériorité polysémique, impensable,*” which the human translator accurately captures in the rendering “a polysemic, unthinkable antecedence.” The automated translation fails to capture the essence of the source language utterance. It produces a jerky rendering that goes thus “of a polysemous anteriority, unthinkable.”

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL translation is neither accurate, nor natural, while the human translation is accurate.

#### Excerpt 16

**Source Text:** *La beauté est avant la réalité», d’une antériorité polysémique, impensable, trop pacifique pour nos yeux abrégés dans la distance, incapables au loin de penser sans coupure, fragment, histoire, différence. Le corps balloté des femmes au loin, histoire, différence. La beauté précède le désir, son fragment, l’histoire, la coupe transversale de la réalité et de la fiction (188).*

**Context of production:** Maude Laures examines the dimensions of Laure Angstelle’s book as she sets out to translate the concept of beauty therein..

**Human Translation:** Beauty is before reality,’ a polysemic, unthinkable antecedence, too pacific for our eyes abridged in the distance, unable afar to think without seams, fragment, history, difference. The body of women tossed about in the distance, history, difference. Beauty precedes desire, its fragment, history, the transection of reality and fiction (145).

**DeepL Translation:** “Beauty is before reality”, of a polysemous anteriority, unthinkable, too peaceful for our eyes abbreviated in distance, unable in the distance to think without cut, fragment, history, difference. Women's bodies tossed about in the distance, history, difference. Beauty precedes desire, its fragment, history, the cross-section of reality and fiction.

**Discussion:** Also, the source text contends that our eyes cannot think without being interrupted by saying “*incapables ... penser sans coupure...*” which the human translator renders as “unable ... to think without seams...,” while the DeepL translation reads “unable... to think without cut...”

**Quality Assessment:** Both translations are not accurate reflections of the source text.

#### Excerpt 17

**Source Text:** *La peur est pour toute femme un signal de repliement. Ce n’est pas sa limite, c’est dans sa tête une manière « creuse » de vigilance qui se forme entre sa subjectivité et la*

*réalité : une poche d'eau dans le regard qui rend le monde flou, pochade. La peur empêche.* (190).

**Context of production:** Maude Laures, the fictional translator, contemplates the six dimensions (one of which is fear) treated in Laure Angstelle's book which she is getting ready to translate.

**Human Translation:** Fear is for every woman a signal to withdraw. It is not her limit, it is in her head a 'hollow' manner of vigilance forming between subjectivity and reality: a pocked of water in the gaze which makes the world blur, **quick take**. Fear impedes. (147).

**DeepL Translation:** For every woman, fear is a signal for withdrawal. It's not her limit, it's a "hollow" form of vigilance in her head that forms between her subjectivity and reality: a pocket of water in the gaze that makes the world blurred, **stubborn**. Fear gets in the way.

Discussion: The human translator renders "*pochade*" as "quick take," an apt rendering the word, whose meaning in French denotes something that is roughly executed or sketchy. The DeepL translation completely mistranslates the element of interest, which it renders as "stubborn."

**Quality Assessment:** The DeepL rendering is not accurate, while the human translation is accurate.

### Excerpt 18

**Source Text:** *Une mère fait la différence si elle instruit sa fille. Une mère qui n'instruit pas sa fille mérite d'être oubliée devant son téléviseur. Une mère ignare est une calamité* (54).

Context of Production: Mélanie accuses her mother of failing to tutor her about the complications that come with of same-sex love.

**Human Translation:** A mother makes a difference if she has taught her daughter well. A mother who doesn't teach her daughter deserves to be forgotten in front of her television set. An ignorant mother is a calamity (121).

**DeepL Translation:** A mother makes a difference if she educates her daughter. A mother who doesn't educate her daughter deserves to be forgotten in front of her TV set. An ignorant mother is a calamity

**Discussion:** the source text excerpt *si elle instruit sa fille* is translated by the human translator through an addition of "well" in the utterance: "if she has taught her daughter well." In fact, the DeepL rendering does not add any information to the excerpt and simply translates the utterance as "if she educates her daughter."

**Quality Assessment:** The source language intent is better mirrored by the DeepL translation than the human translation. Hence, the latter is accurate.

### Excerpt 19

**Source Text:** *C'est avec Lorna que j'ai appris à nager, à connaître le désert. Toi, tu auras voulu m'apprendre à pleurer. A te regarder, j'apprends la peur. On dirait que tu as peur de tout. Mais qu'est-ce qu'une vie si on a peur de tout?* (154)

**Context of Production:** Mélanie accuses her mother of having failed to impact her life in any way and for being a bad role model.

**Human Translation:** It was Lorna who taught me how to swim, how to know the desert. **All you wanted to teach me was how to cry.** I learned about fear from looking at you. You seem afraid of everything. But what is life if one is afraid of everything? (121)

**DeepL Translation:** It was with Lorna that I learned to swim, to know the desert. You would have taught me to cry. Looking at you, I learn fear. You seem afraid of everything. But what's a life if you're afraid of everything?

**Discussion:** The source language conditional excerpt is a phrase “*tu aurais voulu m'apprendre à pleurer.*” It is translated by the phrase “All you wanted to teach me was how to cry.” “Want” is as a verb that expresses a desire or wish to do something, and “to” is a preposition that serves as a marker used to introduce the infinitive form of the verb “want.” Meanwhile, the DeepL translation uses an equivalent conditional phrase “You would have taught me to cry.” “Would have” is a conditional statement about a past hypothetical situation in which someone did not fulfill a desire or wish because they did not meet the required conditions. It suggests that something would have happened if all things had been equal.

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is not accurate, for it changes the grammatical form of the utterance from the conditional to express a desire, while the DeepL rendering is accurate.

### Excerpt 20

**Source Text :** *Je regarde Angela Parkins. Elle me fait un grand signe, vient vers moi, me prend par la taille. La musique est trop forte. La musique est encore trop douce. Le corps d'Angela Parkins cabriole, chevreuil fou aux yeux pleins de lubies. Corps de voltige, corps de vertige. On nous regarde. On nous observe (247).*

**Context of Production:** Mélanie describes the scene of her intimate dance with Angela Parkins, when the latter advises her to embrace the erotic.

**Human Translation:** I look at Angela Parkins. She signals widely to me, comes toward me, takes me by the waist. The music is too loud. The music is too soft. Angela Parkins' body capers about, crazy deer with yes full of wildness. High-flying body, vertigo body. They are looking at us. They are watching us (201).

**DeepL Translation:** I look at Angela Parkins. She gives me a big wave, comes over to me, takes me by the waist. The music is too loud. The music is still too soft. Angela Parkins' body capers, a mad deer with eyes full of whimsy. A body of acrobatics, a body of vertigo. We're being watched. We're being watched.

**Discussion:** In the source text, the author's comments “*On nous regarde. On nous observe...*” are rendered on one hand by the human translator as: “They are looking at us. They are watching us,” and on the other hand by DeepL translation as “We're being watched. We're being watched.” Both translations indicate observation, but their foci and perspectives differ. “They are watching us” is a direct statement in the active voice, emphasizing “they” as the actors and “us” as the objects of their gaze. “We are being

watched,” is an indirect statement in the passive voice, whose focus has shifted to “us” as the recipients of the action, leaving the actors (they who are the watching) unspecified or implied. There is a complete change of the source language perspective in the DeepL translation, while the human translation retains the intention of depicting lesbian women as endangered beings who are under constant threat due to the malevolent gaze of patriarchal society.

**Quality Assessment:** The human translation is accurate while the DeepL translation is not accurate.

### **Presentation and Interpretation of Findings**

From the above analyses, the following synthesis of findings of the two modes of translation are illustrated on the tables below:

**Table 1: Synthesis of Findings of DeepL Translation**

SN	Value Judgment	Frequency	Percentage
1	Accurate	15	75
2	Not accurate	5	25
3	Total	20	100

From the above findings, out of 20 times, the renderings by DeepL translation were accurate 15 times, that is 75% and inaccurate 5 times, that is 25 percent.

**Table 2: Synthesis of Findings of Human Translation**

SN	Value Judgment	Frequency	Percentage
1	Accurate	10	50
2	Not accurate	10	50
3	Total	20	100

In all, based on the frequencies above, out of 20 times, the renderings by the human translator were accurate 10 times, that is 50% and inaccurate 10 times, that is 10 percent. Going by the findings above, DeepL produces more accurate translations than the human translator, with a 25% accuracy margin.

### **Conclusion**

The excerpts analysed are made up of verbal and non-verbal statements which are dynamic and open to negotiation. Several factors, including cultural and ideological factors, condition the interpretation of the texts which, in consonance with Genette 1997:1, consist of verbal statements that are endowed with significances that go beyond the linguistic signs. From the findings of this study, the human translator depended heavily on metatexts or paratexts to interpret discourse elements in the utterances prior to translating them, hence, her renderings failed to accurately mirror the author’s intention and rather reflected the translator’s ideological stance.

Apart from the source text, the human translator was doubly constrained by the communicative conditions of her potential recipients as echoed by House (2015:21), which motivated her to over translate or under translate in some circumstances.

Conversely, DeepL translation, which was not operating under such constraints, produced better renderings in most excerpts, especially in instances where the human translator did not have an acceptable framework for literary analysis that was different from a metatext or paratext, or where she lacked resources to interpret verbal statements in the source text and read meaning in Brossard's intention to accurately convey it to target readers.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that there is need for consensus on the framework for identifying invariants (main markers) in literary texts to protect translated works from vilification. Literary translation must be grounded in literary and translation theories and not on the desire to transform texts and disguise the works of translators to appear like naturalised target language texts. Hence, as cross-cultural vessels of literary writings, translators must not ground their decisions on ideological issues but rather on the need for linguistic probity of translated texts.

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