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French in Springfield: A Variationist Analysis of the Translation of First-Person Singular Future Actions in the Quebec and French Dubbings of The Simpsons

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Future Actions in the Quebec and French Dubbings of *The Simpsons*

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The Simpsons is a North American sitcom which made its debut on December 17, 1989. Created

by Matt Groening for the Fox Broadcasting Corporation, this animated series for adults is a witty

and biting sociopolitical satire on American society as portrayed by a variety of zany characters

living in the imaginary town of Springfield. This is a place where

> Teachers are bored and quick to stifle any creativity or curiosity in their pupils. The
>
> police officers, elected officials, and court officers are corrupt, shiftless and incompetent.
>
> The town's leading Christians are annoying and narrow-minded do-gooders or
>
> hypocrites. Springfield's biggest employer, Montgomery Burns, owner of the nuclear
>
> power plant, is evil incarnate, a monstrously rich and greedy man who routinely
>
> disregards employee safety and the environment (Neuhauss 2010, 763).

The resounding success of the series, which to date has broadcast more than 500 episodes,

transcends linguistic boundaries: it is dubbed and/or subtitled in several languages, including

Arabic, Hindi, Catalan, Punjabi, Spanish, Chinese, Swedish, Portuguese, German, and French.

Within the French-speaking community, there are two versions of *The Simpsons*: the

French[1] version (translated and dubbed in France) and the Quebec version (translated and

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[1] In my use of the phrase "French version", the adjective 'French' is synonymous to 'relating to France' (the
territory) and not 'relating to the French language'. In the latter sense, the Quebec version of *The Simpsons* is also a
French version insofar as the language spoken in Quebec is French.

dubbed in Quebec). The reason for this dual dubbing is both economic and ideological. Since 1949, a law passed by the French Parliament has imposed an embargo on movies or TV programmes dubbed or subtitled outside of France (Deslandes 2005). To gain access to the French public therefore, all foreign films and television programmes must be dubbed or subtitled in France. It is argued that this strategy will guarantee French citizens' jobs in the film industry (economic reason) while protecting the French language and its speakers from the negative foreign influence of 'bad' translation performed abroad (ideological reason). In 1975, the Quebec National Assembly retaliated against the French embargo by passing its own law prohibiting the screening in Quebec of movies dubbed abroad.[2] Concerning the dubbing of *The Simpsons* in particular, in Quebec, the argument goes something like this: since the series is distinctively North American and is deeply rooted in North American culture, it takes a North American French (i.e. Quebec French) speaker to faithfully and accurately translate it.

Owing to the conflict between France and Quebec, 'Springfielders' can be heard speaking French from France or French from Quebec depending on the place of dubbing. To date, the existence of this dual dubbing has not received due scholarly attention, even though, in the Anglo-Saxon world, the series itself has inspired several books, academic papers, newspaper articles, personal blogs, and other forms of commentary. In the Francophonie, scholarly interest in *The Simpsons* is somewhat lukewarm and the fact that there exist two different versions in French does not seem to arouse much intellectual curiosity. To the best of our knowledge, the only study that pays attention to the Quebec and French dubbing of *The Simpsons* is Plourde's MA dissertation (2000). Basing his study on nine episodes of the first season aired in 1990, Plourde contends that the translation strategy at work in Quebec and in France strives for a

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[2] According to Deslandes (2005) this law has never been enforced.

radical appropriation of the American series through a complete alteration of the connotative system. In other words, to turn Springfield into a French setting, Quebec and Parisian translators resort to similar strategies, all of which seek to wipe out foreign cultural elements. Plourde portrays both dubbings as '*une forme de traduction réactionnaire dont l'effet principal est d'occulter certains éléments du discours et de la culture de l'original, surtout l'appareil connotatif*' [3] (2000, 20).

This article follows on from Plourde's work to the extent that it uses the French and Quebec dubbings of *The Simpsons* as a springboard to address a broader question. However, unlike Plourde's study, which is only translation studies-oriented, our analysis combines sociolinguistic (variationist), discursive, grammatical, and translation studies approaches. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the adaptation of cultural elements in both dubbings, it looks at one particular linguistic constituent which is omnipresent in all the episodes of its corpus, namely the translation of first-person singular future actions. Building on variationist sociolinguistics, it seeks to uncover the patterns underlying the various translation solutions retained by translators from Quebec and France.

The article begins with a presentation of the theoretical framework underpinning the study. It then highlights the relationship between dubbing and translation before examining the linguistic means used to express first-person singular future actions in English, French from France, and Quebec French. It continues with a description of the corpus used and the discussion of findings. The conclusion dwells on the theoretical and practical implications of the results.

Theoretical considerations

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[3] 'A form of reactionary translation whose main goal is to overshadow some elements of discourse as well as the culture of the original, notably the connotative apparatus' (My translation).

The present study falls within the framework of sociolinguistics and, more specifically, variationist sociolinguistics. The basic tenet of the variationist approach is put forward by Labov (1972) in his pioneering book entitled *Sociolinguistic Patterns*: 'It is common for a language to have many alternate ways of saying the "same thing"', he writes (1972, 188). In other words, speakers of a language constantly 'make choices when they use language and […] these choices are discrete alternatives with the same referential value or grammatical function. Furthermore, these choices vary in a systematic way and as such they can be quantitatively modelled' (Tagliamonte 2006, 12). To be able to model the choices quantitatively, 'variationist analysis puts language in context, socially, linguistically, synchronically, and diachronically' (Tagliamonte 2006, 14-15). This article looks at the various alternatives used by translators (as speakers of the language into which they translate) to render future actions expressed in the first-person singular.

As language users, translators have different ways of saying more or less the same thing. When reformulating into another language a message initially formulated in a source language, they choose between several possible solutions. In the target language, these interchangeable solutions form what some discourse analysts call 'paradigms' (Mortureux 1993), that is, lists of linguistic units that are likely to occupy the same position in a given communicative situation. The availability of several linguistic options to the translator is probably one of the reasons why Even-Zohar (1981) defines translation as follows:

> Translation involves reformulation of an utterance a in a language A by means of an utterance b in a language B. Thus, the process of decomposition and recomposition between two utterances in two different languages [is] admitted to be of a translational nature' (Even-Zohar 1981, 3)

Similarly, Newmark (1982, 7) defines translation as a 'craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language'.

The theoretical question that both Even-Zohar's and Newmark's definitions raise is the following: what factors inform the translator's decision when choosing between several alternatives? As it will become apparent throughout this study, the complex nature of translation as an activity makes the answer to this question very complicated. For instance, it is hard to explain, after the fact and just by looking at the translated text, why a translator decided to render (1) by 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d or 1e:[4]

1. You must fix that car today.

    1a. Vous devez réparer cette voiture aujourd'hui.

    1b. Il faut que vous répariez cette voiture aujourd'hui

    1c. J'exige que vous répariez cette voiture aujourd'hui.

    1d. Cette voiture doit être réparée aujourd'hui.

    1e. Réparez cette voiture aujourd'hui.

One might speculate as to why the translator chose or should have chosen this or that option, but unavoidably, every assumption will be, to some extent, conjectural since translation as a form of rephrasing is context-bound. To understand why the translator chose this solution over that one, it is important to take into account the general context in which translation took place. As sociolinguists (Fishman 1965, Mestrie and al. 2000) argue, speech reflects as well as creates context, which can be defined by a cascade of Wh- questions. Applied to translation, context-bound questions look something like the following: who translates what for whom, when, why,

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[4] We are by no means suggesting that these are the only solutions available. Depending on the context, one may use '*tu*' instead of '*vous*', '*arranger*' or '*dépanner*' instead of '*réparer*', '*auto*' instead of '*voiture*', and so on.

and under which circumstances?[5] It is only by providing unequivocal answers to each of these questions that one can attempt to account for the translator's decision. If we consider the question "Who translates?" for example, knowing the translator's name is not enough. It is also important to know his or her idiosyncrasies, ideological stances, cultural background, degree of experience, level of training, attitudes towards certain words (a translator may consistently prefer one word over another), etc. As Erkazanci-Durmus (2011, 24) puts it,

> Translators are not neutral mediators between the source and the target language, but socially and historically constituted subjects (Hatim and Mason 1990, Katan 2009). They interpret texts by placing them against their own background education and knowledge of words and phrases, existing statements, conventions, previous texts, that is, their general knowledge which is ideological.

All of these external factors make the task of looking for patterns in translations if not impossible, at least extremely difficult.

While predicting how a translator may rephrase a message may prove nearly impossible at the individual level (micro-level), the same operation at the supra-individual level (macro-level) may be relatively feasible. In other words, it is possible to predict that to render the idiomatic expression in 2, Quebec translators may choose (among other possible solutions not mentioned below) between 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d, while their French counterparts may choose between 2x, 2y, and 2z, as shown in Table 1 below.

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[5] These questions are framed after the title of a seminal article by Fishman (1965) on code-switching in multilingual settings: 'Who speaks what language to whom and when'.

Table 1

Original statement	Quebec translators	French translators
He fell for it!	2a. Il s'est fait pogner.	2x. Il s'est laissé prendre.
	2b. Il s'est fait avoir.	2y. Il s'est fait avoir
	2c. On l'a eu!	2z. On l'a eu!
	2d. Il s'est laissé prendre.	

Table 1 : Translation solutions and community verbal repertoire

As this table shows, 2a is not in the paradigm of solutions available to French translators because the word '*pogner*' is not attested in most English/French bilingual dictionaries or in unilingual French dictionaries such as *Le Petit Robert* or *Le Larousse*.[6] It is unlikely that translators in France use it. Conversely, 2a is an option (or perhaps the preferred option) for Quebec translators, because it is part of the verbal repertoire of Quebeckers and it is attested in most French dictionaries published in Quebec, such as *Le Dictionnaire québécois d'aujourd'hui*. In colloquial Quebec French, 2a may be more frequent and more transparent than 2b and 2c. Therefore, a Quebec translator who wishes to translate the way Quebeckers speak ordinarily is most likely to choose 2a. This example shows that at the macro-level, one might indeed *predict* how a form is likely to be translated, by taking into account the linguistic habits of the targeted audience.

The decision to translate the way people speak is not new. To justify his translation of *The Holy Bible* into a dialectal German, Martin Luther[7] (1545) argued that he listened to the speech of the mother at home, the children in the street, the men and women in the market, the

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[6] The word can be found in the online dictionary *Trésor de la langue française.* However, it does not have the meaning component identified in this example, i.e. *to be taken in, to be had.*
http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=1804924425;
[7] Cited in Gemar (1995, 29).

butcher and various tradesmen in their shops, and translated accordingly. As we shall see, a similar strategy seems to be at work in the translation of *The Simpsons* into French by Quebec translators and French translators.

Finally, the present study falls within the framework of what Toury (1995) calls Descriptive Translation Studies (henceforth DTS), whose purpose is to describe, explain, and predict phenomena pertaining to translation. DTS does so by looking at translation first as an 'empirical discipline' (1995, 1), that is, as a scholarly field which 'account[s], in a systematic and controlled way, for particular segments of the "real world"' (1995, 1). For Toury, the Translation Studies specialist is someone who is able to use '(observable and reconstructable) facts' (1995:1) as a starting point for theoretical insights. He or she starts by focusing on 'translated texts and/or their constituents, on intertextual relationships, on models and norms of translational behaviours or on strategies resorted to in and for the solution of particular problems' (1995, 1). As 'translated texts' are examined, he or she refrains from adopting any normative attitude. The object of study is described as it is and not in terms of how it should be. A similar attitude is adopted here. As a 'constituent' of the translation of *The Simpsons* in France and in Quebec is examined, our intention is not to pass judgment on existing translations, but, simply to describe them as they are, potentially to explain them, and finally to predict possible translation strategies.

Translation or Dubbing?

Although the terms *translation* and *dubbing* are used routinely and interchangeably in this paper, the data examined come in fact from dubbing, which is a complex form of translation involving audio-visual texts. In contradistinction to translation proper where a text written to be read in one language is 'converted' into another written text to be read in a different language, dubbing is a

multi-semiotic activity that 'necessitates the grafting of a voice belonging to a different person onto the actor appearing on the screen' (Petit 2004, 26). In dubbing, the target text, though written, is meant to be read out loud, that is, to be *enacted*. This is why Cary (1985) relates dubbing to drama, which is a genre subjected to the imperatives of show efficiency, anticipation of audience reactions, and so on. In other words, 'When transposing a film or a television series, the translators tend to portray to their audience the spirit and heart of the work, rather than striving to provide a pure literal translation of the spoken words' (Petit 2004, 37). It follows that some translation solutions retained may be determined not by linguistic clues, but by non-linguistic and technical considerations (such as the necessity to synchronize the lip movements of the actor with the voice of the dubber, the need to match dialogues with gestures or facial expression, etc.). For instance, when dubbing a show or a movie into French, translators must ensure that '*À chaque labiale de la langue originale, doit correspondre une labiale en français, mais pas nécessairement la même*[8]'. This phonetic constraint may force them to change the meaning of the original message. Translation thus appears to be but one (usually the first) of the stages in the whole dubbing process and it does happen that a decision made by a translator is subsequently changed by the stage director for dramatic reasons. As a matter of fact, 'When vocal intonation, accentuation and gesture dramatically change the verbal meaning […] changes are made [to the dubbed version] to help the new soundtrack "ring true" and match the screen image' (Petit 2004, 37).

As far as the dubbing of first-person singular future actions into French (for France or Canada) is concerned, however, the constraints identified above do not apply. As we will see in

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[8]'*Each labial sound pronounced by the actor in the original script is rendered by another labial sound (not necessarily the same) in French'* http://www.doublage.qc.ca/p.php?i=176 accessed on January 9, 2014. My translation.

the next section, the main variants in the Quebec version for example is */je vais/* and */je vas/.* The

alternation of these two variants does not appear to be influenced by phonetic factors because the

movement of the lips when one pronounces */je vais/* and */je vas/* is almost the same, the only

difference being the aperture: the mouth is open in */je vais/* and very open in */je vas/.* It is

unlikely that French-speaking viewers of *The Simpsons* would notice such a minute difference in

lip movements.

Expressing first-person singular future actions in English and in French

According to Labov (1972, 202), 'The techniques […] for the direct observation of language in

use presuppose that the outlines of the grammar have been sketched in […]*'*. This is precisely

what we intend to do in this section. Table 2 sketches out the main[9] forms identified in grammar

books as the linguistic paradigm of future tenses applied to first-person singular future actions in

French and in English:

Table 2

First-person singular future actions in	
English	**French**
Simple future (I will/shall + Infinitive) e.g. I will call the police.	**Simple future (Je V-Rai)** e.g. J'appellerai la police
I am going to+ infinitive e.g. I am going to call the police.	**Periphrastic future (Aller+ Verb infinitive)** e.g. Je vais appeler la police
Present continuous (I am + Ving) e.g. I am calling the police	**Simple present** e.g. J'appelle la police
Simple present e.g. I call the police	

Table 2: Expressing first-person singular future actions in English and French

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[9] In discourse though, there are several other ways of expressing future actions including the use of modal verbs (I *can* call the police, I *must* call the police), of some future-oriented phrasal verbs (I *intend to call* the police, I *am about* to call the police), or of certain lexical choices (I *plan* to call the police). However, this study does not deal with such cases.

In both languages, the form chosen is always context-bound. However, one important difference between the two languages lies in their respective use of the simple future. While the English language uses *I will + infinitive* to describe both impending and far-off events, the French language uses it mostly for remote events to emphasize their hypothetical character. There is a difference between 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d below.

      3a. You are hurt. I will call the doctor.

      3b. Tu es blessé. J'appellerai le médecin.

      3c. Tu es blessé. Je vais appeler le médecin.

      3d. Tu es blessé. J'appelle le médecin.

In 3a, despite the use of *I will+infinitive*, the imminent nature of the action is still suggested and understood. But this imminence is absent in 3b, while it is present in 3c and 3d. This example shows, on the one hand, that the distribution of future tenses in French and English is not interchangeable, and on the other, that in French, there is an aspectual difference between the simple future and the periphrastic future. The *Office québécois de la langue française* highlights this difference as follows: '*la nuance entre les deux formes réside dans le lien entre l'action future et le moment de parole, et non dans la distance plus ou moins grande qui sépare l'action évoquée et le présent. Bien qu'il soit possible d'employer ces deux formes pour parler d'un fait à venir, on ne peut pas nécessairement les utiliser indifféremment dans tous les contextes. Ainsi, lorsque l'action évoquée est située dans un futur immédiat et qu'elle est vraiment ancrée dans le moment présent, seul le futur proche peut être utilisé.*'[10]

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[10] 'The nuance between both forms lies in the link between the future action and the moment of speaking and not in the distance (long or short) between the two. While both forms serve to discuss future actions, they cannot always be used indiscriminately in all contexts. For instance, when an action is to take place in a near future and is deeply rooted in the present, only the periphrastic future may be called for' Office québécois de la langue française, http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit_bdl.asp?id=4122. Accessed on February 2, 2014. My translation.

Sociolinguistic studies on French reveal that in Quebec French, the first-person singular periphrastic future is a paradigm with three variants: (i) *Je vais+ Infinitive*; (ii) *Je vas+infinitive*; and (iii) *Je m'as + Past participle*. Mougeon et al. (2010, 69) make the following observations about the three forms:

> In Canadian French, the future variable involves three variants. However, when one focuses on verb forms used in the first-person singular, there are, in fact several variants within the periphrastic future namely **je vais**, **je vas**, and **je m'as**. It is worth pointing out that alternation between **je vais** and **je vas** dates back to the 16th century and that, in fact, in the early part of that century, **je vas** was considered a feature of educated speech. It was only later in that century that grammarians prescribed the use of **je vais** and that **je vas** became progressively associated with vernacular spoken French […].
>
> While **je vas** has a long story of robust usage on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in vernacular varieties of French, it has now become virtually extinct in urban European French (Martineau and Mougeon: 2005). In contrast, **je vas** is still quite frequent in many varieties of contemporary Canadian spoken French.
>
> As for **m'as**, it is used mostly in Quebec French (Deshais et al.:1981) and in the varieties of French spoken in the provinces west of Quebec. (Hallion: 2000, Mougeon et al: 2008)[11]

These remarks are validated by the way translators of *The Simpsons* in France and in Quebec deal with first-person singular future actions. While French translators resort to three forms, to wit

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[11] Emphasis in the original.

     (i)   Je vais+infinitive;

     (ii)   Je V-Rai; and

     (ii)   Other forms such as the simple present and verbs of intentions;

Quebec translators choose between four[12] forms, namely:

     i)   Je vas+infinitive,

     ii)   Je vais+infinitive,

     iii)   Je V-Rai,

     iv)   Other forms such as the simple present and verbs of intentions.

The different solutions used by translators on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean to render first-person singular future actions prompted the following questions: are there patterns in the retained solutions? If so, how can these be described? If not, which extralinguistic factors might account for the seemingly random alternations of the different variants?

Corpus and data gathering

According to Labov (1972), research on sociolinguistic patterns must be based on direct observation of language in use. In this study, the linguistic data used derive from audio-visual texts that are themselves translations/dubbings of English audio-visual texts. We are thus dealing with indirect written and oral data. This complex origin of data poses a methodological challenge, namely that of defining the identity of the subjects of study. Are they the (voices of) dubbers as they impersonate characters on the screen? Are they the characters themselves even though they do not utter the words heard? Finally, are they the translators who chose these forms during the translation process? For the purpose of this research, we assume that we are dealing with the language use of characters themselves as imitated by dubbers following choices made

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[12] *Je m'as* is not attested in our data.

by translators. Characters are perceived as 'living beings' (even though they are only cartoons) using a form of French (even though they normally only 'speak' English) put in their mouths by translators. An important hypothesis in this paper is that in choosing how characters speak French, translators from France and Quebec take into account both their social attributes in the imaginary setting of Springfield and the language habits of their respective targeted audience. For instance, on account of social status, translators from both France and Quebec are likely to refrain from putting a substandard variety of French in the mouth of the wealthy Mr. Burns. Conversely, they will readily allow a character like Moe, the bartender, to use slang and vernacular. To verify this hypothesis, we examine the translation of first-person singular future actions in ten episodes selected from the existing 500 plus episodes: there are four episodes from Season 3, three from Season 8, and three from Season 20. Table 3 shows the titles of the episodes used.

Table 3

Seasons and episodes[13]	English Titles	French Titles (France)	French Titles (Quebec)
S3E1	Stark Raving Dad	Mon pote Michael Jackson	Lobot-Homer
S3E3	When Flanders Failed	Le Palais du Gaucher	Flanders fait faillite
S3E9	Saturdays of Thunder	Un père dans la course	Bartmobile
S3E19	Dog of Death	Chienne de vie	La Mort d'un chien
S8E8	Hurricane Neddy	Une crise de Ned	Une crise de Ned

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[13] To encode the seasons and episodes used, the following alphanumeric technique is used: S for season followed by the season number, then E for episode, followed by the episode number, and finally E, Q or F for the language. Thus S3E1Q refers to Season 3, Episode 1, Quebec version. S3E1F refers to Season3, Episode 1, French version.

S8E9	El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Jomer	Le Mystérieux Voyage d'Homer	Le voyage mystérieux d'Homer
S8E15	Homer's Phobia	La Phobie d'Homer	La phobie d'Homer
S20E1	Sex, Pies and Idiot Scrapes	Sexe, mensonges et gâteaux	Crime-pâtissière
S20E7	Mypods and Boomsticks	Les Apprentis Sorciers	La pomme de la colère
S20E15	Wedding for Disaster	Mariage en sinistre	Le sacrament de mariage

Table 3: Titles of episodes used

To gather our data, each episode was watched and transcribed in the three language tracks, namely English, French from France, and Quebec French. After editing, the episodes were examined and the forms under study isolated. The extraction of first-person singular future actions in the ten episodes yielded 104 original forms in English.

The main limitation in this study is related to the uneven distribution of the forms studied among the characters. For example, comparing Marge's six uses of first-person singular future actions to Homer's forty-three uses may seem questionable and statistically flawed at first glance. Valid as it is, such a criticism is nonetheless undeserved. It is practically impossible to achieve number equality when studying the use of a specific linguistic feature by different characters in different audio-visual texts. The fact is that the frequency of a form in the mouth of a character is dependent on such factors as his role in the plot, the number of his verbal interactions, the situation in which he speaks, and so on. To minimize the effect of this methodological shortcoming on our study, we preferred the use of percentage figures to absolute numbers. The former looks at the distribution of the feature under study in relative terms, while the latter looks at it in absolute terms.

Results and analysis

Table 4 summarizes the various ways in which first-person singular future actions are translated

in France and in Quebec in the ten episodes under examination.

Table 4

	English	Quebec				France		
	# of tokens	Je vas+Inf	Je vais+Inf	Je Vrai	Other	Je vais+Inf	Je Vrai	Other
S3E1	12	7	1	1	3	9	0	3
S3E3	15	6	5	2	2	5	3	7
S3E9	12	7	3	1	1	6	1	5
S3E19	7	5	0	0	2	2	2	3
S8E8	7	6	0	0	1	0	2	5
S8E9	10	8	0	2	0	5	3	2
S8E15	11	8	0	0	3	5	4	2
S20E1	6	4	0	0	2	4	0	2
S20E2	17	10	1	3	3	7	5	5
S20E7	7	6	0	0	1	6	0	1
Total	**104**	**67**	**10**	**9**	**18**	**48**	**20**	**35**
%	**100%**	**64.42%**	**9.62%**	**8.65%**	**17.31%**	**47.12%**	**19.23%**	**33.65%**

Table 4. Translating first-person singular future actions: solutions per episode

This table shows that, in Quebec, the solutions selected to translate first-person singular future

actions are, in order of preference: i) *Je vas+ Inf*; ii) *Je vais+ Inf*; iii) *Je V-Rai*; and iv) *Other*. In

France, on the other hand, the solutions are, in order of preference: i) *Je vais+Inf*; ii) *Other*; and

3) *Je V-Rai*. The table also shows that *je vas + Inf* is a constant feature in all the studied episodes

in the Quebec version.

In both versions, the periphrastic future is more prevalent than the simple future. This is

consistent with the OQLF observation that '*Le futur proche est en concurrence avec le futur

simple dans la langue courante et particulièrement à l'oral*'.[14] Table 4 shows that in the

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[14] 'The simple future is in competition with periphrastic future in everyday language and especially in oral speech', http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit_bdl.asp?id=4122. Accessed on February 2, 2014. My translation.

translation of *The Simpsons,* the periphrastic future prevails. It also indicates that in Quebec, there are two competing forms in the periphrastic future, namely *Je vas+Inf* and *Je vais+Inf*, and that in the translation of *The Simpsons*, the former is more prevalent than the latter. At the same time, the form *Je vas+Inf* is noticeably absent from translations performed in France. This absence substantiates the sociolinguistic observation mentioned above, i.e. that the form *Je vas+Inf*, though formerly acceptable in French, has since become extinct in France while it still flourishes in Quebec.

According to the DTS approach, the goal of the theory of translation is not just to describe phenomena pertaining to translation. It should also explain and predict the translator's linguistic behaviour. This can be done by looking for patterns in the various translation solutions retained. Tagliamonte (2006, 14) summarizes the different methods proposed by Labov (1969) to aid the variationist sociolinguist find patterns in language use.

> Sometimes these are discovered by scouring the literature, both synchronic and diachronic. Sometimes they "emerge from the ongoing analysis as a result of various suspicions, inspections, and analogies" (Labov 1969:729). Sometimes they are stumbled upon by chance in the midst of analysis and a 'Eureka!' experience unfolds. More often, the very worst days of variation analysis come when you are in the midst of realms of statistical analyses and data and numbers, and you just can't see the forest for the trees! As long as one's practice has been "carried out with a degree of accuracy and linguistic insight", Labov promises that "the end result is a set of regular constraints which operate upon every group and almost every individual" *(Labov 1969, 729).*

Are there regular constraints that influenced translators in Quebec and in France, as they chose between the various forms identified to translate in the way that they did? To answer this

question, we looked at intra-textual and extra-textual constraints. At the intra-textual level, the translator's decision is analyzed in terms of the communicative context in which the first-person singular future is used. The phrase 'communicative context' is used after Baugh (2011, 18-19) to encompass a set of situation-bound parameters including '[a] differences in public vs. private discourses, (b) differences in formal vs. informal speech that take place among interlocutors who share equal status, and (c) speakers who find themselves in a superior-to-subordinate position'. At the extra-textual level, we considered the role of ideology in the rewriting of the source text (Lefevere 1992). Defining translation as a form of rewriting, Lefevere (1992, 1) argues that in order to achieve 'various ideological and poetological ends'(1992, 2), translators as rewriters often resort to the manipulation of the original.

In analyzing intra-textual constraints, we began by 'suspecting' a link between the translation solutions retained and the original forms. Our suspicion was that the form *I will + inf* and *I am going to + inf* are preferably rendered, respectively, by the simple future (*Je V-Rai*) and the periphrastic future *(Je vais or Je vas + Inf)*. In our data, out of the 104 first-person singular future forms, there are 24 *I am going to + Inf* and 37 *I will+ Inf*. Table 5 summarizes how they are translated:

Table 5

	Quebec				France		
	Je vas+Inf	Je vais+Inf	Je VRai	Other	Je vais+Inf	Je VRai	Other
I am going to/ I'm gonna + Inf (n=24)	18 or 75%	2 or 8.33%	2 or 8.33%	2 or 8.33%	14 or 58.33%	4 or 16.67%	6 or 25%
I will + Inf (n=37)	26 or 70.26%	2 or 5.40%	6 or 16.22%	3 or 8.11%	20 or 54.05%	11 or 29.73%	6 or 16.22%
61	**44 or 72.5%**	**4 or or 6.86%**	**8 or 12.27%**	**5 or 8.22%**	**34 or 56.19%**	**15 or 23.2%**	**12 or 20.61%**

Table 5: Link between original forms and translation solutions

The results show that the original form in English has no bearing on the translation solutions retained. The forms *Je vas + Inf* in Quebec and *Je vais + Inf* in France are still the preferred solution (with more than 50% occurrence in both versions) regardless of the original forms in English. In other words, the different forms used to express first-person singular future actions in English do not seem to have played any role in the translators' decisions.

The second intra-textual factor has to do with what Baugh (2011, 18-19) calls 'the differences in public vs private discourse*'*. The question here is whether translators made characters use one form in public discourse and another in private discourse. In other words, does Homer Simpson for example use *Je vas+Inf* in private spaces and *Je vais+inf* or *je V-Rai* in public spaces? Data analysis reveals no clear-cut distribution in the various forms used. While *je vas+Inf* stands out as the preferred form in private discourse in Quebec dubbings (around 90% occurrence), it is also present in public discourse, such as in the following examples in which Ned Flanders addresses 'Springfielders' gathered before his house in the aftermath of a hurricane :

S8E8A: And if you really tick me off, *I'm gonna run* you down with my car.

S8E8Q: Et si vous me faites vraiment me choquer, *je vas* vous *écraser* avec mon auto.

Conversely, the forms *je vais+Inf* and *je V-Rai* are at times used by translators when rendering private discourses, such as in the following examples.

Homer is talking to Marge at home

S8E9A: Okay! Quit nagging me. *I won't have* a beer.

S8E9Q: OK! Achale-moi pas. *Je boirai* pas de bière.

Marge is talking to Bart at home.

S3E1A: Bart, watch Maggie while *I get* the laundry.

S3E1Q: Bart, surveille Maggie. *Je vais chercher* la lessive.

These examples show that the public vs. private discourse variable is not a determining factor in the solutions selected by Quebec translators. Likewise, in translations made in France, the public vs private discourse variable does not seem to have informed the translator's decisions. The reason for this is that in international French, the difference between periphrastic future and simple future is not analyzable in terms of formality/informality, but rather in terms of degree of certainty and imminence of the envisaged action. Thus, when Burns says to Smithers in S3E3A 'Hold it, Smithers. I *will open* the can', French translators rephrased as follows in S3E3F 'Arrêtez, Smithers. C'est moi qui *vais l'ouvrir*'. But when, minutes later, Mr. Burns says, (still to Smithers) 'To the mall. I *will explain* on the way', the French translators used the simple future and translated: 'Au centre commercial. Je vous *expliquerai* en route'. In the first example, the action (to open a can) is certain and imminent; hence the periphrastic future. But in the second example, although Mr. Burns promises to explain something to Smithers on the way, there is no certainty that he will keep his word. In fact, he doesn't!

Another sociolinguistic factor considered to account for the distribution of the different solutions retained is related to the social status of characters, and the formality or informality of their exchanges. Regarding the social status, we posited that *The Simpsons'* characters fall into three main socioeconomic categories to wit: the lower class, the middle class, and the upper class. In our data, characters from the lower end of the social spectrum do not use the forms studied and are therefore not relevant to the present analysis.

Most characters are blue collar workers and can be said to belong to the middle class of Springfield. Since the show is about the Simpsons, it makes perfect sense that 67 *je vas+inf* identified in the Quebec dubbing are used by members of the Simpson family, namely Homer

(*35 je vas* out of 43 first-person singular future actions), Bart (*11 je vas* out of 16), Lisa (*2 je vas* out of 4) and Marge (one *je vas* out of 6). After all, the linguistic interactions of The Simpson family constitute most of the dialogues. In percentage terms and with relation to our data, Quebec translators make Homer use *Je vas+inf* more than 81 % of the time, Bart more than 68 %, Lisa 50 %, and Marge around 16% of the time. With due allowances, it is fair to argue that in our corpus, translators do not make Marge and Lisa, both female characters, use the form *Je vas+inf* as often as Homer and Bart. This conscious or unconscious decision may be attributable to the sociolinguistic role of women in every society. Labov (1972, 302) maintains that women 'are more sensitive to prestige patterns'. He adds that 'If anything, they put more effort into speech' (1972:303). Marge's overall linguistic behaviour seems to be consistent with her role in the nuclear Simpson family as the 'model housewife' (Neuhaus 2010, 767) who watches over her family's well-being and the way they, including herself, use language. When in S3E19, Bart swears and curses, she quickly warns him: 'Bart, watch your language'. The fact that the form *Je vas+inf* still creeps into her verbal repertoire (albeit only once out of six occasions according to our data), however, bespeaks to the pervasiveness of this form in Quebec French. In other words, to achieve sociolinguistic truthfulness, translators ensured that characters that become Quebeckers by virtue of translation use *je vas+inf* at least once. That is why Ned Flanders (Homer's neighbour), Agnes (Principal Skinner's wife), Grandpa Simpson, and Moe (the bar owner) all use *je vas+inf*, whether rarely (e.g. Agnes) or more often (Flanders). The omnipresence of *Je vas+inf* in the speech of these characters functions as an idiosyncrasy of their Quebecness. Ideologically, it is an integral part of the 'reterritorialization'[15] process (Brisset 1990) inherent to 'domesticating' (Venuti 1998) translations.

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[15] According to Brisset (1990), "reterritorialization" is a form of spatial appropriation, i.e. a process whereby a text travels from one geographic area to another through linguistic and cultural manipulation.

Nonetheless, according to our data, there are some characters in whose mouth Quebec translators abstain from putting the form *Je vas+inf*. These include well-to-do characters such as 'Springfield's nuclear magnate' (Grode 2014, 6L) Mr. Burns (who uses first-person singular future action six times in our data), Smithers (4 times), Apu the Indian store owner (4 times), and well-educated characters such as Dr. Nick Riviera (3 times) or Principal Skinner (4 times). In other words, those characters that do not use *je vas+inf* are either rich, educated, or foreign[16] to Springfield. The distribution of the form *je vas+inf* along social, educational and ethnic lines partially corroborates the following observation by Plourde (2000): in the dubbing of *The Simpsons*, '*Le français québécois est utilisé par les personnages illettrés, stupides ou occupant des métiers cols bleus. Cette situation instaure un paradoxe: l'élite parlera un français dit international ou standard, alors que les étrangers, même les Français, parleront une variante non standard du français*[17]' (21). However, the social stratification variable of the form *Je vas+inf* is not as clear cut as it seems because in S20E2 for example, translators make a wealthy and knowledgeable character like Denis Leary use *Je vas+inf* twice while talking to Marge on the phone. The latter instance shows that in the translation process, the ideological intent (i.e. the desire to domesticate the show) can sometime supersede the social stratification variable.

Baugh (2011) notes that when studying language use in context, one should look at the relationship between the status of participants and the degree of formality/informality of the situation. This is all the more necessary since as Labov (1972, 209) puts it, 'Any systematic observation of a speaker defines a formal context in which more than the minimum attention is

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[16] In S7E23, (Much Apu About Nothing), Dr. Riviera takes a citizenship test, implying that prior to this he was not a citizen of the United States. He is likely of Latino descent.
[17] 'Quebec French is used by uneducated and stupid characters or by characters performing blue collar jobs. This situation results in a paradox: the elite speak a variety of French that is qualified as international or standard, whereas foreigners, including the French themselves, speak a substandard variety of French'. My translation

paid to speech'. To examine the link between translation solutions on the one hand and the

formality/informality of the situation and the status of participants on the other, we looked at

first-person singular future actions in four different contexts, following Baugh (2011):

(i)   Informal speech between interlocutors of equal status

(ii)   Formal speech between interlocutors of equal status

(iii)   Informal speech between speakers in a superior-subordinate relationship

(iv)   Formal speech between speakers in a superior-subordinate relationship

Our data show that when translating first-person singular future actions in informal speech

between interlocutors of equal status, Quebec translators turn almost systematically to *Je*

vas+Inf. Thus, in dialogues between Homer and Ned (S8E8Q), Bart and Homer (S8E15Q), Moe

and John (S8E15Q), Moe and Barney (S8E15Q) *je vas +Inf* is used consistently. However, this

distribution is not straightforward. For instance, when Ned addresses his fellow neighbours in

S8E8Q, he alternates between *Je vais+ Inf* and *Je vas+Inf.* Likewise, in S20E2Q, Bart uses *Je V-*

Rai when talking to Lisa '*J'aurai jamais de téléphone portable*' he says (I'm never gonna get a

cellphone).This example shows that Quebec translators also allow Bart to switch (albeit very

rarely) to the standard future form.

The analysis of the translation of first-person singular future actions in formal speech

between interlocutors of equal status also yields mixed results. In the Quebec dubbing, Lisa uses

the standard *Je V-Rai* when writing a letter to Bart in S3E1Q: '*Peut-être bien qu'un jour, sous la*

*pression d'un adulte, je **serai obligée** de te donner une bise lors d'une réunion de famille future*

et lointaine[18]…', thus using the simple future in a norm-abiding way to suggest both the distant

and uncertain nature of the envisaged action. But when the Simpsons invite the Bin Ladens (who

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[18] *'Perhaps if a professional so advises, I will give you a hug at some far-distant family reunion'.*

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have just moved to Springfield) over for dinner in S20E7Q, Homer uses *Je vas + Inf* three times despite the formality of the occasion. As a matter of fact, the Simpsons and their guests are all dressed up and Homer is doing his very best to behave politely even if he ends up upsetting his visitors by bombarding them with embarrassing and suggestive questions.

When probing the relationship between language use and communicative context, the third step is to look at the informal speech between speakers in a superior-subordinate relationship. In our data, when translating Mr. Burns' words to Smithers, Quebec translators seem to avoid *je vas+Inf,* even in an informal situation (see examples above). Also, in S20E1, when Marge says to her boss, at the phallic bakery, 'I will do it", Quebec translators rephrase her statement as follows: '*C'est d'accord*'. Furthermore, in S20E2, when Marge calls Denis Leary to offer to return his phone (stolen by Bart), Quebec translators make her avoid the form *Je vas+ Inf* while rendering 'I will send you your phone back right away'. They translated: '*Je vous renvoie le téléphone, promis juré*'. Meanwhile, on more than one occasions, Denis Leary uses *Je vas+Inf* when talking back to Marge. Thus, 'I will tell you what is hard […] In fact can I give you some advice?' becomes '*Je vas vous dire ce qui est dur[…]Je vas vous donner un bon conseil*'.

Finally, we looked for patterns in the formal speech between speakers in a subordinate-superior relationship. In S3E9, Homer has an exchange with Dr. Nick Riviera at his clinic. Quebec translators refrained from putting *Je vas+inf* in the mouth of both participants while rendering that exchange. However in S8E8Q, Ned uses *je vas+inf* during a prayer to God: '*... Je vas craquer si ça continue… Qu'est-ce que je vas faire?*'

Overall, it is hard to pinpoint regular and predictable patterns to account for the alternation of forms in the translation of first-person singular future actions in the Quebec

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dubbing. If anything, the way Quebec translators use the different forms of periphrastic future available in Quebec French is consistent with Mougeon et al.'s observation (2010, 69): '*Je **vais** is the preferred form of middle class and female speakers […]. In contrast, **je vas** shows no discernible pattern of social stratification and it clearly outranks **je vais** and **m'as** in terms of frequency*'. Indeed, according to our data*,* in the Quebec dubbing, *je vas+inf* is used 67 times out of 104, while *je vais+inf* is only used 10 times. Moreover, while some wealthy characters like Mr. Burns and educated characters like Principal Skinner and Dr. Nick Riviera do not use *je vas+inf,* another well-off and learned character, Denis Leary, uses it more than once. Also, even if Marge's preferred mode of expressing first-person singular future action is *je vais+inf* (3 times out of 6) and *Je V-Rai* (2 times), she still uses *Je vas+inf* on one occasion. Conversely, even if Homer and Bart stand out as great *je vas+inf* users, they still resort to *Je vais+inf* or to *Je V-Rai* occasionally. All of these inconsistencies show that in the Quebec dubbing, the translator's decision is informed not so much by the desire to be consistent, but rather by an extratextual constraint, namely the 'domesticating' ideology (Venuti 1998) which can only be achieved if the French spoken in Springfield mirrors the French of Quebec. The lack of rigorous regular pattern observed in the alternation of *Je vas+Inf, Je vais+inf,* and *Je V-Rai*, reflects the lack of patterns in the use of these forms in spoken Quebec French. By the same token, the statistical domination of *Je vas+inf* over *je vais+inf* in the French of Springfield parallels the relationship between both forms in Quebec spoken French.

Let's now turn our attention to the dubbing made in France. As mentioned earlier, to render first-person singular future actions, translators from France chose between the following three forms: *Je vais+Inf* (49 times out of 104 or 47.12 % of the time), *Je V-Rai* (20 times or 19.23% of the time), and other forms such as the simple present, modal verbs, the imperative, or

verbs of intention (35 times or 33.65% of the time). From the outset, it is obvious that the form *Je vais+inf* is more frequent than *je V-Rai*, and this is in line with the sociolinguistic observation that in spoken French periphrastic future is more frequent than simple future. A detailed analysis of the distribution of both forms reveals that translators from France seem to base their decision on the way they perceive the future actions involved. Their use appears thus to be more in line with what is presented in grammar books about periphrastic future and simple future. According to French grammar, as we have seen, periphrastic future is used when the action is both looming and certain, whereas simple future is reserved for distant and uncertain future actions. The following examples drawn from our data confirm this distribution:

Example 4 from S3E1 (Lisa to Bart)

4.a) Bart, my birthday is in two days. *I'm going to be* eight years old.

4.b) Bart, mon anniversaire c'est dans deux jours. Je *vais* avoir 8 ans.

Example 5 from S3E1 (Homer to Bart)

5.a) When I *get* home, *I'm going to wrap* my hands around your neck…

5.b) Quand *je vais rentrer* à la maison, *je vais mettre* mes mains autour de ton cou.

Example 6 from S3E3 (Ned to a customer)

6.a).I *will be* here all night if you change your mind.

6.b) Je *serai* là toute la soirée si jamais vous changez d'avis.

Example 7 from S8E8 (Grandpa to Homer)

7.a) I *ain't leaving*. I was born in this nursing home and *I'll die* in this nursing home.

7.b) Je m'en *irai* pas. Chu né dans cette maison de retraite et j'*ai* bien *l'intention*

d'y *mourir*.

Example 8 from S8E8 (Ned to his neighbours)

8.a) If you really tick me off, *I'm gonna run* you *down* with my car.

8.b) Si vous me cassez les pieds, je vous *passerai* dessus avec ma voiture.

Example 9 from S20E1 (Homer to Ned)

9a) *I'm going to tell* you what's over: our partnership.

9.b) Je *vais* te *dire* ce qui est fini: notre association.

In (4), (5), and (9), the future actions described are all imminent and certain: Lisa's birthday in

two days (4), Homer's return to his home after a stay at an asylum and his strangling of Bart (5),

and the end of Homer's partnership with Ned (9). Conversely, the future actions in (6), (7), and

(8) are more distant and hypothetical. In fact, in (6) and (8), the use of the simple future is

imposed by the rule governing the sequence of tenses in conditional sentences. According to that

rule, when the verb in the subordinate clause is in the simple present, the verb in the main clause

must be in the simple future, the simple present or the imperative. By adhering to this rule,

translators from France are clearly basing their decision on linguistic constraints. However in (7)

Grandpa's intention to stay is neither imminent nor certain. In fact, in the plot, he eventually

leaves the nursing home. In this example, the translator's decision is informed by his

appreciation of the degree of certainty of the action. It is worth noting that in the Quebec dubbing

all of the verbs highlighted in the examples above are rendered by *Je vas+ inf*, regardless of

grammar constraint (e.g. the time sequence constraint in conditional sentences in 6, 7, and 8).

Again, this shows that Quebec translators are more concerned with the ideological aspect of their

activity than with linguistic "correctness". For instance, Ned's words in (8) above become: '*Si vous me faites vraiment me choquer, **je vas** vous écraser avec mon auto*'.

The handling of first-person singular future actions in the episodes dubbed in France thus appears to be more conservative and norm-abiding. According to Robyns (1997), this translational strategy echoes the imperialistic attitude of France for whom the French language is both universalistic and homogeneous. In the dubbings made in France, all the characters (with the exception of foreigners such as Apu the Indian) speak the same variety of French, namely 'standard' French. Building on Robyns (1997), Plourde rightly observes that

> '*Cette position impérialiste fait en sorte que par le doublage, on reprend dans le discours télévisuel l'idée d'uniformisation linguistique et culturelle déjà courante dans l'écrit. On retrouvera peu ou pas du tout de variantes sociolectales ou dialectales (absence de régionalismes et de parlers régionaux) et l'utilisation du français non standard se limitera aux personnages étrangers.* (21)[19]

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine how first-person singular future actions are dealt with in the Quebec and Parisian dubbings of *The Simpsons*. Analysis of 104 items from ten selected episodes revealed that while periphrastic future is the preferred solution in both versions (it is used about 75 % of the time by Quebec translators vs 48% of the time by translators from France), two competing forms of periphrastic future are present in the Quebec version, namely *je vas* and *je vais*, with the former being more frequent than the latter (*Je vas* is used around 65% of

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[19] 'Owing to this imperialistic position, the idea of linguistic and cultural homogeneity which already prevails in writing is also applied to dubbing. That is why there are few or no sociolectal or dialectal variants [in the French dubbing] (absence of regionalisms and other regional dialects). Meanwhile, non-standard French is used by foreign characters'.

the time and *je vais* about 10% of the time). Looking for patterns in the various solutions

retained, the study showed that in the Quebec version, the form *je vas* is used mostly by

uneducated low-middle class male characters like Homer, Bart, Ned, Moe, etc. Female

characters like Marge, Lisa, Agnes, use the form less frequently, while well-off characters like

Mr. Burns, and educated characters like Principal Skinner do not use it at all. However, all the

frequent users of *je vas* also use *je vais* or *je V-Rai*, albeit rarely. Conversely, *je vas* is used by a

wealthy and knowledgeable character such as Denis Leary. These inconsistencies blur perceived

patterns and lead us to believe that the seemingly free alternation of forms in the Quebec dubbing

is attributable to style-shifting on the one hand and to ideology on the other. Taking these

choices as a style-shifting phenomenon, one can argue that, as professional language users,

translators know that 'There are no single-style speakers' (Labov 1972, 208). The variation and

heterogeneity observed in the use of first-person singular future actions in the Quebec French of

'Springfielders' are intended to reflect the variation and heterogeneity of that linguistic feature in

Quebec society itself. If we take shifts as an ideological phenomenon, they can be seen as a

manifestation of the 'defensive ideology' (Robyns 1997) that characterizes translation in Quebec.

While the use of French allows Quebec to position itself as different from the United States, the

use of Je *vas+inf* assumes a 'minoritizing' function (Venuti 1998) with regard to standard French

in that it 'releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the

standard dialect and literary canon to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and the

marginal' (1998, 11).

     In the version dubbed in France, a different ideology is at work, i.e., the imperialistic

ideology (Robyns 1997) which manifests itself through the use of a universalistic French. As

French translators allow characters with different economic and intellectual backgrounds to

speak standard French, they even out the linguistic differences between them. In so doing, they assume or predicate linguistic homogeneity despite obvious heterogeneity (Duranti 2011).

The analysis of both versions provides yet another proof that translation is first and foremost 'an ideological activity' (Basil and Hatim 1997, 146) in which language is 'a non-neutral medium' (Duranti 2011, 28). Gentzler is therefore right to observe that 'Translation is not a neutral site in the Americas[20]; rather, it is a highly contested one where different groups, often with competing literary or political interests, vie for space and approval' (2008, 3).

The present study also has some practical implications, the most important of which is related to translator's training. Translators are usually portrayed and trained to act as custodians of the target language. They have a sociolinguistic responsibility which, in theory, prevents them from using linguistic forms considered substandard or illegitimate. This study shows that by using *Je vas+inf*, Quebec translators are consciously departing from the linguistic norm. But this departure allows them to achieve *sociolinguistic veracity* that hinges on the reproduction of language as a (social) habit. In other words, the Simpson family in Springfield cannot be fully reterritorialized in Quebec unless they adopt the linguistic habits of Quebec French-speakers. Ironically, the form *je vas+Inf*, which is a hallmark of Quebec spoken French, is conspicuously absent from grammar books, let alone English-French bilingual dictionaries, as it is from translators' language training.[21] To be able to use *je vas+ Inf* in a translation such as in the dubbing of *The Simpsons* in Quebec, one must have sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistics courses are therefore definitely called for in translation training programmes.

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[20] Gentzler's remark in fact applies to translation everywhere, not just the Americas.
[21] Even in 'La Banque de dépannage linguistique' of the Office québécois de la langue française or OQLF, there is no mention of *je vas*. This is another ideological move, because by ignoring or reducing the complexity of the periphrastic future in Quebec French, the OQLF gives the impression that there is no difference between Quebec French and Parisian French as far the periphrastic future is concerned.
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