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Tropes in translation

An analysis of Dutch creative collocations and compounds translated into English

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Case study 1: *De helaasheid der dingen* / *The Misfortunates*

5.1 Background: The Novel

De helaasheid der dingen (2006) was translated as *The Misfortunates* (2012) by David Colmer and published by Portobello Books, an independent publishing house which prides itself on being “home to original and independent-minded writers, [...] a third of [whom come] into English in translation.” (<http://portobellobooks.com>). The book is a fictionalised autobiography of author Dimitri Verhulst’s upbringing in a godforsaken Flemish town with the made-up name of *Reetveerdegem*, wittily translated as “Arsendegem”. Abandoned by his mother at a young age, Dimitri or Dimi (as Verhulst refers to himself in the book) is left behind with Pierre, his alcoholic father, and a bunch of affectionate, but equally drunken, uncles in a dilapidated house presided over by his toothless grandmother.

Told as a series of loosely related episodes, this is the tale of a boy exposed on a daily basis to poverty, an inadequate diet, to drunken debauchery, filth and nicotine-filled air. In one early episode we learn that Pierre, Dimitri’s father, was drunk in the pub as his mother gave birth to him in a maternity hospital run by nuns. And from then on, much of this memoir takes the reader back to Dimitri’s childhood pubs: to the pub where his uncles lured little cousin Sylvie to drink; to the pub where Omer the landlord organised a grotesque drinking contest; and to the make-shift pub where Dimitri’s youngest uncle Potrel (semantically translated as “Girder”) hosted a Herculean drinking contest – presented as a parody on the *Tour de France* – in order to outdrink Omer.

Beyond the pub, the effects of booze and fags linger: we learn of Pierre’s proud disregard for possessions because he’d rather spend his earnings on drink; we learn of a social worker who was sent to the house to rescue Dimitri from his inebriated surroundings; and we learn of Pierre’s nicotine-filled days in a drying-out clinic to which he had fled in an attempt to make amends.

Most of the story is told from the point of view of Dimi the child, but towards the end of the novel we catch up with Dimitri the man (by now a successful writer) to discover that he too has a son, born to a woman he never loved.

5.2 Background: Author and Translator

The bleakness of the subject matter is, in many ways, redeemed by the vibrancy of the language. In a favourable review published in the *Guardian*, Gerard Woodward refers to the “excremental poetry of their [the Verhulsts’] grubby lives” adding that “it takes an exceptional writer to wring beauty from such material” (*Guardian*, 22 March 2012). And Lucy Popescu of the *Independent* also describes Verhulst’s writing as “poetry [of] urban deprivation” (*Independent*, 8 February 2012).

Obviously these comments reflect the quality of the prose of the English translation as much as they do the quality of the original writing. Indeed both author and translator have received ample praise. Author Dimitri Verhulst (who made his breakthrough with *Problemksi hotel* and *De helaasheid der dingen*) is an award-winning Flemish writer, renowned for his neologisms and striking prose style; and translator David Colmer is no stranger to literary prizes either. He is a prolific translator of both prose (e.g. Gerbrand Bakker, Willem Frederik Hermans, Jeroen Olyslaegers) and poetry (e.g. Hugo Claus, Ramsey Nasr, Cees Nooteboom), for which he has won many awards and nominations. These include the 2010 Dublin IMPAC Literary Award for *Boven is het stil/The Twin* by Gerbrand Bakker; the 2012 Vertaalprijs – an annual prize awarded by The Dutch Foundation for Literature for an entire oeuvre; and the 2013 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (now the International Man Booker Prize) for *De omweg/The Detour* by Gerbrand Bakker.

In the very year that Colmer clinched the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, he also won the Vondel Translation Prize for *The Misfortunates*, gaining credit for the “flexibility and creativity” of his translation, which captured the “remarkable balance between the sublime and the riotous.” (Vondel Prize Jury Report, 2013). This balance – and sometimes clash – between the sublime and riotous, between the hifalutin and low-life, between the carnal and abstract, between the positive and negative is something we will explore further as we zoom in on Verhulst’s unusual choice of adjective-noun bigrams, and the way in which Colmer has translated them.³³

5.3 The Data

Using the technique described in Chapter 2.5.2 and 2.5.4, I generated a list of adjective-noun bigrams from *De helaasheid der dingen*, and then extracted all those which had zero hits in the reference corpus nTenTen. Of these bigrams, I judged twenty-seven to be creative. As explained in Chapter 2.7, judging whether or not a bigram with zero hits in the reference corpus was actually ‘creative’ involved

33 The Dutch bigrams appear in bold at the beginning of each paragraph; their translations (as they appear in *The Misfortunates*) are quoted further down the paragraph in the context in which they appear. For ease of reference they are in bold and underlined.

(i) supplementary Google searches (taking me from multi-billion word corpora to the trillions of words on the web); (ii) asking native speakers what they thought; (iii) and looking to see whether the word in question was figurative, i.e. whether it contained a rhetorical trope. The fruits of these findings will be discussed in Sections 5.3.1–5.3.9 below.

In addition to these twenty-seven creative Dutch adjective-noun bigrams, I also found nine creative English adjective-noun bigrams which were the translations of more prosaic Dutch forms. These were the so-called ‘denormalised’ bigrams (discovered using the reverse test for normalisation described in Chapter 2.8), which will be discussed in Section 5.4 below.

All the bigrams have been subdivided into rhetorical tropes, and ordered alphabetically.

5.3.1 Alliteration

Alliteration is one of the hallmarks of Verhulst’s style. So not surprisingly the search for unusual bigrams yielded a couple which seem to stand out primarily in terms of their alliterative effects. And in keeping with the theme of the book, both of these revolve around drink:

bezopen bestaan (gloss: sloshed existence) occurs in the sentence *Dikke Zulma had nog nooit whisky gedronken, nog geen drup in gans haar **bezopen bestaan*** and has been translated as “Lardy Zulma had never drunk whisky, not a drop in her entire **boozed-up existence**”. Although the alliteration³⁴ has disappeared in translation, *bezopen bestaan* has been rendered as an unusual English bigram. With zero hits in both enTenTen and Google Books, “boozed-up existence” is more daring than, say, the shadow translation BOOZY EXISTENCE. In addition, the alliteration has been partially compensated for by an eye-rhyme on <e>: *entire ... existence*”.

NOT NORMALISED

bedronken cafébazinnen (gloss: drunken barmaids) occurs in the sentence *Terwijl mijn vader op het gebied van vrouwen een meer dan walgelijke, haast geperverteerde smaak had, met een lichte voorkeur voor in vodden gehulde poetsvrouwen en oude en **bedronken cafébazinnen***.

Although this example could have been classified as consonance, it has been classified as alliteration because *-bazinnen* in *cafébazinnen* can stand as a word in its own right. The bigram has been translated as the fully alliterative “*boo*zed-up

34 *Bezopen bestaan* could also be termed initial rhyme seeing as the repetition involves not just the initial phoneme but the initial (albeit unstressed) syllable /bə/.

barmaids” in “Whereas my father’s taste in women was beyond disgusting, almost perverted, with a mild preference for tattered cleaning ladies and elderly **boozed-up barmaids**”, compensating once more for the alliteration that was lost in the translation of *bezopen bestaan* above. (As we will see in 5.3.4 below, there is further compensation for this loss in Colmer’s translation of *zatte skald* as “boozed-up bard”.

NOT NORMALISED

5.3.2 Antipersonification

voorradige mannen (gloss: men in stock) occurs in a sentence describing the nun who presided over the maternity hospital where Dimitri was born: *Haar platonische relatie met de Heer zal haar kriebelingen niet geblust hebben, maar ze zal dat wel verkozen hebben boven de in onze contreien voorradige mannen die dronken en met een ruiker brandnetels de vrouw kwamen eren die hun uren geleden een kind had geschonken.*

This bigram has been classified as antipersonification because normally *voorradig* modifies inanimate objects. We see this in nTenTen where VOORRADIG occurs 465 times in attributive position, but always before inanimate nouns. The top collocates given in Word Sketch are ASSORTIMENT (‘assortment’), PRODUCT (‘product’) and GRONDSTOF (‘raw material’). By using *voorradig* (instead of the more common BESCHIKBAAR (‘available’)) to modify *mannen* (‘men’) the author is, in effect, depersonifying the men “by contagion” (Geeraearts 2010, p. 38); but this antipersonification has not been replicated in translation: “Her platonic relationship with the Lord might not have hushed her itchings, but she probably still preferred it to the **available men** in our parts, who arrived drunk and with a bunch of stinging nettles for the woman who had borne them a child just hours before.”

Colmer has chosen an adjective that frequently combines with both human and inanimate nouns. (“Available men” has 768 hits in enTenTen). A less normalising translation – one that captured the depersonification – might have been BUT SHE PROBABLY STILL PREFERRED IT TO THE MEN WE HAD IN STOCK. This shadow translation is simply a way of exploring the rhetorical trope; I do not wish to suggest that the post modifier THE MEN WE HAD IN STOCK is better in context than Colmer’s choice. After all the prepositional phrase IN STOCK would have clashed rhythmically with the prepositional phrase “in our parts”; and “available men” fits well in the sentence, especially in combination with the inventive turn of phrase, “hushed her itchings”. More than anything, my shadow translation with the post-modifier WE HAD IN STOCK illustrates the lack of an English pre-modifier with the semantic prosody of *voorradig*. Becher (2011, p. 42) argues that “many instances of explicitation that may seem enigmatic at first in fact go back to not-at-all-enigmatic, previously established

cross-linguistic differences in terms of syntax, lexis and communicative norms”. Might it not also be the case that some instances of apparent normalisation also go back to cross-linguistic differences in terms of syntax, lexis and communicative norms? “Available men” would seem to be one of them.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

5.3.3 Catachresis

ongebonden stront (gloss: thin shit) refers to the content of the colostomy bag of a terminally ill character who keeps company with the Verhulsts in the pub: “natte, ongebonden stront met schuim erop”. What makes this vivid description unusual is that *ongebonden*, when it refers to a substance, often refers to soup: a thin soup, or a light broth, as opposed to *GEBONDEN SOEP*, which is thick and creamy. Indeed *soep* is the only substance collocate of *ongebonden* in n1TenTen. Conversely there is not a single example of *ongebonden stront* in either n1TenTen or Google Books. Colmer’s translation of the phrase as “Wet, **sloppy shit** with froth on top” could be seen as normalisation this since “sloppy” often combines with “shit”. A non-normalising translation might have been *WET, BROTHY SHIT WITH FROTH ON TOP*. However Colmer’s translation does echo (consciously or unconsciously) the phonetic repetition in the bigram: in Dutch, <on> is repeated in <**ongebonden stront**> and <**erop**>, and in English /ɒ/ is repeated in <**sloppy**> and <**froth on top**>. As if to enhance this, sibilants are repeated in <**sloppy shit**>. This is yet another example of how translators find themselves responding to different levels of the linguistics system when faced by what Daniel Hahn (2016) described, perhaps hyperbolically,³⁵ as a “million individual choices”.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

verlepte badstad (gloss: withered seaside town) occurs in the sentence [*Er*] was [...] *iemand van ver buiten het dorp komen opdagen, de voorzitter van een drinkclub uit de verlepte badstad Oostende*, and has been translated as “someone from far outside the town had shown up, the president of a drinking club in the **faded seaside resort** of Ostend.”

Van Dale gives “withered” as the primary translation of *verlept*, followed by “wilted” and “faded”. But unlike “faded”, it is unusual for the Dutch adjective *verlept* to modify a place: the examples given in Van Dale are *een verlept gezicht* (~ face), *een verlepte schoonheid* (~ beauty) and *een verlept uitzien* (~ look). And in n1TenTen, too, the concordance lines are dominated by collocations which combine *verlept*

35 Whether or not Hahn’s statement is actually hyperbolic will be further discussed in the Chapter 10.

with nouns referring to the human form, flora and food.³⁶ So even though “faded” is enshrined in the dictionary as a possible translation of *verlept*, Colmer’s use of it to modify “seaside resort” could be seen as normalising because “faded seaside resort” (with 3 hits in enTenTen and 317 in Google Books³⁷) is much more common than WILTED SEASIDE RESORT (with 0 hits in enTenTen and 1 Google Books).

On the other hand there are co-textual factors that perhaps make *verlept* a more likely candidate than “wilted”: *verlept* has the same prefix as its semi-synonym *vervallen* (a more common collocate of *badstad*) and it begins with the same letter as the head of the noun phrase in which it is embedded: *voorzitter* *verlept*). In other words, *vervallen* could be acting as a paradigmatic prime of *verlept*, and *voorzitter* as a syntagmatic prime of *verlept*, making *verlept* seem more at home in the Dutch sentence than “wilted” could ever have been in the English sentence.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

5.3.4 Hyperbole

communistisch toilet (gloss: communistic toilet) occurs in a passage describing Dimi’s first home: *Mijn eerste levensjaren bracht ik met mijn ouders door in de Kantonstraat, in een minuscuul steegbeluikje met een gemeenschappelijke waterpomp en een communistisch toilet*. This has been translated as “I spent my first years with my parents in Kanton Street on a tiny courtyard with a communal water pump and a **communistic toilet**.” While this might seem uneventful as a translation, there are subtleties in the morphology of the English that are worth mentioning: Colmer has chosen the unusual adjectival form “communistic” instead of the regular adjective COMMUNIST. With 129,298 hits in enTenTen for COMMUNIST (adj) versus 2,221 for COMMUNISTIC (adj), the former is almost 60 times more frequent than the later. This is in stark contrast to the Dutch, where *communistisch* is the standard adjectival form. What we may be witnessing here is a case of ST interference but it could equally be the translator’s sensitivity to what is known as the end-weight principle: roughly speaking this is the principle that shorter phrases work best in sentence-initial or medial position and that longer phrases are most at home in sentence-final position. By adding the suffix <-ic> to COMMUNIST, Colmer has ensured that the sentence-final noun phrase is at least as long as the penultimate noun phrase.

36 Of the 48 instances of *verlept* in attributive position, 17 of the nouns it precedes refer to flora (e.g. *verlept roosje* (“wilted rose”)); 11 to food (e.g. *verlept broodje* (“withered sandwich”)); and 7 to the human form (e.g. *verlept gezicht* (“withered face”). Of the 13 remaining examples 10 refer to things we can imagine being withered (e.g. *verlept bandje* (“withered tape”)), with only three odd examples like *verlept businesscentre*.

37 The number of Google hits quoted in these case studies and in the appendices refer to the smaller figures given after scrolling through the results, rather than to the larger figures given before scrolling through the results. (See 2.4, A Cautionary Word About Word Counts).

Whatever the reason for Colmer's translation – ST interference, sensitivity to the end-weight principle, or both – the result is an even more unusual bigram in English than in Dutch.

NOT NORMALISED

izabelgele vocht (gloss: old-fashioned yellow liquid) is an ornamental phrase referring to beer. There is also something nostalgic about the phrase because it occurs in the scene depicting grown-up Dimitri's return to his childhood pub to meet his uncles again. In this scene, Dimitri's uncles succumb quickly to the alcohol in the beer, stirred as they are by sudden memories of their late brother Pierre, who Dimitri of course reminds them of: *Het eerst beneveld door het izabelgele vocht zal onze Herman zijn, overmand door de onverwachte herinnering aan zijn dode broer die ik heb aangevoerd*. Whilst it is not unusual to refer to beer as GELE VOCHT ('yellow liquid'), IZABELGEEL (an old-fashioned kind of yellow) is an exceptionally unusual modifier of VOCHT as well as a very infrequent word in itself. There are no examples of *izabelgele vocht* on the web at all. The sentence has been rendered in translation as: "The first to let the **amber fluid** fuddle him is our Herman, overcome by the unexpected memories I've evoked of his dead brother".

Is this normalisation or not? From a frequency point of view, it is. Unlike *izabelgele vocht*, "amber fluid" is a known collocation; it is registered in the OED and in the Van Dale (EN-NL) as Australian slang for beer, and there are 261 hits for "amber fluid" beer in Google Books.³⁸ But the phrase is not a simple denotation. As Rees (2006, p. 14) points out, it is a beautifying and "elevating euphemism" sometimes used interchangeably with AMBER LIQUID and AMBER NECTAR (which is also used for whisky). "Amber fluid" therefore captures the function of *izabelgele vocht*, itself an elevated version of *gele vocht*. Moreover, although "amber fluid" is attested, it is less frequent than its synonyms AMBER NECTAR and AMBER LIQUID. Indeed, enTenTen gives 43 hits for AMBER FLUID versus 296 for AMBER LIQUID and 162 for AMBER NECTAR (in the context of alcohol).

Frequency issues apart, "amber fluid" produces an alliterative effect characteristic of Verhulst's style. The English sentence reads: "the first to let the amber fluid fuddle him ..." giving rise to alliteration on /f/. Another factor influencing the translation may have been gender: both Amber and Izabel are girls' names. Was the translator (unconsciously) echoing the feminine side to the Dutch modifier?

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

38 By typing into Google "amber fluid" beer, you only retrieve instances of amber fluid which occur in texts which also contain the word beer.

zatte skald (gloss: drunken Norse court poet) occurs in a passage referring to Girder's monumental drinking contest, dubbed "Tour de France". So gargantuan was this drinking contest that it needed its own poet, a **zatte skald** to extol its virtues: *Wat wij nog misten was een eigen krant, een lofzang, een eruptie van grootheidswaan, een zatte skald die zijn mosterd haalde bij de haast delirerende journalisten die in 1903 reeds de grootsheid bejubelden van de wielerversie van de Tour de France.* The bigram has been translated as "boozed-up bard", embellishing the hyperbole with Verhulst-like alliteration (see 5.3.1 above). The alliteration could also be interpreted as a compensation for the loss of the assonance on /a/ in *zatte skald*, but alliteration, being word-initial, is arguably more prominent than assonance involving short vowels. The entire English sentence reads: "What we lacked was a newspaper of our own, a paean, a megalomaniac eruption, a **boozed-up bard** drawing his inspiration from the almost delirious journalists who, from the very beginning in 1903, applauded the glory of the bicycle version of the Tour de France."

NOT NORMALISED

5.3.5 Metaphor

geconsacreerde gangster (gloss: consecrated gangster) occurs in a phrase describing Dimitri's youngest uncle Girder (*Potrel* in Dutch), as *toch al zestien [...] en stilaan een geconsacreerde gangster*. The metaphor is obvious here: criminal activity described in terms of the sacred. This incongruous and unusual metaphor has been replaced in translation by the common metaphor, "fully fledged" in: "already sixteen and almost a **fully fledged gangster**" (Google Books gave 0 hits for "consecrated gangster(s)" versus 128 hits for "fully fledged gangster(s)",³⁹ plus hundreds more hits for full-fledged gangster(s)). It is difficult to know why a literal translation (CONSECRATED GANGSTER) was avoided here. After all, CONSECRATED would have resonated well with the religious metaphors "schadelijk gebed" and "stenen brevier" discussed below. But perhaps it was less a matter of avoidance and more a matter of attraction to the alliteration of "fully fledged", an alliteration which, as we have seen, is typical of Verhulst's style, (and which here makes the sentence roll of the tongue).

NORMALISED

schadelijk gebed (gloss: harmful prayer) occurs in the phrase *mijn schadelijk gebed van nitrosaminen, formaldehyde, nicotine and benzeen* and refers to one of the many cigarettes smoked by Dimitri on a daily basis. Here "prayer" is being used incongruously, or ironically, as a metaphor for smoking. The metaphor has been kept

39 The figure of 89 Google Books hits given in Appendix 1a is only for "fully fledged gangster" in the singular. In other words, the figures given in the Appendices are, unless stated otherwise, for the specific forms used in the translations.

in translation and its incongruity perhaps even strengthened by Colmer's choice of the word "toxic" as a translation of *schadelijk* (instead of the more literal "harmful"). In English, the entire phrase reads: "my **toxic prayer** made up of nitrosamines, formaldehyde, nicotine and benzene". A normalising translation might have smoothed over the metaphorical incongruity by replacing "prayer" with something more neutral like INTAKE to give TOXIC INTAKE OF NITROSAMINES [...]. TOXIC INTAKE is also more common than "toxic prayer" (see Appendix 1a).

NOT NORMALISED

slappe schijf (gloss: floppy disc) occurs in a sentence about Dimi's grandmother's retirement home: *De ouderen laten hun verbazing merken, ze randomiseren de slappe schijf van hun steeds mankere geheugen en zien in het beste geval nog ergens een flits van mijn kindergezicht oplichten*. The phrase *slappe schijf* – here a metaphor for cerebral functioning – is a calque derived from the English term "floppy disc". But *slappe schijf* is a neologism too since Dutch normally uses the English term. In his translation, Colmer captures the originality of the calque by coining the phrase "flabby disc", giving: "The older ones are visibly surprised. They randomise the **flabby disc** of their increasingly crippled memory and see, in the best instance, a distant flash of my face as a child."

NOT NORMALISED

stenen brevier (gloss: brick breviary) occurs in the following short passage: *De cafetaria gaf altijd een inkijk in de kalender, het was een stenen brevier. Nu hingen er gele strikken en beschilderde eieren aan het plafond, een teken dat Pasen naderde*. The English translation reads: "The cafeteria was a **brick breviary**, it always gave a nod to the church calendar. This time there were yellow ribbons and painted eggs suspended from the ceiling to indicate that Easter was on its way." The metaphor has been translated literally into English (with a fortuitous addition of alliteration – i.e. **brick breviary**) and is, on the face of it, just as opaque as the Dutch. But the context changes things slightly. In the Dutch, the metaphorical phrase comes after the explanatory phrase *De cafetaria gaf altijd een inkijk in de kalender* whereas in English the metaphor comes first. According to Barlow (2007) putting opaque or low frequency information earlier in the sentence increases the processing burden on readers. To this extent, Colmer's repositioning of the metaphor within the sentence has a denormalising effect (although Colmer does add information later on in the sentence by explicitly translating *kalender* as "church calendar").⁴⁰

NOT NORMALISED

40 Here sentence is taken to mean any string of words between full stops regardless of whether they contain a finite verb.

zompige ogen (gloss: boggy eyes) refers to Dimitri's father's eyes welling up when news reaches him (in the pub, of course!) that Dimitri, his son, has just been born: *En het zal wel stil geworden zijn in de kroeg, men zal de stekker van de jukebox hebben uitgetrokken, en de ogen van mijn telefonerende vader hebben gadegeslagen; zompige ogen die voor wie hem kende bescheid gaven van een geboorte.*

Zompig is an unusual epithet for tearful eyes because the word normally refers to something boggy like a swamp. In n|TenTen, the top collocates of ZOMPIG are MOERASDELTA ('marshy delta'), MOERAS ('morass'), VEENGROND ('peat'), MOERASGEBIED ('marchland'), VEENGEBIED ('peatland') en WEILAND ('meadow'). Metaphorically applied to eyes, the effect is comic and somewhat negative.

The bigram has been translated as "blubby eyes" in "They'd have pulled out the plug of the jukebox and stared at my father's eyes as he listened to the person on the other end of the line: **blubby eyes** that announced a birth to those who knew him."

With 0 hits in both enTenTen Google Books, "blubby eyes" is unusual. However, given that the verb BLUBBER is a synonym of CRY, the metaphorical surprise conveyed by *zompige ogen* seems to be missing from the English bigram. Does this mean then that *zompige ogen* should have been rendered as SQUELCHY EYES instead? Not at all. Although BLUBBER the verb means 'to cry', BLUBBER the noun refers to excessive body fat, particularly that of whales and other marine mammals. So to the extent that "blubby" triggers an association with blubber the noun, there is a metaphor in both the ST and the TT, albeit from different cognitive domains.

Interestingly Tirkkonen-Condit (2002) addresses metaphors and the switching of cognitive domains between ST and TT in her exploration of Mandelblit's (1996) "Cognitive Translation Hypothesis". Although Tirkkonen-Condit (2002) looked primarily at the translation of fixed metaphorical expressions, her findings suggest that whenever there is shift from one cognitive domain to another in the translation of a metaphor, increased cognitive effort is involved (ibid, p. 115). Seen like this "blubby eyes", far from being a form of flattening, could be regarded as a creative metaphorical shift.

NOT NORMALISED

5.3.6 Metonymy

dronken monden (gloss: drunken mouths) refers to the drunken men who are spreading rumours that Dimitri's beautiful aunt Rosie is back in town. It features in the sentence *In die dagen werd ik dan ook voortdurend aangeklampt door herboren mannen die wilden weten of de dronken monden van het dorp de waarheid spraken.*

Here drunkenness is attributed by association (that is metonymically) to the men's mouths rather than to the men themselves. In Colmer's translation, the sentence

becomes, “I spent those days being constantly buttonholed by reborn men who wanted to know if the town’s **drunken mouth** was speaking the truth”. Here Colmer turns the plural *monden* into the singular “mouth”, thereby doubling the metonymy: now it the town’s mouth that is drunk by association with the mouths of the men who live in the town, again by association with the men themselves. Rather than a flattening, there has been a redoubling of the trope. And yet the creativity of this translation is not reflected in the frequency counts: Google Books showed 333 hits for DRUNKEN MOUTH. This shows once again how triangulation (see Chapter 2.7) can sometimes lead to conflicting results. Note too how the ‘chained metonymy’ (town’s mouth that is drunk by association with the mouths of the men who live in the town, who in turn are drunk by association with the men themselves) also results in personification – a town with a mouth – illustrating once again how blurred the lines between rhetorical categories can be.

NOT NORMALISED

mottige villa’s (gloss: mothy villas) occurs at a bleak moment in the novel when Dimitri, now a grown man, is in hospital awaiting the birth of his son from a woman he does not love. As he paces, he ponders: *Moest het nog een naam hebben ook, net als boten, mottige villa’s en orkanen*. The bigram has been classified as metonymy because the modifier *mottig* (‘mothy’ / ‘moth-eaten’) usually applies to soft furnishings rather than to the solid buildings that house them. Colmer has translated the bigram not as MOTH-EATEN VILLAS (which had 1 hit in Google Books) but as “hideous villas” (106 hits in Google Books) in “It would need a name too, like boats, **hideous villas** and hurricanes.” At first sight this is a clear example of normalisation: but it should be noted that in Belgian Dutch, *MOTTIG* has become a synonym of *LELIJK* (‘ugly’), and the translation reflects this. Moreover, the translation is sensitive to alliteration and assonance: the repetition of /h/ in “hideous” and “hurricanes”; and the repetition of stressed /i/ in “hideous” and “villa”.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

vadsige maaltijd (gloss: bloated/flabby meal) occurs in the sentence describing the behaviour of Pierre, Dimitri’s father, as he tries to cope with alcohol withdrawal symptoms: *Hij sleepte zich van de ene vadsige maaltijd naar de andere, beet balpennen en tandenstokers kapot*. This bigram has been classed as metonymy because Pierre’s meals – consisting of meals like “seven slices of bread with bacon and a thick slathering of mustard” – make him bloated but the bloatedness gets attributed, by an associative leap, to the meal itself. The metonymy has been preserved in the sentence “He dragged himself from one **bloated meal** to the next,

chewing up biros and toothpicks”. There are 2 occurrences of BLOATED MEAL in enTenTen, and 41 in Google Books, so the bigram is not unknown. Nonetheless BLOATED MEAL is far less usual than the shadow translation GREASY MEAL, which has 55 hits in enTenTen and 337 in Google Books.

NOT NORMALISED

vadsige plan (gloss: bloated/flabby plan) refers to a plan cooked up by Omer (landlord of the pub, the Liars’ Haven) to organise a competition to beat the world record in drinking: *geen van ons [was]bereid [...] mee te gaan in het vadsige plan van Omer*. This bigram has been classified as metonymy because the corpulence conveyed by the word *vadsig* applies more to the person of Omer than to his plan. But there is a metaphor here too in that *vadsig* also conveys the grossness of the plan. Both the metaphor and the metonymy have been replicated in translation in the sentence “none of us was willing to go along with Omer’s **bloated plan**”. In contrast to some of the previous examples in this section, there is not an obvious normalising shadow translation for *vadsige plan*: INFLATED PLAN and BLOW-UP PLAN, like the translator’s “bloated plan” are unusual; and the more common FAR-REACHING PLAN (with 278 hits in enTenTen plus 42 without a hyphen) is perhaps too free a translation to be considered as a serious shadow alternative.

NOT NORMALISED

vadsige praat (gloss: bloated / flabby talk) refers to the lyrics of smutty songs which André is trying to teach Dimitri’s innocent cousin Sylvie. To see how this section works, a longer quotation is needed. The sentences have been numbered:

(1) André ging van mijn nicht ‘een echte’ maken, en leerde haar een van onze liedjes waarvan ik mij vandaag afvraag of iemand er zich nog een volledige strofe van herinnert. (2) Het waren liedjes, sommige vijftien coupletten lang, vol vadsige praat. (3) Ze stonden bol van de schunnige woorden waarmee ons abecedarium tot aan de z was gevuld, en het beeld van mijn nog veel te jonge nicht die daar dronken op de biljarttafel liederen vol seksuele toespelingen zong, en dat in een dialect dat haar volledig misstond, vervulde ons met zoveel eenvoudige vreugde dat we er nog maar een op dronken.

Colmer’s translation reads as follows:

(1) André decided to turn my cousin into ‘the real thing’ and taught her some of the songs we used to sing. (2) Some of them were fifteen verses long and I

now wonder whether there's anyone left who can remember a complete verse. (3) They were crammed with the filthy words that filled our ABC right up to Z, and the sight of my seriously underage cousin standing drunk on the pool table singing songs that were full of sexual innuendo, and doing it in a dialect that didn't suit her at all, filled us with such simple joy that we immediately got in another round to celebrate.

The relative clause of Dutch sentence (1) (i.e. *waarvan ik mij vandaag afvraag...*) has been omitted from English sentence (1) and transposed to the second half of English sentence (2) (i.e. “and I now wonder whether”). The omitted phrase from English sentence (1) has been replaced by “we used to sing”. The parenthetical phrase between commas in Dutch sentence (2) (i.e. *sommige vijftien coupletten lang*) has been given main-clause status in the first half of the coordinated English sentence (2), thereby allowing Colmer to omit the complement phrase *vol vadsige praat*. Perhaps Colmer felt the meaning of *vol vadsige praat* had been repeated in Dutch sentence (3) as the bigram *schunnige woorden* (‘filthy words’), and that there was no need for duplication here. Whatever the translator's reasons, this unusual Dutch bigram (which has 0 hits in nTenTen, and three hits in Google Books, all of which are quotes from *Helaasheid*) has been normalised by omission.

NORMALISED

5.3.7 Oxymoron

aangename schok (gloss: pleasant shock) occurs in the very first sentence of the novel, heralding the return of Silvie's mother, glamorous Auntie Rosie to Reetveerdegem: *De vermeende terugkeer van tante Rosie naar Reetveerdegem werd als een aangename schok ervaren in de levens van onze volstrekt nutteloze mannen*. This oxymoron (the soothing word *aangenaam* juxtaposed with the abrasive word *schok*) is reproduced in translation as “**pleasant shock**”. At first sight this example may seem too obvious to include – after all, who would think of translating *aangename schok* and anything other than “pleasant shock”? But as we saw in Chapter 2.1, straightforward translations do not always find their way into print. Sometimes they are forsaken in favour of more common alternatives. (The example given in Chapter 2.1 was *dorstige zand*, which had been translated as “dry sand” instead of the literal THIRSTY SAND.) Here, however, the less common alternative has been chosen: the bigram “pleasant shock” has 151 hits in enTenTen compared to 10,906 hits for the shadow translation PLEASANT SURPRISE.

NOT NORMALISED

onvoorziene spaarzaamheid (gloss: unexpected thrift) occurs in a sentence describing Dimitri's father's hatred of possessions and anything associated with capitalism: *Dreigden wij door onvoorziene spaarzaamheid het einde van de maand te halen met een financieel overschot, dan haalde hij de bankrekening leeg en zoop hij zijn volledige loon erdoor om ons te beschermen tegen de verleidingen van het kapitalisme.*

This bigram has been classified as an oxymoron because *spaarzaamheid* ('thrift', 'frugality'), which requires discipline and calculation, is in stark contrast with its modifier *onvoorzien* ('unanticipated', 'accidental'), which implies a lack thereof. This contrast has been conveyed in translation as "If a **burst of unexpected thrift** put us in danger of reaching the end of the month with a financial surplus, he hurriedly plundered the bank account and drank his entire pay packet to protect us from the temptations of capitalism." There is a sense in which the oxymoron has been enhanced in translation by the addition of the word "burst", a word which is in stark contrast to "thrift" meaning careful, plodding management. (Moreover there were no examples of BURST OF THRIFT [without UNEXPECTED] in either enTenTen or Google Books.)

NOT NORMALISED

triestige tronie (gloss: dejected face/ mug) occurs in the phrase describing Herman, one of Dimitri's older uncles: *Hij wakkerde met zijn aangeboren melancholie en zijn triestige tronie de moederinstincten in de vrouwen aan.*

Tronie is a derogatory word for 'face' with a generally negative prosody. Its top two collocates in nITenTen are *GRIJNZEND* ('smirking') and *LELIJK* ('ugly').⁴¹ As such, the word *tronie* does not arouse sympathy. But the adjective that modifies it does: *triest* ('sad') intensified by the suffix *-ig* to give *triestig* collocates with *GEZICHT* ('face', 'features'), *VERHAAL* ('story'), *ZAAK* ('affair', 'business') and *NIEUWS* ('news'). Colmer has, however, undone the contrast by translating *tronie* as the neutral word "features", in "With his innate melancholy and **mournful features**, he aroused their maternal instincts." A non-normalising translation might have read *HIS MOURNFUL MUG*, because it preserves the oxymoron and appears to be a thousand times less frequent in Google Books than *MOURNFUL FEATURES*. However, this shadow translation might sound a little obscure to some and is perhaps too British.

NORMALISED

(wetenschappelijk) verantwoorde toestanden (gloss: academically- /scientifically sound situation/ commotion) refers, rather disparagingly, to an academic project initiated by a professor of folklore. The project involves recording, for posterity, the

41 Sketch Engine's 'Word Sketch' function generates lists of common collocates for any given word provided the word is frequent enough.

Verhulsts as they perform their filthy drunken pub songs. It occurs in the sentence *Ik stond open voor heel wat dingen in het leven, maar dat mijn nonkels zich inlieten met wetenschappelijk verantwoorde toestanden was me toch een brug te ver*. The word *toestand*, given in Van Dale as “state”, “commotion”, or “affair”, has a negative and slightly chaotic connotation; its top collocates given by Word Sketch are KRITIEK (‘critical’), BESCHONKEN (‘drunken’) COMATEUS (‘comatose’). The combination of this word, therefore, with the phrase *wetenschappelijk verantwoord* (‘scientifically responsible’) produces a comic, oxymoronic effect. Colmer could be ‘accused’ of flattening the incongruity in his translation, “I was open to a lot of things in life, but my uncles **acting in the name of science** was going too far” because *to act in the name of science* is not an oxymoron. According to this line of reasoning, “acting” would have to be replaced by, say, the more incongruous FAFFING ABOUT TO GIVE: FAFFING ABOUT IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE. However, there is a good reason for not doing so: namely irony, itself a rhetorical device. In context, “acting in the name of science” is ironic because Dimitri’s uncles simply never act in the name of science. The increased irony in the TT provides a counter example to Øverås (1998, p. 14), who, following Lomheim (1995), argues that creative collocations often involve more irony than standard collocations: here the TT has actually become more ironic with the *removal* of the ST creative collocation.

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5.3.8 Personification

doodgewaande gevoelens (gloss: feelings assumed dead) refers to long-forgotten sexual and romantic feelings reawakened by the return of Auntie Rosie: *alleen al het feit dat tante Rosie teruggekeerd kon zijn, [had] in het dorp doodgewaande gevoelens weer [...] aangewakkerd*.

Doodgewaand normally modifies nouns with a human referent. It is often found in the phrase VERMIST EN DOODGEWAAND, denoting a person who has gone missing and is assumed dead. Colmer’s translation preserves the personification here by translating *doodgewaand* as the postmodifier “that had been given up for dead” in “the mere fact of Auntie Rosie’s having returned to Arsendegem had been enough to blow life into **feelings that had been given up for dead** in our town.” This translation keeps the personification, in contrast to the shadow translation LONG-FORGOTTEN FEELING (with 10 hits in enTenTen and 216 hits in Google Books). The fact that Colmer has used a postmodifier instead of a premodifier probably has to do with cross-linguistic differences between Dutch and English (Becher 2011, p. 42) as mentioned in our discussion of *voorradige mannen* above in 5.3.2 above.

NOT NORMALISED

moordende drank (gloss: murderous drink) occurs in a mock journalistic passage pretending to be coverage of the Tour de France. But this ‘Tour’ refers to Girder’s drinking competition, rather than to a cycling competition:

In vele honderden kilometers, omgezet in vele liters moordende drank, gaande van whisky tot en met cognac, onder de bijtende zon en in de nachten die hen zullen verbergen in hun doodskleed, zullen ze vergeefsheid tegenkomen, ledigheid en luiheid, verlamde en onwillige slokdarmen, slikreflexen die het laten afweten.

The bigram has been classified as personification because of the active present participle *moordend* (as in MOORDENDE SOLDAAT) suggesting human agency. But *moordende drank* is also reminiscent of the common collocation MOORDENDE CONCURRENTIE (according to Word Sketch, CONCURRENTIE is the most common collocates of MOORDEND) where the feeling of human agency has perhaps been eroded through repeated use. Moreover a Google search for “moordende concurrentie, “tour de france” yielded 66 results, suggesting that the bigram *moordende drank* is actually an echo of the phrase MOORDENDE CONCURRENTIE as often used in the Tour de France: this interpretation would be in keeping with Verhulst’s extended metaphor.

Interestingly Colmer has translated *moordende drank* as “killing booze” in the following:

Over many hundreds of miles, converted into many gallons of **killing booze**, ranging from whisky to cognac, under the biting sun and nights that shroud them, they will encounter purposelessness, idleness and laziness, numbed and unwilling gullets, recalcitrant gag reflexes.

The translation uses the present participle of the active verb TO KILL, thereby preserving the personification, and like the Dutch, the English bigram is low frequency: KILLING BOOZE has no hits in enTenTen, and no hits in Google Books, except for phrases like PAIN-KILLING BOOZE. However, the English translation misses the association with the language of the Tour de France – something which might have been captured by the low-frequency bigram FIERCE BOOZE by analogy with FIERCE COMPETITION. But this shadow translation somehow sounds off. Semantically closer to *moordend* (and loosely associated with competition) might have been LETHAL BOOZE or DEADLY BOOZE. These, however, are more commonplace with, respectively, 18 and 42 hits in Google Books

NOT NORMALISED

schreeuwende eeuw (gloss: screaming century) shows Verhulst once again playing with the sounds of the language. This assonance-crammed bigram occurs in a phrase about Dimi's uncles and their love of the singer Roy Orbison: *Roy [werd] nauwelijks vermeld [...] in de obligate lijstjes met de muzikaal absolute hoogtepunten die op het einde van die schreeuwende eeuw, hún eeuw, overal verschenen.*

Schreeuwend ('screaming') is often used figuratively: its top two collocates in Sketch Engine are KRANTENKOPPEN (as in SCHREEUWENDE KRANTENKOPPEN 'screaming headlines') and TEKORT (as in *schreeuwend tekort* 'dire shortage'), but it is unique in combination with *eeuw* ('century'). The translation of *schreeuwende eeuw* as the zero-frequency bigram "strident century" has not managed to capture the assonance – although it is difficult to see how it could – but it has captured the quirkiness of the collocation, in contrast, say, to the shadow translation TUMULTUOUS CENTURY, which has 70 hits in enTenTen and 354 hits in Google Books. In context Colmer's translation reads: "he was virtually absent from the obligatory lists of musical highlights that appeared everywhere at the end of that **strident century**, their century". And like the Dutch word *schreeuwend*, "strident" is associated with discordant sounds: the sound collocates Word Sketch gives are CLAMOUR AND CACOPHONY.

NOT NORMALISED

5.3.9 Synaesthesia

[van zonden] doorsopt geslachtsorgaan (gloss: sin-soaked genitals) comes from a section of the novel in which Verhulst lambasts the midwife-nuns who worked at the maternity hospital where Dimi, his fledgling self, was born: *Geen enkele vrouw zou met een gerust gemoed mogen bevallen in een katholieke materniteit, waar nonnen altijd uit jaloezie sadistische trekken kunnen vertonen als zij met hun fikken in een van zonden doorsopt geslachtsorgaan zitten te woelen.*

The classification as synaesthesia might seem like an odd choice – after all, the bigram as a whole does not really fit this description – but the modifier is, within itself, synaesthetic. It is a multi-word adjective combining the abstract prepositional phrase *van zonden* ('of sin') with the tactile adjective *doorsopt*. The synaesthesia, and the assonance and consonance, of the Dutch have all been captured in the creative English bigram **sin-drenched genitals**, which turns the Dutch prepositional premodifier *van zonden doorsopt* into a compound adjective "sin-drenched" in a sentence which reads: "No woman alive should have an easy mind about giving birth in a Catholic maternity hospital, where jealous nuns can always give in to their sadistic tendencies the moment they get their paws on someone else's **sin-drenched genitals**, taking revenge for their own life of abstinence and prayer by using the

forceps a little more often than strictly necessary.” A normalising translation might have been SINFUL GENITALS.

NOT NORMALISED

vettige gedrag (gloss: greasy/oily behaviour) refers to Dimitri’s uncles’ lewd behaviour towards the social worker who has come to inspect their home, and whom they mistakenly take to be Dimitri’s father’s girlfriend. It occurs in the phrase [*Wij*] *amuseerden ons nu al bij de gedachte dat mijn vader zich straks mocht gaan verantwoorden voor het vettige gedrag van zijn broers*. This bigram has been classed as synaesthesia because *gedrag* (‘behaviour’) – an abstraction with a hint of the visual – is modified here by a word which appeals to the senses of taste and perhaps touch. It is far more unusual than the near synonymous phrases SCHUNNIG GEDRAG and GOOR GEDRAG (both meaning ‘filthy behaviour’). nITen is not large enough to expose this pattern (it gives 0 hits for the lemma *vettig gedrag*, 1 hit for SCHUNNIG GEDRAG, and 2 hits for GOOR GEDRAG) but Google Books brings out the contrast better, with its 4 hits for the lemma VETTIG(E) GEDRAG versus 69 for SCHUNNIG GEDRAG and 72 for GOOR GEDRAG. Colmer has translated *vettige gedrag* as the relatively common “sleazy behaviour” in “we were already amusing ourselves with thoughts of my father being called to account for his brothers’ **sleazy behaviour**”. This translation is less synaesthetic than *vettige gedrag* and could conceivably be replaced by the more literal GREASY BEHAVIOUR (2 hits in Google Books) to keep the synaesthesia. On the other hand, Winter (2019) has argued, on the basis of experimental data, that so-called synaesthetic metaphors involving taste and smell are not properly synaesthetic but primarily emotive and evaluative. And clearly there is an evaluative element to Verhulst’s use of the word *vettig* here. The translator’s choice of the word “sleazy”, therefore, could be said to highlight the evaluative function of Verhulst’s use of the word *vettig*.

NORMALISED

5.4 Denormalisation

Next I analyse the nine English creative bigrams which Sketch Engine unearthed independently of the NL->EN pairings. As with the previous section, these are subdivided into rhetorical tropes and ordered alphabetically.

5.4.1 Alliteration

Sketch engine highlighted two examples of unusual alliterative bigrams in English. In both cases there was no alliteration in the Dutch, although there was consonance: *mefistofelische figuur* becomes “**m**ephistophelean **m**aniac”, and (*Palmier had*) *alles*

van een zeemeermin becomes “(Palmier was) perfect **mermaid material**”. Once again Colmer seems to be appropriating Verhulst’s alliterative style, this time by embellishing the consonance with alliteration.

5.4.2 Catachresis

German dirne is Colmer’s rendering of the Dutch phrase *Duitse deerne*, which occurs in a sentence about the singer Roy Orbison: *Maar wat de zanger onwederroepelijk geliefd maakte was dat hij zijn rouw met zoveel overtuiging droeg dat iedereen het hem vergaf dat hij nadien met een Duitse deerne opnieuw in het huwelijk trad.*

Deerne (a Dutch word denoting a woman seen as an object of lust) has been translated into English using the German cognate *dirne*, which is also a rare piece of English slang cited in the Urban Dictionary but not in the OED. Colmer’s translation of the entire sentence reads: “But what made the singer so irrevocably loved was that he wore his mourning with so much conviction that everyone forgave him when he remarried, hitching up with a **German dirne** this time.” The fact that Colmer has used an unusual loanword here makes the phrase more exotic than the Dutch. (As far as I can see, the surprisingly large number of Google hits (131) for “German dirne” refer only to the German word DIRNE.)

in-our-circles-highly-infamous detoxification clinic. Here Colmer uses a prepositional phrase as a premodifier after a definite article. This is a common construction in Dutch, but highly unusual in English. The entire sentence reads: “At five o’clock that Saturday afternoon, my father would be able to admit himself to the **in-our-circles-highly-infamous detoxification clinic**, the Pilgrim in Scheldewindeke” and was translated from, *Om vijf uur die zaterdagmiddag mocht mijn vader zich laten opnemen in de in onze kringen zeer beruchte ontwenningkliniek De Pelgrim te Scheldewindeke*. A normalising translation might have used some form of postmodification, or kept “highly infamous” as a premodifier but deleted “in our circles”.

5.4.3 Hyperbole

extraterrestrial stench occurs in the sentence describing Dimi’s father’s defecation: “His compost gave off an **extraterrestrial stench** of farmyard cheddar”. The bigram corresponds to a verb+adverb construction in Dutch: *Zijn humus stonk buitenaards naar jarige kaas*. Colmer has mimicked the hyperbolic metaphor of the Dutch, despite the availability of a ready-made cliché in English, namely: HIS COMPOST STANK

TO HIGH HEAVEN OF FARMYARD CHEDDAR OR simply HIS COMPOST STANK UNUSUALLY OF FARMYARD CHEDDAR.

mephistophelean maniac, already mentioned in 5.4.1 on account of its alliteration, occurs in the sentence “In the peloton they didn’t bother trying to launch a pursuit – no, they sipped their whisky calmly and wondered whether this **Mephistophelean maniac** would change up a gear in the last forty kilometres.” It refers to Dimi’s uncle Girder and his fiendish drinking during the so-called ‘Tour de France’. In Dutch, Girder is described as a **mefistofelische figuur** (figure) but in English he becomes a maniac. With the transformation from a figure to a maniac, the translation certainly seems more hyperbolic than the Dutch. But if you look at the context, the English takes the word *maniak* from a later point in the Dutch sentence and creates out of it an alliterative bigram in the middle of the English sentence. The original Dutch sentence reads: *Er werd zelfs geen moeite meer gedaan in het peloton om de achtervolging op deze mefistofelische figuur in te zetten, neen, men nipte gelaten van de whisky en vroeg zich af of die maniak nog een tandje bij zou steken in zijn laatste veertig kilometer.*

5.4.4 Hypallage

sadistic reluctance occurs in a phrase describing time passing painfully slowly: “I’ve seen the hands of the clock revolve around each other with sadistic reluctance often enough” and is a translation of *ik heb de wijzers van de klok zich vaak sadistisch traag rond elkaar zien draaien*. The personification of the Dutch (the sadistic behaviour of the hands of the clock) is taken a step further in English by attributing sadism to the reluctance, which in turn is a personified attribute of the clock.

serial oblivion. In a sentence describing his father, Verhulst writes: *De jaren dat hij zich plichtsbewust serieel te pletter zoop was hij zijn eetlust kwijtgespeeld*. The transformation from [adverb + infinitive] construction to an [adjective + noun] construction, although not unusual in itself (Langeveld, 1986), makes the translation more figurative than the original. It does so by introducing metonymy into the target text where the serial nature of the drinking is attributed by association to the oblivion rather than to the drinking itself, giving: “The years in which he dutifully drank himself into **serial oblivion** had robbed him of his appetite.”

sozzled return refers to Girder coming home drunk in the phrase “making a **sozzled return** [...]” Here the quality of being drunk is projected onto the noun “return” by association with the person who is returning. There is no such metonymy in Dutch.

There is, however, a creative compound (literally meaning “cross-eyed drunk” in the ST (*scheelbezopen zou moeten terugkeren*)) for which the hypallage could be compensating.

tight-arsed lemonade refers to the drink that Sylvie (Dimi’s prim little cousin) is sipping in the pub. The metonymy is clear: here Sylvie’s inhibition (expressed by the common metaphor “tight-arsed”) is projected onto the lemonade she is drinking: “Or hadn’t we noticed that she was guzzling **tight-arsed lemonade**, lemonade bloody lite of all things, sugar bloody free?” In the Dutch, however, there is no metonymy at this point: Sylvie’s inhibition is expressed by an adverb and refers to Syvie’s demeanor itself: *Of hadden we dan nog niet gemerkt dat ze truttig limonade zoop, limonade licht bijgod, sugarfree bijgod.*

5.5 Summary and Discussion

We have zoomed in on 27 NL->EN bigrams, and 9 creative bigrams in the English version of the book which were found independently of the 27 NL-EN pairings. Starting with the NL->EN pairings, two had clearly (or relatively clearly) been normalised. These were the creative metaphor *geconsacreerde gangster* rendered as the dead metaphor “fully fledged gangster”, and the creatively incongruous collocation *triestige tronie* transformed into the more congruent “mournful features”. In addition *vadsige praat* had been omitted entirely, but perhaps, as argued above, to avoid redundancy.

Fourteen of the creative bigrams were also creative in translation. Of these, seven had been kept in a fairly straightforward fashion: the metonymic *vadsige maaltijd* and *vadsige plan*; the metaphor *slappe schijf*; the oxymoron *aangename schok*; the personifications *moordende drank* and *schreeuwende eeuw*; and the synaesthetic adjectival phrase in *van zonden doorsopt geslachtsorgaan*. The other seven had not only been kept, but also seemed to have been intensified in some way or other: in English the bigrams *zatte skald* and *bedronken cafébazinnen* were given, as it were, alliterative highlights; in English the hyperbole *communistische toilet* was given more weight by the low-frequency and longer than standard adjectival form “communistic”; in English the opacity of the metaphor *stenen brevier* was enhanced by moving it to earlier in the sentence (although explicit information was added later in the sentence in the form of “church calendar”); in English the contradiction of *onvoorziene spaarzaamheid* was thrown into sharper relief by the addition of the word “burst”; in English the incongruity of the metaphor *schadelijke gebed* was magnified by the modifier “toxic”; and finally in English the metonymic *dronken monden* was redoubled into the metonymic “drunken mouth”.

The remaining nine examples fell into a grey area: these were bigrams which appeared to have been normalised but for which there were always ‘mitigating circumstances’. *Vettig gedrag*, in translation, seemed to lose its synaesthesia but, given that synaesthetic metaphors are almost always highly evaluative (Winter 2019), the translation was perhaps responding to this. *Zompige ogen*, in translation, appeared to lose its metaphorical force but given the ambiguity of “blubby”, it underwent, arguably, a creative metaphorical shift (Tirkkonen-Condit 2002). *Verlepte badstad*, in translation, also appeared to lose something of its metaphorical force but paradigmatic and syntagmatic priming could have played a crucial role here. The translation of *voorradige mannen* appeared to have been depersonified but as Becher (2011) might have suggested, contrastive differences (rather than normalisation) were probably at play. And *wetenschappelijk verantwoorde toestanden* lost its oxymoron but arguably gained in irony (running contrary to the observations made by Øverås 1998). The translation of *mottige villa's* appeared, too, to have shed its metonym/metaphor, but the normalising translation was probably a response to the dialectical differences between Flemish and Dutch.

In addition there were two cases where preservation of the phonetic contour of the sentence seemed to explain the apparent normalisation. These two cases were *izabelgele vocht* and *ongebonden stront*. And finally there was one case, namely *bezopen bestaan*, where alliteration seemed to be compensated by an eye-rhyme.

Turning now to the 9 English creative bigrams which were found independently of the NL->EN pairings, we saw how Colmer seemed to have generalised Verhulst’s alliterative style (e.g. “mermaid material”), and how one of his alliterative bigrams (i.e. “mephistophelean maniac”) even doubled up as hyperbole. More daring still, perhaps, was his use of loan constructions which, in their closeness to Dutch, produced highly creative wording in English. Finally, there were four places where Colmer introduced metonymy which wasn’t there in the Dutch, ranging from the almost normal-sounding “sadistic reluctance” to the prominent “tight-arsed lemonade”.

There is not enough data here to posit correlations between rhetorical tropes on the one hand and the tendency to normalise – or denormalise – on the other. Moreover, as we have already seen, many of the examples lend themselves to multiple classifications. However, one area which might be interesting to explore further is the question of hypallage: specifically whether translations from Dutch into English have a tendency to introduce hypallage in an effort to use [adjective + noun] constructions instead of clumsy [adverb + verb construction] such as “he drank himself into serial oblivion” instead of “he serially drank himself into oblivion”. Such an investigation would have to be the topic of future research.