



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Tropes in translation

An analysis of Dutch creative collocations and compounds translated into English

Cohen, I.C.

Publication date

2019

Document Version

Other version

License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Cohen, I. C. (2019). *Tropes in translation: An analysis of Dutch creative collocations and compounds translated into English*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

6

Case study 2: *De inscheper / Man on the Move*

6.1 Background: The Novel

De inscheper (Otto de Kat, 2004) was translated into English by Sam Garrett and published by MacLehose Press in 2009 under the title *Man on the Move*. It is set over several decades of the mid-twentieth century and follows the adventures of protagonist Rob as he drifts across the ocean from continent to continent, from city to city, from labour camp to labour camp, in search of a life more exciting than the one he left behind in Holland.

The novel is written in a clipped style, with short, often truncated, sentences reflecting Rob's life: fleeting episodes and memories; relationships cut off in their bud, by negligence or misfortune. Relationships that figure prominently are his friendship with Yoshua, a young boy who helps him survive the goldmines in Johannesburg; his deep attachment to Guus, a fellow prisoner of war who drowns tragically at sea; and his guilty neglect of his parents, the memory of which haunts him throughout the book.

As clipped as the language might be, it is also intensely lyrical. As one reviewer wrote, "this book purports to be a novel but [... might] better be appreciated as an epic poem – an impressionistic, existential Odyssey" (*The Scotsman*, 7 August 2009). The lyricism stems in part from the author's use of common language in uncommon ways such as *hun woorden stootten elkaar aan* (THEIR WORDS KNOCKED INTO EACH OTHER). So unlike *Rupert* and *De helaasheid der dingen* this book does not experiment with outrageously odd collocations. Its unusualness is more subtle than that: it can be seen in the way ordinary words combine in extraordinary ways, in longer strings like above but also in bigrams. Nevertheless, Sketch Engine revealed many bigrams which flout normal usage and which are interesting from a rhetorical point of view.

6.2 Background: Author and Translator

Otto de Kat is the pseudonym under which Jan Geurt Gaarlandt publishes his novels. Gaarlandt is a Dutch journalist, poet, novelist and publisher - he founded Uitgeverij Balans in 1986. His first novel *Man in de verte*⁴² appeared in 1998, under the name Otto de Kat. Five more novels followed. The author was the winner of the Halewijn

42 Translated as *The Figure in the Distance* by Arnold and Erica Pomerans (2002)

Literature Prize in 2005 and nominated for the Libris Prize in 2015 for *De langste nacht*⁴³. His work has been translated into German, French, English and Italian.

The lyricism noted by the reviewers of *Man on the Move* obviously reflects the quality of the English translation, and the translator, as much as it reflects the quality of the Dutch. With more than 40 translated novels to his name Sam Garrett has taken on many of Holland's leading authors ranging from classics (Gerard Reve's *De Avonden /The Evenings*) to best sellers (Herman Koch's *Het diner/ The Dinner*). His work has been shortlisted for prestigious awards including the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (2005 and 2013), the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Award (2010), the PEN Translation Prize (2014) and the Best Translated Book Award (2014). Moreover, he has been awarded the Vondel Prize for Literature on two separate occasions (2003 and 2009).

6.3 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 inscheper*, and then extracted all those which had zero hits in the reference corpus nITenTen. Of these bigrams, I judged 45 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 (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 6.3.1– 6.3.7 below.

In addition to these 45 creative Dutch adjective-noun bigrams, I also found seven creative English adjective-noun bigrams which were the translations of more prosaic Dutch forms. These were the so-called 'denormalised' bigrams (which I discovered using the reverse test for normalisation described in Chapter 2.8) and will be discussed later on in Section 6.4.

All the bigrams have been subdivided into rhetorical tropes, and ordered alphabetically. Some of the bigrams were not easy to categorise, however. The general problems associated with categorisation have already been discussed in Chapter 3; the specific way they manifested themselves here had do with the subtlety of the language, which gave rise to fewer clear-cut cases, which in turn meant that more bigrams were categorised under the heading "catachresis".

43 Translated as *The Longest Night* by Laura Watkinson (2017).

6.3.1 Catachresis

heillose zon (gloss: unholy sun) describes the sun in Thailand that beat down on Rob as he laboured on the construction of the railroad to Burma: *Pas veel later zou de modder komen, in een ander land, onder de heilloze zon van Thailand, land zonder God*. HEILLOS literally means ‘unholy’ or ‘without salvation’ but the word is often used in the sense of ‘disastrous’ as in EEN HEILLOS PLAN (‘a disastrous plan’); it is unusual, however, in combination with SUN. The translation “devastating sun” in “The mud would come much later, in a different country, under the **devastating sun** of Thailand, land without God” is also an oddish collocation because DEVASTATING normally describes natural disasters like EARTHQUAKES, FLOODS, TORNADOS and TSUNAMIS. (In enTenTen, these words all belong to the top ten collocates of DEVASTATING.) Moreover, with only one hit in enTenTen, DEVASTATING SUN is a far less obvious choice than shadow translations like MERCILESS SUN, FIERCE SUN, HARSH SUN or GLARING SUN, all of which fit the context.

NOT NORMALISED

neerduikelende dieren (gloss: tumbling down animals) occurs in a scene in which Guus’s father is out hunting: [...] *geweer schuin omhoog, meedraaide met de overvliegende eenden en keek naar de neerduikelende dieren, één, twee, soms drie eenden tegelijk*. The strangeness of this collocation stems from the strangeness of the image. Since birds are not prototypical *dieren* (‘animals’), the bigram *neerduikelende dieren* makes you think more readily of mammals than of birds, thus flouting what generative linguistics call selectional restrictions, and producing what Horii (2004, p. 82) calls a disparate collocation. The Dutch *dieren* has been normalised in English to “birds”, thus ironing out the disparity of the collocation: “his gun held up at an angle, turning with the ducks as they passed overhead and saw the **birds tumbling down**, one, two, sometimes three in a row.” However, this is not a simple case of normalisation: the repetition of /d/ in *neerduikelende dieren* makes the Dutch phrase sound natural (as if the first /d/ primes the reader for the second /d/), as does the repetition of similar vowels in the stressed syllables *neer-* and *dier-*. These effects are hard to mimic in English with ANIMALS or even BEASTS: only BIRDS anticipates the plosives /b/ and /d/ in TUMBLING DOWN.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

ondergrondse dag (gloss: underground day) refers to the day in the life of a mine-worker: *Morgens vroeg zwegen ze meestal, zich innerlijk verwerend tegen een ondergrondse dag*. ONDERGRONDS, the first element of this bigram, is polysemous: it can mean literally ‘underground’, or metaphorically ‘furtive’, ‘dark’ or ‘belonging

to the underworld’, and in this context it carries both the literal and metaphorical meanings, whereas in the translation it does not. The bigram has been rendered as “day underground” in the sentence “In the early morning they were mostly silent, steeling themselves against **a day underground**”. The inversion (*ondergrondse dag* -> “day underground”) is elegant but it conveys only the literal meaning of ONDERGRONDS. The ambiguity of the Dutch could perhaps have been captured if the translator had used the less common but attested UNDERGROUND DAY, which has six hits in enTenTen (as opposed to 66 for “day underground”).

NORMALISED

onverbiddelijke associatie (gloss: unrelenting association) occurs in the sentence [Rob] *vermeed [...] het om zijn huis in te richten, bang voor de onverbiddelijke associatie met zijn ouders*. This is an odd bigram in Dutch given that ONVERBIDDELIJK (‘unrelenting’) collocates strongly with NOODLOT (‘fate’), GESTRENGHEID (‘severity’), NATUURKRACHT (‘force of nature’) and NATUURWET (‘law of nature’) when used as an adjective; and with STRENG (‘strict’), TOESLAAN (‘strike’) and AFSTRAFFEN (‘punish’) when used as an adverb.⁴⁴ *Onverbiddelijk* does not, however, collocate with *associatie*, and this collocational ‘clash’ is reflected in the translation, which reads: “[Rob ...] avoided furnishing his room, fearful of the **unrelenting association** with his parents”. The stormy feel has been captured in English by UNRELENTING, which collocates strongly with metaphorical storms such as HOSTILITY, BARRAGE, and ONSLAUGHT. The translator has chosen the non-normalising UNRELENTING, which is remarkable given the availability of safer or stronger collocates such as PERSISTENT or even RELENTLESS (both of which have more than ten times as many hits as “unrelenting association” in Google Books – see Appendix 2a). So a normalising shadow translation might have read: FEARFUL OF THE PERSISTENT ASSOCIATION WITH HIS PARENTS.

NOT NORMALISED

onverbiddelijke eersteklasafdeling (gloss: unrelenting first-class department) occurs in the passage describing a ship:

De oorlog had er een troepenschip van gemaakt, maar ondanks dat had het zijn Franse arrogantie bewaard. Er was een onverbiddelijke eersteklasafdeling, het sloependek, bedoeld voor officieren en oudkrijgsgevangenen.

This has been translated as:

44 Collocations are taken from Word Sketch with enTenTen as input.

The war had made a troop carrier of it, but it had lost nothing of its French *hauteur*. Its **implacably first-class section**, the boat deck, was strictly reserved for officers and POWs. [Italics original]

Onverbiddelijke eersteklasafdeling is perhaps even odder than *onverbiddelijke associatie* for it verges on oxymoron: As we saw above ONVERBIDDELIJK collocates strongly with negative words (e.g. NOODLOT, TOESLAAN and AFSTRAFFEN) whereas FIRST-CLASS, from the point of view of the dominant class, is positive. The translation of this bigram as “implacably first-class section” is ingenious, or at least highly serendipitous. Like the Dutch, it is oxymoronic but it is phonetically and orthographically so close to the common collocation IMPECCABLE/IMPECCABLY FIRST-CLASS that it rolls off the tongue and its unusualness almost goes unnoticed.

NOT NORMALISED

onvervangbaar sentiment (gloss: irreplaceable sentiment) occurs in the sentence describing Rob’s desultory life:

*Alles zat er nog in dat stuurloze hoofd van hem, alles verhuisde mee waarheen hij ook ging. Naar Clifton Street 22, of naar Gang Coorde 10 in Bandoeng, waar en wanneer ook: tot aan de nok gevuld met **onvervangbaar sentiment**, nutteloos geheugen, gedachten zonder verband.*

This has been translated as:

“It was all still there in that rudderless mind of his, he took everything with him, no matter how often he struck camp. To 22 Clifton Street, or to 10 Corridor Coorde at Bandung, wherever and whenever: packed to the rafters with **irreplaceable sentiment**, useless memory, thoughts pulled out of joint.”

What makes *onvervangbaar sentiment* unusual is that ONVERVANGBAAR does not normally combine with abstract nouns denoting emotions: its top four collocates are collective nouns for relatively concrete objects: MUSEUMCOLLECTIE (‘museum collection’), ERFSTUK (‘heirloom’), CULTUURGOED (‘cultural heritage’), BEZITTING (‘possessions’). And this collocational tendency is the same, if not stronger, in English. A normalising translation might, therefore, have rendered NL *sentiment* as a collective concrete noun like MEMENTOS or MEMORABILIA, both of which are included in the top twenty collocates of IRREPLACEABLE, giving rise to a shadow translation like: PACKED TO THE RAFTERS WITH IRREPLACEABLE MOMENTOS.

NOT NORMALISED

verdroomde middag (gloss: dreamed-away afternoon) depicts a typical afternoon in the then Mozambique City of Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), and occurs in the sentence *Lourenço Marques zou snel ontwaken uit de verdroomde middag*. The morphologically complex adjective VERDROOMD is made up of a root derived from the verb DROMEN preceded by the negatively tinged prefix VER-, which often denotes, or connotes, ‘waste’ as in VERGANE GLORIE/LOST GLORY. Translated literally, *verdroomde middag* produces the clunky if not ungrammatical DREAMT-AWAY AFTERNOON. Perhaps to avoid this, Garrett opted for the common expression “afternoon slumber” in “Lourenço Marques would soon awake from its **afternoon slumber**”. However, apart from producing a more clichéd collocation, SLUMBER does not capture the sense of waste: its two most common adjective collocates are DEEP and PEACEFUL. One solution might have been to reverse the adjective and noun (and to replace the possessive determiner ITS with the indefinite article AN) giving LOURENÇO MARQUES WOULD SOON AWAKE FROM AN AFTERNOON DREAMT AWAY.

NORMALISED

6.3.2 Hypallage (transferred epithet)

bevelloze formatie (gloss: uncommanded formation) describes the flight of geese above the IJssel: *Ganzenvluchten boven de IJssel, in bevelloze formatie, zwenkend, verdwijnd in de avondhemel*. This bigram has been translated as a longer phrase in “The flight of geese above the IJssel, **in perfect formation without directives**, swerving, vanishing into the evening sky.” Using frequency to gauge normalisation will not work here because the longer a phrase is, the more likely it is to be unique. But frequency is not the only indicator of normalisation. As Øverås (1998) argues, normalisation can also manifest itself as explicitation, and this is what we see here: first the addition of “perfect” (which is not a grammatical or stylistic requirement here), and second the addition of the post-modifier “without directives”, which undoes the hypallage. The hypallage could have been preserved as UNCOMMANDED FORMATION, although it is not a phrase that rolls off the tongue in this sentence.

NORMALISED

gedwongen burgerpak (gloss: enforced/strained civvies) occurs in the sentence *Het mannetje op de eerste rij, de eenogige officier in gedwongen burgerpak, dankte na de laatste met moeite verdwijnde toon het publiek voor hun aandacht*. It refers to the clothing worn by an officer at a musical soirée for civilians. This phrase is both unusual and layered because GEDWONGEN can either mean (i) ‘enforced’ as in compulsory, (ii) ‘forced’ as in strained, or (iii) ‘forced into something’ like being forced or squeezed into a suit. It is because of interpretation (iii) that I have classified

this bigram as a hypallage: the squeezing has been transferred from the officer to the suit. At first sight the translation appears to have removed hypallage for the English reads: “the one-eyed officer **forced into civilian order**”. But the layers of meaning have been skilfully reintroduced into the English with the bigram “civilian order”, which corresponds to *burgerpak*. This is how: among its many senses, ORDER can mean a military “uniform [...] for a specified purpose or for a particular occasion, as drill order, field-day order, review order [...] shirt-sleeve order” (OED online). So by translating *burgerpak* as the oxymoronic “civilian order” the translator has managed to convey the regimented sense of GEDWONGEN too. The English translation reads: “The little man in the front row, the one-eyed officer forced into civilian order, thanked the audience for its kind attention after the final note wavered and disappeared.”

NOT NORMALISED

laconieke ogen (gloss: laconic eyes) describes the look in Guus’s eyes as he plunges overboard to his death. This bigram has been classified as hypallage because the adjective *laconieke* (“laconic”) actually refers to the *look* in Guus’s eyes rather than the eyes themselves. The transferred epithet has been abandoned in translation and the phrase normalised to, “**carefree look in his eyes**”. Although I have classified this example as normalised, this is not born out by the frequency counts: LACONIC EYE(S) is actually more frequent than CAREFREE LOOK IN * EYES, although this probably has to do with the relative length of the phrases.

NORMALISED

6.3.3 Metaphor

aaneengeklonken mars (see *gepantserde wil* below)

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

fijnmazig zonlicht (gloss: fine-meshed sunlight) describes the autumn light: *De nazomer kwam met fijnmazig zonlicht*. This unusual description has been preserved in translation as the zero-frequency “finely knit sunlight” in “The early autumn came, with **finely knit sunlight**.” Note too, how the addition of the comma between “came” and “with” emphasises the second part of the sentence by setting it (and with it the unusual bigram) apart. A normalising translation might have opted for a higher frequency collocation such as FILTERED SUNLIGHT (with 164 hits in enTenTen). Indeed this shadow translation makes sense given that FILTERED SUNLIGHT could be interpreted as sunlight filtered by a finely woven mesh of, say, autumnal trees.

NOT NORMALISED

geboeid leven (gloss: captivated/shackled life) refers to Rob's life in Holland: *Wat ze [Rob's familie] in Holland nooit hadden begrepen: zijn verzet tegen het onvermijdelijke, tegen een geboeid leven*. The Dutch word "geboeid" is ambiguous: it can mean (1) 'chained' / 'shackled'; or (2) 'captivated' / 'captivating'. In addition *geboeid* conjures up ships (EEN HOOG GEBOEID SCHIP is a ship whose sides have been raised with upright planks, and where presumably the fenders or buoys, DE BOEIEN, are placed high up). The English translation, "What no-one understood in Holland: his kicking against the inevitable, against **a life in shackles**" only captures the first meaning. But there is a zero-frequency alternative which conveys something of the ambiguity of the original, namely RIVETED LIFE because RIVETED means both fastened or secured, and captivating. This would give rise to the following shadow translation: WHAT NO-ONE UNDERSTOOD IN HOLLAND: HIS KICKING AGAINST THE INEVITABLE, AGAINST A RIVETED LIFE. On the other hand it is very obvious from the context of the entire novel that Rob's life in Holland is a life in shackles, so the translator is picking out the relevant meaning.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

geharnaste blik (gloss: armoured gaze) refers to Rob and Guus's constant vigilance in the Japanese labour camp: *Instinct, voor- en achterzijde gedekt, een geharnaste blik tegen een overmacht aan geweld*. The phrase has been translated as the zero-frequency bigram "armoured eye" in "Instinct, front and back covered, an **armoured eye** in the face of blistering violence". There is no normalisation here despite the availability of high frequency shadow translations like WATCHFUL EYE, KEEN EYE OR BEADY EYE.

NOT NORMALISED

gepantserde wil (gloss: armoured will) occurs in the sentence describing Guus and Rob's growing attachment to each other as they march from Ban Pong to their first camp: *Hun gepantserde wil om die reis te overleven, hun aaneengeklonken mars, hun gebarricadeerde wereld, hun blik, hun onwrikbaar geloof in elkaars geheugen*. The translation reads: "Their **iron will** to survive that journey; their armoured march, their barricaded world, the look in their eyes, their unshakeable faith in each other's memory." This bigram *gepantserde wil* has, on the face of it, been normalised: it is a low frequency bigram (unattested in both n1TenTen and Google Books) but has been translated as the common collocation "iron will" (whose Dutch counterpart is EEN IJZEREN WIL). However, Garrett might have refrained from using AMOUR-CLAD here to save the word AMOUR for his translation of *aaneengeklonken mars* later in the sentence as "armoured march".

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

haarfijn talent (gloss: hair-fine talent) describes Guus's talent for suppressing the past: *Guus met zijn haarfijn talent om het verleden alleen toe te laten wanneer het kon en moest*. The bigram (perhaps a play on the more common collocation HAARFIJN GEVOEL) is unattested in the Dutch corpora, and the English translation reflects this: "Guus with his **fine-spun talent** for only allowing the past to come in when feasible and when needed." Here the translator has opted for "fine-spun talent", (unattested in both enTenTen and Google Books) even though the common collocation SHEER TALENT would have been an option. Indeed, if the translator had wanted to play it safe by normalising, this would have been an obvious choice. For SHEER not only means 'pure' but also 'fine-spun' as in SHEER STOCKINGS.

NOT NORMALISED

ijle vriendschap (gloss: rarefied friendship) describes the brief relationship between Rob and Yoshua, a young South African boy who dies in a mining accident shortly after they meet. This uncommon bigram has been translated as the relatively common collocation "**tenuous friendship**". Although the Van Dale gives TENUOUS as one of the translations of IJL (as in IJLE LUCHT/TENUOUS AIR), the two words have quite different connotations: TENUOUS is associated with the negative or superficial. Its top collocates are GRASP as in 'her tenuous grasp of historical events'. Other common collocates are of a similar ilk: GRIP, HOLD, LINK. IJL on the other hand collocates with (1) words related to air (BERGLUCHT, LUCHT, ATMOSFEER), (2) plants (POPULIER, ZEGGE, STENDEL) and (3) the quality of one's voice (KLANK, ZANG, STEMGELUID); and unlike TENUOUS is not negatively tinged. It is difficult, however, to come up with an alternative. The negativity of "tenuous" hints at the bleak ending to Rob and Yoshua's friendship, whereas low-frequency shadow translations like DELICATE FRIENDSHIP or ETHEREAL FRIENDSHIP would not have achieved this effect.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

luchtledig plezier (gloss: vacuous pleasure) occurs in the sentence describing Guus's luxuriously hedonistic days at university: *Weelde om de dagen van ongebreidelde vrijheid, en luchtledig plezier*. Its literal translation VACUOUS PLEASURE has not been used but instead the fairly common collocation "hollow pleasures" in "Luxury, for they were days of unbridled freedom and **hollow pleasures**." This is normalisation to the extent that the English uses a far more common collocation than the Dutch. But the more literal VACUOUS PLEASURE is not uncommon either and is arguably more cumbersome than "hollow pleasures". Another possibility might have been DEFLATED PLEASURES: like *luchtledig plezier* it is quirky and nonchalant, but it is also inappropriately comical in this context.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

onuitputtelijke dagen (gloss: inexhaustible days) occurs in the sentence *De Bandoeng-maanden, de onuitputtelijke dagen waarin ze werden beloerd door de Jap, getrapt en gedrild*, which has been translated as “The Bandung months, the **age-long days** in which they had been hounded by the Jap, kicked and drilled”. The Dutch bigram is odd in that *onuitputtelijk* (‘inexhaustible’) normally combines with words denoting sources or resources: its five most frequent collocates are BRON, INSPIRATIEBRON, ENERGIE, ENERGIEBRON and MOGELIJKHEID. This mirrors English INEXHAUSTIBLE, whose five most frequent collocates are SOURCE, SUPPLY, RESOURCE, ENERGY and TREASURE. The English translation “age-long days”, however, portrays DAYS more conventionally in terms of a period of time rather than in terms of a resource or as something which can be exhausted. (Both Dutch and English *dag* ‘day’ normally collocate with words denoting sequences or periods of time.) It is also worth noting that ONUITPUTTELIJK is a positively tinged word which clashes with the negative co-text; whereas “age-long” (whose top collocates include ENMITY, FEUD and QUARREL) is negative, consistent with the negative co-text. Moreover, “age-long days” is more frequent in Google Books than the shadow translation INEXHAUSTIBLE DAYS. To this extent the English translation is a normalising one. But it is normalising in an odd way because the English bigram contracts huge eras (age-long) into small units of twenty-four hours (days), which is also a contradiction.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

rafelige gedachten (gloss: frayed/threadbare thoughts) describes the kind of thoughts that Rob had in his late teens as he fantasised about his future: *Heftige idealen, rafelige gedachten over het meesterwerk van zijn toekomst*. This has been translated literally as “frayed thoughts” in “Wild ideals, **frayed thoughts** about the masterpiece that would be his future. With only three hits in enTenTen, and 31 in Google books, “frayed thoughts” is more quirky and far less common than possible shadow translations like FRAGMENTED THOUGHTS, INCOHERENT THOUGHTS or, more freely RANDOM THOUGHT (see Appendix 2a).

NOT NORMALISED

smetteloze woordenschat (gloss: spotless vocabulary) occurs in a phrase describing Guus as a dapper student: *Geen spoor van verlegenheid, geen stap verkeerd gezet, een smetteloze woordenschat, vest, horlogeketting*. It has been translated as “Not a trace of shyness, not one wrong step, an **immaculate vocabulary**, waistcoat, watch chain”. This is a subtle example, and shows how the question of normalisation can be extremely fine-grained. The bigram has been translated as “immaculate vocabulary”, where “immaculate” contains an etymological trace of a word for stain:

MACULA in Latin (SMET in Dutch). But there is another word which comes close to “immaculate”, namely IMPECCABLE, which contains the etymological trace of a word for SIN (i.e. Lat. PECCARE). Van Dale gives both words as translations of SMETTELOOS, and enTenTen shows no significant difference in frequency between IMMACULATE VOCABULARY and impeccable vocabulary (i.e. 2 versus 0 hits). But Google Books give 23 hits for “immaculate vocabulary” (Garrett’s translation) versus 169 hits for IMPECCABLE VOCABULARY, the shadow translation. In other words, this translation subtly resists normalisation.

NOT NORMALISED

staalkoude nacht (gloss: steel-cold night) depicts a bitterly cold night in east Holland: *De trein naar Deventer reed door het landschap waar hij ooit doorheen gekomen was in een staalkoude nacht en dat hij in de vroege morgen had zien ontwaken.* With 0 hits in both nlTenTen and Google Books, *staalkoud* is an unusual way to refer to an icy-cold night. The English translation “steely cold night” (in, “The train to Deventer crossed the countryside he had once ridden through on a **steely cold night**, and had watched waking up in the early morning”) tries to respect this, both in terms of meaning and in terms of relative frequency. With only 19 hits in enTenTen, the modifier STEELY COLD is far less common than semantically similar expressions such as FREEZING COLD and BITTERLY COLD which have 6951 and 3826 hits in enTenTen respectively.

NOT NORMALISED

stuurloze hoofd (gloss: rudderless head/mind) refers again to Rob’s desultory state of mind and occurs in the sentence *Alles zat er nog in dat stuurloze hoofd van hem, alles verhuisde mee waarheen hij ook ging.* It has been translated as “It was all still there in that **rudderless mind** of his, he took everything with him, no matter how often he struck camp.” Van Dale translates *stuurloos* as DISORIENTED and ADRIFT. But in a shipping context, *stuur* means HELM or RUDDER. What is striking here is that Garrett has taken a strongly pictorial interpretation of *stuurloos* to form a bigram which is significantly less frequent than a shadow translation like DRIFTING MIND.

NOT NORMALISED

vastgeklonken bestaan (gloss: fettered existence) describes Guus and Rob’s lives as prisoners of war, and it comes at the end of a sentence that depicts the moment they are liberated from the labour camp by the American forces: *Ze waren meegenomen, ontvoerd uit hun miezerige, vastgeklonken bestaan.* This has been translated as “They had been swept up, kidnapped out of their measly, **calcified lives**.” Although

vastgeklonken is closer in meaning to FETTERED, “calcified” is a striking image in this context and, like the Dutch, forms part of an unusual bigram. The fact that “calcified life” is far more unusual than FETTERED LIFE is not visible in enTenTen. But results from Google Books reveal a considerable difference (see Appendix 2a).

NOT NORMALISED

vijandig spijkerschrift (gloss: hostile cuneiform) refers to the handwriting of the bureaucrat who kept a record of the prisoners of war in the Japanese labour camp, *IJskoud stond zijn [Robs] naam daar, in een vijandig spijkerschrift, het overtuigende bewijs van zijn aanwezigheid*. This bigram has been translated freely as “angry chicken scratches” in “His [Robs] name had been there, clear and cold in **angry chicken scratches**, the conclusive proof of his presence”. Although “chicken scratches” is a standard U.S. expression for messy handwriting, the entire expression “angry chicken scratches” has zero hits in enTenTen and one hit in Google Books, and seems to be an inventive way of translating *vijandig spijkerschrift*.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

6.3.4 Metonymy

double-breasted burgemeester (gloss: double-breasted mayor) describes one of the guests at a social gathering: *De officier en de orgeldraaier, de double-breasted burgemeester en de armendokter*. The metonymy (i.e. the mayor is double-breasted by association with his jacket) has been reproduced in translation as “double-breasted mayor” in “The officer and the organ grinder, the **double-breasted mayor** and the healer of the poor.” Of course, the English lacks the loanword, but then the loanword was already English.

NOT NORMALISED

kreupele cadans (gloss: crippled cadence) describes the rhythm of a day in a Japanese labour camp. The bigram has been classified as metonymy because the cadence (*cadans*) is crippled (*kreupel*) by association with the prisoners’ carriage: *Staan, hangen, slenteren, schuifelen, staan, hangen, slenteren, schuifelen, kreupele cadans van een kampdag*. This has been translated literally as, “Stand, wait, saunter, shuffle, stand, wait, saunter, shuffle, **crippled cadence** of a day in camp.”

The metonymy here is supported by the alliteration on /k/, which makes the phrase sound cohesive, so in a sense it would have been strange if the translator had abandoned the alliterative metonymy here. But in another sense, it would *not* have been: the bigram is peculiar and the translator could have normalised to a higher frequency, but nonetheless poetic, collocation such as HALTING CADENCE.

NOT NORMALISED

verwongen stad (gloss: twisted city) refers to the city of Cape Town and to the twisted mentality of the people who live there: *verwongen stad, waar zwart niet raakte aan wit, tenzij wit een zwarte aanhield ter controle*. It has been classified as metonymy because *verwongen* refers to the city by association with the mentality of its citizens. Normally, though, *verwongen* refers to people: it collocates strongly with words denoting the views and attitudes people hold, and also with words denoting facial expressions; its collocates include GODSBEELD ('image of God'), WERELDBEELD ('world view'), MENSBEELD ('portrayal of humankind'), ZELFBEELD ('self-image'), TRONIE ('mug'), GELAAT ('face/countenance') and GEZICHT ('face'). The metonymy has been preserved in translation as "[...] **contorted city** where black and white never met, not unless white stopped black to check his pass". And although contorted city has about 80 hits in Google Books, it is less common than TWISTED CITY (see Appendix 2a). Note, too, the translator's daring omission of articles in the phrase "white stopped black to check his pass."

NOT NORMALISED

6.3.5 Personification

loeiende zon (gloss: blaring sun) occurs in the sentence *het oneerlijkste gevecht in zijn [Guus'] leven was dat met de loeiende zon van Java en Thailand*, and has been translated as "the most unequal fight of his life had been against the **roaring sun** in Java and Thailand". Although *loeiende* is not itself a collocate of *zon*, it rhymes and therefore resonates with GLOEIEND ('white-hot/glowing'), which is a common collocate of *ZON*. And if GLOEIEND denotes extreme heat, LOEIEND denotes extreme noise such as wailing, bellowing or mooing. Top subject collocates of the verb LOEIEN are the nouns SIRENE ('siren'), KOE ('cow') and WIND ('wind'). So *loeiende* could conceivably have been translated as the more clichéd BLARING, for the latter rhymes with GLARING and also denotes loud noises. It could also have been translated as very high frequency SCORCHING SUN. Instead the translator opted for the old-fashioned "roaring sun",⁴⁵ for which there are no hits in enTenTen.

NOT NORMALISED

ongeboren uren (gloss: unborn hours) occurs in the sentence *Vooral 's nachts op de meest ongeboren uren zeilden de bommen neer*. This zero-frequency bigram (along with the three preceding words, *op de meest*) has been translated as "in the small hours" in the sentence "Particularly at night, **in the small hours**, the bombs would come sailing down." This idiom fits snugly into the sentence (the nine Dutch syllables have been pared down to four) but at a cost. "The small hours" is not only far more

45 Google Books N-Gram Viewer shows this bigram to have been particularly popular in the twenties.

frequent than (*op de meest*) *ongeboren uren*, it is also more neutral: it lacks the sense of incipience that the Dutch bigram has. A shadow, non-normalising translation might be AT (THE MOST) INCHOATE HOURS OR more literally, IN THE UNBORN HOURS.

NORMALISED

nietsontziende zon (gloss: ruthless sun) occurs in a sentence describing the time Rob spent in isolation in an apartment in Cape Town: *Uren zat hij voor zijn raam de nietsontziende zon in te kijken*. This has been translated as “For hours he would sit at the window, staring into the **unscrupulous sun**.” As with *heillose zon* above, the translation preserves the quirkiness of the Dutch. Here, not only has the personification been kept, but the translator has chosen to combine SUN unusually with “unscrupulous” instead of the shadow translation RUTHLESS, which would have produced the much stronger collocation, RUTHLESS SUN. Of course at a semantic level, there is a nice parallelism in the Dutch between ZIEN (‘seeing’) and KIJKEN (‘looking’) – i.e. *de nietsontziende zon in te kijken* – but it would be a tall order to reproduce this parallelism in English.

NOT NORMALISED

verstomd verleden (gloss: silenced past) occurs in a phrase describing a turning point in Guus’s life: Guus is in the pub with his father and about to leave Holland forever: *Stilte, een oogopslag, twee monden die dronken. De momenten waarin zoveel samenbalt, hoe zie je ze, hoe onderga je ze, hoe verdwijnt alles, waar ben je dan. Het einde van de toekomst, een **verstomd verleden**, geen dromen meer*. Common collocates of *verleden* (which semantically overlap with *verstomd*) are VER (‘distant’) and GRIS (‘grey’). But *verstomd* itself is not a common collocate of *verleden*; and this unusualness is reflected in the literal translation, “speechless past” in “Silence, a glance, two mouths swallowing. The moments in which so much contracts, how to see them, endure them, how does it all vanish, where does it leave you. The end of the future, **a speechless past**, no more dreams.” If the translator had wanted to normalise the Dutch here, he could, for instance have opted for the shadow translator DIM PAST.

NOT NORMALISED

zuigend oerwoud (gloss: sucking jungle) describes the oppressively dense jungle in Thailand, a jungle so dense and humid that it sucks the energy right out of you. It has been translated imaginatively as the zero frequency bigram, “**leeching jungle**”. A normalising shadow translation might have been SUFFOCATING JUNGLE, which also captures the oppressive humidity of the jungle in Thailand.

NOT NORMALISED

6.3.6 Oxymoron

droge verbijstering (gloss: dry amazement). This bigram has been classified as an oxymoron because it denotes both the absence and presence of emotion: *droge* (as in OP DROGE TOON ‘in a dry tone’) withholds emotion, whereas *verbijstering* obviously expresses it. Indeed, *verbijstering* collocates strongly with WOEDE (‘rage’) and VERDRIET (‘sorrow’). The bigram describes the way a Japanese guard announces that peace has broken out: ‘*Haiwa arimasoe – Het is vrede, de Jap kondigde het af met droge verbijstering, ongelovig, [...]*’. In English the bigram has been dispensed with entirely, along with the verb, and the sentence rearranged to: “‘Haiwa arimasu – Peace has come.’ The Jap was **in shock**, incredulous, [...]”. There is normalisation here, with semantic as well as syntactic changes, and the resulting English sentence is not only more standard but also more explicit in the sense that the word SHOCK explains, as it were, the guard’s inability to express emotion. Perhaps this unusual oxymoron could have been conveyed in English by the infrequent phrase BRITTLE AMAZEMENT, giving “‘Haiwa arimasu – Peace has come.’ The Jap ANNOUNCED IN BRITTLE AMAZEMENT AND DISBELIEF, [...]”. But it is questionable whether this shadow translation works as a whole.

NORMALISED

galante wrakstukjes (gloss: gallant bits of wreckage) occurs in a sentence describing Rob’s father’s old desk at home : *De geheimzinnigheid van dat bureau, de roerloze dingen erop en erin, kleine, galante wrakstukjes uit een vergane tijd*. This has been translated as “The mystery of that desk, the motionless objects within and upon it, **gallant bits of flotsam** from an age gone by.” Apart from the context, what makes this bigram curious in Dutch is the tension between the word *galant* (‘gallant’) with its hint of heroism and the bitsy diminutive *wrakstukjes*. To iron out this tension completely a translation would have to take liberties (e.g. by omitting the metaphor and translating *galante wrakstukjes* as, for instance, MEMENTOS) But even a fairly literal translation leaves some leeway for normalisation. This leeway stems from the fact that “bits of flotsam” is synonymous with PIECES OF FLOTSAM, and from the fact that PIECES is more compatible with GALLANT than BITS. It is difficult to see this pattern using Sketch Engine alone (where the lemmas GALLANT BIT OF and GALLANT PIECE OF only have one hit each), but if we expand the search to Google Books, a pattern does emerge: Google Books returns 8 hits for GALLANT BITS but 233 hits for GALLANT PIECES;. The translator, having opted for GALLANT BITS, seems to be resisting normalisation here.⁴⁶

NOT NORMALISED

46 “flotsam” as a translation of *wrakstukjes* (which does not necessarily refer to wreckage *at sea*) is a good example of compensation: in this case, “flotsam” compensates the translation of *roerloos* (RUDDERLESS) as “motionless”, which loses the explicit maritime reference.

onderhuidse waardering (gloss: subcutaneous appreciation) refers to the mutual – but bottled-up appreciation – between Rob’s father and his long-time friend: *En dat hij de man sterk bewonderde, abnormaal sterk zonder te weten waarom. Misschien alleen al omdat hij opgewassen bleek tegen zijn vader? Botsing tussen koninkrijkjes, test zonder inzet, de toon van onderhuidse waardering.*

Onderhuids is an odd collocate of *waardering* because it is mainly used in anatomical contexts: of the top 50 collocates of *onderhuids*, 47 refer to the body (or things that are done to the body) e.g. WEEFSEL (‘tissue’), INJECTIE (‘injection’) and PUISTJE (‘pimple/zit’). The other three collocates refer to emotions but, like the bodily counterparts, are rather unsavory. These are SPANNING (‘tension’), WOEDE (‘rage’) and IRRITATIE (‘irritation’). What makes *onderhuidse waardering* unusual then is the clash between a negatively charged adjective and a positively charged noun. This clash has been softened in translation to “unspoken appreciation” in: “And his vast admiration for the man, out of all scale, without knowing why. Perhaps simply because he was a match for his father? A clash of little kingdoms, a contest without stakes, their **unspoken appreciation**.” The semantic clash between *onderhuids* and *waardering* could have been retained had the translator opted instead for SUPPRESSED APPRECIATION OR BOTTLED-UP APPRECIATION.

NORMALISED

ongecontroleerde bewondering (gloss: uncontrolled admiration) depicts Rob’s admiration for the same old friend of his father’s, a friend who had exerted untold influence on Rob’s life: *Hij had het zelf nooit goed begrepen, zijn ongecontroleerde bewondering voor de man met de Nietzsche-snor en de verweerde kop.* The Dutch *bewondering* (‘admiration’) has a positive connotation and collocates with neutral or positive words like MATELOOS (‘immeasurable’), VOL (‘full of’), DIEP (‘deep’) and GROOT (‘big’). Here, however, it has been paired with *ongecontroleerd* (‘uncontrolled’), a negatively tinged word whose strongest collocates are URINEVERLIES (‘urine loss’) and CELDELING (‘cell division’). This negative-positive Dutch bigram could, in principle, have been translated as UNCONTROLLED OR UNCHECKED ADMIRATION (according to Work Sketch, both alternatives combine frequently with negatively tinged words like HYPERTENSION, PROLIFERATION, SPASM, SEIZURE, ANGER and BLEEDING) but has, instead, been rendered as the more common and less oxymoronic bigram “passionate admiration” in “He had never really understood it himself, his **passionate admiration** for the man with the Nietzsche moustache and the weathered face.”

NORMALISED

onwillekeurige tekeningetjes (gloss: involuntary drawings) occurs in a sentence describing how Rob, as a child, whiled away the hours in his bedroom at home: *Onwillekeurige tekeningetjes die hij krabbelde in verloren uren en die hij snel weer weggooid*. It is an odd bigram because *onwillekeurig* normally occurs in noun phrases denoting involuntary physical moments: its top 10 collocates include CONTRACTIES (‘contractions’), SAMENTREKKING (also ‘contractions’), SPIERBEWEGING (‘muscle movements’) and URINEVERLIES (‘urine loss’) and other nouns of this ilk. This sense of involuntary compulsion could perhaps have been captured in English as INVOLUNTARY DRAWINGS but the Dutch bigram has been translated as the more common and far-from-compulsive “**Casual drawings** scribbled in idle hours, then promptly thrown away.

NORMALISED

opperste genegenheid (gloss: supreme affection) When Guus was a student, his father granted him the use of his study: *Zijn vader had hem [zijn studeerkamer] afgestaan[...] – een daad van opperste genegenheid*. This bigram is less obviously oxymoronic than the previous two, both of which contrasted the positive with the negative. Here the contrast is between a word associated with warmth, i.e. *genegenheid*, and the somewhat cooler word *opperste*: the five most frequent adjectival collocates of GENEGENHEID are DIEP (‘deep’), WARM (‘warm’), WEDERZIJD (‘mutual’), OPRECHT (‘sincere/heartfelt’), BROEDERLIJK (‘brotherly’). OPPERST (‘utmost’), on the other hand, combines most frequently with CONCENTRATIE (‘concentration’), VERBAZING (‘surprise’), and VERWARRING (‘confusion’). In English this has been normalised to the frequent “deepest affection” in “His father had turned it over to him [...] – a gesture of **deepest affection**.” The shadow translation SUPREME AFFECTION (which exploits the fact that OPPERST is a calque of the French word SÛPREME) might have captured something of the coolness and unusual of the Dutch.

NORMALISED

vederlichte overmoed (gloss: feather-light recklessness) occurs in the sentence *Zijn beslissing om zich aan te melden bij het leger tilde hem naar een vederlichte overmoed* and has been translated as “His decision to sign up had raised in him a **feather-light recklessness**.” The English bigram, just as the Dutch, is highly distinct. Not only is it unattested in enTenTen, it is also absent from the web. But a more conventional alternative was open to the translator: he could have normalised the bigram to CHEERFUL RECKLESSNESS OR LIGHT-HEARTED RECKLESSNESS.

Although the translation normalises neither the frequency of – nor the metaphor expressed by – the bigram, it does play down the oxymoron. The oxymoronic

character of the NL bigram has to do with the morphological make-up of the Dutch noun *OVERMOED*, which contains the prefix *OVER* (‘an excess of’) and the stem *MOED* (‘courage’). In the Dutch this excess, this over-the-top-ness, is in sharp contrast to the understated feather-light-ness denoted by the adjective. The oxymoron is less explicit in English, but is not lost.

NOT NORMALISED

vrijwillig verdriet (gloss: voluntary sorrow) occurs in the sentence *Op weg naar een bevrijdende oorlog, op weg naar een nieuw huis, een andere vrouw, een vrijwillig verdriet*. The bigram refers to the sorrow that Rob has inflicted on himself: sorrow of his own making such as the sorrow of voluntarily exile. It is contrasted here to the sorrow that Rob feels when his father dies, a sorrow that is not of his own making. This bigram feels oxymoronic because *verdriet* is usually involuntary: it happens to you. The English translation as “free sorrow” in “Bound for a liberating war, a new home, a different woman, **free sorrow**” is not, however, as oxymoronic as the Dutch because *FREE* has a wider range of meanings than *vrijwillig*. To that extent this is a normalising translation. On the other hand, “free” resonates with one of the grander themes of the novel, namely free will, so is a well-chosen word.

NOT NORMALISED

zwierige zelfbedrog (gloss: swirling self-deception) evokes the atmosphere in a casino where elegantly dressed clientele kid themselves that they will win more than they will lose. This bigram has a curious ring to it because *zwierig* is a joyful word and mainly collocates with concrete nouns, in particular with nouns denoting clothes and physical actions. Its top five collocates in nTenTen are *ZOMERJURK* (‘summer dress’); *ZWAAI* (‘wave’/ ‘skirt’), *GEBAAR* (‘gesture’) and *WALS* (‘waltz’). Here, however, *zwierig* has been paired with something more abstract and negative: *zelfbedrog*. This oxymoronic blend of the positive and the negative, and of the sartorial and mental, could perhaps have been captured in English by a bigram containing a similar semantic clash, e.g. *SWIRLING SELF-DECEPTION* or *flamboyant self-deception*. Instead, the translator has opted for “**frivolous self-deception**”. This translation dispenses with the oxymoronic mix. *FRIVOLOUS* is often found in the company of negatively-tinged words like *LAWSUIT*, *LITIGATION*, *SPENDING* and *OVER-SPENDING*, making it a more obvious partner for “self-deception” than *FLAMBOYANT* or *SWIRLING*. However, *FRIVOLOUS* does resonate phonetically with the sartorially-tinged word *FRILLY*, perhaps making the translation feel right.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

6.3.7 Synaesthesia

onkreukbaar wit (gloss: uncreasable/ unimpeachable white) occurs in a passage describing a game of cricket: *Het lome spel van de teams in onkreukbaar wit*. This bigram has been classified as synaesthesia because it combines colour (*wit/white*) with texture (*onkreukbaar*). But more than texture is involved: *onkreukbaar* not only means un-crease-able; it also means incorruptible – i.e. it denotes the absence of creases in both cloth and character. There seems to be no English word that captures both meanings so the sentence has been translated as “The languid play of teams in **impeccable whites**.” In other words it is contrastive differences (as argued by Becher 2011) rather than a purported tendency to normalise would seem to be at play here.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

roffelende zon (gloss: drumming sun) describes the blistering heat of the Japanese camp: *Appèl, in de roffelende zon, trechter van hitte, moordenaar*. Compared to the two examples above, this one is strongly synaesthetic in that *roffelend* is associated with sound (its most common collocate in enTenTen being GELUID) whereas *zon* (‘sun’) involves brightness (sight) and heat (touch). The synaesthesia has been conveyed in English as the unusual and, like the Dutch, assonant “thrumming sun” (in, “Roll call in the **thrumming sun**, funnel of heat, murderer”) despite the availability of SIZZLING SUN (53 hits in enTenTen), which would also have captured the synaesthesia of the Dutch but which would have been a much more conventional and thus normalising option.

NOT NORMALISED

6.4 Denormalisation

Next I discuss seven English creative adjective-noun bigrams which Sketch Engine unearthed independently of the NL->EN parings. These were English bigrams which had 0 hits in enTenTen, and which seemed more quirky than their source text (ST) counterparts, even when the ST counterparts themselves had 0 hits in nITenTen. As explained in Chapter 2, this is because nITenTen is significantly smaller than enTenTen, so judgements concerning creativity do not, and cannot, only depend on frequency in the Sketch Engine corpora. They also depend on Google searches, on the rhetorical make-up of the bigram, and on native speaker intuitions.

6.4.1 Hyperbole

chthonic roar depicts the sound of a storm at sea: “He was pushed flat against the hull of his ship and heard the **chthonic roar** of an unearthly storm.” This “chthonic roar” (which means a roar coming deep from the underworld) corresponds to the more mundane ST bigram *diepe ruisen*, which literally means ‘deep roar’: *Hij werd*

*plat tegen de wand van zijn schip gedrukt en hoorde het **diepe ruisen** van een onaardse storm.* In principle the translator could have opted for the DEEP ROAR, which is less hyperbolic and considerably more frequent than “chthonic roar” in both enTenTen and Google Books. Instead he opted for a denormalising translation.

6.4.2 Metaphor

bolted-down horizon is Garrett’s rendering of the Dutch phrase *besloten horizon* which occurs in a sentence depicting a landscape viewed from a train: *Het kleine afgemeten landschap, hekken zover het oog reikte, dorpjes en kerktorens aan een **besloten horizon**.* The entire sentence has been translated as “The landscape in little blocks, fences as far as the eye could see, villages and steeples on a **bolted-down horizon**.” With 0 hits in nlTenTen and only two hits in Google Books, the Dutch phrase *besloten horizon* is unusual, but the English is even more arresting. Unlike the Dutch word *besloten* (which is an antonym of the Dutch word OPEN, itself frequent modifier of *horizon*) “bolted-down” does not have an antonym which collocates with “horizon”; it is both more noteworthy and more figurative than the Dutch, as opposed to, for instance, the shadow translation BOUNDED HORIZON.

shrivelled expectations occurs in a sentence about the city of Bandung: “Bandung was decay, a playtime of shrivelled expectations.” The bigram is a translation of **vergame verwachtingen** (‘lost/faded expectations’) in *Bandoeng was de ontbinding, een speelkwartier van **vergame verwachtingen**.* Garrett’s translation brings out the visceral qualities of the passage right from the beginning of the sentence. For instance Garrett could have translated *ontbinding* before the comma as CORRUPTION, but instead opted for the more carnal “decay”. The word “decay”, in turn, sets the scene for a carnally tinged translation of the bigram *vergame verwachtingen* as “shriveled expectations”, a creative bigram with zero hits in enTenTen compared to the shadow DIMINISHED EXPECTATIONS, which has 319 hits and which could also have served as a translation.

6.4.3 Personification

crouching life occurs in the sentence “Where the city of Nagasaki had been was only a **crouching life** – those who went there went to stoop, to dig” and corresponds to the unusual Dutch phrase *leven op hurken* in *Waar Nagasaki was geweest was alleen nog een **leven op hurken** – wie daarheen ging ging om te bukken, te graven.* But the English is perhaps even more unusual than the Dutch: in Dutch the personification is expressed as a post-modifying prepositional phrase (*op hurken*), whereas in English the personification is expressed as a pre-modifying adjective (“crouching”), which is

syntactically closer to a noun than a prepositional phrase. The translator could have opted for a less unusual phrase by using a postmodifier like in the Dutch, giving the shadow translation “[...] A LIFE BENT/CROUCHED DOWN.

naked walls occurs in the complex phrase “[Pictures] to keep the naked walls at bay, a reflex from the days of his father who always wanted ‘something on the wall’” and is a translation of [*schilderijen*] om **de kaalte te verdrijven**, reflex uit de tijd van zijn vader die altijd en overal ‘iets aan de muur’ wilde hebben. “Naked walls” is not uncommon, but it is significantly more unusual than BARE WALLS. “Naked” mostly collocates with people, body parts or abstractions (e.g. NAKED TRUTH) whereas BARE modifies a wider range of semantic categories including parts of houses such as CONCRETE, WIRE, FLOOR and WALLS. So BARE WALLS would have been the most obviously idiomatic choice here. The translator’s choice here emphasises the bareness suggested by the solitary noun *kaalte*.

6.4.4 Oxymoron

improper fragrance is a translation of *onbetamelijke geur*, a phrase which occurs in a passage about the smell of a bookshop which reminds Rob of Guus’s father’s study and the university library. The Dutch sentence reads: *Zo rook papier, dit was zoals het vroeger was. De boekenkasten van zijn [Guus’] vader roken zo, van de universiteitsbibliotheek, de onbetamelijke geur van vrije tijd*, and has been translated as “This was how paper smelled, this was how it used to be. His father’s bookshelves smelled like this, the university library, the **improper fragrance** of spare time.”

The English translation “improper fragrance” introduces an element of oxymoron that is not there in the Dutch, making it more quirky than the Dutch. This is how: “improper”, like *onbetamelijk*, has a negative association – its top collocates include ILLEGAL, UNETHICAL and IMMORAL; “fragrance”, by contrast with the neutral Dutch word *geur*, has a positive association – its top collocates include FRUITY, SWEET and PLEASANT.

If “improper fragrance” is slightly contradictory from a semantic point of view, it is extremely unusual from a frequency point of view: it is unattested in both enTenTen and Google Books. More commonplace would have been IMPROPER SMELL, although the translator might have avoided IMPROPER SMELL to avoid repetition (after all the verb SMELL has already been used twice in the same sentence). Whatever the reason, “improper fragrance” is a denormalising translation and, like the other examples in this section, challenges the notion that translators tend to normalise.

6.5 Summary and Discussion

Although short, *De inscheper* is a treasure trove of creative NL bigrams. Using Sketch Engine I discovered 45 creative Dutch bigrams and then 6 English bigrams which were more quirky than their source text counterparts. Of the 45 creative Dutch bigrams, I classified 10 as normalised: the unconventional *verdroomde middag* became “afternoon slumber”; the two transferred epithets *laconieke ogen* and *bevelloze formatie* became the more explicit “carefree look in his eyes” and “in perfect formation without directives”; *ondergrondse dag* lost its ambiguity when it was translated as “day underground”; and the curious personification of *ongeboren uren* was reduced to the commonplace “small hours”.

These five instances of normalisation were thinly spread out over a range of rhetorical categories (catachresis, metaphor, hypallage and personification). But the other five instances of normalisation were concentrated into the category of oxymoron: *droge verbijstering*, which both strongly expresses and conceals emotion, mutated into “shock”; *onderhuidse waardering*, which contains a clash between a negatively charged adjective and a positively charged noun, was smoothed out in translation to “unspoken appreciation”; a similar dynamic was at work with *ongeconroleerde bewondering*, which was rendered as “passionate admiration”; the vaguely oxymoronic mix of warmth and coolness expressed by *opperste genegenheid* was neutralised to “deepest affection”; and finally the compulsive *onwillekeurige tekeningetjes* was toned down to the far-from-compulsive “casual drawings”.

The 10 bigrams discussed so far were relatively clear-cut cases of normalisation. However there were a further 10 examples of apparent normalisation which, upon closer analysis, were ‘mitigated’ by context or co-text: for example *aaneengekloken mars* and *gepantserde wil* were replaced by the more conventional metaphors “armoured march” and “iron will”, but within the context of the sentence it was difficult to do otherwise; the synaesthesia of *onkreukbaar wit* did not lend itself to a non-normalising translation in context – the shadow translation we explored led to a dead end; the normalisation of the disparate collocation *neerduikelende dieren* to “birds tumbling down” seemed to be accounted for by an absence of comparable phonetic primings in English (cf. Hoey 2005). If this case of normalisation was mitigated by an *absence* of primings, there was one case of normalisation which seemed to have been mitigated by the *presence* of primings: namely the translation of *zwierige zelfbedrog* as “frivolous self-deception”. The priming or the association at play here was the phonetic similarity between FRIVOLOUS and FRILLY.

We also encountered creative and quirky Dutch bigrams which sounded almost as if they had been translated from idiomatic English. The most striking example was the unusual metaphor *ijle vriendschap*, translated literally as the stock metaphor

(Newmark 2008) “tenuous friendship”. In other words, we witnessed cases where the literal translation of a creative bigram resulted, paradoxically, in a normalised bigram.

The remaining 25 bigrams had NOT been normalised in translation. For these the translator had found creative solutions – solutions very much in keeping with the overarching themes of the novel: a maritime odyssey of captivity and freewill. In most cases the creative solutions were noteworthy given that they were cases where the NL bigram could have been normalised in English with a readily available conventional synonym or near synonym: for instance Garrett could have used DRIFTING MIND instead of “rudderless mind” for his translation of *stuurloze hoofd*; and he could have used SHEER TALENT instead of “fine-spun talent” for his translation of *haarfijn talent*. Moreover, even when there were no normalising synonyms or near synonyms available, there were often corresponding terms in context which could equally have lured the translator down the path of normalisation. For example Garrett could have written SIZZLING SUN instead of “thrumming sun” for his translation of *roffelende zon*; or FILTERED SUNLIGHT instead of “finely knit sunlight” for his translation of *fijnmazig zonlicht*. The fact that in all these cases the translator opted for the original instead of the stock metaphor (to use Newmark’s terms once again) belies the normalisation hypothesis. It is thanks to Sketch Engine, and particularly the function Word Sketch, that we can generate collocations on a large scale and use them to invent shadow translations, and show *how* the translation challenge the normalisation hypothesis. It takes us beyond Vanderauwera (1985) and even Kenny (2001), who was using corpus techniques.

There were, however, cases where Sketch Engine did not help. These were examples where the shadow translation came very close in frequency to the actual translation; in these cases it was necessary to broaden the search out to Google Books so that these subtle differences became apparent. These broader searches showed how the translator had opted each time for the more arresting or unusual of the two synonyms. Examples were “immaculate vocabulary” instead of the shadow translation IMPECCABLE VOCABULARY, and “gallant bits of flotsam” instead of the shadow translation GALLANT PIECES OF FLOTSAM. These, in their own little way, provided further counter examples to the normalisation hypothesis.

But what we see here is more than just a lack of normalisation. We see great creativity on the part of the translator, comparable to that of the author. For instance, if author Otto de Kat exploited phonetic primings (in, for instance, *neerduikelende dieren*) so too did the translator Sam Garrett. The most salient example was Garrett’s translation of *onverbidelijke eersteklasafdeling* as “implacably first-class section” which, by virtue of its phonetic similarity to the much more common IMPECCABLY FIRST CLASS SECTION, managed to sound deceptively natural. Beyond the exploitation

of primings we also saw instances of highly creative compensation, the most salient example being the translation of *gedwongen burgerpak* as “forced into civilian order”; here a creative oxymoron (i.e. “civilian order”) compensated the loss of a pun. This creativity is perhaps reminiscent of the Chesterman’s rhetoric meme (Chesterman 1997/2015, pp. 21–23) where translators are seen to complete with the original authors in terms of creativity. This meme manifested itself particularly in the six examples of denormalisation given above: the English bigrams which were found independently of the 45 Dutch-English pairings.

In these six examples the translator had taken the inventiveness of the author to further heights, giving rise to what I have termed ‘denormalisation’. These included the arresting metaphor “bolted down horizon”, the personification of “naked walls” and the daring “chthonic roar”. But in contrast to the previous case study, the denormalised bigrams in this case study did not include any transferred epithets (hypallage). I had hypothesised in Chapter 5.5 that the addition of creative hypallage was perhaps inherent to the act of translating from Dutch into English: that it was a technique employed to avoid the clumsy ADVERB+VERB sequence that literal translations from Dutch can occasionally produce. This case study undermines that hypothesis: not only were there no transferred epithets in the set of denormalised EN bigrams, but two of the three NL transferred epithets were actually *normalised* in English (i.e. *bevelloze formatie* and *laconieke ogen*).

Apart from these observations about hypallage, the most striking finding in this case study was the tendency on the part of this translator to normalise oxymora. Half of the normalised bigrams had been oxymora in source text, and a further three bigrams which had not been classified as normalised (i.e. *vederlichte overmoed*, *vrijwillig verdriet* and *zwierige zelfbedrog*) came out as less oxymoronic in translation (although Garrett did create an oxymoron of his own with his “civilian order”). This feels significant in a translation which otherwise showed little tendency to normalise. It is premature to say whether the normalisation of oxymora is a widespread phenomenon, but it is perhaps worth noting that Colmer (otherwise a linguistically inventive translator) normalised two of the four oxymoronic bigrams in his translation of *De helaasheid der dingen*.