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### Tropes in translation

*An analysis of Dutch creative collocations and compounds translated into English*

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# 9

## Case Study 5: *Bonita Avenue*

### 9.1 Background: The Novel and Author

*Bonita Avenue*, Peter Buwalda's debut novel was published in 2010 by Pushkin Press. It is a shocking family drama expressed in sometimes shockingly visceral language. The story, spanning eight years and two continents, narrates the cataclysmic downfall of Siem Sigerius – Rector Magnificus, Fields Medal Laureate, and newly appointed Minister for Education – when he becomes privy to his step daughter and son-in-law's shady internet dealings and embroiled in his son's criminal past. (His step daughter and son-in-law go by the name of Joni and Aaron; his son by the name of Wilbert.)

*Bonita Avenue* was nominated for several major awards, including the Libris Literatuur Prijs (modelled on the Man Booker Prize), and won two debut novel awards, namely the *Academica Debutantenprijs* and the *Selexyz Debuutprijs*. But it was not just the drama of the novel that appealed to the critics; Buwalda's style made something of an impression too as *Trouw*, one of the Dutch national broadsheets, pointed out:

*Al meteen op de eerste pagina's van 'Bonita Avenue', de debuutroman van Peter Buwalda, word je overrompeld door diens stijl. Buwalda vertelt zijn verhaal [...] in lange, bedachtzame zinnen, met beelden die je een bijna fysieke leeservaring bezorgen. „Siem Sigerius was een gedrongen, donkerbehaarde kerel met een stel oren waarnaar je meteen moest kijken; ze waren kroppig, ze leken gefrituurd, en omdat Aaron gejudood had wist hij dat het bloemkooloren waren.” (Trouw, 30 October 2010)*

Right from the very first pages of Peter Buwalda's debut novel *Bonita Avenue* you are overwhelmed by the author's style. Buwalda narrates the story [...] in long carefully-wrought sentences, using images which give rise to an almost physical reading experience: “Siem Sigerius was a stocky, dark-haired fellow with a pair of ears that grabbed your attention; they were lumpy, they looked deep-fried, and Aaron's judo past told him they were cauliflower ears”. (*Trouw* text: my translation. Quotation from *Bonita Avenue*: translated by Jonathan Reeder)

## 9.2 Background: The Translation and Translator

*Bonita Avenue* was translated from the Dutch by Jonathan Reeder and published in English under the same name in 2014 by Pushkin Press, a publisher dedicated to publishing “high-quality writing from around the world” (<https://www.pushkinpress.com/about/>). The translation received some excellent reviews with critic Andrew Cummins of *The Guardian* hailing Reeder’s translation as “note perfect”. *Bonita Avenue* was Reeder’s second published work of translated fiction following *The Cocaine Salesman* by Conny Braam, both of which earned his work a place on the longlist of the high-profile International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, an annual prize worth €100,000.00 for a novel written in, or translated into, English. Although *Bonita Avenue* was only the second novel that Reeder translated, he has had decades of experience translating for concert halls and the opera, with a number of ‘singing librettos’ to his name.

## 9.3 The Translator’s Style – Compounds

Having introduced the writer, the book and the translator, I now turn to the specific focus of this case study, namely Buwalda’s creative language. In contrast to *De helaasheid der dingen*, *De inscheper* and *Sluiterijd* this case study focuses on creative compounds rather than on creative collocations. This is because the aforementioned three novels exhibited little in the way of creative compounds whereas one of the creative hallmarks of Buwalda’s style is his ability to invent startling new words, like, for instance, *kropoor* (‘head-of-lettuce ear’). Moreover, there is a precedent for embracing compounds and collocations within a single monograph, namely Kenny 2001, the study which inspired this one.

These considerations apart, there are theoretical grounds for examining creative collocations together with compounds: according to Lehr (1996, pp. 139–140 in Kenny, 2001, p. 96), ad hoc compounds – compounds invented within the context of creative discourse like a novel – can be treated on a par with collocations because they do not have the same stability as lexicalised compounds or fully-fledged words. Van der Wouden (1992, pp. 452–454) takes things even further, suggesting that all Dutch compounds can be treated on a par with collocations, since collocational ties exist both above and below the level of the word. And within the tradition of generative-transformational grammar the distinction between collocations and compounds is also neutralised (Benczes, 2006, p. 22). Moreover, many of the compounds considered here contain modifiers which have a similar rhetorical function to the modifiers in the adjective-noun bigrams of the other case studies. However, differences remain. One of the differences, as Kenny (2001, p. 97) contends, is that “creative writers attempt to confer a more universal status upon

singular events or situations by providing a ‘word’ for those events or situations, and although unusual collocations are startling in themselves, they are startling in a different way to unusual, ad hoc compounds.” To understand Kenny’s point, consider Buwalda’s compound *slagroomknieën* (whipped cream knees): this compound creates the impression that the whipped cream is somehow a permanent feature of the knees rather than a substance accidentally dolloped all over them (which could have been denoted by the phrase *met slagroom bedekte knieën*).

Whatever our view on the relationship between collocations and compounds (defined here as “morphologically complex construction that contains at least two elements that can otherwise occur as free forms” (Benczes 2006, p.199)),<sup>59</sup> Buwalda’s novel provides a wealth of creative compounds – compounds which would pose a challenge to any translator, and it seems therefore only fitting to make these the focus of this case study.

One of the reasons why compounds pose such a challenge to translators is because they give rise to an uneven playing field between Dutch and English. The *Oxford Handbook of Compounding* notes:

Dutch is famous for its productive compound formation. Dutch native speakers easily make new compounds on the spot, and they also easily embed compounds in compounds, leading to sometimes rather complex structures. (Don, 2011, p. 1 in Rochelle Lieber and Pavol Štekauer, 2011)

Although there is no universal agreement as to how much ‘better’ Dutch is at compound formation than English,<sup>60</sup> there are theoretical (e.g. morphophonological) and empirical grounds for arguing that the difference is significant. From a morphophonological point of view Dutch has a number of linking elements (<-e>, <-s> and <-en>) which, according to Mukai (2013), facilitates compounding;<sup>61</sup> from an empirical point of view, Dutch (translated from German) has also been shown to contain a significantly higher percentage of compounds than English translated from the same German texts, even taking into account the possible influence of cognates

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59 This definition actually works better for English than for Dutch. In Dutch the constituent elements do not always look like free forms, so can better be viewed as stems. But this fact does not affect our argument.

60 Actually, when it comes to recursion Donalies (2005, p. 61 in Noninckx, 2015, p. 10) argue that Dutch is less compound sensitive than English, e.g. NL OVERDRACHT VAN DE BEWAKINGSOPGAVE VOOR DE ETIKETTERING VAN RUNDVLEES versus EN BEEF LABELLING SUPERVISION DUTIES DELEGATION LAW.

61 Although this does not immediately concern us here it is worth noting too that Dutch compounds are almost always concatenated orthographically into a single word. This is in contrast to English where compounds can be written as a single word (e.g. FOOTBALL), a hyphenated word (e.g. ICE-AXE), or as two separate words (HEAVY METAL as in the ‘music’). Moreover, in English the orthographic rules are by no means stable (Crystal, 2003, p. 61).

(Noninckx, 2015). In Noninckx's survey of 400 German nominal compounds, she found that 64% of them had been translated into Dutch by means of a compound whereas only 40% had been translated into English by means of a compound. This corroborated earlier findings by Ermlich (2004), Campe (2008), and De Metsenaere et al. (2014). Moreover, all four studies taken together suggest that the relative ease of compound formation in Dutch compared to English holds constant across text types (i.e. in both informative and literary fiction).

We can safely say, therefore, that Reeder was faced by a double challenge when he translated *Bonita Avenue* into English: first the productivity of Dutch compounds in general; second, the creativity of Buwalda's compounds in particular.

#### 9.4 The Classification of Compounds

Now that I have motivated the inclusion of creative compounds into this PhD thesis, which otherwise focuses on creative collocations, and now that I have hinted at the added challenge which compounds pose, I will briefly discuss how I went about classifying the creative compounds from *Bonita Avenue* into rhetorical categories.

When it comes to the (sub-)classification of compounds there is a wealth of literature to fall back on. Some commentators allow their analysis to proceed along syntactic lines, others along semantic lines (Benczes, 2006, p. 16), while many appeal to both syntactic and semantic criteria. For example, Bloomfield 1933 introduced a distinction between syntactically endocentric and syntactically exocentric compounds but also between semantically endocentric and semantically exocentric compounds.

Jespersen (1954, pp. 148–150) invented an extensive sub-classification system using a motley array of semantic terms like 'time' (e.g. DAYDREAM, a dream that takes place in the day); 'sex identification' (e.g. GIRLFRIEND, BOYFRIEND); 'equality of rank' (e.g. FELLOW-CREATURE); and 'pars-pro-toto' (e.g. BLUE-BEARD). But he also appealed to formal syntactic categories like 'prepositional' (e.g. MOTHER-OF-PEARL) and 'appositional' (e.g. LADY-FRIEND).

Almost twenty years later Adams (1973/2013) came up with an extensive classification of her own, rigorously based on word-class categories like adverb-adjective; adverb-verb(ing); noun-verb(ed), and noun-verb(ed) etc.. But like Jespersen she too crossed the syntactico-semantic line by also appealing to functional categories such as 'instrumental', 'locative', 'comparative' and 'intensifying'. After Adams, Downing (1977, p. 810) proposed a more pragmatic approach to classification, arguing that "the appropriateness of a given relationship depends on the use to which the compound will be put."

The last three paragraphs are, of course, no more than a mini-glimpse at how compounds were variously classified over the course of half a century, but they contain one mega-lesson: there is often more than one (logical) relation pertaining between the elements of a compound. Thus, for example, although Jespersen classifies *LADY-FRIEND* as ‘appositional’, he could equally well have grouped it under the (logically incompatible) category of ‘sex identification’ along with *GIRLFRIEND* and *BOYFRIEND*.

Ironically, this fuzziness was noted decades before even Bloomfield embarked upon his analysis of compounds. As early as 1891 and in a move almost prescient of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (see Chapter 3.3 and 3.4), the legendary Henry Sweet wrote:

It must, indeed, be borne in mind that this very vagueness [of compounds] is the chief reason why composition is resorted to: it is only by leaving open the logical relations between the elements of compounds that we are able to form them as we want them without stopping to analyse exactly the logical or grammatical relations between the words we join together, as we might have to do if we connected them together by more definite means, such as prepositions or inflections. (Sweet, 1891, §1560)

If this holds for compounds in general, then surely it must hold for creative compounds in particular.

Indeed it is this vagueness which Benczes (2005, p. 251) calls the “chaos” of compound classification. In response to this “chaos” (e.g. the endocentric/exocentric dichotomy being too general; the minutiae of syntactic classification being too specific and unsuited to the “vagueness [...] of] the logical relations between elements of compounds” (Adams 1973/2013, p. 89)) Benczes proposes to look at (creative) compounds through the more inherently nebulous lens of metaphor and metonymy, an approach which I will be following. Please note, however, that Benczes’ agenda is completely different to mine; Benczes’ analysis of compounds in terms of metaphor and metonymy is fuelled by her commitment to conceptual metaphor theory (for a full account see Benczes, 2006). I, on the other hand, am adopting this approach in an attempt to investigate rhetorical or literary tropes in translation. This means that I will go beyond Benczes two categories of metaphor and metonymy (as I did with the other case studies) to include tropes like personification and oxymoron, but I will, of course, not escape the fuzziness which beset the other approaches (see Chapter 3).

## 9.5 The Data

Using the techniques described in Chapter 2.5.2 and 2.5.3, I generated a word list from *Bonita Avenue* and then extracted all those which had zero hits in the reference corpus nITenTen. Of these, I judged 47 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 compound in question was figurative, i.e. whether it contained a rhetorical trope. As with all the other case studies, judgements here involved an element of subjectivity.

In addition to the 47 creative Dutch compounds, I also found seven creative English compounds which were the translations of more prosaic Dutch forms. These were the so-called ‘denormalised’ compounds, which I discovered using the reverse test for normalisation described in Chapter 2.8.

All the compounds have been categorised in terms of rhetorical tropes and are discussed in Sections 9.5.1–9.5.6 and 9.6 below. The same compounds are also listed alphabetically in Appendix 5, along with information regarding word counts in the reference corpora.

### 9.5.1 Catachresis

*doodgemokerd* (gloss: sledgehammered to death) is formed from the adjective *dood* (‘dead’) and the verb *mokeren* (‘to hammer’), which in turn is derived from the noun *moker* (‘sledgehammer’). The compound crops up in the sentence *Hij [Sigerius] heeft een zoon die een man heeft doodgemokerd*, and is translated as “[He has] a son who **bashed** a man **to death**”. The translation feels less exotic than the original, and the empirical data confirms this. A concordance search for the verb *BASH* in combination with *DEATH* yielded 156 hits. A concordance search for the verb *HAMMER* in combination with *DEATH* yields 151 hits. But a concordance search for the verb *SLEDGEHAMMER* in combination with *DEATH* yields only one result (not surprisingly given that “sledgehammer” is an uncommon verb), namely: *MY OLD BUDDY . . . BOUGHT A MAC LAST WEEK AND SLEDGEHAMMERED HIS PC TO DEATH*. The less conventional phrase *TO SLEDGEHAMMER SOMEONE TO DEATH* is clearly possible and could have been used here instead of “bashed”. But phonetically my shadow translation does not work: it loses the assonance of *bash-man*, which had mimicked the assonance in *doodgemokerd*.  
NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

*eetgraag* (gloss: ‘eatative’) is an original compound formed by analogy with the common compound *praatgraag* (‘talkative’). Aaron uses the word when he

describes a confrontation he had in a hospital canteen with a man wearing clogs: *Daar staat hij, op z'n klompjes, met z'n anabolenrug naar me toe, ingeklemd tussen allerlei ander eetgraag volk, en hij schuift een dienblad langs de vitrines van dat zelfbedieningsding. Ik loop naar hem toe.*<sup>62</sup> It has been translated as “There he was in those clogs, his anabolic back to me, wedged in between the rest of the **grazers** shuffling along the lucite display cases with a tray in his hands. I walk over to him.” “Grazers”, whilst not itself a creative compound, introduces a creative metaphor into the sentence, given that the noun GRAZER normally refers to herbivorous animals, typically cows: its top collocates enTenTen include HERBIVOROUS, LARGE-BODIED and SHORT GRASS.

NOT NORMALISED

*harenwringend* (gloss: hair-wringing) is a term that Aaron uses as he recalls Joni nervously wringing out her wet hair when they were on holiday. This recollection is triggered by Joni walking out on Aaron for good. *‘Weet je wat?’ had ze gezegd terwijl ze harenwringend naar hem toe was gelopen en haar snorkel en flippers voor zijn voeten gooide, ‘ik wil naar huis [...]’* What makes *harenwringend* unusual is that it resonates with the common Dutch compound *handenwringend* (hands-wringing). As such it adds torment to the act of wringing out one’s hair. The sentence has been translated as “‘You know what?’ she had said as she walked over to him, **wringing out her hair**, and tossing her flippers and snorkel at his feet, ‘I want to go home.’” The compound has been under-translated as a straight-forward phrasal verb “wringing out her hair”, rather than as the less common form WRINGING HER HAIR.

NORMALISED

*kapotgezworen* (gloss: ulcerated broken) This compound is formed from the adjective *kapot* (‘broken’) and the past participle of the verb *zweren* (‘to ulcerate’), and is used by Wilbert to describe a rotten nerve in his face. It occurs in the sentence *Die van mij is kapotgezworen*, rendered into English as “Mine **festered itself kaput**”. This translation combines the loanword “kaput” (a cognate of *kapot*) and the uncommon reflexive “fester itself” (of the almost 14,000 instances of “fester” in enTenTen15, only one was reflexive). All in all, this is a daring translation, given that the translator could have opted more conventionally for FESTERED AWAY.

NOT NORMALISED

*kindervloekje* (gloss: child curse) refers to a mild swearword that Joni uses to play down a gross situation: *Ik zei geloof ik ‘godsie’, op lichtverbaasde toon. Een*

62 The compound *anabolenrug* is discussed in 9.5.4 below.

*vriendelijk kindervloekje*. It has been translated as the zero-frequency compound in “I think I said something like ‘jeepers’, in a slightly surprised tone. A mild **kiddie-curse**”, even though the compound could have been normalised with a hyponym like LITTLE CURSE. Note too how the diminutive <-ie> of the word “kiddie” reflects the diminutive in the word *vloekje*.

NOT NORMALISED

*kutjepikandijvie* (gloss: cunt-cock-endive) is one of Wilbert’s swearwords – one extracted from his sensational repertoire of swearwords: *Maar Wilbert vindt vanaf minuut één alles ‘kutjepikandijvie’ of ‘fuckjes’ of ‘zaad’ of ‘hoeren’ of gewoon ‘kut’ als hem iets niet meteen lukt, er is geen houden aan*. This swearword is in stark contrast to Jonie’s “kiddie-curse”. The translation (“Wilbert calls everything “**cocksucker**” or “fucked” or “jism” or “ho” or just “shit”, there’s no stopping him”) captures the contrast but does so with the conventional term of abuse “cocksucker” instead of with a surrealistic, and funny, compound.

NORMALISED

*plopperzwaardje* (gloss: plunger sword) refers to the small Indonesian sword, or cutlass, that Sigerius’s father kept hidden under his bed. *Onder z’n bed lag zo’n, hoe heet het, zo’n plopperzwaardje, een klewang, en als jullie moe-der of ik...* The first noun in the compound - *plopper* - is a derogatory term for an Indonesian, and the insult has been transferred replicated in English as “wog-“ to form the unusual compound “wog-cutlass” in “Under his bed he had a, watchamacallit, one a them **wog-cutlasses**, a ‘klewang’, and if your mother or me...” A normalising translation might simply have used the hypernym to give ONE OF THEM CUTLASSES.

NOT NORMALISED

*poepzitten* (gloss: poop-sitting), a term invented by a young minor character in the book, means resisting the urge to defecate by pushing back. It occurs in the sentence *Poepzitten, zo noemde de kleine smeerpip dat*, and has been translated literally as “**Poop-sitting**, that’s what the little stinker called it.” This odd Dutch compound could have been ironed out to SITTING ON YOUR POOP, but was instead translated as an unusual English compound.

NOT NORMALISED

*rectorenschedel* (gloss: rector-skull) refers to Sigerius’s head in the sentence *op zijn rectorenschedel, onder zijn kortgeknipte, licht grijzende haar, bewoog er [een spier]*. The oddity here derives from the excess of words letting us know who the head

belongs to: first *zijn* then *rectoren-*. This is conveyed in English by an odd double genitive, “**his** rector’s skull” in “on **his rector’s skull** under that cropped, slightly greying hair, [a little muscle moved]”. If the translator had used a conventional single genitive instead, i.e. ON THE RECTOR’S SKULL, the effect would not have been preserved. (It should be noted too that *-rectoren* functions here as an unusual classifying adjective, as if a *rectorenschedel* was a type of skull; and that the use of the double genitive in English also turns “rector’s” into a classifying adjective).

NOT NORMALISED

*stiefteefje* (gloss: step-bitch) is the term of abuse with which Wilbert (Sigerius’s son) insults Joni (Sigerius’s step daughter): ‘*Wie had je hier dan verwacht, rukker? Je stiefteefje?*’ With zero hits in the reference corpus it is unusual in Dutch, and has been translated into the equally unusual “stepwhore” in “Who’d you expect, wanker? Your stepwhore?”. The translator has opted for a creative compound here, even though plenty of conventional alternatives were possible, such as THAT BITCH OF A STEPDAUGHTER OF THAT WHORE JONI.

NOT NORMALISED

### 9.5.2 Hyperbole

*hongerbekkens en -nek* (gloss: hunger-pelvises and -necks) occurs in a sentence featuring the hulking student Murk, who presides over the student bar: [*Murk*] *verdedigde [...] als een bleke Hulk de lange trap naar de kroeg, vloekend en brullend, zijn kwabbige blote bovenlijf druipend van de bakolie, zijn armen om de **hongerbekkens en -nekjes** van benauwde achttienjarigen die zich alles anders hadden voorgesteld*. The Dutch hyphenated compound conflates two noun-noun compounds, *hongerbekkens* (‘hunger-pelvises’) and *hongernekjes* (‘hunger-necks’), and resonates with the common Dutch compound *hongerbuik* (‘hunger-belly’) — a word used to describe the bloated bellies of famine-afflicted children. Although the translator softens the hyperbole here by using the high-frequency phrase “skinny hips [and neck]”, he makes up for this later in the sentence by rendering *achttienjarigen* as “eighteen-year-old runts”, where runt reintroduces the hyperbole. The full translation reads: “Murk defended the long staircase to the bar like a pale-skinned Hulk, cursing and screaming, his blubbery bare torso dripping with deep-frying oil, his arms around the **skinny hips and necks** of frightened eighteen-year-old runts who had envisioned something completely different.”

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

### 9.5.3 Metaphor

**aflaatparels** (gloss: penance pearls). When Sigerius gives his wife a pearl bracelet to make up for his sins, she says: *Dit zijn aflaatparels, één parel staat gelijk aan een jaar minder vagevuur*. The Catholic image has been preserved in the translation as the zero-frequency compound “penance pearls” in “These are **penance pearls**, a single pearl is equal to one year less of purgatory.” Note too how the assonance in the Dutch (aflaatparels becomes alliteration in the English (**p**enance **p**earls).

NOT NORMALISED

**appelstroopogen** (gloss: apple-syrup eyes) depicts the look of feigned innocence on porn star Bobbi’s face, and occurs in the sentence *moeten we haar geloven op haar appelstroopogen?* It is translated as “are we supposed to believe this doe-eyed skank?”. Although “doe-eyed” captures her look of feigned innocence, it is a conventional image, with 819 hits in enTenTen. In theory the compound could have been translated literally as the zero-frequency compound APPLE-SYRUP EYES but apple-syrup is not culturally familiar. Moreover, the English co-text compensates for the loss: the word “skank” to the immediate right of “doe-eyed” reintroduces an element of surprise because “doe-eyed” does not usually collocate with negative words like “skank” but rather with positive words such as INNOCENCE, VIRGIN AND HEROINE. In other words, the loss of original metaphor has been compensated with the addition of an oxymoron.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

**baantjeskannibaal** (gloss: job cannibal) is a word Kannegieter, a politician, uses to describe Sigerius. In doing so he is taking a poke at Sigerius’s political ambitions: *‘Toehappen,’ zei Kannegieter. Jij hapt altijd toe, ouwe baantjeskannibaal, had hij gedacht*. This has been translated as “‘Grab it,’ Kannegieter said. *You* always grab it, you old **vulture**, he thought.” There is normalisation here in the sense that the zero frequency compound *baantjeskannibaal* has been translated into the relatively common word “vulture”, which has 40,115 hits in enTenTen. Moreover, out of a random selection of 20 concordance lines, 17 showed “vulture” being used metaphorically to refer to humans e.g. “The people running this website are vultures preying on vulnerable people who are desperately looking for help”. A possible shadow translation here might have been CAREER SHARK, with only one hit in enTenTen.

NORMALISED

**Bobbi-diertje** (gloss: bobbi-pet/small animal) is Joni’s nickname for a porn star she works with (the one with the *appelstroopogen* [see above]): *Waar ik het vereiste sadisme vandaan had gehaald hield ik wijselijk voor me, het **Bobbi-diertje** dat met haar wang tegen mijn schouder lag zou het misschien niet eens begrepen hebben.* The compound *Bobbi-diertje* combines the proper name *Bobbi* with the common noun *diertje* (‘pet’), a term which dehumanises the woman. This dehumanising and unusual syntactic effect is reflected in the translation as the unusual and euphonic compound *Bobbi-doll*, even though the translator could have opted for the hypernym *DOLL*, which would have had a normalising effect. Reeder’s translation of the entire sentence reads: “Where I mustered up the requisite sadism, I was wise enough not to divulge; that **Bobbi-doll** with her cheek resting on my shoulder might not have even understood.”

NOT NORMALISED

**doodshoofdslank** (gloss: skull-thin) is a complex compound formed from the word *doodshoofd* (itself a compound meaning ‘skull’<sup>63</sup>) and the word *slank* (‘thin’). It occurs in the phrase *het overdadig opgemaakte, doodshoofdslanke gezicht, keek onthutst en verheugd tegelijk*. It depicts the frighteningly aged face of a woman Joni sees for the first time after many years. The compound has been translated as “skeletal” in “overly made-up, **skeletal** face emanated delight and dismay at the same time”, when perhaps a compound like *SKULL-THIN* could have been used instead.

NORMALISED

**gedachtenbrand** (gloss: thought-fire/blaze) denotes a head-splitting migraine, and occurs in the following passage narrated by Joni: *Ik zette mijn zonnebril op, maar het razende geflakker zat aan de binnenkant, het was **gedachtenbrand**.* This creative compound has been rendered as the original compound “thoughtburn” rather than by an explanatory phrase like *BLISTERING MIGRAINE*, *BURNING MIGRAINE* or, more freely, *THROBBING MIGRAINE*. The English version of the complete sentence reads: “I put on my sunglasses, but the frenzied flickering was on the inside: **thoughtburn**.”

NOT NORMALISED

**kleuter-Rembrandt** (gloss: infant Rembrandt) is a rather nebulous term used to refer to the artistic ambitions of one of the minor characters as Joni recalls: *Ik zag hem staan op die olympische heuvel, zijn **kleuter-Rembrandt** warmpjes in zijn rug, Los Angeles aan zijn voeten, wegdromend over een eigen museum.* (“I could just

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63 *Doodshoofd* with only 662 hits in the reference corpus is used less frequently than *schedel*, which has 11,827 hits in the reference corpus.

see him up on that Olympic mount, his **toddler-Rembrandt** glowing at his back, Los Angeles spread out at his feet, daydreaming of his very own museum.”) The metaphor is kept in its translation as “toddler-Rembrandt” without any explicitation.

NOT NORMALISED

**koortsmail** (gloss: fever-mail) occurs in the phrase *een schrikbarende koortsmail die hij in zijn verzonden items had aangetroffen*. It refers to an email that Aaron sent to Joni, and has been translated as “a disturbing **panic-mail** he’d discovered in his Sent box”. Interestingly *koortsmail* has been translated with the inventive compound “panic-mail”, when a number of normalising alternatives were available, such as the shadow translations PANICKY EMAIL OR FEVERISH EMAIL. What makes “panic-mail” unusual is (1) that it is hyphenated and (2) that it is preceded by an indefinite article, given that MAIL is usually uncountable.

NOT NORMALISED

**kropoor** (gloss: head-of-lettuce ear) is the unique term Buwalda uses to describe what is commonly called a *bloemkooloor* in Dutch and a ‘cauliflower ear’ in English: a fibrous deformation of the ear that afflicts sportsmen who have suffered too many blows to the ear. The significance of the ear is that Sigerius, the anti-hero of the novel, has one and, as the narrator says, *je moet zo’n kropoor verdienen*. In translation this phrase becomes: “you had to earn **ears like that**”. The translation of the creative compound *kropoor* into its hyponym “ear” is obviously normalising. And yet it is difficult to find a solution as succinct as *kropoor* to slip into the idiomatic phrase, “you had to earn ... like that”. I have played with the shadow translation CABBAGE EAR AS IN YOU HAD TO EARN A CABBAGE EAR LIKE THAT, but I am not sure that it works.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

**ramplaneetje** (gloss: catastrophe-little-planet) occurs in a sentence describing Aaron’s hometown, Enschede, after the firework explosion catastrophe: *De lucht op zijn ramplaneetje was anders gezegd nogal ijl, hij werd er licht van in z’n hoofd*. What makes this compound unusual – as well as belittling – is the diminutive: in its non-diminutive form, the compound *ramplaneet* is far more frequent. Although the bigram could have been normalised to calamity planet, its unusualness has been captured in translation as the conspicuously hyphenated compound “calamity-planetoid”. This translation not only captures the diminutive, it also has a hard edge to it, in keeping with Buwalda’s style in general. The entire sentence reads: “The air on his **calamity-planetoid** was, to put it otherwise, rarefied, and it made him light-headed.”

NOT NORMALISED

*raviolineus* (gloss: ravioli-nose) describes the shape of the nose of an aggressive minor character. Its translation as the zero-frequency “**ravioli-nose**” preserves the metaphor completely. A normalising translation might have softened the metaphor by turning it into the simile RAVIOLI-LIKE NOSE or by replacing the metaphor with a literal description like FLATTENED NOSE.

NOT NORMALISED

*schollenmond* (gloss: plaice-mouth) is an unusual compound that resonates with the old-fashioned insult *schollenkop* (a derogatory term for a fisher-wife). *Schollenmond* is used here to refer to the act of stupidly blurting something out, in: *ik [was] bang [...] dat Rusty zijn schollenmond voorbij had gekletst*. Reeder has translated this as “flounder mouth in: “I was afraid [...] that Rusty had shot off that **flounder-mouth** of his”. The translation profits from the fact that “flounder”, when used as a verb, also means ‘to blunder’. If the translator had been tempted to normalise here he could have opted for a more general phrase like BIG MOUTH, although this would have been a very flat translation.

NOT NORMALISED

*woordkak* (gloss: word-crap) describes Aaron’s panicky verbal outpouring after Sigerius discovers his deep dark secret. It comes at the end of the phrase, *toen begon hij te jemieëren, zonder dat hij er invloed op had stroomden de bezwerende clichés uit zijn mond, woordkak, waterige drab...*. This is translated as “Then he launched into a lamentation, an uncontrolled stream of clichés, **verbal diarrhoea...**”. The couplet *woordkak, waterige drab* has been conflated into the single collocation “verbal diarrhoea”, which has 221 hits in enTenTen. But Dutch has an equivalent expression, namely VERBALE DIARREE, with nineteen hits in the reference corpus, as opposed to zero for *woordkak*. A non-normalising translation could have been something like WORD-CRAP, WATERY MUCK.

NORMALISED

#### 9.5.4 Metonymy

*anabolenrug* (gloss: anabolic back) is a compound we met earlier in 9.5.1 (in connection with *eetgraag*). And as we already saw, this compound had been translated closely as “**anabolic back**”, preserving the metonymy of the ST: the muscly back is anabolic by association with the anabolic steroids that make it so muscly. But unlike many of the compounds we have looked at so far, this one has not been translated as a hyphenated compound, but as a more loosely connected adjective-noun bigram. It would not have been easy, however, to translate *anabolenrug* into

a compound in English. It would have produced clunky shadow translations like ANABOLICS-BACK OF ANABOLIC-STEROIDS-BACK. Besides, this compound has clearly not been normalised in English: the translator did not opt for a normalising translation like MUSCULAR BACK OF HULKING BACK.

NOT NORMALISED

*chutneyboer* (gloss: chutney-seller) is a term Aaron uses to refer to the owner of a local delicatessen, and occurs in the sentence *Voor even geen teisterende fantasieën over haar escapades met de chutneyboer, voor even maakte hij zich geen zorgen over Stol en z'n McKinsey, maar verlossing kon je het niet noemen*. It is scathing in its particularity, labelling the shop owner only in terms of a single thing he sells. Its translation as “chutney-hawker” in “For now at least, no tormenting fantasies about her escapades with the **chutney-hawker**, for now no agonising about Stol and McKinsey, but you could hardly call it a solace” matches the original in terms of specificity and nastiness. A normalising, translation might have been the hypernym GROCER.

NOT NORMALISED

*drieletterafasie* (gloss: three-letter-aphasia) refers to the family’s aversion to swear words (the worst Dutch swear words contain three letters rather than four!) and occurs in the sentence *Janis en ik raakten ogenblikkelijk behept met drieletterafasie*. Although the metonymy has been lost (in Dutch the three letters stand by association for swearwords), its translation as “cuss-aphasia” in “Janis and I were struck dumb with **cuss-aphasia**” has zero hits in both enTenTen and Google Books, and is an unusual compound.

NOT NORMALISED

*druipsmoel* (gloss: dripping gob) refers the mouth of Wilbert, Siem’s profligate son and occurs in the phrase *Was die scheve druipsmoel niet eerder een Godsbewijs [...]? God had bepaald dat hij door het leven moest als het cliché van een moordenaar*. The compound is made up of verb stem of DRUIPEN (‘drip’/ ‘trickle’) and the informal noun *smoel* (‘face’/ ‘trap’/ ‘gob’). Like the noun-noun compounds *mayonaisevingers* and *slagroomknieën* we will meet below, this compound creates the impression that the modifier is a permanent property of the head noun. This effect is persevered here in English where *druipsmoel* is translated as “dribble-gob” in “Wasn’t that twisted **dribble-gob** more proof of God than not? [...] God had determined that he should go through life as the cliché murderer.” A normalising translation might have turned the compound into a phrase like DRIBBLING GOB. But the translator opted for a less usual alternative.

NOT NORMALISED

*feestjopen* (gloss: party-boobs) crops up in boyish banter about Joni: *altijd die feestjopen tegen je aan*. It has been translated by the low frequency hyphenated compound “party-knockers” in “forever pressing those **party-knockers** against you”. The metonymy has also been kept: A normalising translation might have omitted the first element of the compound and simplified it to **KNOCKERS**.

NOT NORMALISED

*kinokussen* (gloss: kino kissing) is an obscure compound referring to a type of kiss: in fact, it is so obscure that even the original Dutch comes clad with an explanation: *Het meisje heette Julie, ze had pluizig bruin haar en leerde hem ergens in dit bos wat zij ‘kinokussen’ noemde; twee geopende vissenmonden die elkaar vochtig beademden*. The compound is translated directly (by means of a loanword) and is equally obscure in English: “The girl was named Julie, she had fluffy brown hair and taught him, somewhere in these woods, how to **kino-kiss**: two wide-open fish mouths that exchanged moist air, like in the movies. But there is a difference: the English version come with an additional explanatory phrase “like in the movies”. Given this additional explanation, “kino” could have been omitted from the English translation, leaving just “kiss”. But the translator chose not to do this, and instead opted for an unusual compound.

NOT NORMALISED

*lik-op-stuk-oor* (gloss: tit-for-tat ear) is another of Buwalda’s unique compounds built around the word *oor* (‘ear’). Here it is used to describe Sigerius playing with his ear as he pauses for thought in a conversation about a fight: Sigerius is in favour of fighting back no matter what! The Dutch phrase reads: *met zijn vrijgekomen hand bepotelde hij zijn misvormde lik-op-stuk-oor*. *Lik-op-stuk* comes close to the English phrase ‘tit-for-tat’ and usually forms part of a compound with the Dutch word **BELEID** (‘policy’) or **AANPAK** (‘approach’, ‘method of attack’). Here it has been translated as “**zero-tolerance ear**” in “with his now-free hand he strokes his deformed **zero-tolerance ear**”. This unusual English compound keeps the metonymy, although it does not feel as visceral as the Dutch. I have agonised over shadow translations for this compound but cannot think of any adequate alternatives.

NOT NORMALISED

*mayonaisevingers* (gloss: mayonnaise-fingers) is not as unusual as the other compounds in this category but has been included here because of the metonymy: the expression implies that the mayonnaise is somehow a permanent property of the fingers rather than just covered in mayonnaise. The fingers in question belong to

the young Wilbert (Sigerius' profligate son) who, expecting to see his father, *kneep [...] met zijn mayonaisevingers in zijn volle lippen van de spanning, maar het was zijn vader niet [...], het waren twee politieagenten in vol ornaat*. In translation, the metonymy has been converted into a more literal expression: “Wilbert clamped his **mayonnaise-covered fingers** around his full lips in anticipation, but it wasn't his father, it was two uniformed policemen.”

NORMALISED

*Siemzegg*ers (gloss: siem-sayer) is what Buwalda calls the Siem Sigerius' sycophantic followers in the sentence *Met een stuk of tien andere Siemzegg*ers bewoonden Knaak en Van der Doelen een patriciërshuis aan de Oldenzaalsestraat. It is metonymic in that the name refers to those people by virtue of something they do (i.e. kowtowing to Siem, and calling him Siem). The compound is built by analogy with the word *oomzegger* (uncle-sayer, i.e. a niece or a nephew), and has been preserved in translation as “Siemsayers” in “Knaak and Van der Doelen lived with about ten other **Siemsayers** in a swanky town house on the Oldenzaalstraat”

NOT NORMALISED

*slagroomknieën* (gloss: whipped-cream knees) occurs in a passage describing a fight at a party during which whipped-cream was hurled across a room: *Mijn slagroomknieën op zijn vette schouders, Scotty klapte achterover, ik zat boven op hem, ik sloeg en krabde, en ik schreeuwde, half in het Engels, half in het Nederlands*. It has been translated as “My **whipped-cream knees** on his fat shoulders, Scotty fell over backwards, I was on top of him, clawing and beating him, and screamed, half in English, half in Dutch. “Unlike *mayonaisevingers*, *slagroomknieën* has been translated literally, thereby preserving the suggestion that the cream is a defining characteristic of the knees rather than a substance accidentally covering the knees. In other words, the metonymy has been kept.

NOT NORMALISED

*verradersluchtje* (gloss: traitor's smell) are the words of an enraged Wilbert to his sister Joni: *Ik had je gó dverdomme aan repen gesneden, geloof dat maar. Ik róók je, je verradersluchtje. Ik rook je braafheid, je trouw aan je papa, je trouw aan je nestje, je –'*. This unusual compound has been translated hyponymically as Judas-smell in the sentence “I should have *fucking* slashed you to ribbons when I had the chance. I *smelt* you, your **Judas-smell**. I got a whiff of that goody- two-shoes, your loyalty to Daddy, loyalty to your safe little nest, your—”. The translator's creativity

here is all the more noteworthy given that he could have opted for the shadow translation I SMELT YOUR DECEIT, instead of the creative compound “Judas-smell”.

NOT NORMALISED

*vijftigersbuik* (gloss: someone-in-his-fifties’ belly) refers to Sigerius’s spreading belly and crops up in a phrase describing his shocking nakedness: *met onder zijn voorzichtig bollende vijftigersbuik duidelijk zichtbaar zijn geslachtsdelen*. This compound has been translated as “fifty-plus belly” in the phrase “his genitals clearly visible under his cautiously rounded **fifty-plus belly**”, which is also a low-frequency compound. But the English compound is even more metonymic than the Dutch compound because the age (fifty-plus) is associated directly with the belly rather with the person who owns it (as in the genitive construction *vijftigers*). Had the translator wanted to normalise the Dutch here, he could have resorted to something like MIDDLE-AGED PAUNCH.

NOT NORMALISED

*vuurwerkvuistjes* (gloss: firework-fists) occurs in the sentence *Sigerius’ oren leken geamputeerde vuurwerkvuistjes* (the Enschede fireworks disaster is a recurrent theme in the book). The English translation “Sigerius’s ear resembled amputated **firework fists**” preserves the image and uses a collocation that is unusual in English too. Had Reeder wanted to normalise this, the phrase could have been explicitated.

NOT NORMALISED

*zaadbalie* (gloss: sperm-counter) is the metonymic name given to the checkout counter in a lugubrious sex-shop that Sigerius furtively enters. It occurs in the sentence *De lucht van plastic videobanden, mannezweet, vloerbedekking. De lucht van zaaád. De pissebed achter z’n zaadbalie*. The creative compound has been kept in translation, with added alliteration (**cum-counter**), which could be seen as a counterpart to the assonance in the Dutch (**zaadbalie**). The entire English sentence reads: “The smell of plastic videotapes, man sweat, carpeting. The smell of *semen*. The louse behind his **cum-counter**.”

NOT NORMALISED

### 9.5.5 Oxymoron

*cijferdichters* (gloss: number-poets) describes the passionate mathematicians who Sigerius associated with in the US: *In Berkeley en Boston leefde hij voor getallen. De mannen van zijn soort heetten nu Quillen en Wiles en Erdős, skeletachtige cijferdichters van doorschijnend rijstpapier die zichzelf in de nok van hun schedeldak*

*hadden teruggetrokken*. In translation, the oxymoronic rational-poetic combination is softened to the less contradictory compound “digi-poets”: “In Berkeley and Boston he lived for numbers. Men of his ilk were now named Quillen and Wiles and Erdős, skeletal **digi-poets** made of translucent rice paper who had retreated into the furthest reaches of their own cranium. “Digi” has a far broader range of referents than *cijfer*. Apart from numerical digits, “digi” (short for ‘digital’) can also refer generally to the digital age. A “digi-poet” thus is a relatively frequently used term to refer to poets who produce and display their work electronically. A possible shadow translation, one that would capture the contradiction of the Dutch might have been MATH POETS, but this shadow translation would only have worked for the US edition: in British English it would have to be MATHS with an -S.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

***gierlach*** (gloss: screech-laugh) is a compound made up of the truncated verb *gieren* (‘shriek’/ ‘scream’) and the noun *lach* ‘laugh’. With only one hit in the reference corpus it is unusual, although it is related to the common idiom GIEREN VAN HET LACHEN (‘shriek/scream with laughter’). In English the compound has been rendered as “guffaw”, a common single-stemmed noun with 2,842 hits in enTenTen, making the translation far more normal frequency-wise. But it is not only at the level of frequency that the compound has been normalised in English; it is also at the level of semantics. In Dutch *gierlach* is at odds with the sentence in which it is embedded: *het laatste woord ontaardde in een **gierlach** die diep in Sigerius’ keel ontsprong*. What makes this sentence strange is the semantic clash between the stem *gier-* (which denotes something screechingly high) and the phrase *diep in Sigerius’ keel* (which suggests something deep or low). This clash has been resolved in the English phrase, “the final words dissolving into a **guffaw** that bellows forth from deep within Sigerius’s throat”, where “guffaw” and “bellow” are both semantically compatible with “deep”. A less normalising translation might have been WHOOPING-LAUGH. Although it does not roll off the tongue easily, and although it is not highly uncommon, this shadow translation would have preserved the oxymoron.

NORMALISED

***perzikoortjes*** (gloss: peach ears) is a metaphor used to describe Aaron’s ears (which are being contrasted to Sigerius’s cabbage ears (*kroporen*)) but in the context of a sentence which describes them as *doodgewoon* (perfectly normal), it is an oxymoron. The entire Dutch sentence reads: *Aan Aarons eigen hoofd zaten twee doodgewone, ongeschonden **perzikoortjes***. Syntactically this compound mirrors the other compounds built around the head noun *oor* (e.g. *kropoor* and the triply hyphenated

*lik-op-stuk-oor*) apart from the diminutive suffix *-(t)je*. And perhaps it was with the diminutive in mind that the translator rendered the compound as “peachy-soft ears” in “Aaron had a pair of perfectly normal, unblemished, **peachy-soft ears**”. The English adverbial ending *-y* does, after all, resonate with the Dutch diminutive *-je*, which itself has a softening effect. Nonetheless the English normalises the image, not just because the translation avoids the unusual compound PEACH-EARS but also because it neutralises the oxymoron in the phrase *doodgewone [...] perzikoortjes*: there is, after all, nothing *doodgewoon* (perfectly normal) about peach-ears (*perzikoortjes*). However, perhaps the oxymoron is slightly less conspicuous in Dutch than it would have been in English given that *perzikoortjes*, unusual though it is, is analogous to the common Dutch compound *perzikhuidje* (peachy skin).

NORMALISED

*vaderschoot* (gloss: father’s lap/apron) occurs in the sentence *Vóórdat de verloren zoon in de vaderschoot terugkeerde hadden drieletterwoorden in onze boerderij het effect van schrikdraad*. With zero hits in the reference corpus, the word *vaderschoot* is unusual, and its unusualness stems from the oxymoronic clash between modifier and head: the head noun *schoot* (‘lap’/ ‘apron’) is associated with the feminine (as in the VIRGIN’S LAP meaning WOMB), whereas the word *vader* (‘father’) is obviously masculine. (This would explain why *moederschoot* has 942 hits in nITenTen, and *vaderschoot* absolutely no hits). The translation, “Before the prodigal son had returned to **Daddy’s hearth and home**, four-letter words were like electric fencing” neutralises this clash. *Vader* is softened to “daddy” and *schoot* is masculinised to “hearth and home”. It would have been possible to preserve the semantic clash in translation as, say, FATHER’S APRON STRINGS/LAP or perhaps to DAD’S MATERNAL ARMS without upsetting the balance of the sentence.

NORMALISED

### 9.5.6 Personification

*luxereet* (gloss: luxury-ass) occurs in the sentences *[ik zag] het deinen van een bekende kont. De luxereet van Barbara Ann*. The *Barbara Ann* in question is a pleasure yacht moored to a pontoon. The sentence has been translated as “I spotted the undulating of a familiar tush. Barbara Ann’s **high-class ass**.” The Dutch compound is unusual in terms of frequency (with no hits in nITenTen) and in terms of designation (one does not usually refer to the stern of a boat as a *reet*). This is reflected in the English where stern is designated by two anthropomorphic words, namely the slang word “tush” and “ass”.

NOT NORMALISED

### 9.5.7 Puns

**ademsлаг** (gloss: breath-beat) combines two high-frequency Dutch compounds (*ademhaling* [“breathing”] and *hartsлаг* [“heartbeat”]) into an unusual blend. It occurs in the sentence *Vanuit de verte dringt een zwaar gehijg tot hem door – zijn eigen ademsлаг*. A shadow translation capturing the unusualness of that blend might have been HIS OWN BREATH-BEAT. Instead, *ademsлаг* has been translated as the normal-sounding phrase “**rhythm of his own breathing**” (the string RHYTHM OF \* BREATHING<sup>64</sup> had 20 hits in enTenTen). The entire English sentence reads: “He becomes aware of a distant, heavy panting—the **rhythm of his own breathing**”.

NORMALISED

**borstengraaierij** (gloss: breast-groping) occurs in the following context: Sigerius’s villainous son Wilbert worked for a while in the rolling mill of a steelworks (*warmbandwalselij* in Dutch) and was accused by a female co-worker (a forty-one year-old woman who ran the steelworks canteen [*een vrouw die de walselijcantine beheerde*]) of lascivious groping. The Dutch reads: *Nadat de vrouw zich bij Harselaar had beklagd over ‘borstengraaierij [...]’*. The word *borstengraaierij* (with its –erij ending) resonates with *warmbandwalselij* and *walselijcantine*, both of which occur in the previous two sentences. This is not reflected in the English: “After the woman had complained to Harselaar about ‘**boob-grabbing**’, [...]” since “boob-grabbing” is a fairly common term bearing no phonological or morphological resemblance to the word “rolling mill”. Having said that, I cannot think of a compound that would work, other than the long-winded and less arresting, SHE ACCUSED HIM OF “MILLING AROUND HER BREASTS”. Moreover, my shadow translation is not believable as a piece of dialogue.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

**dicht-bij-zijn-bedshow** (gloss: close-to-his-bed-show) contains a compact phrase embedded in a compound. With zero hits in nTenTen, it is an unusual expression playing on the fixed idiom *ver-van-mijn-bedshow*, meaning ‘an issue that is not directly of interest’ (literally – far from one’s bed). It refers to Sigerius’s massive emotional involvement with his son’s criminal past – a past that Sigerius is incapable of viewing from a distance. The expression is translated as “**way-too-close-to-home scenario**”, which does full justice to the meaning in context but not to the Dutch language pun. Not that I can think of a way of capturing that pun.

NORMALISED BUT NOT IN CONTEXT

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64 The wildcard \* stands for one single word.

*klotekusser* (gloss: crap/balls kisser) occurs in the following dialogue:

‘Nu z’n kipje in Amerika met Jim én met Jeff ligt te naaien,’ gaf Björn toe, ‘en papa klotekusser niet meer ziet staan, gaat klotekusser geheimpjes doorvertellen.’

This is an interesting compound because the modifier *kloete* serves a double purpose here: it is both an adjective meaning ‘shitty’ or ‘bloody awful’, and an object noun phrase meaning ‘balls’ (as in ‘testicles’), derived from the plural noun *kloten*. So the compound can be taken to mean either ‘shitty kisser’ or ‘testicle kisser’. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a compound in English that captures this exact pun, and the translator has opted for the common compound “butt-kisser” in,

“Now that his chick’s o fucking Jim *and* Je in America,” Björn conceded, “and Daddy can’t bear the sight of butt-kisser any more, butt-kisser’s gonna spread some secrets.”

NORMALISED

## 9.6 Denormalisation

This section lists and discusses the seven examples of denormalisation which I found using the procedure outlined in Chapter 2.8. These were creative English compounds which had no hits in the reference corpora and which are often the translations of more commonplace Dutch compounds or phrases – hence the term ‘denormalisation’. It should be noted, however, that my method only unearthed English compounds which took the form of a single or hyphenated word. It was impossible to search for compounds which were realised as two orthographic words seeing as Sketch Engine cannot distinguish between two-word compounds and two-word phrases.

The seven examples which the program did find are presented here as follow: the English compound is given first, in context, followed by the Dutch compound to which the English compound corresponds.

### 9.6.1 Metaphor

**assertiveness-eczema** occurs in a sentence describing the university students who Aaron loathed: “These guys had chronic **assertiveness-eczema**, scaly and white as an out-of-date chocolate bar.” This extraordinary compound corresponds to the Dutch phrase *uitsloegen van de geldingsdrang*, which contains the lexicalised compound *geldingsdrang* (the normal Dutch word for assertiveness).

**half-yarns** occurs in the sentence “Margriet Wijn does not spin **half-yarns**, or concoct ordinary lies—she cultivates new realities.” This is an inventive term for HALF-TRUTHS, which in principle could have been used instead, given that the ST phrase was *halve waarheden* (half truths) in: *Margriet Wijn spint geen halve waarheden, of gewone ordinaire leugens, ze plant nieuwe werkelijkheid aan*. Note too how the translator has inserted a second verb (“concoct”) to collocate with “lies” so that he can set up a cohesive alliterative link between ‘concocting lies’ and ‘cultivating new realities’. This is similar to the cohesive alliterative link in the Dutch between *Margriet Wijn* and *halve waarheden*.

**mosshead** occurs in the sentence where Sigerius’s son Wilbert is doing the talking; specifically he is bragging about a fight he had with a guy: “So what do I do, I sneak up behind him, let out a scream and grab him by his **mosshead** and drag him into the ocean.” Although the compound Mosshead with a capital <M> occurs commonly as a place name, it is rare as a common noun and even rarer as a way of describing someone’s hair<sup>65</sup> As such it denormalises the Dutch ST, which uses the conventional, lexicalised compound *kroeskop* (‘a person with frizzy hair’) in *Dus wat doe ik, ik loop vlak achter hem, grijp hem plotseling schreeuwend bij z’n kroeskop en sleur ’m de zee in*.

**prickle-fingers** occurs at one of the most dramatic moments in the novel. Siem Sigerius is on the verge of being discovered stark-naked in his son-in-law Aaron’s house, so he flees into the garden in an attempt not to be caught. The “prickle-fingers” stand, metaphorically, for the conifer cones and needles that barefooted Sigerius is treading on, but also for the other unsavory encounters that he has had that evening: “He can only think of one thing: without dawdling he wriggles between two man-sized conifers belonging to Aaron’s neighbor’s yard, for the second time this evening he squeezes himself among countless **prickle-fingers**, the grainy sand sucks itself deeper into the hole in the sole of his foot.” This compound corresponds to the Dutch ST *kriebelvingers*, which carries the same metaphor, but which is less unusual as a compound than the English. The Dutch ST reads: *Hij kan maar één ding verzinnen: zonder talmen wringt hij zichzelf tussen twee manshoge coniferen die bij de tuin van Aarons burens horen, voor de tweede keer vanavond wurmt hij zich tussen ontelbare kriebelvingers, het korrelige zand zuigt zich vast in het gat onder zijn voetzool*.

65 The Urban Dictionary (<https://www.urbandictionary.com>) has an entry for mosshead, namely “a derogatory [sic] term for a black person” but the person referred to in the novel is white, and it is unattested in enTenTen).

**spark-spattering** describes the look in Aaron’s eyes after he has sunk into the depths of a psychosis. This is how Sigerius’s daughter Joni describes him: “I was so shocked by his face—eyes like **spark-spattering** transformer stations”. The compound adjective “spark-spattering” is as unusual as it is vivid, and corresponds to the common Dutch word *spattend* in *Ik schrok zo van zijn blik – ogen als spattende transformatiehuisjes*.

### 9.6.2 Metonymy

**jailbird-neck** refers to Wilbert’s aggressive-looking neck, as described from the point of view of his father Sigerius: “His face hardened, his right eyebrow crept upwards in provocative amazement. He hoarded aggression, I could see it. He closed his right eye and turned his head stiffly. He took a couple of seconds to loosen up his jailbird-neck.” The ST compound to which it corresponds is *bajesnek* in *Zijn gezicht verstarde, zijn rechterwenkbrauw kroop omhoog van getergde verbazing. Ik zag dat hij agressie oppotte. Hij sloot zijn rechteroog en draaide met zijn hoofd alsof hij een stijve nek had. Hij maakte zijn brede **bajesnek** los, secondenlang*. Although the Dutch compound has not been lexicalised and is not frequent either, the English perhaps stands out even more than the Dutch because of the recursion: “jailbird-neck” is, after all, a compound within a compound.

**sob-gob** describes Joni’s face as viewed by Aaron, who feels that her crying makes her look less pretty: “He compared Joni’s **sob-gob** with her usual Scandinavian freshness.” This compound is a creative translation of the common compound *huilhoofd*, which occurs in the following ST sentence *Hij vergeleek Joni’s **huilhoofd** eens rustig met haar gewoonlijke Scandinavische frisheid*.

### 9.7 Summary and Discussion

As argued earlier in this chapter, Reeder faced a double challenge when he translated Buwalda’s compounds into English: on the one hand the productivity of Dutch compounds in general; on the other the creativity of Buwalda’s compounds in particular. Using the methods outlined in Chapter 2, I found 47 creative compounds in Bonita Avenue, i.e. compounds which were unattested in n1TenTen, highly infrequent on the web, and which struck native speakers as unusual. Of the 47 compounds, 31 were translated as compounds and 16 by other means (e.g. phrases and sometimes simplexes). This ratio (31/47) equates to 66% and is substantially higher than the figure reported in Noninckx (2015), which revealed that only 40% of a corpus of 400 German compounds were rendered as compounds in English translation. In addition we must remember that Noninckx was only looking at nominal compounds,

so if we were to isolate the creative *nominal* compounds in *Bonita Avenue* then the percentage rendered as compounds in English would increase to 73% (that is 29/40). Of course differences in both source language and sample size make it impossible to calibrate Noninkx's 40% with the 73% observed here but perhaps we could take this percentual gap as a broad indication that Reeder was acutely sensitive to the compounding aspect of Buwalda's style.

Indeed this chapter has revealed that many of Buwalda's nominal compounds were translated as unusual compounds in English even when there was an obvious shadow translation in the form of a phrase. Thus, for example, *koortsmail* was translated as the compound "panic-mail", even though the phrase PANICKY EMAIL was an obvious alternative; likewise *vijftigersbuik*, was translated as the unusual compound "fifty-plus belly" even though it could have been rendered as the familiar phrase MIDDLE-AGED PAUNCH. Moreover Reeder seemed to have internalised Buwalda's style to the extent that he also came up with creative compounds where Buwalda had not: thus Buwalda's *halve waarheden* became "half-yarns" in English and, from a different grammatical category, Buwalda's *spattende* became "spark-spattering" in translation. Even more interestingly, perhaps, were Buwalda's *jongens die wit uitsloegen van de geldingsdrang*, who became "guys [who] had chronic **assertiveness-eczema**". Here the meaning conveyed by the lexicalised compound *geldingsdrang* ('assertiveness') and the phrasal verb *uitsloegen* ('to break out [in a rash]') were fused into the extraordinary compound "assertiveness-eczema". Next to these there were seven examples where Buwalda had used a compound in Dutch but where the English compound seemed to stand out even more: for example, the transformation of *kroeskop* into "mosshead"; or of *huilhoofd* into "sob-gob". These instances of denormalisation can perhaps be seen as (unconscious?) compensation for cases where the creative compounds were lost in Dutch, as in *woordkak* / "verbal diarrhea".

Finally, it is also worth noting that all but one of the N-N compounds (except for where recursion was involved) were hyphenated. Thus the translation gave us "party-knockers" and not PARTY KNOCKERS; "flounder-mouth" and not FLOUNDER MOUTH; "chutney-hawker" and not CHUTNEY HAWKER etc. The only exception to this was "penance pearls". This is worth noting because, as Kenny (2001, p. 97) said, "creative writers attempt to confer a more universal status upon singular events or situations by providing a 'word' for those events or situations". And the translation seems to pay heed to this, because although a hyphenated word is not a solid word, it is more of a word than a compound cleaved in two by a space.

If Reeder's translation was compound-sensitive, if he created new (hyphenated) compounds on the fly, how did he render the rhetorical tropes? This is a separate question from the compounding issue. For as we have seen, creative compounds can

be normalised without necessarily changing the morphology (e.g. the translation of *klotekusser* as “butt-kisser”, where inevitably the uniquely Dutch-language pun was lost).

Of the ten compounds classified as Catachresis, seven (*eetgraag*, *kapotgezworen*, *kindervloekje*, *poepzitten*, *plopperwaardje*, *rectorenschedel* and *stiefteefje*) kept their quiriness and three were normalised. Interestingly, all three of the normalised compounds deviated from the common pattern of a right noun-headed binary compounds: two of the compounds had a verbal head *doodgemokerd* and *harenwringend*, and the third (*kutjepikandijvie*) seemed to involve concatenation in the sense that it is not clear where the head is.

The next category, Hyperbole (containing only one member *hongerbekkens en -nekjes*) again did not conform to the typical compound pattern, in that it is elliptical. Moreover the normalisation that there was, was compensated by the word ‘runt’.

Moving on to Metaphor: of the thirteen compounds in this category, eight became unusual metaphors in English, i.e. they were *not* normalised; these were: *aflaatparels*, *bobbi-diertje*, *gedachtenbrand*, *kleuter-Rembrandt*, *koortsmail*, *ramplplaneetje*, *raviolineus*, and *schollenmond*. Of the other five, two seemed to have been normalised at first sight but upon closer analysis were ‘mitigated’ by compensation or other co- or contextual factors; these were: *appelstroopogen* and *kropoor*. This means that only three of the original thirteen compounds in this category had clearly been normalised, that is flattened in English despite the availability of unusual shadow translations. These were *baantjeskannibaal*, *doodshoofdslak* and *woordkak*.

In the category Metonymy, ten of the fourteen compounds (i.e. *anabolenrug*, *chutneyboer*, *drieletterafasie*, *druipsmoel*, *feestjopen*, *lik-op-stuk-oor*, *slagroomknieën*, *Siemzeggere*, *vuurwerkvuistjes* and *zaadbalie*) fully preserved the trope in translation, mainly with literal renditions. And two others (i.e. *vijftigersbuik* and *verradersluchtje*) even heightened the trope in translation. Of the remaining two, one (*kino-kussen*) preserved the metonymy but was normalised to the extent that it was followed by an explicitation, and the other (*mayonaisevingers*) completely removed it by adding the past participle “covered” to give “mayonnaise-covered fingers”.

The category Oxymoron contained a group of four compounds whose elements either bore a contradictory relationship to each other or a contradictory relationship to elements in the immediate co-text. These were the rational/poetic contrast inherent in *cijfersdichters*; the high/low contrast between *gier-* and *diep* in the phrase *een gierlach [...] diep in Sigerius' keel*; the normal/abnormal contrast of *doodgewone [...] perzikoortjes*; and the male/female contrast inherent in the compound *vaderschoot*. Interestingly all four of these were normalised in translation, adding (anecdotal) evidence to what we have seen so far: the propensity of translators to normalise

oxymora. Although, we have to remember too that Reeder's phrase "doe-eyed skank" introduced an element of oxymoron into the translation that was not there in the Dutch.

And finally, although all four compounds in the category Puns had been normalised, three of them were language specific and difficult to capture in translation.

Summing up the figures, only ten of the 47 highly unusual compounds were normalised fully and a further five were normalised but with mitigating circumstances. Interestingly, it was in the category of oxymoron that ALL the compounds underwent normalisation. Of course the numbers are too small, and the categories too fuzzy, to draw any firm conclusions (there were, after all, only four compounds within this category), but taken together with the other case studies, there does seem to be a tendency on the part of translators to normalise oxymora more than any other trope (except for language specific puns). This observation about oxymora will be discussed further in the Chapter 10.

As if to compensate for these 'losses', Reeder also invented seven creative compounds in the style of Buwalda where no creative compound was present in the ST. As I explained earlier, Sketch Engine could only detect compounds if they took the form of a single or hyphenated word. It is therefore entirely possible that the seven denormalised compounds found here were only a subset of the total set of English denormalised compounds. This fact only strengthens our impression that Reeder's translation was highly creative (and resistant to normalisation), except when it came to oxymora.