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An analysis of Dutch creative collocations and compounds translated into English

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English Summary

Tropes in Translation: An Analysis of Dutch Creative Collocations and Compounds Translated into English

This thesis researches ‘normalisation’ in literary translation by analysing six prize-winning Dutch novels translated into English by six top-tier literary translators. The novels in question are *Bonita Avenue* by Peter Buwalda; *De inscheper* by Otto de Kat; *De helaasheid der dingen* by Dimitri Verhulst; *Rupert, een bekentenis* by Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer; *Sluiterijd* by Erwin Mortier; and *Spijkerschrift* by Kader Abdolah. Translated into English by Jonathan Reeder, Sam Garrett, David Colmer, Michele Hutchison, Ina Rilke and Susan Massotty respectively, their English titles read: *Bonita Avenue*; *Man on the Move*; *The Misfortunates*; *Rupert: A Confession*; *Shutterspeed*; and *My Father’s Notebook*. These six novels contain a wealth of creative language, making them invaluable case studies for anyone interested in the question of whether, and if so how, such language gets normalised in world-class literary translation.

Research into normalisation is, of course, not new, so **Chapter 1** surveys earlier work on the topic, paying particular attention to Ria Vanderauwera 1985 (a landmark example of a ‘manual’ approach to the subject) and to Dorothy Kenny 2001 (a landmark example of a ‘corpus’ approach to the subject). But Chapter 1 also briefly relates the question of normalisation to other areas of Translation Studies: to so-called translation ‘universals’ on the one hand and to polysystems theory on the other.

Chapter 2 narrows down my initial research question (which read: Has the language of these Dutch novels been normalised in translation?) to a more specific research question which reads: Have the creative compounds and creative adjective-noun bigrams in these Dutch novels been normalised in translation? Recasting the research question in this form enabled me to obtain some quantitative answers to the question of creativity in translation. Put simply, it enabled me to look up the frequencies of the creative compounds and bigrams in reference corpora. As such, Chapter 2 stresses the importance of large reference corpora, and explains how the exponential growth in corpora size since Kenny 2001 enabled me to automatically

extract creative compounds and creative adjective-noun bigrams from my corpus of Dutch novels

Once I obtained my data, I classified them in terms of rhetorical tropes (e.g. metonymy, personification and oxymoron). **Chapter 3**, therefore, is on defining rhetorical tropes: it explores the inherent fuzziness of rhetorical tropes, and in doing so, appeals to the theories of Eleanor Rosch, Patrick Hanks, and, inevitably, Ludwig Wittgenstein too. This chapter is the last of **Part 1 – Beginnings**.

The next set of chapters belong to **Part 2 – Case Studies**, and they focus on five novels (that is, all the novels except for *Rupert, een bekentenis*, which I used to illustrate my method in Chapter 2). **Chapter 4** introduces the case studies in general, explaining how they are organised. This chapter also introduces the notion of shadow translations (“potential translations which could have been used but which were not” Matthiessen 2001: 83 as quoted in Chesterman 2017, p. 241), something I make extensive use of in the case studies.

Chapter 5, the first of the case studies, looks at *The Misfortunates*, David Colmer’s translation of *De helaasheid der dingen* by Dimitri Verhulst. After introducing the novel, the author and the translator, the chapter analyses 36 creative adjective-noun bigrams in context, revealing much inventiveness on the part of the translator as well as the author. The chapter ends by pointing out a couple of features (e.g. the use of transferred epithets) which seem to be typical of this translator’s style.

Chapter 6 looks at *Man on the Move*, Sam Garrett’s translation of *De inscheper* by Otto de Kat. Like the preceding case study and the subsequent ones too, it starts with some background information on the novel, the author and translator, before going on to analyse the language itself. As short as *De inscheper / Man on the Move* is, it proved to be a treasure trove of creative lexis, yielding more than 50 creative adjective-noun bigrams. Analysing them revealed much inventiveness on the part of the translator and some interesting effects of co-text and context.

Chapter 7 looks at *Shutterspeed*, Ina Rilke’s translation of *Sluiterijd* by Erwin Mortier. *Sluiterijd/ Shutterspeed*, like the previous two case studies, yielded a wealth of creative bigrams for analysis. Interestingly, the 38 bigrams studied in this chapter showed on the surface more normalisation than the previous two case studies, but closer analysis revealed the subtle workings of co-text. This chapter also revealed Rilke to be a master of implicature, the intricacies of which are fully explained in the chapter.

Chapter 8 focuses on *My Father’s Notebook*, Susan Massotty’s translation of *Spijkerschrift* by Kader Abdolah. As the only example of exophonic literature in this study, this novel it is something of an outlier, and its quirkiness turned out not to reside in creative compounds or creative bigrams, but in other kinds of creative

tropes. So this chapter explores those other tropes along with their translations and relates them to Wright 2010's findings on the translation of exophonic literature. The chapter also shows the limitations of trying to operationalise linguistic creativity purely in terms of compounds and bigrams.

Chapter 9, the last of the case studies, is on *Bonita Avenue*, Jonathan Reeder's translation of *Bonita Avenue* by Peter Buwalda. It is a novel brimming with creative compounds, and this chapter examines more than 50 in detail, exploring how gems such as *appelstroopogen* (gloss: apple-syrup eyes), *gedachtenbrand* (gloss: thought-fire) and *kropoor* (gloss: head-of-lettuce ear) function in context and how they have been translated into English. This chapter also includes a section on the morphology of compounds, as well as a brief exploration of the differences between Dutch and English compounding.

After the case studies comes **Part 3 – Conclusions and Caveats**, made up of chapters 10 and 11. **Chapter 10** concludes that the translators in this study were not, as a whole, inclined to normalise quirky language, except perhaps when it came to oxymora. It then goes on to examine the significance of this finding by delving into the thorny issue of statistics and the notion of empowerment.

If Chapters 1–10 investigated the *How* of translation, **Chapter 11** considers the *Why*. This chapter comprises an article which I published in *Target* 30(1), 2018 titled "On Randomness". It builds on Chesterman's 2008 article, "On Explanation", which examines what it means to explain translational phenomena. Chesterman ends his article by asking: how much is beyond explanation? My article addresses this question.