

***C'est trop auch!* The Translation of Contemporary French Literature Featuring Urban Youth Slang**

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Abstract: The French post-colonial novel has recently been witnessing the emergence of urban youth language or *français contemporain des cités* (Goudaillier 2001). This linguistic variety allows underprivileged youths from multi-ethnic suburbs to rebel against authority by deliberately violating standard language norms. Its characteristics include frequent lexical input from immigrant languages, in particular Arabic and English, and the use of *verlan* at the morphological level, with the latter involving a form of back slang using syllabic inversion, which can be recurrently applied to heighten its coding function. In view of the social rejection of this 'antilanguage' (Halliday 1978), it has had difficulty penetrating into literature. However, this is now beginning to change, with urban youth discourse appearing in a number of novels, mostly by young 'post-migration' writers (Geiser 2008), such as Faïza Guène, Insa Sané and Rachid Djaïdani. While this language variety has mainly been dealt with by sociolinguists, some of the novels concerned are now crossing borders, and a multi-disciplinary approach to this phenomenon is now called for, combining linguistic, literary and translational tools.

The transfer of this heterolingual genre does indeed raise a number of issues. For example, if we assume that translation is a cultural-political practice (Venuti 2008), what options do translators have to convey the resistant discourse of young immigrant slang users? How will the relationship between language use and social identity manifest itself in the target text? And how can a contrastive linguistic analysis of the features of urban youth language help to resolve translation problems? I will draw on a corpus of French and Dutch novels as well as some translations from French in an attempt to answer these questions.

1. Introduction

Wesh les frères, bien ou koi? [What's up bros, you OK?]¹ is a French greeting with the same denotation as, but very different connotations, from *Bonjour mes amis, comment allez-vous?* [Hello my friends, how are you?]. While the latter is a question in standard French, the former is a typical urban youth slang utterance,² featuring an Arabic term (*wesh*), colloquial use of *frères* and *ou quoi*

¹ Unless stated otherwise, the English translations presented in this paper merely serve to elucidate the foreign expressions and do not have any literary pretensions.

² The terms '(urban youth) language/slang/vernacular' will be used interchangeably.

[literally, 'or what'] as well as a non-standard spelling (*koi* for *quoi*). Recent decades have seen this variety develop in low-income neighbourhoods of major Western cities that are home to several generations of immigrants. Heavily marked by code-switching, it is often referred to as a multi-ethnolect (Dorleijn & Nortier 2013) involving English as well as a multitude of non-Western languages.

So far, most research into this multi-ethnic slang has been carried out by linguists, who focus on its characteristics, and sociolinguists, who address such questions as: what motivates speakers to express themselves through these linguistic practices, and what is the relationship with group identity? This latter notion should be viewed as a dynamic concept for, as Jørgensen (2010: 3) states, identities are constructed and negotiated in linguistic discourse. In general, three main motives for the use of this sociolect are distinguished. First, it creates recognition and social cohesion, thus contributing to in-group identity. Following Gumperz (1982), I will refer to this function as the 'we code'. It may help explain the phenomenon of 'language crossing' (or 'crossing', Rampton 1995) that frequently emerges in an ethnically mixed group. This involves the generalised use of a minority language or variety that does not belong to the speaker, for example German youths using Turkish, a practice that challenges traditional conceptions of identity (Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003: 5). The second function, referred to as the 'they code', implies that the speakers oppose themselves to an outside world which is perceived as hostile, specifically the establishment represented by teachers, parents, police and other authorities. Such a situation fosters the creation of a system of norms and values of their own, including the creation of an 'antilanguage' (Halliday 1978). The third function of slang is a recreational one: adolescents find it amusing and challenging to invent new words and expressions, especially in young, verbally-oriented musical styles such as rap and *raï*. In many cases, status considerations play a role. Pooley (2008: 333) highlights the prestige acquired in the peer group through displays of verbal wit. This is also a prominent feature of oral competitions such as rap battles and slams, which are popular in the street culture that is familiar to many of the speakers.

The sociolinguistic approach, which is predominantly empirical, tends to analyse real-life situations involving spoken discourse. However, this language use has also manifested itself in recent years in written form, in particular through social media and rap lyrics accompanying YouTube clips. A very recent phenomenon is its emergence in literary fiction (Linn, forthcoming) including novels written on the one hand by young 'domestic ethnic minority writers' (Berkers, Janssen & Verboord 2011: 24) and on the other by 'native' Western writers. Literary theory has so far paid scant attention to this language variety. Moreover, since several novels featuring this sociolect have recently been published in translation, a multidisciplinary study of this phenomenon is needed, one that combines linguistic, literary and translational approaches. The transfer of this hybrid genre raises a number of issues. What options do translators have to convey the resistant discourse of young immigrant slang users? How will the relationship between language use and identity manifest itself in the target text? And which translation strategies and resources may be helpful to convey this variety in

translation? In this paper, I will attempt to answer these questions by focusing on French and, to a lesser extent, on Dutch. As far as translation is concerned, I will draw on a bilingual comparable corpus of novels as well as on a small case study involving two translations.

In Section 2, I will discuss French urban youth language, while its appearance in literature will be addressed in Section 3. Section 4 will be devoted to the translation issues to which this variety gives rise and will present a tool deemed of particular benefit to translators, i.e. a contrastive bilingual inventory of youth slang features in both French and Dutch. Section 5 will focus on youth discourse in original Dutch fiction as well as in two translations of French novels. The final section will present a conclusion.

2. French urban youth slang

Modern French slang is commonly referred to as *français contemporain des cités* [contemporary French of the *cités*] or FCC for short (Goudaillier 2001), although numerous other terms are equally used (see, for example, Pooley 2008: 322). Unlike the British or American term ‘suburb’, the French term *cités*, or *banlieues*, refer to the deprived districts on the periphery of major cities, where large groups of immigrant workers were housed in the booming post-war period, for the most part in high-rise social housing projects. Many of these older immigrants, especially those from former North African colonies, were semi-literate Muslims whose mother tongue was Berber or an Arabic dialect and who never achieved full mastery of spoken, let alone written, French (El Galai 2005: 130-131). The aberrant position of this group in particular – with its different culture, religion and language – clashed with the rigorous government policy that traditionally sought to achieve national unity (Aitsiselmi 2006: 140). This explains why not just the first generation but often their descendants down to the third generation are not fully accepted as citizens, even though the majority have French nationality and their first language is French. Moreover, the immigrant-born youths who grew up in the ghetto-like *cités* have little prospect of improving their situation; their school dropout rate is high and more than 40% of them are unemployed (report ONZUS 2014: 7). Thus, these neighbourhoods have become a breeding ground for an informal economy based on drug trafficking and other illegal activities, which in turn trigger a repressive police response. Against this backdrop, there are periodic riots that generate a stream of negative media attention, leaving the adolescents feeling even more stigmatised (Doran 2007: 499). As a result of both economic and demographic factors (large, densely housed families), as well as social conditions (educational failure, lack of parental supervision), groups of adolescents in the *cités*, especially boys, tend to hang out on the street. This helps to create an interethnic street culture that prioritises *macho* values, such as claiming respect through the display of physical force and an obsession with honour (Lepoutre 2001: 27-28). The street is thus a place where the ‘we code’ attitude (as the first motive mentioned above for the use of slang) is reflected in loyalty to the peer group and in both physical and verbal violence towards the outgroup. According

to Valdman (2000: 1190), there is consensus among linguists on the identity function of FCC.

The second factor involved, the ‘they code’ attitude of adolescents, is expressed at the linguistic level through a violation and distortion of official language rules, a practice that is perceived as a type of subversive behaviour directed against the authorities (Goudaillier 2011). This may be explained by the fact that French society is traditionally characterised by a centralist, strongly normative linguistic attitude, whereby the standard language enjoys high status while any ‘deviant’ varieties, including colloquialisms and slang, are considered inferior (Lodge 1991: 109). This view, which easily leads to the devaluation of language users themselves, is known as the ideology of the standard (Milroy & Milroy 1985). Strict compliance with linguistic norms is imposed through the hierarchical education system, where those who fail to demonstrate a near-perfect language proficiency, especially at the written level, are frequently stigmatised. That is why, in Wise’s opinion (2000: 128), French youths have more reason to rebel against the authorities as guardians of correct language use than, for instance, their British peers. Another motive may be that, for many immigrants from former colonies, French is still perceived as a language of external domination (Hargreaves 2007: 90).

The third function of slang, that of playfulness, is also relevant for FCC, often in a competitive context. Gadet and Hambye (2014: 206) point out that, in street culture, group members tend to embody their status within the group through a specific public stance and verbal dexterity. In doing so, French youths not only revert to models from North American hip-hop culture, but also link up with the rich verbal and rhetorical tradition of France (Vitali 2011c: 175). The exploitation of this creative force is not restricted to rap and slam artists such as Grand Corps Malade, Keny Arkana, and Médine, but also extends to ethnic minority writers, several of whom are also known for their slam abilities, e.g. Rachid Djaidani and Insa Sané. Some (Santaki, Sané) even include a soundtrack in their novels.

As far as the linguistic characteristics of FCC are concerned, first of all, there is a strong influence from the numerous immigrant languages, leading to various forms of code-switching and code-mixing at the lexical level. From the Senegalese Wolof, for example, we have *toubab* [(white) French], and from dialectal Arabic³ *wesh* [literally ‘what’] used in the greeting of friends cited at the beginning: *wesh les frères!* Well-known loanwords from Romani are *bédave* [to smoke (weed)] and *bicrave* [to deal (drugs)]. Additionally, as in all strata of the population, we find input from American English, as in *sniffer* [to sniff (drugs)] or *c’est dead* [it’s hopeless]. Another source of lexical input is reinvigorated *argot*, a former coded language with historical roots (Lodge 1991), including terms such as *daron* [old man, dad] and *thune*⁴ [dough, money]. The extensive

³ I.e., different from the classical Arabic of the Qur’an.

⁴ Due to orality, the spelling may vary. In this case, for example, we find *thune*, *thunes*, *tune*, and *tunes*.

coverage of semantic fields such as illegal activities, drugs and sex is no coincidence, since these are favourite topics dealt with in FCC (Pooley 2008).

The most important morphological feature of FCC is *verlan*, a technique similar to back slang (Partridge 2015: 276-277) that involves manipulation of syllables in order to hinder understanding. According to linguists such as Goudaillier (2011), street youths apply this technique as a symbolic repudiation of a society they experience as oppressive, since '[t]o take the Other's language, transform it into something unrecognisable, then send it back "inside-out" translates into a rejection of that Other' (Goudaillier 2011: 185-186). The name is iconic: it is a phonetic reversal of *l'envers* [reverse]. Thus *arabe* [Arab], with *beura* as an interim step, is transformed through truncation into *beur*. The recurrent use of this procedure, known as *reverlanisation*, is even more strongly associated with FCC (Valdman 2000: 1191). As an example, *verlan beur* may again be transformed into *rebeu* or its truncated form *reub*. Repetition of this technique also implies that the /ə/ (schwa) tends to replace other common French vowels, thus reinforcing the general exotic appearance of this discourse (Gadet 2007: 121). Combinations of procedures are frequent, as in *debléman*, in which Arab *bled* [village] is *verlanised* and an English suffix is added. Since there are no clear-cut boundaries between language registers, some characteristics of FCC, especially *verlan* and argotic terms perceived as trendy, may also penetrate into a more broadly used colloquial register. However, once a *verlanised* utterance becomes widely known, it loses its coding function and a new term is introduced, either by *reverlanisation* or by substitution. Goudaillier (2011) discusses an example of this dynamic: the popular argot word *thune* [dough] was picked up by street youth and *verlanised* into *neutu*. When this form appeared in a TV ad, it was effectively annexed by commercialism. Its use was then dropped, whereupon trendsetters reintroduced the old French synonym *maille*, which in turn was *verlanised* into *jeuma*.

As we have seen, various forms of truncation are another morphological characteristic. To a greater extent than the somewhat older process of apocope, which involves deleting a word's final syllable or syllables (*séropo* for *séropositif*), apheresis is currently in vogue, whereby the first part or first syllable is suppressed. This gives rise to monosyllabic words that are difficult to identify, such as *leur* for *contrôleur* [conductor] and *rien* for *Algérien* [Algerian]. Sometimes these final syllables are reduplicated, creating terms like *zonzon* for *(pri)son* [jail] and *ziczic* for *(mu)sique*.

Shifting, or the erroneous use of grammatical categories (whether conscious or not)⁵, is also applied, for instance an adjective used as an adverb: *il est grave beau ce keum* [that guy is *serious > very handsome], or as a verb in *je peux dead pour lui* [I'd *dead > die for him]. Ignoring grammar rules also includes non-conjugation, especially in verbs of Romani origin: *on m'a chourave le portable* [they've *steal > stolen my cell phone]. In subordinate clauses, the

⁵ For a discussion of this controversial issue, see for instance Arditty and Blanchet (2008) and Pooley (2008: 322).

required *que* is often omitted: *c'est pas sur ø c'est demain* [it's not sure (that) it is tomorrow].

The creative urge of slang speakers – also highly exploited in rap lyrics – continuously gives rise to new tropes, especially metaphors and hyperboles. Thus the Anglicism *airbags* is used to indicate big breasts, and 'to be under house arrest' is expressed by *être alcatraz*,⁶ alluding to the notorious US prison. Hyperboles in violent street culture (Pooley 2008: 323) often appear in the form of a threat: *J'le crève!* [I'll finish him]. Paradoxically, a negative or aggressive message may have a positive tenor, with *une boucherie* [lit. butchery, slaughter], for example, used to refer to a great party. This type of semantic shift can also be observed in other languages: in English and Dutch, for example, expressions such as 'sick'/'ziek' and 'da shit'/'de shit' may convey a positive meaning.

Yet another way to violate French linguistic norms, on a phonetic level, is to stress the first rather than the more common last syllable. An orthographic illustration of this practice can be found in a novel by Thierry Jonquet (2006: 59), set in a secondary school in a deprived urban area. One pupil shouts at another ('bastard') who has to go to the toilet, urging him to defecate in his pants: '*T'as qu'à iech* (verlan of *chier* [to shit]) *dans ton froc, bâââtard!*' In the same vein, Valdman (2000: 1191) mentions the creation of new consonant combinations that are difficult to pronounce, such as verlanised *kteurfa* for *facteur* [postman].

To summarise, slang in general and French slang in particular is made up of a blend of ingredients that specifically expresses the function of 'antilanguage' and thus symbolise the rebellious identity of the young speakers. The extent to which FCC is perceived as a coded language for a non-initiated audience is shown by the fact that French television documentaries featuring slang speakers from the *cités* tend to be subtitled (Lepoutre 2001: 156). How do these linguistic practices manifest themselves in literature?

3. FCC in French literature

Until now there has been little systematic research into the prevalence of multi-ethnic slang in literature. One reason for this could be that the study of immigrant literature, which has a large degree of overlap with this genre, enjoys low prestige among French academics, as François observes (2008: 54). The present study is therefore of an exploratory nature and is limited at this stage to fictional prose, excluding other potentially relevant sources such as film subtitling, comics or rap lyrics. For the French corpus, I selected a dozen novels (see Primary sources) discussed in one or more academic publications. I took 1999 as my starting point, the year in which the term 'street language' was introduced for the Dutch language area (Schoonen & Appel 2005), which will be discussed later. By analogy, I will provisionally use the term 'street literature' for literary prose that involves street culture and language. For the collected data I

⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ8XhPSx-HU&list=PLAEC2CF7822BCED20&index=2>.

make a rough distinction between two types of novels that include FCC, in stylised form of course, as occurs with any literary reproduction of spoken discourse (see e.g. Chatman 1978). In particular, FCC fits in with Lane-Mercier's definition of a literary sociolect (1997: 45): 'the textual representation of "non-standard" speech patterns that manifest both the socio-cultural forces which have shaped the speaker's linguistic competence and the various sociocultural groups to which the speaker belongs or has belonged'. Therefore, written discourse interspersed with deviant speech markers, such as those in FCC (and dialect, for that matter), is inevitably stereotypical because it tends to highlight sociocultural and linguistic differences (Lane-Mercier 1997: 46). Nonetheless, more sophisticated functions may also be exploited. Lay-Chenchabi (2006), for instance, describes a number of 'resistance tactics' *beur* writers in France apply in order to 'subvert [the dominant] language from within' (Lay-Chenchabi 2006: 100-101). These strategies include code-switching between registers, adding an ironic ending to stereotypical expressions, or using parody. As to the discursive situations in which this rebellious practice is used, Sebba (2003: 162) observes in a similar case, that of English novels featuring Creole-based youth slang, that it mainly appears in direct speech and dialogue by characters and is not often used for the narration. The same appears to apply to the French corpus.

First, FCC appears in novels by young immigrant writers or, more accurately, 'post-migration' authors (Geiser 2008) who are second or third generation immigrants. They usually have some degree of familiarity with the street life represented in their novels. Some focus on crime fiction (e.g. Rachid Santaki) or youth literature, such as the French-Senegalese writer and rapper Insa Sané. Since the large-scale riots around Paris in 2005, this genre has been referred to in France as *littérature* (or *écriture*) *de banlieue*. In addition to *beur* authors (i.e. those with North African roots writing in French), who have been present for decades, other African and French Antillean authors have recently emerged (Hargreaves 2011: 41). Recurring themes in these novels, beyond the somewhat older issues of displacement and identity, are rebellion against social injustice, violence (especially against women) as well as conflict with the father figure (Le Breton 2011). In many cases there is an autodiegetic narrator, with the narrator's role coinciding with the protagonist's, often suggesting an autobiographical content (Olsson 2011: 43). This applies to novels by authors such as Mohamed Razane, Rachid Djaïdani and Insa Sané. Women writers are underrepresented; Faïza Guène, who debuted at the age of nineteen with *Kiffe kiffe demain*, is one of the few successful ones. According to Le Breton (2011), Guène is also one of the first to pay attention to positive values such as solidarity within a community of neighbours and political optimism.

As far as the literary function of FCC is concerned, in this part of the corpus the same patterns emerge as in the sociolinguistic motives referred to before, i.e. consolidation of in-group identity, expression of antagonism and a playful, occasionally parodic element. This last element is in line with Pym (2000), who emphasises the variety of situations that can be expressed by a sociolect, ranging from the suggestion of reality to parody. In these novels, youths usually do show an ability to switch codes according to the communicative situation

(Linn, forthcoming). Remarkably, the appearance of FCC, with its often violent tenor, alternates with more subtle stylistic devices such as humour, irony and poetry (Le Breton 2011). In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, for instance, a French-Algerian friend of Doria's (the female narrator) cites a Rimbaud poem by heart (180) in order to impress her. This could be viewed, among other things, as a playful allusion to the role of education in the French integration debate, but also as an indirect clue to demonstrate that the author does possess the amount of linguistic and cultural capital required by the French publishing industry (Berkers, Janssen & Verboord 2011: 29). References to 'high literature' are indeed quite common in French fiction, whereas prose conventions do not allow for "noble" uses of locally or socially marked ways of speaking' (Grutman 2006: 29). This type of intertextual reference may thus serve to compensate for the use of a 'low variety'⁷ such as FCC.

The second category of literature that involves FCC comprises novels written by native French authors, usually highly educated, that feature young slang speakers. In accordance with Lane-Mercier's (1997: 46) focus on the negative aspects conveyed by non-standard discourse, such as the risk of stereotyping, we find numerous cases of stigmatisation here. FCC serves particularly to stress the fact that the characters are born to immigrant and lower class families, have few qualifications, and are unemployed or downright delinquent. In Sylvain Pattieu's novel *Des impatientes* (2012), all these qualities, plus a rebellious attitude, apply to the young French-Cameroonian narrator Bintou Masinka, who is expelled from school for bad behaviour. The social, linguistic, and generation gap is even more clearly illustrated in another novel set in a secondary school, Bégaudeau's *Entre les murs* (*The Class*). The French teacher, as the guardian *par excellence* of standard language, keeps reprimanding his fourteen-year-old pupils for their incorrect language use. One of them refuses to express his – indiscreet – question out loud, arguing that '*vous allez vous vénère*' [you'll be pissed; verlanised form of *énervé*] (90). This utterance is followed by a prompt rebuke from the teacher: '*On parle français!*' [We speak – correct – French!]. Thoroughly conditioned, the young speaker corrects his 'mistake' by immediately switching to the unmarked term: '*Vous allez vous énerver*' [You will be angry]. Furthermore, because of FCC's association with violent or illegal activities, quite a few novels are set in a criminal environment, in a prison or a police station, such as Alain Guyard's *La zonzon* [The Prison] and Santaki's crime novel *Flic ou caillera* [Cop or Scum]. Here FCC is the preferred means of expression for offenders. Thus, in the majority of novels by French writers, FCC-speaking adolescents find themselves trapped in a linguistic ghetto, experiencing difficulty switching to a formal register (or 'high variety') when required by the communicative context and therefore limiting their social prospects. Conversely, the use of standard language usually conveys connotations such as white, well-educated and

⁷ Several linguists do indeed speak of a diglossia situation (Gadet 2007: 119).

enjoying a high socio-economic status, as in the case of the French teacher in *Des impatientes*⁸ and *Entre les murs*, or the philosophy teacher in *La zonzon*.

The emergence of urban youth vernacular in literature is paradoxical in several respects. First of all, we are dealing with a temporal paradox: with their oral and dynamic character, slang creations are often outdated by the time they are recorded. This is even more true of literary texts, given the time lapse between writing and publication. A second, inherent paradox is that this kind of coded language is designed to exclude the out-group, whereas writers usually seek to communicate with their readership (Chatman 1978: 28), and this is hampered by an overly hermetic form. A third problem is the gap between readers and FCC speakers, whether the latter are staged as narrators or, more frequently, as characters. As we have seen, the majority of fictional hardcore slang speakers correspond to the stereotype of poorly educated or unemployed youth from a disadvantaged neighbourhood, hanging out on the street and engaged in all kinds of semi-legal activities (Le Breton 2011). According to Donnat (2005), however, the average French reader is an older, educated adult, in most cases a woman, with a relatively high socio-economic status; in other words, precisely the group that street youths rebel against. This bourgeois readership – or even a younger audience not familiar with street culture – will therefore have considerable difficulty fathoming codes such as complex forms of verlan and multilingualism involving ‘exotic’ languages. The writers are acutely aware of this problem, as evidenced by their frequent use of various paratextual or intratextual strategies to elucidate their heterolingual discourse.⁹ Thus, Faïza Guène in *Du rêve pour les oufs* adds footnotes with a translation of the Arabic terms used by the Algerian speakers, while Santaki’s crime novel *Flic ou caillera* contains a five-page glossary of street terms, which are mainly Arabic, English and verlan. In *Viscéral* Rachid Djaïdani provides synonyms in another register; he has the narrator comment – once again – on two underprivileged youths: *Pour tout l’or du monde jamais ils n’abandonneraient leur cité téci tess* [Not for all the gold in the world would they leave their *cité* (in standard language, verlan, and verlan with apocope respectively)] (8).

In Djaïdani’s début *Boumkœur* (1999), the narrator’s friend Grézi (who later turns out to be his hostage taker) can virtually only express himself in verlan. To make Grézi’s words comprehensible to the non-initiated reader, they are preceded by an intralinguistic translation in more or less standard¹⁰ spoken French:

[Grézi:] – Les policiers ont interpellé mon père pour le ramener au poste, pour une garde à vue. On m’a dénoncé, ça devient dangereux, la police va

⁸ A pun on the botanical term *Impatiens* (L.), denoting a plant from the Balsaminaceae family, and the French *impatientes*, i.e. “impatient girls” (Pattieu 2012: 11).

⁹ For Meylaerts (2012: 520), heterolingualism (a term coined by Grutman) refers to the use of foreign languages or social, regional and historical language varieties in literary texts.

¹⁰ The use of *ça*, which in oral discourse frequently replaces the more formal *cela*, makes this somewhat colloquial.

me mettre la main dessus. *Phrase non décodée*.¹¹ les keufs, ils ont pécho mon reupe pour le menra au stepo, en garde à uv. On m'a lanceba, c'est trop auch, les steurs vont m'serrer. (Djaïdani 1999: 68-69)

In the second, 'non-decoded' part, eight verlanised terms appear: *keufs* [*flics* = cops], *pécho* [*choper* = to catch], *reupe* [*père* = father], *menra* [*ramener* = to take], *stepo* [*poste* = police station], *garde à uv* [*garde à vue* = custody], *lanceba* [*balancé* = reported], and *auch* [*chaud* = hot, meaning 'dangerous']. *Steurs* is a truncated form of *inspecteurs* [police officers] and *vont m'* (elision for *me*) *serrer* means 'are going to catch me'; the colloquial *trop* is used as an intensifier, meaning 'very'.

We can assume that these strategies of accommodation are directed not only at the audience but also, prior to that, at publishers. The meagre supply of 'street literature' seems a clear indication that publishing houses are reluctant to launch rather hermetic novels by ethnic minority writers who usually find themselves relegated to the margins of literature (Hargreaves 2011). This is not helped by a discourse that violates the linguistic norms of their esteemed readers. The negative social attitude towards this latter aspect is reflected in the generally disapproving comments of critics – if the young authors are reviewed at all (Olsson 2011: 247-248). Despite this gloomy situation, demographic reasons alone suggest that demand for this type of literature will be boosted in the coming years by new generations of well-established descendants of immigrants growing up in a multicultural society. This applies not only to the original novels, but also to their translations. What options are available to resolve translation problems in French street literature? How do translators deal with them in practice? And to what extent can knowledge of youth slang and literature in the target culture be helpful in this process?

4. Translation of FCC in literature: A contrastive approach

As we have seen, two of the most prominent features of French urban youth vernacular are *verlan* and multilingualism or – when transformed into literature – heterolingualism. For such hybrid texts, we may recall Pym's (2000) assertion when discussing the translation of literary sociolect in general that 'source texts can also be foreignizing' (Pym 2000: 72). Moreover, as Meylaerts (2012: 521) explains, in the case of multilingualism, traditional binary perspectives on translation such as 'source text' vs 'target text', or 'foreignizing' vs 'domesticating' strategies have in fact become irrelevant because they are tied to monolingual conceptions. Instead, translation scholars should consider issues such as: how multilingual can or should a translation be in a certain context, and what are the functions of a hybrid discourse in target texts? (ibid.). However, the choice of a suitable strategy is not just up to individual translators; as Grutman contends (2006: 23-24), translation strategies are influenced by the target community's views of foreign languages and cultures in general, and translation in particular. In the same vein, Lewis (2003: 419) argues that translation choices

¹¹ Italics in the original.

concerning multilingual texts are first and foremost conditioned by the 'lectal options' a target culture offers. Meylaerts (2012) points out interesting perspectives regarding the approach of heterolingualism in translation studies, but fails to propose new tools. For this reason, and out of pragmatic considerations, I will revert to traditional concepts in my analysis, bearing in mind that they may not always correspond to the complexity of sociolinguistic discourse.

When discussing hybrid literature, Lewis (2003: 412) mentions a *trou béant* [huge gap] between translation theory and practice. Let us therefore examine how translators actually deal with language variation in literature. According to most translation scholars (e.g. Venuti 2008; Leppihalme 2000), deviant linguistic markers, such as those related to sociolect or dialect, tend to be homogenised, standardised or downplayed in translation. Knauth (2011: 9) argues that this practice also holds true for non-standard markers in multilingual texts, such as the appearance of 'exotic' vocabulary and *verlan*. This strategy seems justifiable in the case of target languages that lack an equivalent linguistic phenomenon or process. However, critics tend to blame the translator rather than the language system. If translators cover up this type of characteristic, they risk being accused of homogenisation and flattening (Wuilmart 2007); yet by making overly specific translation choices, they expose themselves to the critique of ideological manipulation (Lane-Mercier 1997: 55) or even ethnocentric violence (Venuti 2008: 21). Thus, Berman (1985: 78) believes that to render Argentinian *lunfardo*, which contains many slang elements, by Parisian argot would be an erroneous strategy that is bound to produce a ridiculous effect.¹² But what then are the options for reproducing discourse featuring FCC in a similar '*univers sociolinguistique*' (Lane-Mercier 1997: 52) to the one created in the source text? This requires reflection on which criteria should be given priority in the translation process.

For that purpose, I will turn to the Czech translation scholar Jiří Levý, whose standard work *Umění překladau* (1963) was translated into English in 2011 as *The Art of Translation*. Levý contends that a literary work that claims to evoke reality must accord with the 'norm of veracity' (2011: 61). For the audience to gain an impression of authenticity, the author must create an illusion based on a contract with the reader: even though readers are aware that they are reading fiction, they still require the novel to comply with the 'rules of verisimilitude' (Levý 2011: 19-20, cf. Chatman 1978: 49-50). If we extend these rules to translations, this implies that target readers tend to assume that the essential characteristics of the source text have been captured. In this way they can cherish the illusion that they are reading the original without the intervention of a mediator (*ibid.*); hence the need, according to Levý, for an 'illusionist translator' (2011: 19), a concept that is more or less comparable to Venuti's (2008) 'invisible translator'.

¹² See also Mével's discussion (2007) of the 'dialect-for-dialect' strategy in the English-dubbed version of the film *La Haine* in which African American Vernacular English is used to replace French *verlan*.

If we apply the credibility principle to our corpus of urban youth vernacular, then translators must ensure that target language readers feel they are being presented with ‘authentic’ street language, without being distracted by terms or constructions that break this illusion. From an illusionistic perspective, therefore, it is not so much expressions with a different semantic load from the source term that make unsatisfactory translation choices, but rather utterances that disturb the reading experience because they fail to conform to what readers expect the target language character to say in a given sociocultural context. Here, the credibility and coherence of the narrator’s or characters’ identity may be at stake as FCC-speaking characters cannot step out of their role by using an inappropriate register or an absurd reference. The devil is in the detail, as Levý warns (2011: 68-69): any seemingly insignificant element can disrupt the reader’s illusion. However, in the absence of a description of the reader’s identity, it is not easy to determine which translation strategy is appropriate for a heterogeneous readership in terms of, for instance, age, ethnic background and social environment. A priori it seems impossible to satisfy every reader’s needs to the same extent – but then, this also holds true for the source text. As we have seen, the target language readership does not solely or primarily consist of adolescents from the *cités* who are familiar with slang. For this reason alone, it is probably preferable that translators do not choose the latest neologisms but appeal to already established slang, even if this creates a new contradiction beyond the temporal paradox.

As Vitali (2011b) argues, translating this kind of discourse clearly requires a variety of skills, such as a versatile command of the source and target languages, knowledge of the social context in both cultures, and an affinity with adolescent lifestyles and language use. Moreover, in view of the subversive connotations mentioned above, translators should be aware of the ideological or political implications of their choices (Venuti 2008: 19). It is obvious that this challenge also calls for suitable translation aids. Traditional resources do not suffice to translate urban youth slang; for example, most dictionaries, whether bilingual or monolingual, are not regularly updated and do not give suggestions that go beyond the word or collocation level. Some solace is offered by internet resources such as www.urbandictionary.com or, for French, <http://www.dictionnairedelazone.fr>, as well as by blogs, sites displaying rap lyrics and forums that allow consultation with native speakers, such as <http://forum.wordreference.com> (via the option *Français seulement*). However, these sources can only provide disparate bits of information rather than a more systematic survey, nor do they show the presence of these linguistic youth practices in literature. To find a range of translation options, translators would therefore benefit considerably from a contrastive overview based on both linguistic studies and a comparable corpus (Johansson 2007: 10) of relevant literary sources. Since I will focus on Dutch as a target language, I intend to present a draft for such a bilingual inventory of French and Dutch urban youth vernacular. This then requires a brief presentation of the Dutch counterpart of FCC.

Multi-ethnic Dutch slang is called ‘straattaal’ [street language], a term coined by René Appel in 1999 (Schoonen & Appel 2005). It is spoken not only by ethnic

minorities, but also by 'native' Dutch youths in big cities which have seen a substantial influx of migrants from the former colonies of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, as well as other non-Western countries such as Morocco and Turkey. This influx results from the Netherlands' past as a colonial power and its post war state as a labour migration country (Berkers 2009: 79). If we examine the sociolinguistic functions of this language variety, the factor of in-group cohesion ('we code') appears to be strongly present among Dutch youths (Schoonen & Appel 2005). As in France, we observe an opposition, whether or not symbolic, to the out-group or 'they code' through manipulation of linguistic norms. Opinions diverge as to the possible connection between language proficiency and the use of street language. On the one hand, Schoonen and Appel (2005), for example, assume that slang speakers need an excellent command of Dutch in order to achieve creative expression. On the other hand, Kuiken (2009: 131) finds that the vocabulary used by the third and second immigrant generations is often more limited than that of their native peers, leading to low educational outcomes, which subsequently reduce their options in the labour market. According to Dorleijn and Nortier (2013: 3), adolescents often take pleasure in defying standard language by deliberately making grammatical mistakes. This function, then, corresponds to the ludic element. As in French, creative verbal skills and humour are frequently exploited, e.g. in rap lyrics.

As far as the linguistic roots of Dutch street language are concerned, the large post-war immigration groups mentioned above have imported a number of elements from their corresponding native languages, predominantly Sranantongo (from Suriname), Papiamentu (Netherlands Antilles), with strong Spanish and Portuguese influences, and dialectal Arabic or Berber, spoken by Moroccan labour immigrants and their families (Sijts & Willemyns 2009: 76).¹³ Here, too, lexical imports differ by city, neighbourhood or even school. Thus in Amsterdam, Sranantongo is dominant in multicultural settings, which has led to well-established terms such as 'doekoe' [money] and 'pattas' [shoes] (Kuiken 2009), while in the city of Utrecht, Moroccan Arabic has a stronger presence and, as a consequence, 'tezz' [shit] or 'wollah' [I swear] are frequently heard on the street (Nortier & Dorleijn 2013).

Regarding the syntactical and grammatical level, Muysken (2010: 21) emphasises the overall strategy of simplification.¹⁴ This is illustrated by reducing the article and personal pronoun choices to 'de' and 'die', as in 'de huis' [the house], rather than the correct 'het huis' (cf. American English 'da house'), or 'die mooie meisje' [that beautiful girl] instead of the correct form 'dat mooie meisje'. Omission of the article is also frequent: 'We gaan naar \emptyset Turkse restaurant' [We are going to Turkish restaurant], as well as of the subject announcing 'er' [there]: ' \emptyset Is niemand' [Is no one]. As in French, the subordinator 'dat' [that] is often omitted, changing a dependent clause into a main one: 'Hij denkt \emptyset hij is de man' [He thinks (that) he's the man].

¹³ For reasons why Turkish immigrants have left few traces, see Dorleijn and Nortier (2013).

¹⁴ See Wiese (2009) for a more nuanced view of this phenomenon.

Contractions and clippings are common, sometimes with a suffix added, such as 'Mokro' for 'Marokkaan' [Moroccan] or 'shoppa' for 'koffieshop' [coffeeshop]. Influenced by social media, all kinds of truncation are used, often with a playful motive, such as 'egt' instead of correct 'echt' [really], or 'van8' for 'vannacht' [tonight]; cf. English forms such as '2Pac' [Tupac (Shakur)] or 'w8' [wait]. Stylistic features are again the creative use of metaphors and hyperboles, e.g. 'merrie' [mare] for a Mercedes, or threatening 'ik maak 'm dood!' [I'll finish him].

A contrastive bilingual overview for French and Dutch (the latter not a translation from French) is represented in the following table.

	FRENCH	DUTCH
1. lexical features:	English: <i>c'est dead</i> [it's hopeless]; <i>sniffer</i> [to sniff]	English: check je later! [I'll check on you later]
a) insertion of loanwords	(Algerian) Arabic: <i>wesh</i> [hi]; <i>j'ai le seum</i> [I feel hatred] African languages, e.g. Wolof: <i>toubab</i> [white man] Romani: <i>bicrave</i> [to deal (drugs)]	Surinamese: <i>sma</i> [girl]; <i>ik ga loesoe</i> [I'm leaving] Papiamentu: <i>tantoe spang</i> [very nice] (Moroccan) Arabic: <i>sahbi</i> [friend], <i>tezz</i> [shit]
b) insertion of argot	<i>t'as des thunes?</i> [do you have dough, money?]; <i>mon daron</i> [my old man, dad]	–
c) semantic shift	<i>elle est mortelle</i> [she's awesome] <i>c'était une boucherie!</i> [it was a great party]	het is ziek [it's sick = great] dat is de shit [that's the shit = fantastic]
2. grammatical, syntactic, and morphological features:	verlanisation: <i>chaud</i> > <i>auch</i> [hot, dangerous] reverlanisation: <i>arabe</i> > <i>beur</i> > <i>reub/rebeu</i> [Arab]	–
a) verlan	in combination with loanword: <i>debléman</i> [man from the <i>bled</i> = (Arab) village of origin]	
b) truncation	especially apheresis: [<i>contrô</i>]leur [conducteur], [<i>Algé</i>]rien [Algerian] with reduplication: <i>ziczic</i> (< <i>musique</i>) [music]; <i>zonzon</i> (< <i>prison</i>) [jail]	apocope: Anti[I]lean], Su/Suri[nameese] with suffix: Mokro [Moroccan], shoppa [coffeeshop]
c) absence of conjugation	<i>on m'a chourave le portable</i> [they've *steal > stolen my cell phone]	–
d) omission of subordinator	omission of <i>que</i> : <i>c'est pas sûr ø c'est demain</i> [it's not certain (that) it will be tomorrow]	omission of 'dat' and shift from dependent clause to main clause: Hij denkt ø hij is de man [He thinks (that) he's the man]

e) omission of other elements	–	omission of subject announcing 'er' [there]: \emptyset is niemand [is nobody] omission of 'het' [it]: ik vind \emptyset niet leuk [I don't like (it)] omission of article: we gaan naar \emptyset Turkse restaurant [we are going to Turkish restaurant]
f) phatic interjections	<i>sur le Koran</i> [(I swear) on the Qur'an] <i>azy</i> (< <i>vas-y</i>) [come on]	wollah [I swear] je weet toch [you know]
g) shift of grammatical category	<i>il est grave beau</i> [he's *serious > very handsome] <i>je peux dead pour lui</i> [I'd *dead > die for him]	hij had een fokked op leven [he had a fucked-up life] ik heb haat aan jou [I got hate *at you]
h) deviant use of article and demonstrative pronoun	–	de huis [the house] die mooie meisje [that beautiful girl]
i) deviant form of future tense	–	use of 'gaan' instead of 'zullen': ze gaat kwaad zijn [cf. she gonna be mad]
3. style: a) metaphors	<i>avion de chasse</i> [fighter plane > pretty girl] <i>être alcatraz</i> [to be under house arrest]	merrie [mare > Mercedes] ankeren [to anchor > fuck]
b) hyperboles	<i>j'le crève !</i> [I'll finish him]	ik maak 'm dood! [I'll finish him]
4. phonological deviation: a) spelling	shift of stress towards penultimate syllable: <i>bââââtard!</i> [bastard]	stressing of consonants: izz goed [it's OK], warr [where] change of vowel [ij]: warr gha jai? [where are you going?]
b) elision and contraction, often with alternative spelling	<i>keskia</i> (< <i>qu'est-ce qu'il y a</i>) [what's the matter] <i>T6</i> (< <i>téci</i>) [verlan for <i>cit�</i>]	egt [really] van8 [tonight] (cf. 2Pac, w8)

Table 1: Comparative overview of urban youth slang features in French and Dutch

Even if incomplete, such an overview shows that not every category has an equivalent in the other language. This means that a translation that remains close to the source text – if indeed possible – will in many cases produce an unnatural effect. Let us consider a short example from French in a hypothetical Dutch translation. In a crime novel by Rachid Santaki (2011: 58), a French-Moroccan male character boasts to his cousin about a girl he has picked up: '*Elle est mortelle la meuf!*' As can be deduced from the overview above, relevant

FCC features here are the semantic shift in *mortelle* [fatal], conveying a positive meaning, and *meuf*, the now widely known verlanised form for *femme* [woman]; dislocation of constituents (*elle... la meuf*) is a typical element in French oral discourse. For a satisfactory translation, it is important to take the intermediate step of determining the function of these elements before choosing an option. Since dislocation is unusual in Dutch (and in English for that matter), systematically maintaining this French construction – as in ‘Zij is hot, die meid!’ [She’s hot, that chick] – would produce a *calque* (Delisle, Lee-Jahnke and Cormier 1999: 16). If applied repeatedly, this could lead to ‘overuse’, i.e. a certain form (in a bidirectional translation corpus) being used more often in translations than in original texts in the same language (Johansson 2007: 32). However, as the contrastive overview suggests, several options are available at the lexical level, for instance, inspired by the online Dutch *Straatwoordenboek* [Street Dictionary]: ‘Die sma is zwaar spang’. Depending on the context, the occurrence of the Surinamese terms ‘sma’ and ‘spang’ need not be problematic if we recall that street terms from a specific language area can easily find their way into wider multi-ethnic circles, where the original etymology is no longer perceived as relevant (Rampton 1995).

Therefore, what is needed in many cases is a flexible approach, one that is in line with Levý’s view that translation is not about reproducing all the individual stylistic features but rather their sociological effect in order to achieve ‘functional identity’ (Levý 2011: 20). Ritva Leppihalme, when discussing the options for translating a sociolect, asserts that there is no need to retain every aspect, provided that ‘the reading experience is emotionally satisfying in other ways’ (2000: 266). This is where compensation comes in: ‘a technique for making up for the loss of a source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or the target text’ (Harvey 1995: 56).¹⁵ A particular function can thus be expressed in the target language either by means of different linguistic resources, or by using the same means but elsewhere. While a specific effect may be lost at the micro level, the overall effect of the text will therefore be maintained. Translators of street literature, such as Bastian (2009) for the German language area and Vitali (2011c) for Italian, do indeed emphasise the usefulness of this procedure.

Before considering how translators in the Netherlands deal with the structural asymmetry between source and target language registers in practice, I will examine how Dutch multi-ethnic youth vernacular manifests itself in literature.

5. Street language in Dutch fiction and translations from French

In the absence of a suitable corpus of Dutch novels I used both the internet and suggestions from colleagues and students to identify a dozen titles (see Primary sources). As for French, my starting point was 1999, which makes the French

¹⁵ This quote constitutes Harvey’s working definition of this procedure, which he elaborates on in his article.

and Dutch corpora comparable. Due to a lack of resources, however, they have not been made available in digital form and have not been explored systematically.

In analogy to the French situation, we can distinguish between novels by relatively young ethnic minority writers and by 'native' Dutch authors. More or less the same issues appear as in the corresponding French novels, such as expressions of uprootedness, social injustice, delinquency and violence, although the description of violent scenes tends to be less explicit. However, they differ markedly from their French counterparts in that there is almost no poetry or lyricism. This may be because, unlike in France, classical poetry is neglected in the Dutch school curriculum and – with the exception of rap lyrics – is usually not appreciated in youth culture. National literary conventions may also play a role; although data are scarce, literary prose in Dutch is not generally known for its lyricism. Nonetheless, as in the overlapping French category, humour and irony are frequent devices. While the rebellious function is less obvious in the Dutch corpus, adherence to group identity is equally manifest. Indeed, the characters, and occasionally the narrator, often struggle with being uprooted, taking refuge in an interstitial space where group member support is vital on both the social and linguistic level.

Most of these aspects are expressed in the following fragment from Bahara's novel *Een verhaal uit de stad Damsko* [A story from the city of Damsko (slang for 'Amsterdam')] (46-47); it also happens to be one of the few instances of metacommunication in the corpus. The context is as follows: in an ethnically mixed group of friends who are playing snooker, the Serbian Zelko, a relative outsider, attempts to make friends with the main character, the popular Dutch-Moroccan Kader.

Dan onderbreekt hij [=Zelko] opeens zijn monoloog en richt zich tot Kader. 'Hé, sahbi, heb je misschien shie tabakka's voor me?' en hij wijst naar de sigaret in Kaders hand. Kader haalt een pakje uit zijn jas, een nieuw pakje, en geeft hem een sigaret. 'Hé, bedankt, sahbi,' zegt Zelko en geeft Kader een kameraadschappelijk bedoelde stoot tegen zijn schouders. 'Choukran voor de tabakka.'

'Ja ja,' mompelt Kader.

Samir stoot een bal weg en zegt dan tegen Zelko: 'Je bent een fokking loser, weet je dat? Waarom gebruik je woorden als choukran en sahbi? Denk je dat we je dan... aardig zullen vinden of zo?'

'Nee man.' Zelko lacht ongemakkelijk. 'Natuurlijk niet. Maar je weet toch, Kader is mijn sahbi. Ik mag hem toch wel zo noemen?'

'Je kan ook gewoon op een normale manier om een sigaret vragen,' zegt Danny. 'Of is het voor Serviërs normaal om zo te slijmen?'

[Suddenly, he (=Zelko) breaks off his monologue and turns to Kader: 'Hey, sahbi, d'you happen to have shie tobacco(s) for me?', pointing to the cigarette in Kader's hand. Kader takes a packet from his coat, a new packet, and hands Zelko a cigarette. 'Hey, thanks, sahbi,' Zelko says and gives him a friendly punch on the shoulder. 'Choukran for the tobacco.'

'Yeah, sure,' Kader mumbles.

Samir hits a ball and says to Zelko: 'You're a fuckin' loser, you know that? Why do you use words like choukran and sahbi? D'you think we're gonna... like you or something that way?'

'No, man.' Zelko laughs uncomfortably. 'Of course not. But, you know, Kader's my sahbi. I can call him that, can't I?'

'You can also ask for a cigarette in a normal way,' Danny says. 'Or is it normal for Serbs to suck up like that?']

In line with the paratextual strategies referred to in Section 3, a Dutch glossary of foreign terms – in this case Arabic – has been added at the end of the novel (240), including *choukran* [thank you], *sahbie* (sic) [friend], *shie* [a few], and *tabakka's* [tobacco, cigarettes].

This example also illustrates the relevance of the aforementioned phenomenon of 'crossing', in which interlocutors from different ethnic backgrounds incorporate terms from someone else's language area in their speech without taking into account their etymology. In this case, this strategy obviously serves as an attempt – albeit artificial – to achieve a sense of interethnic unity. It may also be interesting at this point to draw attention to the reversal of values that is manifested in street culture as a form of counterculture (Halliday 1978: 181). While according to Bourdieu (1991: 70-77) language users usually strive to acquire the most socially esteemed variety in order to accumulate cultural capital, for urban youth slang speakers, as indicated by Lepoutre (2001: 171), it is the 'low variety' that confers prestige within the in-group.

As is the case with its French counterpart, the second category in the Dutch corpus comprises novels by 'home-grown' writers, which feature youthful slang speakers and street culture, and which usually have an external narrator. The authors concerned frequently have a background in police work, child welfare, or journalism. This may explain why these writers, by conveying stereotypical features such as a low educational level, social failure, or delinquency, tend to present a more limited perspective on the characters' discourse than those of the first category. In Robert Vuijsje's bestseller, *Alleen maar nette mensen* [Only Decent People], for instance, all these characteristics apply to some extent to the narrator's Surinamese girlfriend and her social network. Conversely, the use of standard language is almost without exception the preserve of highly educated white citizens who enjoy a comfortable social and economic position, or the prospect of one.

While a comparable corpus can be a useful source of inspiration, a translation corpus allows for a description of actual translation problems and their solutions (Johansson 2007: 10). Ideally, exploration of both corpus types would make it possible to verify whether the similarities and differences discovered in the comparable corpus have been taken into account in the translations. For this purpose, I will explore Dutch translations of French novels featuring FCC. Since the translation corpus appears to comprise only two novels, I was able to compare them manually with their source texts. Both were written by the young French-Algerian Faïza Guène. They are her début *Kiffe kiffe demain*, published in 2004 when the author was only nineteen, and *Du rêve pour les oufs*, published in 2006. These two novels were translated into Dutch, entitled *Morgen kifkif* (2005) and *Dromen tussen het beton* (2006), by Frans van Woerden and Truus Boot respectively.¹⁶ Although the novels have also been translated into English, my concern is with a comparative French-Dutch approach. I will therefore only consider the English translations (confining myself to the UK versions) as an instrument for commenting on the Dutch target texts.¹⁷ My aim is to examine whether the Dutch discourse creates an authentic impression, thus allowing a coherent and plausible reconstruction of the narrator's and characters' identities in the target texts. In other words, to what extent do the translations conform to Levý's illusionistic principle? I will start with the Dutch version of Guène's début novel.

5.1 *Morgen kifkif* (translated by Frans van Woerden)

The narrator is Doria, the fifteen-year-old French-Moroccan daughter of a poor, illiterate Muslim single mother in a Parisian social housing project. She expresses herself mainly in colloquial language and occasionally in FCC, with a good dose of irony and humour and the occasional poetic element. On the whole, in terms of Venuti's dichotomy (2008), the translator applies both domesticating and foreignizing procedures. At the lexical level, colloquial terms and street language are used. One such example is the following scene, in which the narrator's mother is represented picturing France as the backdrop to old black and white movies:

Ceux avec l'acteur beau gosse qui raconte toujours un tas de trucs mythos à sa meuf, une cigarette au coin du bec. (21)

[The ones where the buff actor's always telling his woman so much (*sic*) lies, with a cigarette dangling from his lips. (13)]

Met in de hoofdrol een hippe gast met een peuk in zijn ene mondhoek, die allerlei mooie praatjes aan zijn sweetie verkoopt. (16)¹⁸

The Anglicism 'sweetie' (in italics in the text), which features on several Dutch websites devoted to slang, can be considered an equivalent of *meuf*, while the

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the translations, see Linn (2014).

¹⁷ If no page number is given, the English translation is my own.

¹⁸ All underlinings are mine.

meaning of *mythos*, with its argotic suffix *-os*, corresponds to the collocation ‘mooie praatjes verkopen’ [literally, to sell sweet talk].

In terms of syntax, Van Woerden often closely adheres to the French word order, for example in the case of dislocation. As mentioned before, this colloquial construction is rare in Dutch. A systematic literal reproduction may therefore lead to ‘overuse’, as in: ‘Ik had al gehoopt dat hij zo zou reageren, Hamoudi’ (158) for *J’espérais qu’il réagisse comme ça Hamoudi* (187) [I was hoping he’d react that way (177)].

A specific problem concerns the novel’s geographical context. Possibly to compensate for the loss of FCC features, Van Woerden occasionally turns to the urban dialect of Amsterdam, employing a rather faithful phonetic transcription (underlined). In the following fragment, some girls at a flea market are commenting on the narrator’s cheap clothes:

– *Téma* [verlan for *matez*] *la fille, habillée encore plus mal que sa daronne* (111)

[‘Check out the daughter, her garm’s even worse than her old lady’s’ (101)]

‘Moe-je die meid eens kaike, nog erregere kleren dan die ouwe van d’r’ (94)

Thus, instead of a comparable multilingual urban youth register, the translator uses a specific local dialect, a strategy that Antoine Berman (1985) disapproves of; the main drawbacks of this ‘dialect-for-dialect’ approach are discussed by Mével (2007). Lane-Mercier (1997: 55) might point out the risk of ‘*naturalisation culturelle*’ here, leading the target reader to wonder what these Amsterdam girls are doing in a Parisian *cité*.¹⁹ This gives rise to a problem that Levý (2011: 67) describes as follows: ‘The content of the translated work is derived from the source text, but it is written in the target language. The reader is not aware of this contradiction until there is a clear conflict between the setting of the action and a specific target language expression.’ Other choices associated with this particular urban dialect have further implications for the narrator’s identity. Here, Doria observes that her mother sometimes borrows money from a rich old lady:

Maman lui emprunte de l’argent quand on est vraiment en galère. (25)

[Mum borrows money from her when we’re totally broke. (17)]

Mama leent geld van haar als we echt in de dalles zitten. (20)

The Dutch sentence may cause an identity conflict in several ways: in terms of ethnicity, religion and age. The expression ‘in de dalles zitten’ is not only old-fashioned, but also typically Yiddish, associated in the Netherlands with the Jewish community in Amsterdam before World War II (Sijs & Willemyns 2009: 142). To put such an outdated Jewish expression in the mouth of a young Muslim girl is likely to break the illusion regarding the narrator’s coherence and credibility. A similar disruption, this time with a Christian twist, occurs with the

¹⁹ Consultation of the comparable overview could suggest compensatory lexical options here, such as: ‘Check de kleren van die sma (or: chick), nog erger als die van d’r ma’.

translation of Doria's spiteful comment *Trop pourrave* (161) [that sucks]: 'Kriebelsejezusnogantoe' (137), which contains a reference to Jesus.

As to the frequent culture-specific elements that occur in the novel, the translation strategy varies. Some of these items are explained by a footnote or an addition in the target text (Franco Aixelá 1996). Thus, for instance, *à Carrefour* (10) becomes 'bij de chique supermarkt [at the posh supermarket] Carrefour' (8). The implicit connotation conveyed by this proper name has been made explicit here for the Dutch audience. In other cases, no information is given. For instance, Doria recalls a prize she won *à la fin d'année de CM2* (72) [at the end of fifth grade (64)], an element that has been retained in the translation: 'aan het eind van mijn jaar [at the end of my year] in CM2' (60). Since this concept is unknown in the Netherlands, it is probably not clear to a Dutch readership what age this proud childhood memory refers to.²⁰ The target text therefore offers less information at this point about the narrator's identity.

5.2 *Dromen tussen het beton* (translated by Truus Boot)

Faïza Guène's second novel *Du rêve pour les oufs* (2006) is once again set in a dreary Parisian *cité* featuring a fractured family. The autodiegetic narrator is the wisecracking but socially unsuccessful 24-year-old Ahlème, who left school at sixteen and has to care for her invalid father ('the Boss') and her younger brother Foued. Ahlème's language use is broadly similar to that of Doria, while Foued as a 'tough street guy' uses mainly FCC to express himself.

Modern slang also appears in the Dutch version, although significantly less often than in the source text (Linn 2014). Some examples of Foued's speech: 'Je moet hun fucken voordat zij jou fucken' (121) for *Faut les enculer avant que ce soit eux qui le fassent* (98) [You gotta fuck 'em up the arse before they fuck you (98)]; '[ze] geven me doekoe' (119) for *ils nous donnent des tunes* (97) [they give me dough].

Other lexical choices, however, may interfere with aspects of the identity of characters or the narrator. As youth slang is associated with a sub-standard register, it is conspicuous that on several occasions a vocabulary is used that has elitist connotations in Dutch, such as, in Ahlème's recordings, 'gedistingeerd' (47) [distinguished-looking (35)] and 'excentrieke architectuur' (33) [wacky architecture (23)], whereas the register in the source text is unmarked. Sometimes, even sophisticated French loanwords appear in Dutch, such as '[hij] zinspeelde op die onvergetelijke derrière' (48) for *il faisait subtilement allusion à ce postérieur inoubliable* (42) [...a subtle reference to her unforgettable backside (36)], or 'Ik heb me opgetut voor mijn rendez-vous' (85) for *Je me suis arrangée pour mon rendez-vous* (71) [I've fixed myself up for our date (69)]. The use of this 'high variety' utterances by the, admittedly, clever but poorly educated Ahlème does not match her identity insofar as her educational background is concerned. The same strategy appears in the representation of

²⁰ In the Dutch educational system this level corresponds to Group 7 or 8 (children aged 11).

other characters, for example when an old acquaintance apologises to Ahlème after an unfriendly comment, using the very formal 'Excusé' (132) for French 'Excuse' (108), while 'Sorry' (as used in the English translation, 107) would be more plausible. In the dialogue, this register clashes with the communicative situation, again disrupting the novelistic illusion.

At the syntactical level, where dislocation is concerned, Boot tends to adhere to the French colloquial word order even more strictly than Van Woerden. Especially in short sentences, this may create an impression of artificiality, e.g. where Ahlème comments on Foued: *C'est qu'il prend soin de lui, ce petit con* (90) [He takes good care of himself, the little jerk (90)], translated as 'Hij verzorgt zichzelf wel goed, het klotejong' (112).

As far as culture-specific references are concerned, the translator applies a variety of strategies, just as Van Woerden does in *Morgen kifkif*. Some of these choices suggest a different aspect to a character's identity, for instance when a *bourse du lycée* (91) [EMA²¹ grant (90)] for fifteen-year-old Foued, who we know has a history of truancy, is translated as 'studietoelage' (112), i.e. a study grant for university. Another translation choice raises doubts about the religious aspect of Ahlème's identity: the daughter of a Muslim, she declares that during her childhood in Algeria she attended an 'openbare school' (52), meaning a public, non-religious school, where the source text mentions *une petite école communale* (45) [a small community school (39)]. This element does not conform to the historical context (Kateb 2004).

This use of a language register and culture-specific items that do not always comply with the 'rules of verisimilitude' described by Levý (2011: 19-20) imply that the representation of the characters' and narrator's identity is less coherent in Dutch and may therefore be perceived as less credible than in the source text.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the phenomenon of urban youth language, in particular the French and Dutch varieties, drawing on both sociolinguistic sources and a comparable literary corpus consisting of twelve novels featuring this type of slang for each of the languages. On the basis of this information, I have drafted a contrastive overview of characteristics of FCC vs Dutch street language. With regard to the functions of the varieties, linguists tend to stress the speakers' rebellious identity ('they code') for the French language area, whereas the 'we code' factor seems to play a more prominent role for the Dutch, although this does not necessarily imply that antagonism is less present. The ludic aspect is present in both languages.

As to the transformation of urban youth discourse in literature, the three aforementioned functions occur, each one helping to highlight different aspects

²¹ Education Maintenance Allowance.

of the fictional identities, which may range from an impression of authenticity to parody or stereotyping. This last effect appears to be more prominent in novels written by 'native' Western writers, who tend to focus on underprivileged youths with limited cultural and linguistic capital. Young ethnic minority authors, in contrast, tend to emphasise more positive elements, such as humour and interethnic solidarity. The tendency to show a wider linguistic variety in their characters' discourse is specific to the French multi-ethnic authors, as indicated by the use of FCC in alternation with poetic allusions and lyrical expressions which typically belong to high culture. These features, which are traditionally present in French writing, are absent in the corresponding Dutch category. While this again conforms to national literary conventions, the fictional characters appearing in the Dutch corpus thus seem to display a more one-dimensional identity.

The translation problems caused by this hybrid variety require highly creative skills in order to present the target audience with a language that comes across as natural, in keeping with Levý's 'illusion of authenticity'. This implies that the language used by a character or narrator should be coherent and credible to a variety of readers, i.e. consistent with his or her constructed fictional identity. Given the lack of suitable translation resources to help achieve this aim, an additional tool is presented here in the form of a bilingual French-Dutch overview of linguistic features, intended as a source of translation suggestions. Although incomplete, this contrastive survey may enable translators to assess the options available to them. Thus, faced with the absence of a specific linguistic phenomenon, they can decide to apply compensation, a flexible technique to achieve overall functional identity. Further research could augment this draft overview by adding examples and possibly, at a later stage, including more languages.

I subsequently examined a small corpus of two translations into Dutch of novels by Faïza Guène to discover to what extent the translations conformed to Levý's 'norm of veracity', whereby the narrator and characters should be plausibly represented through their use of language. It appears that various aspects of their identity, such as age, religion, cultural and educational level, repeatedly differed from those expressed in the source texts, thus affecting the novelistic illusion of authenticity. The strategies applied to deal with culture-specific elements were not always consistent, which once again led to differences in the representation of the fictional identities. To confirm these findings, it would be interesting to verify the extent to which intended groups of readers in the target culture are capable of understanding street language.

As a case in point, the narrator in Rachid Djaïdani's novel *Boumkœur* cites a fragment in verlan that includes the expression '*C'est trop auch!*' [It's dangerous!]. This same warning could apply to the translation of urban youth vernacular, since translators must not only possess sophisticated linguistic and translational competences, as well as an affinity with heterolingual youth discourse, but should also be alert to the risk of undesirable sociocultural and ideological implications of their choices.

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