Asymmetric syntactic patterns in German-Dutch translation: a corpus-based study of the interaction between normalisation and shining through

ASTRID VAN OOST, ANNELORE WILLEMS
& GERT DE SUTTER
*R.U. EQTIS, Department of Translation, Interpreting
and Communication, Ghent University*

ABSTRACT

The present study investigates how opposing translation universals (explanatory devices) as normalisation and shining through interact with each other. More particularly, we want to find out whether it is more likely to observe instantiations of shining through or (over-)normalisation in translations of contemporary literary fiction and whether the likelihood of these three explanatory devices varies according to translation direction. On the basis of a bidirectional comparable corpus of Dutch and German literary fictional texts (1975-2010), we investigated a case of syntactic variation that exists in both languages, viz. prepositional phrase (PP) placement. In both languages, a PP can be placed either in the middle field or in the postfield, but German presents a more outspoken preference for the middle field, thus making PP placement ideal for an investigation of the interaction between shining through and (over)normalisation. The results of the analyses show that (i) there is a strong form of shining through present in Dutch texts translated from German and (ii) a strong form of normalisation in German texts translated from Dutch. These results confirm Toury's hypothesis that a less prestigious language such as Dutch is more tolerant towards higher frequencies of linguistic features which are typical of highly prestigious source languages as German than the other way around.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Mona Baker (1993) advocated the use of corpus-based methodologies in the field of translation studies, many corpus-based translation scholars have shown that language use in translated and non-

translated texts differs considerably on all linguistic levels – lexical, grammatical, discursive (e.g., Puurtinen 1998, Olohan & Baker 2000, Teich 2003, Olohan 2003, De Sutter & Van de Velde 2010, Lefer 2012, Cappelle & Loock 2013). Most of these differences were interpreted as direct evidence for one or more so-called translation universals, such as explicitation, simplification and normalisation (Baker 1993, 1996). For instance, Olohan & Baker (2000) consider the higher frequency of explicit complementiser *that* in translated English (compared to non-translated English) as an indicator of the explicitation universal.

Although the translation universals framework has come under some attack in recent years (e.g., Becher 2010, De Sutter et al. 2012), there is a large consensus that the conceptual core of the universals framework still makes sense, and is likely to inspire future research initiatives. It is also true that conceptual and methodological adjustments of the original universals framework are indispensable in order to guarantee future productive research in corpus-based translation studies. First, on a conceptual level, we need to restrict research to those universals that are pragmatically, socially and/or cognitively plausible to show up during translation. For instance, Becher (2010) convincingly argued to abandon the translation-inherent type of the explicitation universal in favour of Klaudy's asymmetry hypothesis, as there is no reason to assume the existence of translation-inherent explicitation. Second, we need to rephrase the universals in terms of probabilistic explanatory devices, which are likely to leave traces in translations (via different types of linguistic realisations), but not always to the same extent, depending on a broad range of contextual and cognitive features (genre, translator expertise, translator bilingual profile, use of translation software, languages involved in the translation process etc.). Third, more advanced methodological tools have to be explored in order to reliably chart which contextual and cognitive features affect the likelihood of a given explanatory device, and how different devices interact with each other. Multivariate statistics and multi-methods designs turn out be the most adequate and readily available methodological tools to achieve this (see, e.g., Oakes & Ji 2012 and Fantinuoli & Zanettin 2015 for first explorations in that direction).

The present paper wants to contribute to this (adjusted) line of research in corpus-based translation studies by empirically investigating the interaction of two well-known complementary explanatory devices, viz. shining through and normalisation, while at the same time taking into account the contextual feature of translation direction. More

particularly, we want to find out (i) whether it is more likely to observe instantiations of shining through or normalisation in translations of contemporary literary fiction; (ii) whether the likelihood of both devices varies according to translation direction – German to Dutch vs. Dutch to German – i.e. between languages that differ in the size of language community and prestige.

In order to fully grasp these research goals, and the added value for corpus-based translation studies, it is important to specifically characterize the relationship between shining through and normalisation. Shining through (Teich 2003) refers to the transferring of linguistic features which are typical of the source language into the translated text. It is important to note that shining through only applies to features which are available in both the source and target language, but which are more typical of the source language than the target language. As a consequence, shining through does not cause linguistic errors in translated texts (which would be negative interference), but just increased frequencies of use in translated texts compared to similar non-translated texts in the same language. In other words, a significant higher frequency of a linguistic feature in the source language (compared to the target language) shimmers through in translated texts, thereby causing a frequency difference between translated and similar non-translated texts.

Normalisation is traditionally conceived as the tendency of translators to conform to patterns of use which are typical of the target language, even to the point of exaggerating them (Baker 1996). This definition clearly combines two distinct forms of translation behaviour. First, the translator conforms to the patterns in the target language, as a consequence of which there are no frequency differences between translated texts and similar non-translated texts (henceforth: normalisation). Second, the translator over-uses the typical patterns of the target language, thereby leading to a significant higher frequency in translated texts than in non-translated texts (henceforth: over-normalisation; Teich 2004). Shining through, normalisation and over-normalisation are thus strongly related, mutually exclusive devices: a given linguistic feature cannot be an instance of normalisation, over-normalisation and shining through simultaneously, but of one only. In that respect, the relationship between these devices can be characterized as points along a cline, with source language and target language conformity as its extremes.

Source language conformity		Target language conformity	

Shining through   Normalisation   Over-normalisation

Empirically studying instances of shining through, normalisation and over-normalisation in a corpus of literary fiction German-Dutch and Dutch-German enables us to answer the question how different explanatory mechanisms interact with each other, an issue which has been rarely raised in the field. Additionally, by including both translation directions, we can also investigate whether the interaction between these devices differs in translations from a highly prestigious language (German) compared to translations from a less prestigious language (Dutch) – thereby increasing our understanding of this contextual feature in the translation process. More particularly, following Toury (2012), one could hypothesise that a less prestigious language such as Dutch is more tolerant towards inflated frequencies of linguistic features which are typical of highly prestigious languages as German than the other way around. In other words, translations from German into Dutch would reveal relatively more instances of shining through and fewer normalisations than German translations from Dutch source texts.

In order to study the interaction between shining through, normalisation and over-normalisation, as well as the effect of translation direction in a bidirectional corpus of German and Dutch contemporary literary fiction, we selected a case of syntactic variation that exists both in German and Dutch, viz. prepositional phrase (PP) placement. Both in German and Dutch, PPs can be placed either in the middle field or in the postfield, but the extent to which both languages prefer one of these syntactic options differs considerably, thus making this case of syntactic variation an ideal testbed for the interaction between the three devices.

Before presenting and discussing the results in section 4, and elaborating on the implications for corpus-based translation studies in section 5, section 2 first reviews the literature about PP placement in Dutch and German, and section 3 presents the data and method used in this corpus study.

PP Placement in German and Dutch

German and Dutch are both West-Germanic languages, sharing many linguistic features. A typical syntactic feature of both languages is the so-called bracket or pincer construction (Vandeweghe 2004:234, Ten Cate et al. 2004:36-40), which is characterised by the fixed position of the verbal elements in the clause: the finite verb takes the second syntactic slot in the clause (i.e. the first pole), the infinite verb(s) – if present – take the ultimate or penultimate syntactic slot (i.e. the second pole). These two poles thus divide the clause in three *topological* fields, in which the non-verbal constituents are distributed (example 1a): one before the first pole (the prefield), one between the two poles (the middle field) and one after the second pole (the postfield)[1].

1.a De man[prefield] **is**[1st pole] rustig naar huis[middle field] **gegaan**[2nd pole] na de ruzie[postfield].
The man peacefully went home after the fight.

1.b […] **dat**[1st pole] de man rustig naar huis[middle field] **is gegaan**[2nd pole] na de ruzie[postfield].
[…] that the man peacefully went home after the fight.

The bracket construction exists both in main and subordinate clauses, but in subordinate clauses, the conjunction takes the first pole and all verbal elements shift to the second pole, as shown in example 1b. As a consequence of this, subordinate clauses do not contain a prefield (Zwart 2011:35).

Most prepositional phrases (PPs) in Dutch and German can appear in all three topological fields, which means that their position in the clause is flexible. As this study will only focus on PP placement in subordinate clauses (cf. section 3), we will restrict the discussion to middle field vs. postfield position of PPs (leaving prefield position aside). Examples 2a and 2b demonstrate that the German PP *in den einundzwanzig Monaten seiner Abwesenheit* can be placed either in the postfield (2a) or in the middle field (2b) – and the same applies for Dutch:

2.a […], **dass**[1st pole] sich doch etwas[middle field] **geändert hatte**[2nd pole] in den einundzwanzig Monaten seiner Abwesenheit[postfield].
(Der Tangospieler)

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[1] The three fields can remain empty, as well as the second pole in main clauses (Haeseryn et al. 1997: 1226)

2.b   […], **dass**[1st pole] sich in den einundzwanzig Monaten seiner Abwesenheit doch etwas[middle field] **geändert hatte**[2nd pole] [postfield]. *[…] that something had changed in the twenty one months that he was absent.*

Even though Dutch and German are structurally very similar and they both exhibit a flexible position for PPs, both languages *do* differ as to the extent to which this flexibility is used – i.e., there is a usage difference. More particularly, German displays a more outspoken preference for PPs in the middle field than Dutch (Van de Velde 1973, Eisenberg et al. 1995:790-791, De Sutter & Van de Velde 2010a and 2010b), thus generally leaving the postfield empty. This usage difference between German and Dutch has been empirically verified in De Sutter & Van de Velde (2010a and b), while at the same time investigating the effect of this difference on translated texts. They found that in translated German texts (from Dutch), PPs are positioned even less in the postfield than in original German texts, which points to over-normalisation. In Dutch translated texts from German, significantly more PPs are positioned in the middle field in Dutch than in original Dutch texts, which points to shining through.

Both studies, however, only compared translated texts with non-translated texts, without taking into account the actual syntactic choices that were made in the source texts. Consequently, the authors could only *suspect* an over-normalisation and shining through effect, but they were not able to empirically validate it. Indeed, in order to ensure that a difference between translated and non-translated texts is related to over-normalisation or shining through, one needs to ascertain the source text structure and source text frequencies of PP placement. On the one hand, shining through is only possible if it can be shown that the frequency difference between translated texts and non-translated texts is due to diverging (syntactic) choices in translated texts that are identical to the syntactic choices made in the source texts. (Over-) normalisation, on the other hand can only be attested if it can be shown (i) that there is no significant difference between translated texts and non-translated texts (normalisation) or there is a significantly higher frequency of a given (syntactic) choice in translated texts compared to non-translated texts (over-normalisation), (ii) while at the same time exhibiting a significantly lower frequency of this (syntactic) choice in the source texts.

In this follow-up study, which deals with the same syntactic phenomenon, building on another, but similar corpus of literary fiction, we will be able to empirically verify whether Dutch-to-German

translation indeed results in over-normalisation and German-to-Dutch translation results in shining through, as our corpus consists of non-translated texts, translated texts and their source texts.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the interaction between shining through, normalisation and over-normalisation, we used a bidirectional parallel corpus of contemporary German and Dutch literary fiction (1975-2010)[2]. More particularly, the corpus consists of 22 novels, consisting of 4 German source texts and their translations in Dutch (= 8 novels) and 7 Dutch source texts and their translations in German (= 14 novels). The reason why we selected more novels for the Dutch-to-German translation direction, is that we wanted to make the total number of tokens in both directions comparable (German source texts: 258,287; German translations: 285,160; Dutch source texts: 289,930; Dutch translations: 276,671).

Then, we automatically extracted all Dutch subordinate clauses with one or more than one PP in the middle field or postfield (by means of Paraconc[3]) and the corresponding German clauses. The reason why we focus only on subordinate clauses is practical: in Dutch and German subordinate clauses, the two verbal poles are always present, which is a condition sine qua non for this study, as we need a clear demarcation between the middle field and postfield. As we mentioned above, main clauses sometimes lack a second pole, as a consequence of which there is no possibility to vary the position of the PP: middle field position is the only possible position (if there is no second pole in the clause, the postfield is automatically lacking too). Additionally, we only selected subordinate clauses with the grammatical (semantically empty) conjunction *dat* ('that') and PPs that start with one of the following six frequently used prepositions: *van* ('from, of'), *naar* ('to'), *voor* ('for, before'), *in* ('in'), *op* ('on'), *met* ('with'). The reason for this is purely practical: we wanted to reduce the size of the data set in a principled manner.

All clauses in the corpus that matched these criteria were manually checked; additionally, the data had to comply with the following criteria. First, we removed all PPs that are syntactically dependent on

[2] We are grateful to Hinde De Metsenaere (Ghent University) for granting us access to this corpus.
[3] http://paraconc.com/

other PPs, NPs, APs or AdvPs (see example 3, where the underlined PP *van de kamer* ('of the room') is dependent on the NP *de deur* ('the door'), as we wanted to control for this potentially underlying factor.:

> 3. dat **de deur <u>van de kamer</u>** geopend werd (De tangospeler)
> *That the door of the room was opened*

Second, clauses with a PP in the right-dislocation position were removed, and third, predicate PPs in the middle field were deleted, as they are not subject to variation. Consider example 4, where the PP *in de war* ('confused') is a nominal predicate, and can therefore only be placed in the middle field.

> 4. dat de planten **in de war** raakten (Aimez-vous les moules)
> *That the plants got confused*

After removing all irrelevant observations, the data set contains 412 pairs of clauses for German-to-Dutch translation direction and 309 pairs of clauses for the Dutch-to-German direction.

Next, we checked the individual correspondences (source-and-translation pairs) in both translation directions. Obviously, a PP in the Dutch source text is not always translated by a German PP. Consider example 5, in which the German corresponding structure of the Dutch PP is an NP.

> 5.a dat ik nooit **van die prullen** gehouden heb als ze echt verdwenen zijn (De avondbries)
> 5.b daß ich **dieses Zeug** noch nie mochte, wenn es wirklich verschwunden ist
> *That I never liked these things, if they have really disappeared.*

After checking all individual correspondences, we only retained those source-and-translation pairs in German and Dutch which contain a (corresponding) PP that is located in either the middle field or the postfield. Hence, all clauses with a PP in the afterthought, the prefield or elsewhere were removed from the dataset.

In total, we obtained a data set of 278 translation pairs for German-to-Dutch translation and 216 for Dutch-to-German translation.

The software used for the statistical analyses presented below is R 3.0.1 (2015). For all statistical tests performed in this study, the significance cut-off level is 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we empirically verify to what extent normalisation, over-normalisation or shining through is the most dominant pattern of translation, and whether dominancy is influenced by translation direction. This is done by comparing the relative frequencies of PP placement in Dutch translations vs. Dutch non-translations vs. German source texts on the one hand and the proportions of PP placement in German translations vs. German non-translations vs. Dutch source texts on the other. Based on the literature review presented above, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

1. *German-to-Dutch translation*: there are significantly more PPs positioned in the middle field in Dutch texts translated from German than in original, non-translated Dutch texts, and the deviance is caused by the structural transfer of middle field PPs in the German source texts; so, Dutch translations predominantly exhibit shining through (De Sutter & Van de Velde 2010b).

2. *Dutch-to-German translation:* there are significantly less PPs positioned in the postfield in German texts translated from Dutch than in original, non-translated German texts, and the difference is even more striking in comparison to the frequency of postfield PPs in the Dutch source texts; so, German translations predominantly exhibit over-normalisation (De Sutter & Van de Velde 2010a).

PP placement in translated and non-translated Dutch

Figure 1 shows the distribution of PP placement in both translated and non-translated Dutch. As we can see, the majority of the PPs is positioned in the middle field, regardless whether they are translated or not. In translated Dutch, however, the preference for middle field position is more outspoken (88.33%; 280/317) than in non-translated Dutch (70.87%; 219/309). This difference in PP placement is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 28.41$, d.f. = 1, p < .001), which means that we can be very confident (more than 99.99% confidence) that the attested difference on the basis of our sample is representative for the full; hence, we can conclude that the difference in PP placement between both varieties of Dutch is real.
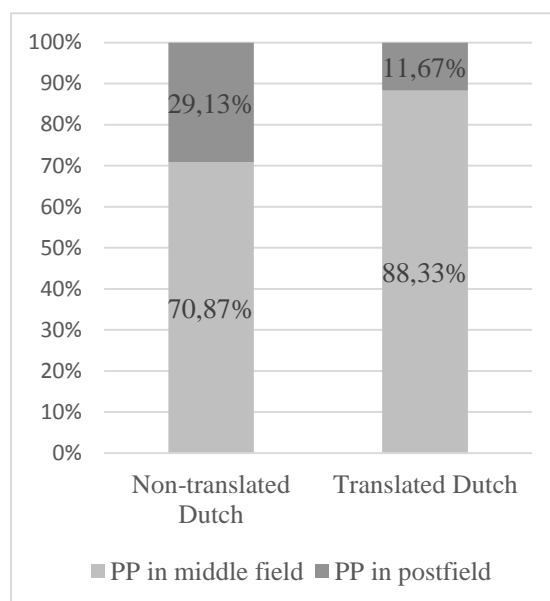
Figure 1 Distribution of PP placement in non-translated and translated Dutch

Given the strong German preference for the middle field position, it seems plausible to explain the results in Figure 1 in terms of shining through, i.e. the strong preference for middle field position in the translated Dutch fictional texts are likely to be influenced by the original PP position in the German source texts. Obviously, this explanation can only be maintained if we can show that German indeed has a strong preference for PPs in the middle field position and if the middle field positions in the Dutch translations strongly correspond to middle field positions of PPs in the German source texts.

Table 1 shows that middle field position indeed is the most preferred slot for German PPs: more than 98% of all PPs show up in middle field position (= 88.49% + 9.71%). Moreover, it can be seen that 88.49% of the German source text PPs that are located in the middle field maintain their position in the Dutch translation, which reveals beyond doubt that shining through is a dominant pattern in translations from German to Dutch. This is further corroborated by the fact that a chi-square analysis convincingly shows that there is no difference at all between the positioning of the PPs in the German source texts and the

Dutch translations ($\chi^2 = 0$, d.f. $= 1$, p$= 1$), thereby confirming our first hypothesis above. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that shining through is dominant, but not absolute, as in 11.15% (31/278) of the cases, PP positions changed during the translation from German to Dutch, mostly middle-field-to-postfield shift, which can be related to normalisation.

	German source text	
Dutch translation	Middle field	Postfield
Middle field	246	4
	88,49%	1,44%
Postfield	27	1
	9,71%	0,36%

Table 1 PP placement in translated Dutch in relation to PP placement in the corresponding German source texts.

In conclusion, we observed a very strong form of shining through in German-to-Dutch translation; only a small proportion of the data exhibited normalisation, albeit non-significant.

PP placement in translated and non-translated German

In this section, we analyse the PP positions in translated and non-translated German texts. As can be seen in figure 2, most PPs are positioned in the middle field, regardless of their status (translated or non-translated). In original German, the PPs are somewhat more frequently positioned in the middle field (98.20%; 273/278) than in translated German (96,76%; 209/216), but this difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.545$, d.f. $= 1$, p$= 0.4604$).
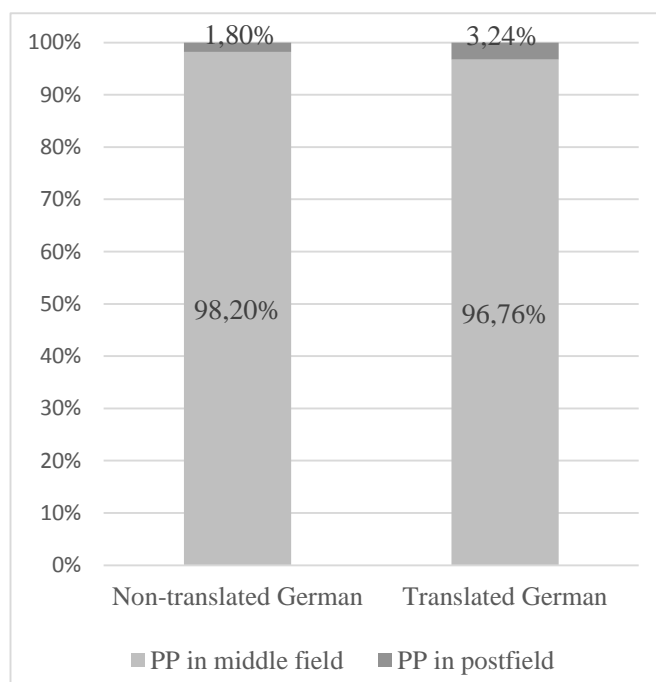
Figure 2 Distribution in non-translated and translated German

Given the fact that PPs in original Dutch are much more frequently placed in the postfield (cf. Figure 1 above), one is tempted to conclude that there is no shining through effect in Dutch-to-German translations, but a normalisation effect, in which Dutch postfield PPs are shifted to the German middle field. To verify whether or not this is true, the corresponding positions of the German PPs in the Dutch source texts were analysed. Table 2 shows that 72.96% of the Dutch PPs that were located in the middle field maintained their position in the German translation, whereas in almost a quarter of the cases (24.07%) the Dutch PPs originally positioned in the postfield shift to the middle field in the German translation. Remarkably, none of the PPs originally positioned in the Dutch middle field shift to the postfield during the translation process. The observed position shift from Dutch to German is statistically significant (χ^2 = 15.6533, d.f. = 1, p < .001), which means that translators change the position of the PPs more frequently than could be expected on the basis of coincidence. These results convincingly show that the dominant pattern in translation of fiction

from Dutch to German is not shining through, but normalisation, signifying that translators adhere to the syntactic rules and preferences of the target language and thereby create a German text in which PP placement does not differ significantly from original German texts. As a consequence, our second hypothesis cannot be confirmed, as our results does not show over-normalisation (over-normalisation would mean that the translated German texts would significantly exhibit an even higher frequency of middle field positions than non-translated German texts).

	Dutch source text	
German translation	Middle field	Postfield
Middle field	157	52
	72,69%	24,07%
Postfield	0	7
	0,00%	3,24%

Table 2 PP placement in the German translations in relation to the position of the corresponding PPs in the Dutch source text .

We thus can conclude that normalisation is the most dominant pattern found in Dutch-to-German translation; only 7 instances (3.24%) of postfield position in the Dutch source texts were *not* changed, making normalisation here not an absolute, but almost absolute pattern.

The results of this case study provide strong support for Toury's (2012) claim that translators are more tolerant towards shining through (or positive interference) when translating from a relatively more prestigious language into a less prestigious language. On the other hand, when the source language is less prestigious than the target language, tolerance towards shining through completely disappears in favour of normalisation.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we investigated asymmetric patterns of translation in German and Dutch, by means of a corpus of contemporary literary fiction. More particularly, we found significant differences in PP

placement in German-to-Dutch and Dutch-to-German translation. We have shown that a strong form of shining through is present in Dutch texts translated from German, whereas German translations from Dutch texts exhibit a strong form of normalisation. These observations do not only confirm Toury's hypothesis (2012) about varying degrees of tolerance towards shining through when source and target language differ in prestige. Our analyses also showed that shining through and normalisation can be present simultaneously – albeit one more dominant than the other, thus confirming that the presence of a given 'translation universal' does not rule out the presence of another, even if these yield opposing outcomes (normalisation vs. shining through). On a methodological level, we also demonstrated that three corpus components are needed in order to tease apart shining through and normalisation, viz. a component with translated texts, a component with similar non-translated texts and a component with the source texts.

The present study triggers new questions, which can be answered in follow-up research: can the main conclusions of this study be confirmed for other registers (e.g. journalistic texts, manuals, speeches, theatre plays…) and other types of (syntactic) variation (e.g. the 'red' and 'green' Dutch verb order, the use of 'er' in Dutch, verb tenses…)? And to what extent would data of simultaneous interpreting yield the same results? Given the fact that interpreters do not have the for a post-hoc editorial control of the translated utterance, one can reasonably predict that shining through is the dominant pattern in interpreted data, irrespective of translation direction, so that Toury's hypothesis can only be valid for written, editorial-controlled translations. Finally, it would be interesting to find out whether instances of *over-shining through* can be found, which means that translators adopt the syntactic rules and preferences of the source language to the extent of exaggeration. This would have been the case in this study, for instance if we would have found significantly more PPs located in the middle field in Dutch texts translated from German than in non-translated Dutch texts and more than in the corresponding German source texts.

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APPENDIX

Overview of the Dutch source texts in the corpus:

Guido Van Heulendonk. *Aimez-vous les moules.* Amsterdam 1998.
Harry Mulisch. *De elementen*. Groningen 2003.
Tim Krabbé. *De renner.* Amsterdam 2009.
Gerard Reve. *De vierde man.* Amsterdam 1981.
Margriet De Moor. *De virtuoos.* Amsterdam 2010.
Boudewijn Büch. *Het dolhuis.* Amsterdam 2003.
Hugo Claus. *Het verlangen.* Amsterdam 1978.

Overview of the Dutch translations in the corpus (source language: German):

Christoph Hein. *De tangospeler.* Amsterdam 1990 [translated by Hasen, W.].
Ingrid Noll. *De avondbries.* Amsterdam 1998 [translated by Schippers, E.].
Julia Franck. *Kampvuur.* Amsterdam 2004 [translated by Keteleer, H.].
Patrick Süskind. *Het parfum.* Amsterdam 1985 [translated by Jonkers, R.].

Overview of the German source texts in the corpus:

Christoph Hein. *Der Tangospieler.* Berlin 1989.
Ingrid Noll. *Kalt ist der Abendhauch.* Zürich 1996.
Julia Franck. *Lagerfeuer.* Köln 2003.
Patrick Süskind. *Das Parfum.* Zürich 1985.

Overview of the German translations in the corpus (source language: Dutch):

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ASTRID VAN OOST
RESEARCH UNIT EQTIS, DEPT. OF TRANSLATION,
INTERPRETING AND COMMUNICATION
GHENT UNIVERSITY, BELGIUM
E-MAIL: <ASTRIDVANOOST@YAHOO.COM>

ANNELORE WILLEMS
RESEARCH UNIT EQTIS, DEPT. OF TRANSLATION,
INTERPRETING AND COMMUNICATION
GHENT UNIVERSITY, BELGIUM
E-MAIL: <ANNELORE.WILLEMS@UGENT.BE>

PROF. DR. GERT DE SUTTER
RESEARCH UNIT EQTIS, DEPT. OF TRANSLATION,
INTERPRETING AND COMMUNICATION
GHENT UNIVERSITY, BELGIUM
E-MAIL: <GERT.DESUTTER@UGENT.BE>