

## An Analysis and Exercise



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# Master Thesis

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the theory and practicality of translating non-standard language. This will be discussed in a number of different ways: 1) building an understanding of the theoretical basis underlying the linguistic and cultural translation of non-standard language; 2) understanding the way in which non-standard linguistic elements (i.e. dialect/sociolect features) of New Orleans English (NOE) in *A Confederacy of Dunces* (*ACoD*), a satirical novel written by John Kennedy Toole, have been translated into Dutch in different periods; and 3) applying these theories to an exercise in analyzing the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the novel *Push* by Sapphire and presenting an informed translation of its first four thousand words from English to Dutch.

Translating dialects, sociolects, and the like are a topic of academic debate within the translation studies community, as these linguistic varieties tend to carry with them, inherently, cultural notions and connotations that pose practical translational problems in terms of cultural transfer. Non-standard linguistic varieties, therefore, could be seen as culture-specific elements (CSEs) which pose difficulties for any translation. Much has been written on the translation of non-standard varieties and a summary of the findings will be given in the theoretical base analysis of this thesis. Naturally, previous studies into non-standard translation offer a basis for hypotheses, but in order to analyze objectively the way in which *this* particular system – NOE – has been translated, separate research needs to be undertaken.

The correlated exercise will consist of analyzing a literary text that thrives on the use of the non-standard language features of AAVE, identifying the key translation problems of that text in relation to its use of non-standard language, and then provide a discussion of the possible and desirable translations in this context by providing a translation of a selection of approximately four thousand words from that literary text.

### 1.1. Contextualization of the research field

The research carried out in this thesis is relevant for the broader field of translation studies, for it offers an insight into the way published translational literature has dealt with the translation of non-standard variety elements that have not yet been analyzed before. By analyzing the ways in which this has been done in different time periods, this thesis offers an investigation into historical translational norms as well as an insight into the different theoretical options that are available to translators when they are forced to deal with non-standard language. By investigating the different options available to translators and the real-life practical applications of these options, a better understanding can be obtained of the ways in which translators genuinely and practically apply theories and the effects these applications have on the interpretative qualities of the target texts. Also, the findings of this thesis shed light on whether translation of culturally rich elements, such as different non-standard lects, is feasible within a practical setting while retaining the cultural information embedded in the source text.

By juxtaposing the findings of this research with conclusions from other studies into the translation of non-standard elements, a broader and better-founded field of

knowledge can be attained. Naturally, each separate non-standard variety produces difficulties that could be solved in similar ways to other varieties but might also be translated more “successfully” using different strategies. By analyzing and studying the translation of these different varieties, a framework of reference concerning the possible and most “desirable” options and strategies for different types of non-standard varieties can be more easily accomplished.

## 1.2. Corpus

*ACoD* was chosen as the main corpus of this thesis, because it provides a work of literature in which the occurrence of non-standard elements is not only highly frequent and salient, but also has a great impact on the underlying themes of the novel; this provides a non-standard textual element that is likely to be dealt with in some form or the other in translations, due to its integral importance in the source text. The original novel was written in 1963, but not published until after the author’s suicide, in 1980. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1981, which established this work as a canonical piece of literature of the southern United States (Giemza 2004: 97-99). The novel is a social satire that incorporates many ethnic, social, and racial components. These components are incorporated through characters that inhabit different backgrounds, upbringings, beliefs, and, most importantly here, different styles of language as well as accents. Later on, I will explain how these different styles and accents consciously and purposefully add to the character representations and how these representations are meaningful to the overall thematic aspects of the novel.

Two translations into Dutch of *ACoD* have been published to date. The first, by TP, was published in 1984 (Utrecht: Skarabee). The second translation was made by Paul Syrier and published by the Amsterdam publishing house Lebowski in Amsterdam in 2000. Since these two translations were made during different time periods, the analyses in this thesis also offer a historical aspect to the question posed. Different time periods within a literary landscape may inhibit different translational norms. It has been investigated whether translational norms in the Netherlands have changed over the years, as well as their (possibly different) impacts on published translations (Kool 2013). Thus, by analyzing two different translations from two different periods, which might inhibit different translational norms, a relevant and interesting historical component could be added to the overall discussion presented here.

The text I have chosen to use for the translation exercise is the novel *Push* by Sapphire, which became well-known after the success of its movie adaptation *Precious*. This story focuses on an African American girl living in Harlem in New York City and within that framework, the language used in the novel can predominantly be classified as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as opposed to General American (GA). Much has been written on AAVE, ranging from linguistic analyses to sociocultural and historical studies of its progress, realization, and diversity. Within the context of this exercise, the novel *Push* will be analyzed both narratologically and stylistically in order to determine what the specific translation problems in this particular text consist of, after which the possible and desirable translation solutions will be discussed, before providing a four-thousand-word translation inspired by this thesis' findings.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Definitions of non-standard language varieties

In order to investigate how non-standard varieties of English have been translated into Dutch in *ACoD* and to build an understanding of how *Push* might be translated most desirably, we will need to look at what non-standard varieties are specifically and what the general theories are concerning their translation, both linguistically and culturally.

First of all, what are (non-standard) varieties of language? Within sociolinguistics, many studies have been conducted to investigate the properties and qualities of such varieties, but before I analyze the translation-specific components, I will explain and define these terms. Laymen often speak of “dialects,” “accents,” “languages,” and the like without a clear and definitive distinction between them. Moreover, many people consider certain features of such language use to be culturally less valuable than others (Federici 2011: 3). Such a *prescriptive* view is much discredited nowadays as modern linguists mostly adhere to a purely descriptive view of language. Such a descriptive view presupposes that all features of any language variety are equal and worthy of research. The key word here is ‘variety’ (Mesthrie et al. 2009: 43), which enables linguists to talk of such things commonly referred to as “dialects,” “accents,” etc., without generalization or hierarchical structures, and also gives them options to more clearly define and apply these terms. For instance, sociolinguistics distinguishes regional varieties, social varieties, ethnic varieties, and idiosyncratic varieties (among others). These varieties are thus not placed in a prescriptive hierarchy but are seen laterally. Each of these types of varieties are relevant for translation and thus I shall give an explanation of each of these; their



concrete literary manifestations will be made clear in the narratological and stylistic analysis of the corpus texts.

As mentioned, regional, social, ethnic, and idiosyncratic varieties are referred to as 'non-standard varieties' (Mesthrie et al. 2009: 44), which logically assumes something to be known as a 'standard variety.' While linguists denounce the notion of a hierarchy of languages, they do acknowledge the fact that in many languages a 'standard' form is present. The foundation of this standard is more a sociopolitical one than a linguistic one, however. The standard form is negotiated through pragmatic levels of prestige which it receives from its speakers. This is where the hierarchy of language comes from in laymen terms. Non-standard varieties receive less prestige than the standard variety and are considered of less value and/or importance. It is relevant to mention this, because in literary texts the use of non-standard varieties is marked precisely because they are presented besides the manifestation of this standard form, but this will be detailed more explicitly later on.

Thus, the non-standard varieties that are relevant for this discussion are: regional, social, ethnic, and idiosyncratic varieties. Even though this thesis will give an account of the definition and manifestations of each of these types of variety, it is worth mentioning that they are not types that clearly occur within their own specific paradigms; these types may overlap in certain situations.

### 2.1.1. Regional varieties

Regional varieties are varieties that are distinguished by their usage by a group of speakers that are characterized by their specific occurrence within a particular region. This is what is commonly referred to as a “dialect,” though the use of “regional variety” is more practical here, since the word “dialect” often conjures up the prescriptive notions which descriptive (translational) linguistics try to avoid. These regional varieties typically have less prestige than the standard variety and are therefore labelled “non-standard.” An example of such a variety is the Yat-variety of New Orleans, which is sometimes controversially referred to as “New Orleans English.” The term New Orleans English is somewhat controversial, since the dialects and accents of New Orleans are not officially branded as such, but there are some scholars who argue that the non-standard features present in New Orleans speech have attained enough overt prestige for them to be considered constitutive of a distinctive ‘New Orleans English’ (Coles in Bernstein et al. 2014: 219). This variety is mostly characterized by specific patterns in its phonological system (Bernstein et al. 2014: 220), and this variety is a major component of the corpus used for this thesis.

### 2.1.2. Social varieties

The second type of variety is the so-called “social variety.” Such varieties are characterized by the fact that they are used within a certain social class or social group. David Crystal defines it as ‘a linguistic variety (or lect) defined on social (as opposed to regional) grounds, e.g. correlating with a particular social class or occupational group’ (in Federici 2011: 7). One of the most famous and textbook examples of a study of social varieties is

Labov's 1960s study of social stratification in New York. In his study, he analyzed the occurrence of pronunciation of different types of "r" in New York lower, middle, and upper-class department stores. Even though the theoretical and methodological practicalities of this study have since been much discredited (by Labov himself as well, notably), it does adequately portray the saliency of characterization and interpretation of people through language. Labov did not take into account the more modern ideas of linguistic convergence and the theoretical frameworks of sociolinguistic communities of practice and social networks, nor the most modern idea of dynamic identity representation which define sociolinguistic research today, though it was the first serious attempt at defining and surveying social varieties. The use of different social varieties in literature often has a great impact on the interpretation and the characterization of different characters in a literary work. For instance, a character that uses a social variety that is strongly associated with a lower-class variety will be more naturally observed as belonging to this particular class, etc. The specific effects of the use of non-standard varieties will be discussed in greater detail later on.

### 2.1.3. Ethnic varieties

The third type of variety is a kind of hybrid between the regional and social varieties and is called the ethnic variety. Ethnic varieties are varieties that are used by a group of speakers that belong together based on their shared origins. Examples of such varieties are Hispanic American in Los Angeles or Chinese English in New York's Chinatown. They

are a kind of hybrid, because these varieties are characterized by speakers who are generally located in the same area (thus regional) and who belong to a certain social class and/or group (thus social). But since the regional and/or social characteristics of these varieties are not set in stone or always universally representative for all its speakers, ethnic varieties are classified as a separate type of variety (Mesthrie et al. 2009: 103-105).

#### 2.1.4. Idiolects

The fourth and final type of variety I will discuss here is the idiolect, or the idiosyncratic variety. This variety constitutes the unique and special representation of each individual's own speech pattern. Every individual speaks a different way – although all speech is influenced by one's origin, social class, upbringing, education, etc. (Hatim and Mason 1990: 43-44). In literary terms, an idiolect may be representative of a writer's personal "style", though writers often use different types of speech to characterize different types of characters in a literary work, which is a striking feature in the case of Toole's *ACoD* and Sapphire's *Push*.

#### 2.1.5. Overlapping

I mentioned earlier that these types are not necessarily clearly distinctive and that there is a certain degree of overlapping. Let me start by saying that the "standard" variety, technically, is in itself a social variety in the sense that it is shared by a certain socially distinctive group of people – those that do not speak any other variety than the standard one,

or people who choose to speak the standard variety though they are capable of utilizing non-standard features. The standard variety is also, in a sense, regional, since the group of people that employ this variety are generally confined to a particular region (be it a whole country or a part thereof). The fact that the ethnic variety is, generally, a hybrid of regional and social characteristics shows in itself this overlapping. Most interesting, theoretically speaking, is the fact that a combination of idiolects compose and constitute any existing variety by pure logic. People, who all have different idiolects, constitute a particular group (regional, social, or ethnic) and therefore form the foundation for a variety. Yet it is also the use of a variety by the surrounding members of that group who form one's idiolect, so in a sense the variety shapes the idiolect, yet the idiolect also shapes the variety. So, in a sense, the boundaries between different varieties (and registers) are somewhat fuzzy (Hatim and Mason 1990: 51).

## 2.2. Linguistic translation of non-standard varieties

When it comes to translating non-standard features, translators have several theoretical strategies at hand which they can employ to facilitate a certain desired effect. Vandepitte (2010) argues that here are two headings under which translating non-standard varieties can be placed. These are “neutralization” and “preservation.” Neutralization of non-standard features encompasses those strategies through which all salience of the use of non-standard features is eradicated in favor of some underlying motive with respect to the target audience. Federici (2003: 10) calls this the ‘conservative approach,’ because neutralization is the safest option a translator can choose to employ when dealing with non-standard varieties. This is because it is virtually impossible to find equivalent elements in the target language which fully convey the linguistic, cultural, and textual connotations which the corresponding source text elements exhibit (Vandepitte 2010: 105). With a target-oriented approach, it may be detrimental to the reading experience when marked elements do not seem to fit in with the text as a whole and thus translators may choose to opt for neutralization.

Vandepitte also mentions that translators have certain options available to them to indicate that non-standard features have been used in the source text that are either outside of the plot entirely or do not deviate the micro level elements away from the standard language. Such options are writing an introductory paragraph explaining the choice of (non-)use of a variety, adding footnotes explaining where non-standard features may have been present in the source text, or by “extended translation” through which characters are explicitly said to have uttered their speech through a certain variety (e.g. “... she

said in dialect.”) (Vandepitte 2010: 107). Neutralization can be a viable option in negating translation problems when they pose too great a difficulty for the translator or when the markedness of the non-standard features is not prominently relevant within a target-oriented approach. This cannot be said, however, for (literary) texts which thrive on, or obtain a special significance from, their representations of non-standard variety, such as *ACoD* and *Push*. In such cases, it may be preferred to preserve these elements in a certain way in the target text in order to retain certain linguistic, cultural, or textual connotations which may be significant for the interpretation of the text world or characters of the source text. It is worth mentioning, too, that for many commercial translations, the translator themselves do not necessarily have the freedom to choose which strategy they believe best. Often, for commercial reasons, publishers decide in which way these elements should be rendered in the target text. Neutralization can be an option with positive effects, since sometimes the presence of explicit non-standard features can put off standard readers from reading a certain text (Vandepitte 2010: 104). Thus, publishers could gain (financially) by diminishing the effects and presence of certain non-standard varieties. Kraai mentions in her MA thesis that even governments can regulate the extent to which non-standard varieties may be represented within a target literary field. She mentions ‘the French literary field, which is regulated by the *Académie Française*’ (2003: 34). This *Académie* regulates the linguistic norms in France and aims to ensure that no deviation from the French linguistic norm enters a written work, be it originally French or a translated work into French.

Translators can employ various strategies in order to preserve non-standard elements. As suggested earlier, preserving non-standard elements is often seen essential since they can add significantly to the characterization of the characters and to the interpretation and localization of the text world of any given literary work. When a novel or otherwise literary work has themes that cannot be detached from a certain cultural or social setting, the varieties used to convey and express these particular settings thus have a significant effect on the interpretation and the reader. When such elements that represent these cultural or social settings are lost through neutralization, the particular elements that create and distinguish the work within its field are lost and possible also the quality of the originality of the work itself. The strategies which may be opted for in order to retain such elements are as follows:

#### 2.2.1. Employing a non-standard 'equivalent' in the TL

The term 'equivalent' here is a very trying one. Within the broader scope of translation studies, 'equivalence' is a term that fails to meet with a practical definition. Especially when dealing with non-standard varieties, because there are many factors in a literary work which these can influence, such as the interpretation of the text world, the interpretation of the characters, or even influence a reader's experience through attitudes towards the non-standard variety itself, besides the more literal lexical, syntactic, morphological, and pragmatic aspects which pose problems for non-standard 'equivalence.' If a translator wishes to retain non-standard features, finding a corresponding target language 'equivalent' would be a translational holy grail. Unfortunately, finding such an equivalent



is what Vandepitte calls a ‘hopeless task’ (2010: 105). First of all, there should corresponding lexical, syntactic, morphological, and pragmatic features which inhibit equivalent cultural and social connotations through which certain characters may be represented precisely as they are in the source text. This is, unfortunately, not realistic. A translator may still, however, choose an existing regional or social dialect from the target language to represent the non-standard elements of the source text, but (s)he should take into account the loss or shifting of certain cultural and social connotations.

### 2.2.2. Employing a so-called scenic dialect in the TL

This strategy links back to the previous one, with the exception of the variety used being a more general one than a fully equivalent version. Vandepitte mentions more general English varieties such as Scottish English, American English, Australian English, etc. For Dutch she mentions ‘Verkavelingsvlaams’ or ‘Poldernederlands’ (ibid.: 106). Reasons for using this strategy are multiple: a perfectly equivalent non-standard variety in TL could not be found and the source exhibits a significant and salient non-standard characteristic. When a source text’s theme or significance is highly dependent on non-standard elements, this needs to be addressed in the translation in some form or the other; it must thus not be ignored (Koster 2014: 43). A translator can then choose to use a more generalized non-standard variety to retain some features and/or connotations that align with the use of the non-standard varieties in the source texts - in other words, that produce the same (desired) effect. The difficulty with this strategy lies in the fact that the very cultural and/or social connotations that a translator may wish to retain in the target text are not necessarily shared by the TL-variety that may be used to represent the non-standard SL-

variety. It is up to the translator to decide whether the connotations are mutual to a sufficient degree in order to establish the desired effect. Works that thrive on the use of AAVE, such as *Push*, would be difficult to translate with such a more generalized variety, for the specific cultural connotations that are inherent in this particular variety could not be easily transferred to the target text through the use of a TL-variety that does not share these very singular cultural connotations.

### 2.2.3. Employing a different type of variety

This strategy requires the translator to be somewhat more creative by using features to represent non-standard ST-elements that do not necessarily belong to one specific TL-variety. Examples of these are ‘colloquial language,’ the use of a ‘pidgin,’ or the choice to render certain elements in a ‘third language’ (Vandepitte 2010: 106). The effect of this strategy is that a translator can choose more (textually) local solutions for certain non-standard element problems rather than limiting themselves to an array of options that are only accessible within a certain domain (such as an existing regional or social variety in the TL). This enables the translator to have a wider variety of TL-elements available in order to render non-standard ST elements in a more corresponding manner in the TT connotation-wise. This also limits the possible effect of creating “wrong” cultural connotations in the translation where these were not present in the source text. For example, Kraai points out that the use of a certain variety in translation juxtaposes this variety with the variety used in the source text. She mentions that these varieties may not have the same sociopolitical standards and thus create friction with the readers and media and may even be considered racist by critics (Kraai 2013: 40). Where more general non-

standard features (such as colloquialisms shared by a broader not-necessarily regional population) are used, such connotations and cultural effects may be marginalized in the translation and thus have a positive effect on the retaining of non-standard features without adding undesired connotations to the translation.

#### 2.2.4. Employing an artificial alternative

This strategy involves using a non-existing non-standard variety which the translator can use in order to reflect a character's speech as incorporating non-standard elements without adding cultural connotations at all (Vandepitte 2010: 106). Where the previous strategy might still invoke connotations connected with social groups through the use of well-known colloquialisms, a completely artificial variety does not necessarily convey such connotations. It must be admitted, however, that rendering a rich and colorful non-standard variety with its own particular cultural and social implications into an artificial, non-associative variety may certainly lose such cultural and social characteristics in the target text. This strategy does prove useful, though, when characterization is deemed more prominent than localization of the source text. H.H. Clark, in his 2010 book *Using Language*, provides a linguistic insight into the ways in which people use language pragmatically. He states that when two characters speak with one another and one uses a non-standard variety where the other one does not, this automatically places them in pragmatically different positions (Clark 2010: 30-31). These different positions may be interpreted as hierarchical, where the person with the most "standard" language carries the most prestige. Readers may thus associate the character who speaks with a non-standard variety to have received a lower level of education or to be someone who belongs to

a rural setting or certain city background (Vandepitte 2010: 103). When such connotations are of a more social nature rather than cultural, this variety could prove tremendously useful. Were the connotations more cultural, though, it would be difficult to convey the exact cultural connotations through such an artificial use of non-standard elements. When only features concerned with the lexicon, rather than grammar and pragmatics as well, are altered into a non-standard fashion, this is called ‘partial dialectalization’ (Vandepitte 2010: 107).

#### 2.2.5. Preservation of Source Text Elements

When certain source text elements are highly representative of the work itself, or when the use of certain elements is highly idiosyncratic and relevant, the translator may choose to abandon translation altogether and retain the specific source text element unaltered in the translation. Though this strategy may cause the reader ‘to abandon the text world on occasion’ (Kraai 2013: 41), the source text element could be so significant for the localization or interpretation of the text that this could be considered the best course of action. For example, Cajun French elements in a novel that thrives on Louisiana culture might be retained in the translation to create a culturally and locally representative text world to a target text reader (ibid.: 41). More research needs to be done in order to see how prevalent this practice is in actual translation, however.

#### 2.3. Cultural translation of non-standard varieties

In the previous chapter, the ways in which lingual elements of non-standard language can either be neglected (i.e., neutralized) in a target text, or be incorporated into the target language/text through different kinds of adaptational mechanisms have been described.

Yet, a mere description of the ways in which source-text non-standard language can be represented in a target text linguistically omits an important aspect of language: its associated and/or represented cultural implications. Robyns claims that translation is ‘not only a textual affair, but can also be seen as a cultural-political act’ (1994 in Naaijens et al. 2010: 349, *my translation*). In this sense, a non-standard language variety used in literature can be seen as a cultural product, as it is its deviation from the standard variety which actively presents different inner-cultural connotations. This means that the use of AAVE in *Push* and the use of NOE in *ACoD* is an overt cultural marker for the group of people that use this variety, and this representation cannot, nor should be, neglected in a culturally responsible translation. The use of such a non-standard variety also engages the literary work in the active power play of literary cultural capital, because the translation of the marginalized voice (i.e., the non-standard variety) needs to be addressed by cultural fields to which it may be exported. The concept of NOE in *ACoD* and AAVE in *Push* can thus be considered cultural products that act as such within translation, which makes it interesting to look at broader theoretical notions of cultural transfer within translation studies and see how a non-standard language variety as a cultural product might fit into this framework.

Thus, using non-standard language varieties as cultural elements, it will prove fruitful to analyze cultural elements in translation generally, before focusing on non-standard language in particular. Discussing the translation of cultural specific elements, Aixéla states:

‘Hoe een CSE vertaald wordt, hangt ook af van de functie en de plaats ervan in de brontekst. De functie van het vertaalde element hoeft in de doeltekst uiteraard niet dezelfde te zijn als in het origineel (wat de mogelijkheid tot weglating biedt), al heeft men wel de neiging dat te denken, en de marge van vrijheid die de vertaler geniet, wordt er ongetwijfeld door beïnvloed, voornamelijk om redenen van geloofwaardigheid en interne samenhang van de vertaling’

(1996 in Naaijken et al. 2000: 206)

If we consider the textual, linguistic manifestations of NOE/AAVE in a novel as a cultural product, its function(s) must be assessed, not only insofar as it pertains to the novel itself, but also to the wider cultural practices in which these varieties play a role. Why are specifically these varieties used, which purposes do they serve, and what is the most responsible way to represent these particular purposes in the target text? What can be considered subjective, and thus interesting, is the notion of what is deemed “responsible” by different perspectives on culture. Within the landscape of world literature, individual positions on cultural aspects of literature, most notably internationally transferred literature through translation, may differ. Venuti states that:

‘[t]he production, circulation, and reception of translations do not simply involve crossing national boundaries, but inserting texts into global networks that are inflected by national boundaries, to be sure, but that reveal the national as constructed by international affiliations.’

(2011: 191)

What he means is that national perspectives on culture, be they native or foreign ones, are constructed through individual cultures' positioning of themselves against others. The practical implications of this are that different cultures can act in various ways when dealing with translation. This is what Robyns (1994) refers to when he discusses important aspects that need to be considered when talking about importing and/or exporting culture through translation.

Robyns identifies three aspects that have an effect on the way in which culture is imported by a certain community. These three aspects are: translation strategies (and norms), selection strategies, and notions of the foreign and translation in that same community. Firstly, the choice of overall translation strategies differs between certain importing communities, since translation norms differ as well — both regionally and historically. Robyns claims that each translation is performed using particular strategies (modernizing versus historicizing, for instance). These strategies are inflected by overall translation norms. The nature of translation norms and the specific translation norms in the Dutch literary landscape will be elucidated in the next chapter. These norms dictate the strategies deemed most suitable for importing literature within different cultures. In terms of non-standard language varieties, the most evident distinction of strategies is between either neutralization and adaptation of the marginalized voice into the target culture, explained in the previous chapter.

The second aspect Robyns mentions are the selection strategies certain communities employ in order to choose which works will be imported, if any at all, and which will

not. He states that ‘the direction and intensity of translation flows from a clear indication of power plays between cultures, and of conflicts within cultures’ (*ibid.*: 351, *my translation*). To assess the selection strategies of a culture, one must look at how much literature it imports as well as exports, and what the respective qualities of the import are. Should a literary culture, such as the Dutch literary landscape, import many more works from English into Dutch than it exports from Dutch into English, then a clear power play is occurring between these two cultures. This is not simply a quantitative notion, for the cultural capital associated with English literature might also prove the Dutch literary landscape more susceptible to adaptation of English non-standard language in literature than vice versa. This point will be elaborated on below.

The third aspect is the general notions concerning the foreign and translation within a particular culture. Is a culture open to translation or does it reject the possibility of translation altogether? Which words are used within specific cultural discourse concerning translation? Robyns states that words used can indicate which notions of translation operate within a culture, when he explains that when the impossibility of translation is apparent in a discussion, it might point towards ‘a particularistic definition of culture, whereas the statement that everything is principally translatable can illustrate a universalistic position’ (*ibid.*: 351, *my translation*).

These three aspects combined can provide insight into the position of a specific group within a culture when it comes to foreign cultural elements — in this case, the specific group would be the literary landscape. Given that the three aspects mentioned before can be manifested differently in a culture, Robyns has identified four general stances that



a culture can take concerning foreign elements, predicated on two questions: (1) does a culture or discourse acknowledge the different nature of foreign cultural elements that could be imported, and (2) what degree of adaptation does a culture or discourse require of effectively imported foreign cultural elements? (*ibid.*: 352). Naturally, these stances are not clear-cut frameworks that cultures adhere to without question; they overlap and flow into each other as each position ultimately evokes an opposition, and so on. Nevertheless, the following stances do provide a theoretical basis of cultural import which practically affect the ways in which translation is dealt with within particular cultures. These stances are:

- Defective
- Transcultural
- Imperialistic
- Defensive

### 2.3.1. Defective

The first stance, the defective stance, indicates that a specific culture acknowledges foreign cultural elements and considers importing these an enrichment to its own cultural identity. This stance may occur when a certain community has acquired far more cultural capital than another, in which the subordinate culture considers the dominant culture somehow better than itself. In this case, the importing culture would have no trouble importing non-standard language into its translations (in the cultural sense), as the use of non-standard source language in the source text is part of the culture that is being looked

up to. In terms of the strategies put forward by Vandepitte, this scenario would see the importing culture trying to maintain and represent the original non-standard features in the target text, as the presence of these features would be considered a valuable cultural addition to the target text. Importing cultures which adhere to this stance might thus be more likely to use the Vandepitte strategy of preserving source text elements to give a sense of the other culture being present in a work related to the importing culture. To identify the defective stance on a broader scale, Robyns uses the example of detective novels in the French and Anglo-American literatures after the Second World War. He states that ‘before the Second World War, the [French] genre was totally dominated by the psychologizing novels of Simenon and others, which combined the detective formula with the French *bourgeois* novel tradition’ (*ibid.*: 352, *my translation*). The upcoming *hard-boiled* genre of detective novels in England and the USA did not become popular in France until after a younger audience looking for innovation considered this evolution of the genre as an enrichment to its own, more traditional (i.e. old-fashioned) notions of the detective novel. This is similar to how “literary thrillers” were a major American genre much translated into Dutch, before Dutch authors themselves also started producing works in this fashion, which leads to the second stance: transcultural.

### 2.3.2. Transcultural

The transcultural stance is defined by the idea that foreign cultural elements are different, yet also part of an overall ‘general-human essence of all cultures and groups’ (*ibid.*: 354, *my translation*). This idea holds that though foreign elements are originated by different

cultures, they can still be understood and conflated with one's own cultural identity. Importing (and exporting) cultural elements therefore does not lead to any cultural translational problems, as each cultural element can be explained through an overall human lens. This would mean that foreign non-standard language varieties can be imported into one's own culture, as the idea of non-standard language varieties (and to an extent, the accompanying prestige differences) is not held exclusively by the exporting culture. Though importing non-standard language varieties may be difficult in a lingual, textual since in any case, the transcultural stance does not oppose the possibility, nor the necessity of importing it. Cultures that adhere to this stance are most likely to try to incorporate the non-standardness of the source text correspondingly into the target text. This could be done by trying to apply the strategies of "employing a non-standard equivalent," "employing a scenic dialect," "employing a different type of variety," or "employing an artificial alternative," depending on the lingual possibilities presented by the language combination and the level of cultural representation wanting to be attained. Providing that this stance is very open to other cultures, it also leads to the notion of stances that are, naturally, less open to other cultures. Robyns identifies these stances as imperialistic and defensive.

### 2.3.3. Imperialistic

The imperialistic stance is a reaction to the transcultural stance, when a transcultural idea of foreign cultural elements is imposed onto a certain community. This stance does not acknowledge the importance of foreign cultural elements and renounces incorporating and/or adapting foreign elements into a native framework, as it considers these less prestigious than one's own culture. Robyns states that this stance holds a paradox in which it

‘on the one hand emphasizes the specificity of its own identity, yet on the other hand it posits that this identity is universal’ (*ibid.* 354, *my translation*). The solution to this paradox, he mentions, is adopting the belief ‘that all different identities are inferior, [...], simply less fully evolved on the path toward universalism’ (*ibid.*: 354-355, *my translation*). A culture with this stance would be very unlikely to produce any literary works incorporating non-standard language, without an overt theme in which the non-standard language variety possesses less prestige than the standard language, which would be considered universal. Cultures adhering to this stance would thus be likely to, in Federici’s terms, fully neutralize the non-standard items, rendering these invisible, as such features would indicate a richness of diversity in the exporting culture with a receiving imperialistic culture would not acknowledge. On the other hand, cultures adhering to this stance might incorporate the non-standard features into a target text in a way that resembles these features as inferior to the standard target text, by “employing an artificial alternative” which actively reshapes the non-standard source variety into a non-standard target variety with overtly low prestige. It does beg the question of whether cultures with an imperialistic stance would be open to importing any kind of foreign literature at all, let alone foreign literature thriving on specific non-standard language varieties.

#### 2.3.4. Defensive

The final stance that Robyns identifies is the defensive stance. A culture might adopt this stance when it feels threatened by foreign cultural elements and strongly opposes importing them. According to Robyns, there are a few practical strategies employed by cultures with a defensive stance: first, importing foreign elements is considered a threat to the

native cultural identity, which is followed by a delegitimizing of the cultural import, and a reaffirmation of the traditional, native cultural identity, often evoked in ‘military metaphors’ (*ibid.*: 356, *my translation*). This stance naturally does acknowledge the different nature of foreign cultural elements, but it sees them as inferior to the native identity and therefore as a threat to be kept at bay. Cultures with this stance are likely to consider non-standard language inferior within their own framework of language prestige, with foreign varieties presumably ranking even lower. Again, cultures adhering to this stance are most likely to neutralize any non-standard features, though this stance is highly unlikely to import any literature from a perceived imposing culture at all.

The different perspectives on cultural positioning are at play with each other and tensions arise from competing points of view. Different cultures adhere to different stances, and cultural contact through translating literature is imminent. This is what Heilbron and Shapiro indicate when they discuss a sociology of translation:

‘translation first presupposes a space of international relations, this space being constituted by the existence of nation-states and linguistic groups linked to each other by relations of competition and rivalry’

(Heilbron and Shapiro 2007: 95)

Cultural capital is unevenly distributed, both within a specific culture (i.e. standard versus non-standard language varieties) and between different cultures, manifested through different stances and different practices concerning translation and cultural import. These

differences can be overtly marked in literary works through language, as discusses by Van Boven and Dorleijn:

‘Binnen literaire werken kunnen dergelijke taaluitingen vanwege het verschil in prestigewaardering gebruikt worden als literair mechaniek en kan de auteur ‘de personages mede karakteriseren door een typerende taaleigen’

(2010: 35)

This passage refers to characters in a novel speaking with a specific dialect in order to present them, usually, as belonging to a lower social class, since non-standard language varieties are generally associated with lower levels of cultural prestige, i.e. cultural capital. If this is the case, then the opposite should ring true as well: that authors can use marginal voices to actively bring these to the forefront and provide these marginal voices with a platform of expression, depending on one’s perception of non-standard language. The interpretation of the inherent qualities of the use of non-standard language would then depend on the stance of the importing culture.

It is obvious that there is an active power play when standard and non-standard language varieties are juxtaposed, but I believe it can be argued that when the use of a non-standard variety is absolutely paramount to the cultural context and interpretation of the source text, such as the use of NOE in *ACoD* and AAVE in *Push*, this power play can be used as a constructive means to deliver more cultural capital to the marginalized voice in question, if an importing culture is receptive to such an idea. This is what Ilhem states when he says:

‘[a] literary dialect is, accordingly, related to the meaning and shape of dialect systematically explored in the grounds of literature in a way that can methodically embrace the cultivation of linguistic diversity and dialect variability in the field of literature: a valuable source to examine speech patterns that represent social niches of dialect speakers in, say a literary genre, the novel.’

(Ilhem 2003: 102)

The use of NOE in *ACoD* and, moreover, the use of AAVE in *Push*, then highlights the relations of competition and rivalry between groups of people with different language varieties within their source culture. Since non-standard language is considered less prestigious, its speakers definitely belong to the “social niches” Ilhem discusses. By adapting the specific characteristics of the context of a non-standard variety, its culture is transposed as well; a culture which might not become known, learned about, empathized with were it not for its representation in literature. For instance, if the non-standard features of *Push* were neutralized completely, its corresponding cultural associations of the African American *urban class* experience in New York would not be interpreted as integrally as it is presented in the source text. It is the foreign status of the non-standard variety which highlights it, draws attention to it, and makes a reader aware of the cultural context a character speaking with that variety. Adapting a non-standard variety culturally, and not

only lingually, can thus be a powerful tool in providing this platform that speakers of non-standard varieties deserve.

The translation of non-standard language can also be indicative of larger literary and cultural stances toward importing cultural elements. Analyzing linguistic instances of neutralization and/or adaptation of non-standard language in translation in accordance with broader translation norms and cultural translation practices will yield interesting insights into the framework of non-standard language in (cultural) translation. To create an expectation of the translations of *ACoD* into Dutch, and to form an idea about the way in which *Push* might be translated most successfully into Dutch, an analysis of 1) translation norms in general, and 2) the translation norms in the Netherlands (indicating its stance on cultural importation) will be discussed below.



## 2.4. Translation norms

Since two different translations of *ACoD* will be analyzed, which were completed in two different periods (the first in 1981 and the second in 2000), it is interesting to see how translation norms may have differed over this period in order to assess an educated expectation as to which of Vandepitte strategies are likely to have been used in these respective translations. Also, in order to assess which strategies might be most desirable for the translation of *Push* in the cultural sense, the Dutch cultural stance must be examined. Firstly, the general notion of ‘translation norms’ as developed by Toury will be discussed, after which I will consider whether these norms have changed over the past forty years in order shape an expectation of the strategies plausibly used in the Dutch translations of *ACoD*.

Norms are a shared set of values and ideas that are commonplace within a certain community. This holds true for the concept of translation as well (Toury 1995: 56). There are several general strategies translators can choose to employ to retain or alter certain effects that are created in the target text. These are historization versus modernization, and exotization versus naturalization. In James Holmes’ terms, these strategies are realized along two axes, one of which is horizontal and one of which is vertical. The horizontal axis represents the degree to which a source text has been subjected to historization versus modernization in its translation. Historization would entail the retaining of historical textual elements, whereas modernization encompasses the adaptation of historical elements to more modern alternatives. The vertical axis represents exotization versus natu-

ralization. Exotization is the retaining of foreign elements in the translation, be they linguistic, textual, cultural, or social, etc. (Holmes 1972 [2010]: 183-188). Naturalization entails the adaptation of foreign elements into elements which are more familiar to the target audience. The two axes compose a diagram in which all combinations of strategies are possible, but the most concrete shifts depend on the degree to which these strategies are implemented. Toury (1995: 57) defines these notions in terms of *adequacy* and *acceptability*. An *adequate* translation would be a source text-oriented translation in which the foreign elements would have largely been retained where possible, whereas an *acceptable* translation constitutes a translation that has been constructed with a target text-approach in mind. An *acceptable* strategy thus means adapting foreign elements to the target audience and perhaps downplaying certain features that could be considered alien to a target audience.

In a recent study, Anniek Kool analyzed different Dutch institutions that dealt with either literary norms or translation norms, such as award institutions and grant institutions (2013). It turned out that it was not entirely clear what the differences between the translational norms in the different periods were, as she states that '[b]oth *adequacy* and *acceptability* seem to be held in high regard' (28). This would mean that no definite norm could be established. However, she found that in the period of 2002 to 2012, *acceptability* was of somewhat greater importance to the institutions alluded to above than *adequacy*. It can thus be inferred that *adequacy* may not have been the sole standard up to which translations were held at the time, but that there has been a shift from *adequacy/acceptability* to *acceptability* alone. This would indicate that over time, the Dutch translation

norms have shifted to a more naturalizing approach, though this may only have been slight.

Now considering this somewhat inconclusive insight with respect to the translation of non-standard varieties, it is difficult to determine what can be expected from an older translation in relation to a more modern one. Can it be expected that a more modern translation is more likely to have neutralized non-standard varieties because it seems that a more modern translation would be more prone to *acceptability*? Or is a more modern translation more likely to adapt foreign non-standard variety features into a target text equivalent due to this same principle of *acceptability*? Kraai postulates in her thesis concerning the translation of AAVE in the 1980s and the 2000s that translation norms of this non-standard variety do seem to have changed over this period (Kraai 2013: 77). She finds that translations in the 1980s were adapted to Dutch culture whenever possible (hinting to *acceptability*), but that they lacked a more sociopolitical awareness concerning the use of non-standard elements. She also found that the more modern translations implement more exotization with regard to the AAVE elements. This would hint at a more *adequate* approach.

The findings by Kool and Kraai can therefore not be entirely reconciled, though I believe that the findings by Kraai are more relevant to this particular thesis, since she also dealt with the translation of non-standard elements. Kool herself does acknowledge that there is little explicit information available concerning translation norms in the Netherlands (2013: 28). Given Kraai's findings, however, one may be expected to see a greater use

of non-standard elements in the more recent translation of *ACoD* than its earlier predecessor. Kraai suggests that contemporary translators are more likely to convey the original story in a Dutch linguistic way, rather than sociocultural, whereas her corpus showed that earlier translations seemed to try just that: tell Dutch stories in a Dutch way. This indicates that the Dutch literary landscape is 1) open to translation in general, 2) imports literary works that deal with, or even thrive, on the use non-standard language, and 3) is somewhat ambivalent about the way in which these features should be dealt with in translation, though not entirely opposed to their presence. From this I gather that the Dutch stance on cultural importation is not defective, imperialistic, or defensive, but mostly trans-cultural, though not most definitely. This is in line with Robyns' indication of the fact that these stances are not necessarily clear-cut but do overlap and flow into one another.

The information presented on norms and the Dutch cultural stance raises the expectation that more non-standard elements are either retained or constructed in the more modern translation of *ACoD*, and that a socio-politically sensible translation of *Push* might be best suitable (i.e. an adapting, *adequate* translation), depending on the lingual possibilities of translating English non-standard varieties into Dutch. In order to ascertain which adaptation strategies specifically would be most suitable for translating non-standard language varieties within this framework, these translation possibilities between English and Dutch must be assessed, which is the subject of the next chapter.

## 2.5. Translatability of non-standard language from English to Dutch

Before an assessment can be made as to which translation strategy would be best suitable and/or desirable for the translation of non-standard language, the different possible translation strategies must be analyzed with the appropriate context in mind, since an informed decision cannot be made until all options have been considered. To recap Vandepitte, the general overarching translation strategies of non-standard varieties are neutralization versus adaptation, with adaptation including the following scenarios:

- Employing a non-standard 'equivalent' in the TL
- Employing a so-called scenic dialect in the TL
- Employing a different type of variety
- Employing an artificial alternative
- Preservation of Source Text Elements

Firstly, I will discuss how each of these translation strategies would affect the use and application of non-standard language in a Dutch translation, using AAVE as the prime example, since this variety is used for the exercise, whereas NOE is discussed in existing translations. I will argue in a later chapter which strategy would be best suitable and/or desirable for the translation of AAVE in relation to its linguistic characteristics, the Dutch translation norms, and the relevant mechanisms of cultural translation.

### *Neutralization*

One way to deal with the use of non-standard language in a Dutch translation would be to completely neutralize it and procure a translation in perfectly standard (prescriptive) Dutch. Even though this would undoubtedly make the target text easier to read, it would not necessarily have a good influence on the macro-level of the text, since we are discussing texts that thrive on the use of non-standard language. In the case of *Push*, themes of the novel include the life and hardships of African American inner-city residents in Harlem. These characteristics are made salient through the use of AAVE, which inherently encapsulates these characteristics and projects these through a character's use of it. Should the use of a non-standard variety be completely erased in a Dutch translation, the connotations of these characteristics are eradicated as well, leaving the protagonist, Precious, less convincingly interpretable to the reader. In this case, where *Push* relies so heavily on the use of AAVE, neutralization seems to be an inexcusable strategy. However successfully (or unsuccessfully) AAVE will be dealt with in the translation, a solid argument can be made about the fact that the translator will need to use an adaptive strategy in one way or the other in order to maintain hopefully all, but at least some, of the most important connotations presented in *Push* through the use of AAVE.

#### *Employing a non-standard 'equivalent' in the TL*

In this case, the translator would opt for an 'equivalent' regional variety or sociolect in the TL that would sufficiently represent the non-standard variety used in the original text. This would mean that the translator chooses a non-standard variety in the TL that

would approximate the original variety in terms of character representation, cultural connotations, and linguistic correlations. In the case of *Push*, this already existing TL variety would need to represent a type of lower-class, inner-city character with a clear representation of Precious' ethnicity. The problem with this kind of translation strategy is that it is extremely difficult to find an already existing target variety that completely encompasses all the characteristics necessary to truthfully represent the cultural connotations associated with the original variety. If, for instance, Precious were represented through an overt Surinam dialect, the interpretation of her origin and life in Harlem would be jeopardized, since a Dutch reader would most likely associate that dialect with Surinam specifically, rather than with an African American, inner-city resident in New York. Even though this variety might yield useful linguistic solutions on a micro-level, its disruption of the character representation on the macro-level might be too great, given the indication that Dutch translation norms are moving towards a more *acceptable* end of Toury's spectrum which would favor representing the original truthfully within an adapted Dutch context. This type of strategy would replace the representation of Precious outside of the context of Harlem, which, through Precious' own words, becomes a quintessential scene of the novel. The linguistic and regional specificity of the variety might be retained in that Surinam Dutch is a very specific dialect with its own characteristics, but it would overtly subjugate the cultural specificity that AAVE also encompasses. Surinam Dutch is taken here as an example, but any corresponding type of Dutch variety would presumably work the same way.

*Employing a so-called scenic dialect in the TL*

The second strategy involves employing a so-called scenic dialect, which means that a more general type of non-standard Dutch is used in the translation to invoke a dialectal use of language to juxtapose the use of standard Dutch. Vandepitte lists a few types of non-standard Dutch as exemplary for the so-called scenic dialect, such as ‘Verkavelingsvlaams’ or West-Flemish (2010: 106). This represents a generalization of non-standard language from one specific source-text variety to one less-specific target variety. If this were applied to *Push*, the result would be that Precious loses her specific ethnic representation through language, since this type of variety in Dutch would not have ethnicity coded into its use. Whereas a non-standard ‘equivalent’ would be too specific in terms of its location connotations, a scenic dialect would be too broad and inherently lacking certain characteristics, i.e. inner-city, ethnicity, lower-class, that are shown to be extraordinarily important in *Push*, and it would most likely be regionally marked, which is less interesting in this context. Naturally, any variety that has regional connotations, such as an ‘equivalent’ variety or a scenic dialect will always have some different regionally inspired cultural connotations attached to it, but these connotations are very likely not to coincide with those of the source text variety. The extent to which this could pose a problem, depends on the feasibility of the use of other types of strategies, which will need to be assessed further.

#### *Employing a different type of variety*

Employing a different type of variety could have some other uses than the strategies outlined above. Vandepitte mentions “different” to mean ‘colloquial’ (*ibid.*). In this



case, the translator would render Precious' speech in a more colloquial fashion than standard Dutch, but without using a specifically regionally marked variety. This would mean considerably lowering Precious' register from standard Dutch to a far more informal speech pattern including deliberate spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, and punctuation flaws. This would give rise to options that could incorporate lower-class, inner-city characteristics without markedly moving away from the source context of Harlem. The incorporation of Precious's ethnicity might prove more difficult, as a colloquial use of language is not necessarily linked to one specific ethnicity. On the other hand, words such as "black," "nigger," "African," etc. are used quite consistently throughout the novel, which could mean the use of a specific ethnically marked variety might prove less necessary, since these words connote Precious's ethnicity overtly. Rendering these words in a corresponding way in Dutch would maintain these connotations quite directly.

### *Employing an artificial alternative*

Using this strategy, a translator can opt to take characteristics from several different target language varieties to create an artificial hybrid that could possibly approximate the linguistic characteristics of the source variety. The advantage of this strategy is that the translator is not limited by the characteristics of any pre-existing target variety or register. Pre-existing varieties, be they more or less formal, all contain constrictions as to what is acceptable language use and what is not. Limiting oneself to one predominant use of one particular variety, the translator consciously leaves out options that might work well in the novel in favor of consistency. In the case of *Push*, there might be consistency

in terms of the use of AAVE, but not in terms of Precious' mastering of language in general, as she is shown to be illiterate until her mid-teens. This strategy might thus be an option to both move away from regionally marked varieties that would distort the interpretation of Harlem as Precious's home base, and from the use of particular variety characteristics that could constrict different linguistic solutions. The downside of this strategy is that it could prove difficult to maintain consistency and not use too many different characteristics through which Precious' might be interpreted as generally incoherent rather than an illiterate African American girl/woman.

#### *Preservation of Source Text Elements*

This strategy entails using words, phrases, sentences, etc., from the source texts directly and unchanged in the translation, sometimes explained through a footnote or something similar. This happens mostly when the source text elements are specifically important to the understanding of interpretation of the plot or characters, though this does not happen very often. Usually, with a more *acceptable* instead of *adequate* approach, all source text elements are translated in some form or another, rather than merely copied. For *Push*, this would mean taking grammatical, phonological, pragmatic characteristics from AAVE as well as lexical items, and inserting these directly into the translation.

It is obvious that each of these strategies have their merits and their drawbacks, each related to the source context of the novel; the level of non-standard language use in the source text itself; the extent to which this use is important; the extent to which this variety could be translated into target language; and whether consciously adapting non-

standard characteristics into the target language would be useful and/or necessary. Generally speaking, all of these strategies are useful within the proper framework, but the necessities demanded by the text, target audience, and target culture will dictate which specific strategy proves most fruitful. Next, I will analyze the characteristics of NOE as well as its use and function in *ACoD*, before moving on to the translation analyses.

### 3. Characteristics of NOE

*ACoD* provides a corpus that is representative for a work in which the non-standard variety Now Orleans English play a major part. It will be explained later that the different ways in which non-standard varieties are used in this book have a significant influence on the overall interpretation of the characters and the text world. The first clue that indicates the occurrence of a specific use of non-standard varieties comes for the book itself. In the original foreword, two passages from the book *The Earl of Louisiana* by A.J. Liebling are quoted, which state:

‘There is a New Orleans city accent ... associated with downtown New Orleans, particularly with the German and Irish Third Ward, that is hard to distinguish from the accent of Hoboken, Jersey City, and Astoria, Long Island, where the Al Smith inflection, extinct in Manhattan, has taken refuge. The reason, as you might expect, is that the same stock that brought the accent to Manhattan imposed it on New Orleans.’

‘You’re right on that. We’re Mediterranean. I’ve never been to Greece or Italy, but I’m sure I’d be at home there as soon as I landed.’

He would, too, I thought. New Orleans resembles Genoa or Marseilles, or Beirut or the Egyptian Alexandria more than it does New York, although all seaports resemble one another more than they can resemble any place in the interior. Like Havana and Port-au-Prince, New Orleans is within the orbit of a Hellenistic world that never touched the North Atlantic.

The Mediterranean, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico form a homogeneous, though interrupted, sea.'

*(Kennedy Toole, ACoD: Foreword).*

Given that different characters in the book speak with a varying degree of non-standard varieties, it makes sense to first discuss the more general features of Southern dialectal varieties and New Orleans English, before investigating the particular features of the specific Yat-accent that is alluded to in the foreword of the novel. The foreword clearly defines and expresses which particular accent is alluded to by mentioning different areas in New Orleans in which this variety is salient. Coles (in Bernstein 2014: 219) explains that this particular variety is, in fact, the Yat-accent.

The most prominent aspect of the Yat-accent lies in its phonological system and it shares many features with Southern American English and New York City English, though it also has more singular attributes which are of a more idiomatic and pragmatic nature than purely phonological or syntactic (Bernstein 2014: 220).

### 3.1. Phonology

Phonological characteristics of New Orleans English include the use of a monophthongal / a ɪ /, which is also characteristic of Southern American English. Another feature is the vocalization of the postvocalic /r/, which basically means the loss of /r/ altogether, except at the onset of words. Bernstein (2014: 220) also mentions certain features which are related directly to New York English:

replacement of fricative interdentalals with stops	<i>that</i>	[dæt]
	<i>nothing</i>	[nʌʔn]
replacement of /ə/ with diphthongal [ɔj]	<i>girl</i>	[gɔjl]
	<i>worse</i>	[wɔjs]
corresponding replacement of /ɔj/ with [ə]	<i>toilet</i>	[tə-lət]
replacement of /ɑ/ with [ɔ]	<i>darling</i>	[dɔlɪn]
	<i>doll</i>	[dɔl]
	<i>Mardi Gras</i>	[mɑdɪgrɔ]

(ibid.: 221)

It is claimed that these features have been adopted by New Orleans English because of the major influx of Irish and Italian immigrants who came from the Northeast of the United States to New Orleans. These immigrants settled in largely mono-ethnic neighborhoods and that is why New Orleans English is largely represented geographically rather than socially. Of course, certain neighborhoods have sociological stereotypes attached to them, so in this sense, the language predominantly associated with a certain neighborhood also becomes associated with the social stratification as this is present throughout those same neighborhoods, but ‘the extent to which this distinction carries over into N[ew Orleans English] is not yet known’ (ibid.).

### 3.2. Syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic features

The most prominent syntactic feature is the use of “ain’t” and the double negative, which are also predominant features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Rickford 1999: 8). New Orleans English is said to be mostly used as a solidarity marker among conversational partners. This means that New Orleans English possesses a covert prestige among New Orleanians who signify that they are native to New Orleans by

consciously and markedly using features that are associated with New Orleans English. Salient lexical features include the use of certain *terms of endearment* such as “babe” or “darling,” whereby the phonological feature of the loss of the postvocalic /r/ could be rendered noticeable in writing through orthographic techniques (e.g. by writing “dahlin”) (Bernstein 2014: 222). Besides this, there are three more pragmatic features that are salient in the conversations between New Orleans natives, which are distinct New Orleans greetings, the use of exaggerated phonological features, and the use of direct questions.

#### 4. Narratological analysis of *ACoD*

*ACoD* centers on the protagonist, Ignatius J. Reilly, a misanthropic man who lives with his mother in New Orleans, considers himself unfit for any type of employment, and firmly believes that modern society is in dire need of “theology and geometry” (Toole 1980: 1). The plot of the novel is a complicated entanglement of different stories that are all connected with each other through the character of Ignatius. I will not attempt to recreate the entire enfolding of the plot, since this would be impossible to do without a lengthy discussion of the novel that would be irrelevant to the central question posed in this thesis. An overview of the relations between the principal characters will be given, because it is their dialogue that provides the most interesting passages for the current research. This overview is represented succinctly by John Lowe in his essay ‘The Carnival Voices of *ACoD*’:

Ignatius Reilly, the book’s Irish American hero, is an overeducated, lazy, thirty-year-old yet adolescent slob. He would gladly spend all his days abed or in front of the television, eating while writing fragmentary essays in his Big Chief notebooks. His indolence is made possible by his doting and dotty mother. When a pathetic police officer attempts to arrest her darling one day, they try to recover in a seedy French Quarter bar named the Night of Joy, which later becomes one of the novel’s centers, functioning openly as a locale for strip shows and covertly as a depot for a pornography ring. Burma Jones, a black New Orleanean, is forced to work there for virtually nothing by the dominatrix Lana Lee, who also abuses Darlene, a would-be stripper who is working on a novelty act involving a cockatoo. Meanwhile,



Officer Mancuso is also being persecuted by his superiors on the police force, who toy with him by making him wear degrading undercover costumes at stakeouts such as the men's room at the bus station. Soon he and his aunt Santa Battaglia meet Mrs. Reilly and introduce her to the world of bowling. Over at Levy Pants, absentee owner Gus Levy entrusts everyday management to the slavish Gonzalez, a staff of underpaid black factory workers, and the senile accountant, Miss Trixie. All of these players and many more are united by the seismic force of an unleashed Ignatius, whose mother forces him to seek work when she has to pay for damages to a building she hit with their ancient Plymouth.

(Lowe 2008: 160).

The plot totals a few months during which many events occur that, in the end, lead to a chaotic climax in which Ignatius faints and falls in the gutter outside the Night of Joy bar, while Officer Mancuso arrests Lana Lee and Ignatius is pictured on the street during the arrest in a pirate costume selling hot dogs from a hotdog cart. Jones, the bar's porter, helped Mancuso arrest Lee, though he is now himself yet again unemployed and is afraid he might still be arrested for "vagrancy" without a job. Whatever "vagrancy" implies is never fully explained in the book, which fuels the racism-theme inherent to the novel, since it implies that black people can get arrested for something that does not even mean anything. Meanwhile, Ignatius' mother is completely fed up with her son and calls a psychiatric hospital to come and take him away. Meanwhile, Ignatius has been in contact with his (ex-)girlfriend Myrna, who lives in New York. She has become so worried about

him that she travels to New Orleans, rescues him from his home, and takes him away to New York, meanwhile passing the ambulance which was about to pick up and transport Ignatius to the psychiatric hospital.

The story is told from a third-person perspective, though there are many pages which represent texts written by Ignatius himself in the novel, as well as much dialogue between different characters. Each character has a saliently idiolectic manner of speech and this is well-represented in the dialogues. The specifics of the characters' individual styles will be dealt with in detail in the stylistic analysis later on, however. Even though there is a third-person narrator, much use is made of free indirect speech, which enables the writer to blur the line between clear-cut narrator's speech and subjective focalization of characters. For instance, free indirect speech is used in *ACoD* to mimic a stream of consciousness without having to add overt punctuation that could possibly distract the reader from interpreting a passage as such a stream of consciousness. This happens when Mr. Gonzalez is waiting for Ignatius to enter his office for his job interview, and he questions why Miss Trixie would seem to have gone to the ladies' room and appears to come back into the office through the front door:

Mr. Gonzalez saw a green visor outside the door. Had Miss Trixie gone out through the factory and decided to reenter through the front door? It was like her. She had once gone to the ladies' room in the morning and been found by Mr. Gonzalez late that afternoon asleep on a pile of piece goods in the factory loft. Then the door opened, and one of the largest men that Mr. Gonzalez had ever seen entered the office.

The use of free indirect speech is relevant, since it limits direct quotation of characters that is mainly reserved for dialogue. And since much of the occurrence of direct speech is marked with non-standard varieties, these dialogues are highlighted more by the absence of direct indication of thought. If characters were not only seen to *speak* in non-standard varieties, but were markedly *thinking* in these varieties as well, perhaps the saliency of their phonological idiosyncrasies could be less distinct. This, in turn, could have an effect on how their *speech* is stereotypically representative of their social class. This is one of the reasons the analyses done in this thesis are aimed at non-standard dialogue, since much of the presentation of thought is created through the device of free indirect speech. So, in a sense, the focalization remains mostly with the narrator throughout the novel, with the exception of the writings of Ignatius which are solely from his point of view. Furthermore, it could be argued that the focalization thus blurs in certain passages where the use of free indirect speech may indicate a character's thoughts instead of overt narration by the third-person narrator. An example of direct speech representation marked by the use of non-standard elements is this:

[Jones:] "If I had me some trainin I woul'n be moppin no old whore flo."

"Be good," Mr. Watson answered vaguely. "Be well behave with the lady."

"Wha? Ooo-wee. You don understand me at all, man. I got a job workin with a *bird*. How you like workin with a bird?"

[...]

“Be nice, Jones!”

“Whoa! Hey, you really been brainwash,” Jones said. “You ain got nobody to come in and mop your flo. How come? Tell me that.”

“Don’t get yourself in no trouble.”

(Toole 2011 [1980]: 132)

Since the non-standard varieties employed in the novel are mostly salient through phonological, and to a certain significant extent syntactical features, direct speech is much represented in order to portray these varieties realistically. Phonological features could be represented in thought, but this would make less sense than their occurring in direct speech.

Since the use non-standard varieties in the novel exists on a scale with some characters using few features associated with New Orleans English and some characters using many, it is relevant to analyze the entire spectrum of speech rather than simply one end of it. The use of different qualities and quantities of non-standard manifestations namely serves a function, which will be elaborated later on (Lowe 2008: 173). I will give a brief depiction of the characters on which I will base my analyses, since their spectral use of non-standard varieties is tied closely with their regional, ethnic, and social identities. Their speech is linked with their identities and thus their speech is also a signifier of their identity, which will be relevant for the analyses of the translations:

- Ignatius

Ignatius is an over-educated slob and this is reflected in his speech. He is an anti-social, easily irritated, and pedantic figure whose favorite way to spend time is by lying on his bed and writing essays on the moral poverty of modern society and how it is in dire need of more “theology and geometry” (Toole 1980: 1). He absolutely despises physical exercise or any kind of labor at all. He causes trouble and mayhem everywhere he goes, even though he is convinced of his own mental and moral superiority and shifts the blame of all bad things that happen to him to other people.

- Lana Lee

Lana Lee is the owner of the Night of Joy bar and runs an illegal distribution center for pornography tailored to high school students. She is often cited as a “dominatrix” and does indeed dominate and terrorizes her staff. She is a no-nonsense, rude, opportunistic businesswoman who employs Burma Jones for the sole reason of being able to hire a cleaner under the minimum wage, since Jones requires a job in order to not get arrested. Her speech reflects her directness and therefore has a distinct quality which will be elaborated on in the stylistic analysis.

- Mrs. Reilly

Mrs. Reilly is Ignatius’ mother and has been a widow for over 15 years. She is presumably a New Orleans native, since she speaks with a mild New Orleans accent. At first, she is rather submissive to Ignatius’ needs and demands, but as the novel progresses, she grows more assertive and stands up for herself and becomes more critical of Ignatius’ lifestyle. She forces him to go out and obtain a job. He finds several but fails miserably at

meeting the demands of those jobs. Mrs. Reilly becomes so agitated and frustrated (partly through the encouragement of her new-found friend Santa Battaglia) that she implores the help of a nearby psychiatric hospital to come and take Ignatius away.

- Burma Jones

Burma Jones is an African American native of New Orleans and his speech reflects his heritage. He speaks with an extremely heavy New Orleans accent, which is characterized through orthographic and syntactic ways in the novel. His first appearance in the novel is at a police station, where he is brought to because of his “vagrancy.” He is told that he requires a job, or he will be arrested again. This leads him to seek the under-the-minimum-wage employment by Lana Lee. He is very critical of the conditions in which he has to work, but his position does not enable him to practically alter or affect the situation. He does realize that Lana Lee is running an illegal business however, and towards the end of the novel, he aids the police in obtaining the evidence of her crime and Lana is arrested. Because of this, however, Jones loses his job and is back at where he started.

## 5. Stylistic analysis of ACoD

To say that *ACoD* inhibits one particular style is impossible. Firstly, there is the narrator who explains and unfolds the plot and then there are all the idiosyncratic and archetypal characters who each convey a distinct type of speech behavior. This analysis will limit itself to the narrator and the principal characters mentioned above, since it is through the style of the narrator by which the individual styles of the characters are differentiated. The dialogue between the characters highlights the differences between their speech patterns and that is why these form the most interesting segments to discuss. I will not go into full-scale stylistic analysis of the narrator and each of the characters, but I will only highlight those aspects of their style that identify and construct the differences between these styles and which are relevant for a discussion of non-standard elements in translation.

### 5.1. The narrator

*ACoD* is typically said to be a comedic and hilarious, though also tragic, book. A great part of the humor that this book exudes is founded in the cynical and sarcastic tone of the narrator. The opening paragraph of the novel runs as follows:

A green hunting cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head. The green earflaps, full of large ears and uncut hair and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side like turn signals indicating two directions at once. Full, pursed lips protruded beneath the bushy black moustache and, at their corners, sank into little folds filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs.

As can be distilled from this excerpt, the narrator speaks with a highly marked tone, that clearly (and humorously) describes the scenes as they unfold. The narrator makes use of much personalization, which accounts for a more vivid and active portrayal of the text world. This is because personalization limits the use of passive verb constructions, which — evidently — create a more passive text world. Ignatius' head is not squeezed into the cap, but the 'cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head.' The narrator also makes use of many adjectives that give distinct qualities to the objects discussed by visualizing them in a very specific way. By saying that Ignatius' head is shaped by a balloon, the reader is immediately confronted with a large, pink, blown up face rather than simply a large head.

In terms of figurative speech, the narrator is thus very prolific. When addressing mere lexical and grammatical categories, however, the narrator seems to play more of a neutral part in the novel. The narrator makes no use of any ungrammatical structures or slang as far as these are not also used in the free indirect speech through which some characters' thoughts are sometimes presented. The effect of omitting any "irregular" aspects of language use in the narrator's text contributes to these aspects being more pronounced when they are used by the other characters.

## 5.2. Ignatius J. Reilly

As mentioned in the character description, Ignatius is an overeducated snob and sloth. His style reflects these qualities in the fact that he uses an extreme amount of academic



language, which he more often than not exclaims in order to procure a pedantic effect on his conversation partner. For instance, the next segment is when officer Mancuso attempts to arrest Ignatius, but Ignatius is trying to persuade him to leave him alone:

Is it the part of the police department to harass me when this city is a flagrant vice capital of the civilized world? [...] This city is famous for its gamblers, prostitutes, exhibitionists, anti-Christ, alcoholics, sodomites, drug addicts, fetishists, onanists, pornographers, frauds, jades, litterbugs, and lesbians, all of whom are only too well protected by graft. If you have a moment, I shall endeavor to discuss the crime problem with you, but don't make the mistake of bothering *me*.

(Toole 2011 [1980]: 3)

Ignatius is always trying to lecture anyone and everyone he meets, and his pedantic style is not only reflected in his speech, but also in his writing. He uses perfect grammar, somewhat archaic constructions at times (the ubiquitously correct usage of “whom” for example), and lexical items that would not be considered part of an average everyday register. His pedantic mind is more thoroughly reflected in his writings, which he explicitly explains as being a means to “educate the world” and provide society with more “theology and geometry.” It is difficult to find an extraordinarily representative example of this speech, since this style and tone is so intrinsic to all of Ignatius’ linguistic behavior that basically any fragment suffices:

‘The perverted (and I suspect quite dangerous) mind of Clyde has devised still another means of belittling my rather invincible being. At first I thought that I might have found a surrogate father in the czar of sausage, the mogul of meat. But his resentment and jealousy of me are increasing daily; no doubt they will ultimately overwhelm him and destroy his mind. The grandeur of my physique, the complexity of my worldview, the decency and taste implicit in my carriage, the grace with which I function in the mire of today’s world – all of these at once confuse and astound Clyde.’

(Toole 2011 [1980]: 227)

Ignatius is also misanthropic and incredibly arrogant. He turns any negative aspect of himself into a euphemistically layered quality. He is grossly fat, but he calls it the ‘grandeur of [his] physique.’ These euphemisms are exceptionally representative of his style. His overeducated and pedantic style leave no room for any grammatical irregularities or use of New Orleans-specific slang. He depicts therefore no implicit use of non-standard elements; he only uses slang when he consciously tries to envision and explain the nature of those that he considers in need of “theology and geometry” by using words that are “typical” for their speech.

### 5.3. Lana Lee

Lana Lee’s speech is extremely direct and authoritative. This is not only represented by the linguistically inherent direct nature of her linguistic behavior, but is also influenced by

the way she is represented by the narrator: “Hey Darlene, listen to this shit,” Lana Lee commanded ...’ (Toole 2011 [1980]: 236). She indeed commands everyone around her, most specifically Burma Jones. Her speech is characterized by a multitude of imperative phrases, which highlight her commanding nature. She never asks anyone to do something, she imminently orders them to do it. There is one aspect of non-standard speech characteristics that she employs very frequently and that is the use of swear words. She swears in nearly every sentence and swearing is known to be a linguistic phenomenon that people can employ in order to come across more aggressive and commanding (Talbot 2010: 170): “I can’t talk in front of those two jerks,” Lana said. “Look, this new porter’s not like the old one. This smartass has been asking about this orphan crap since he first saw you. I don’t trust him. I got cop trouble already.” (Toole 2011 [1980]: 107). It can thus be said that Lana Lee uses somewhat more non-standard language elements than the narrator and Ignatius, because they both do not swear within the same register as Lana Lee does. Swearing is considered of a “lower” register, one which Ignatius would never want to be associated with.

#### 5.4. Mrs. Reilly

Ignatius’ mother (Mother Reilly) is a New Orleans native, which is portrayed through her using significantly salient NOE markers in her speech. These are of a phonological and grammatical nature, where the phonological discrepancies are mediated in the text through orthographical adaptation:

“Oh, Miss Inez,” Mrs. Reilly called in that accent that occurs south of New Jersey only in New Orleans, that Hoboken near the Gulf of Mexico. “Over here, babe.”

“Hey, how you making?” Miss Inez asked. “How you feeling darling?”

“Not so hot,” Mrs Reilly answered truthfully.

“Ain’t that a shame.” Miss Inez leaned over the glass case and forgot about her cakes. “I don’t feel so hot myself. It’s my feet.”

“Lord, I wisht I was that lucky. I got arthuritis in my elbow.”

“Aw, no!” Miss Inez said with genuine sympathy. “My poor old poppa’s got that. We make him go set himself in a hot tub fulla berling water.”

(Toole 2011 [1980]: 4)

In this excerpt, there are certain different types of characteristics present that have earlier been identified as belonging to the NOE variety. Firstly, there is the overt reference to an accent that can apparently only be found in New Orleans with a specific reference to New Jersey. Coles (in Bernstein et al. 2014: 220) already mentioned that there are vast similarities between the characteristics that are inherent to the accents in New York and New Jersey and those found in New Orleans. It can therefore be inferred that Toole is referencing this specific Yat-variety. Coles also mentions that NOE speakers employ specialized greetings, such as ‘how you making?’ (in Bernstein et al. 2014: 224). The ellipsis in this sentence pertaining to the missing verb is also one of those characteristics that AAVE

and NOE have in common. Mrs Reilly's reply to this greeting, 'Not so hot', is another example of specific NOE idiomatic items. The use of the word 'ain't' is not only characteristic of NOE, but also of AAVE and Southern American English in general. The sentences 'Lord, I wisht I was that lucky. I got arthuritis in my elbow' show the orthographical adaptations that Toole uses in order to procure a more realistic rendering of the phonological aspects of the Yat-variety, by changing "wished" into "wisht" and "arthritis" into "arthuritis." The most prominent orthographical adaptation is 'a hot tub fulla berling water.' What is meant here, is "a hot tub full of boiling water." By changing "full of" to "fulla" and "boiling" to "berling", Toole creates an effect which emphasizes the locality of the speech behavior of these two characters.

### 5.5. Burma Jones

Burma Jones is the character who epitomizes Toole's use of non-standard variety characteristics in the novel. He is an African American New Orleans native who will be arrested for "vagrancy" if he does not find a job. Through this context, he can be interpreted as belonging to the lowest classes of society, since he has to sustain himself through his job at the Night of Joy bar below minimum wage. Though it definitely is a sweeping generalization to say that the Yat-accent is representative of "lower classes" of New Orleans society, it can be safely inferred that Toole used these mechanisms in order to produce a humorous investigation of explicit and exaggerated social stratification, race issues, and class issues (Lowe 2008: 173). Not a single sentence of Jones' speech is devoid of an NOE, AAVE, or other non-standard linguistic feature.

”Cawmniss! Ooo-woo. If I call a po-lice a cawmniss, my ass be in Angola right now for sure. I like to call one of them mother a cawmniss, though. Like this afternoon I standin aroun in Woolsworth and some cat steal a bag of cashew nuts out the ‘Nut House’ star screamin like she been stab. Hey! The nex thing, a flo’walk grabbin me, and then a police mother draggin me off. A man ain got a chance. Whoa!”

First of all, there are again the orthographical adaptations to account for phonological characteristic, such as the spelling of ‘cawmniss’ for ‘communist’ and several deletions of letters, such as the deletion “t’s” at the end of words, like Coles (1999 in Bernstein et al. 2014: 220) mentions to be a salient feature of NOE, as well as the deletion of “g” at the end of words in combination with an “n” (‘I standin aroun’). Furthermore, he also uses many grammatical “irregularities” that could either be attributed to his use of NOE or AAVE. These are the use of the infinitive verb as a conjugation (‘my ass be in Angola right now’) and the deletion of modal signifiers (‘I [would] like to call one of them [...]’). He also uses the idiomatic word ‘ain’t’, though he specifies it by also deleting the “t” off of this word. This could be interpreted as a hyperadaptation to the use of non-standard elements, which hints towards the fact that Toole consciously, purposefully, and exaggeratedly renders Jones’ speech in a non-standard fashion.

## 6. Function of NOE in *ACoD*

As can be distilled from the stylistic analysis above, there are many characters who speak with a varying degree of non-standard variety use. John Lowe, in his essay 'The Carnival Voices of *ACoD*' (2008), claims that the use of non-standard language has a conscious purpose. He says that the novel's greatest strength (and according to some critics, greatest flaw) is its use of ethnic humor (2008: 159). The novel is a humorous analysis of class, race, ethnicity, and society, though the lens through which this is mostly accomplished (Ignatius) is incredibly grotesque and bizarre. Interestingly, Lowe claims that there are very subtle differences in speech between Mr. Robichaux (Mrs. Reilly's Creole suitor) and Burma Jones. These differences mark their different ethnicities and backgrounds, since he claims that Mrs. Robichaux speaks French-inflected Creole English and Burma Jones speaks 'Yat'. These are, according to him, differentiated on the page through dialect (2011: 172). Though this distinction is an interesting one in terms of translation, Mr. Robichaux plays a very minor part in the novel and would thus offer little material to work with, which is why this thesis focus on the comparison of Burma Jones versus other characters. Since the novel entails a satirical view of ethnicity, class, race, and New Orleans society, it can be inferred that the use of different language varieties aims at making these differences among the characters more salient. Lowe has the same perspective and argues that 'Toole's presentation of his ethnic characters continues this technique [of mediating differences by staging ethnic hybrids], creating a constant carnivalization of culture that provides a shifting, kaleidoscopic vision of New Orleans, southern, and national culture, as ethnic traditions collide, merge, and influence one another ...' (2011: 173). The greatest difference in use of language between characters is, evidently, between Ignatius

and Burma Jones. Where Ignatius speaks highly eloquently and pompously, Jones speaks a vernacular with ubiquitous non-standard elements. Lowe suggests that modern slavery is a theme that permeates throughout the novel and that white characters are often represented as slave holders where black characters are presented as slaves (quite explicitly). He states that 'Toole shows us a revealing racial contrast: Ignatius's ridiculous job at Levy Pants, where he does virtually nothing, pays sixty dollars a month; Burma Jones's hard cleaning work at the Night of Joy pays twenty dollars. Toole also juxtaposes their experiences on the job' (2011: 177). The use of non-standard varieties becomes critical at this point; the connotations that arise with the use of New Orleans English are inherently racially and ethnically bound. The language that Burma Jones uses is not simply idiosyncratic, it is representative of a larger theme of ethnicity and slavery that only becomes relevant within a dualistic context: its juxtaposition with other ethnic milieus in the novel. The use of non-standard elements thus creates a saliency of ethnicity and race that is paramount in interpreting the novel and understanding its underlying implications of humor and satire. It is not merely stated that Burma Jones is black and that he is a New Orleans native; it is shown through the language that he uses and therefore has a much stronger effect. His experiences of working under the minimum wage are only consciously linked to slavery because he is indeed black *and* because he speaks in a way that is representative of this identity. Without the use of non-standard representative elements, Jones' identity would not be mediated as effectively as it is accomplished in *ACoD* and this has clear and immediate consequences for possible translations.



## 7. Translation analysis of NOE in *ACoD*

As mentioned before, *ACoD* has been translated into Dutch two times, once in 1984 and once in 2000. The earlier translation was done by Toon Pieterse and published by Skarabee in Utrecht, while the second translation was made by Paul Syrier and published by Lebowski in Amsterdam. Both books highlight the protagonist Ignatius J. Reilly on their front cover with the earlier publication using the same image as the source publication, whereas the newer publication fronts an original Dutch design by Dog and Pony in Amsterdam, perhaps foreshadowing an updated version of both its general prose and the way it deals with the ubiquitous non-standard language compared with the 1984 translation.

In order to assess to which extent the earlier and later translations overlap and/or differ, I have taken eight excerpts from the novel that each in their own way represents different characters' speech patterns and styles. The fragments are presented chronologically as they appear in the novel to retain a certain sense of progressivity as a translator may opt for different choices further along the line of translating a text. These fragments have thus not been consciously sorted according to characters, but purely chronologically. The presentation of the analyses below should give a qualitatively sufficient indication of the overall translation strategies chosen by the translators with respect to the salient non-standard elements, which will be elaborated on in the discussion section. The original excerpt X will be given along with the two translations labeled X1 and X2, respectively. X1 will continuously refer to translations from the 1984 version and X2 will refer to translations from the 2000 publication.

### Original 1:

'Hey, how you making?' Miss Inez asked. 'How you feeling, darling?'

'Not so hot,' Mrs Reilly answered truthfully.

'Ain't that a shame.' Miss Inez leaned over the glass case and forgot about her cakes. 'I don't feel so hot myself. It's my feet.'

'Lord, I wisht I was that lucky. I got arthiritis in my elbow.'

'Aw, no!' Miss Inez said with genuine sympathy. 'My poor old poppa's got that. We make him go set himself in a hot tub fulla berling water.'

'My boy's floating around in our tub all day long. I can't hardly get in my own bathroom no more.'

'I thought he was married, precious.'

(page 4)

### Translation 1A:

'Hé, hoe staat het leven?' vroeg juffrouw Inez. 'Hoe gaat het, meid?'

'Niet al te jofel,' antwoordde mevrouw Reilly geheel naar waarheid.

'Dat is jammer.' Juffrouw Inez leunde over de vitrine en vergat haar koekjes. 'Ik voel me zelf ook niet al te best. Mijn voeten.'

'Goeie god, ik wou dat ik zo gelukkig was. Ik heb de arteritis in mijn elleboog.'

'Nee toch!' zei juffrouw Inez met oprechte sympathie. 'Dat heeft mijn oude vader-tje ook. We laten hem baden in een kuip vol kokend water.'

'Die zoon van mij ligt de hele dag in onze badkuip. Ik kom mijn eigen badkamer bijna niet meer in.'

'Ik dacht dat ie al getrouwd was, lieverd.'

(page 12)

### Translation 1B:

‘Hallo, hoe gaat ’t ermee?’ vroeg juffrouw Inez. ‘Hoe voel je je, liefje?’

‘Niet zo best,’ antwoordde mevrouw Reilly naar waarheid.

‘’t Is toch wat.’ Juffrouw Inez boog zich over de vitrine vergat haar taartjes. ‘Ik voel me zelf ook niet zo best. Mijn voeten.’

‘Goh, ik wou dat ik die bof had. Ik heb arteritus in mijn elleboog.’

‘Nee toch!’ zei juffrouw Inez met oprechte deelneming. ‘Dat heeft mijn arme ouwe papa ook. Die zetten we altijd in een heet bad vol Berlijns water.’

‘Mijn zoon zit al de hele dag in ons bad. Ik kan ternauwernood mijn eigen badkamer nog in.’

‘Ik dacht dat ie getrouwd was, meid.’

(page 19)

### Example 1

This first fragment deals with a conversational exchange between Mrs. Reilly and the owner of a bakery she knows and from whom she often buys cakes. The line ‘Hey, how you making?’ is representative for NOE, as Bernstein groups this under the heading of ‘distinct New Orleans greetings’ (2014: 223). There are other significant New Orleans idiomatic items in this excerpt, such as ‘not so hot’ and ‘poppa.’ Certain grammatical features that NOE and AAVE share are also present, such as the use of a double negative when Mrs. Reilly says ‘I can’t hardly get in my own bathroom no more.’ There are also

indications of not only lexical and idiomatic elements pertaining to NOE, but also phonological elements which are represented through orthographic “deviations.” These are ‘I wisht’, ‘arthuritis’, ‘a hot tub fulla berling water.’

Translation 1A takes the original distinct greetings and translates these with a certain colloquial style. ‘Hé, hoe staat het leven?’ for instance, is of a relative low register, but is not a greeting associated with any particular ethnic or racial group. The use of the word ‘meid’ in this context is also indicative of a relatively lower social register than other options. The words ‘jofel’ and the idiom ‘al te best’ fall under this category as well. The translator has opted for somewhat similar orthographic adaptations such as ‘arteritis’, which is presumably a conscious misspelling. It can be inferred that the purpose of these misspellings is similar to the original, which is to provide clues as to a certain accent. However, the combination of generally low register elements and semi-random misspellings do not point towards a specific Dutch non-standard variety but does indicate that the translator has consciously attempted to preserve a certain qualitative element as to the use of non-standard varieties.

Translation 1B treats the same elements described above in a similar fashion as translation 1A. ‘t Is toch wat’, ‘niet zo best’, ‘liefje’, and ‘meid’ are all also of a lower register than standard Dutch, though these words and collocations are somewhat more modern than translation 1A. This is not surprising, since translation 1B was made twenty years later than 1A and it can be guessed that the necessity for publishing a new translation was one of modernizing a possibly outdated translation. There is one discrepancy between 1A and 1B that is, to say the least, remarkable. The original line ‘a hot tub fulla

berling water' is translated into 1A) 'een kuip vol kokend water' and 1B) 'een heet bad vol Berlijns water.' The original phrase is purposefully misspelled in order to represent the New Orleans accent. Either the translator of 1B felt creatively inclined, or he did not understand that this phrase was rendered more phonologically than orthographically relevant. This indicates that the translator of the more modern translation may not have been fully attuned to the stylistic idiosyncrasies that are so important to the overall themes of this novel and could foreshadow more interesting translation choices.

#### **Original 2:**

'And you **lif** somebody wallet.'

'No, I called a policeman a name.'

'Like **wha** you **callin** him?'

**'Communiss.'**

'Cawmniss! Ooo-woo. If I call a po-lice a cawmniss, my ass be in Angola right now for sure. I like to call one of them mother cawmniss, though. Like this afternoon I standin aroun in Woolsworth and some cat steal a bag of cashew nuts out the "Nut House" star screamin like she been stab. Hey! The nex thing, a flo'walk grabbin me, and then a police mother draggin me off. A man ain got a chance. Whoa!'

(page 14)

#### **Translaton 2A:**

'En je pikte iemands portefeuille.'

'Nee, ik schold een politieagent uit.'

‘Wat zei je tegen hem?’

‘Kommienist.’

‘Kommienis? O-jee. Als ik een agent een kommienis noem, dan zit ik vast en zeker achter mekaar met mijn reet in de bajes. Ik zou ook best een van die knakkers een kommienis willen noemen. Zoals vanmiddag, sta ik in Woolsworth en jat de een of andere knul een zak cashew noten uit de Notenbar. Begint die griet te schreeuwen of ze vermoord wordt. Tjee! Word ik gepakt door zo’n winkelchef en sleept zo’n hufter van de politie me mee. Een mens kan geen kant meer uit. Tjee!’

(page 21)

#### **Translation 2B:**

‘En je hebt iemand z’n portemonnee gepikt.’

‘Nee, ik heb een politieagent uitgescholden.’

‘Wat heb je dan gezegd?’

‘Comminis.’

‘Cawminis? Ojee. Als ik een smeris “cawminis” had genoemd, zat ik nou in Angola, zeker weten. Maar o, wat zou ik ze graag voor cawminis uitmaken! Vanmiddag stond ik bijvoorbeeld nog ergens bij Woolsworth, en een of andere vogel jatte een zak cashewnootjes bij de Nut House, en die meid begon te gillen alsof ze een mes tussen haar ribben had gekregen. Ou! Meteen krijg ik zo’n bewakingstiep op mijn nek, en toen sleepte die smeris me weg. Zeg nou zelf, da’s toch niet normaal? Woa!’

(page 30)

## Example 2

The second fragment is a segment from a conversation between Mr. Robichaux and Burma Jones. They have both been taken into the police station for various reasons and are talking about why Mr. Robichaux has been taken in.

There are several linguistic elements present in this excerpt that are characteristic of Jones' speech and indicative of NOE. These are 'lif', 'like wha you callin him?', 'a police a cawmniss', 'standin aroun', 'some cat steal', 'screamin', 'the nex thing', 'A man ain got a chance.' The most salient of these features is the loss of the postvocalic [t] which Bernstein describes as one of the quintessential characteristics of NOE (Coles in Bernstein 2014: 220). Mr. Robichaux only presents one non-standard element here, which is his "pronunciation" of "communist", which he describes as 'communiss.' Jones also uses non-standard grammatical features, such as the loss of third person declensions and the use of non-standard tense structures, such as 'she been stab.'

Translation 2A does not purposefully misspell any words besides 'communist', since the word "communist" is the driving force behind the reason why Mr. Robichaux is there and therefore has a significant effect on the text world. The translation of 'wallet' in 2A is interesting, since 'portefeuille' is a word that is considered somewhat archaic and belonging to a higher register than the more everyday 'portemonnee.' The translator of 2A has deliberately attempted to have Jones speak with a lower register than standard, which can be seen through the use of the words 'achter mekaar', 'mijn reet in de bajes', 'knakkers', 'griet', 'zo'n hufter', etc. There are no misspellings or orthographic adaptations to suggest a particular accent, though.

Translation 2B seems to have incorporated a similar strategy to the translation of the non-standard elements, where they are rendered in grammatically correct language, but of a lower register than standard. Translation 2B does use more modern language, such as ‘portemonnee’ versus ‘portefeuille’, ‘meid’ versus ‘griet’, ‘bewakingstiep’ versus ‘winkelchef’ and ‘smeris’ versus ‘politie.’ The idiomaticity of translation 2B also seems more fluent than 2A, as if 2B has presented Jones’ narrative more colloquially and more like actual speech than 2A. Also, interestingly, 2B used different words to treat the two misspellings of ‘communist’ in a way that resembles the original English pronunciation more than 2A, where it is adapted to Dutch phonology.

### **Original 3:**

‘Sure, go ahead, **babe**. Here. Have a nice jelly doughnut. I just bought them fresh this morning over by Magazine Street. Ignatius **says** to me this morning, “Momma, I sure feel like a jelly doughnut.”

(page 39)

### **Translation 3A:**

‘Tuurlijk, ga je gang, beste jongen. Hier. Neem een lekkere doughnut. Ik heb ze vanmorgen pas gekocht in Magazine Street. Ignatius zei vanmorgen: “Ma,” zei die, “ik heb trek in een lekkere doughnut.”

(page 45)



### Translation 3B:

‘Natuurlijk, ga je gang, jongen. Hier. Neem een lekkere donut met jam. Ik heb ze vanmorgen vers gekocht, daar bij Magazine Street. Ignatius zei vanmorgen tegen me: “Mam, ik heb zin in een donut met jam.”’

(page 60)

### Example 3

In example 3, Mrs. Reilly talks to Officer Mancuso about her son. She addresses Mancuso with the word ‘babe’, which is another term of endearment highly characterized in NOE. She also uses a historical praesens when she says ‘Ignatius says to me this morning ...’. ‘[T]his morning’ indicates that this event happened in the past, yet she uses the present tense to introduce Ignatius’ remarks.

Translation 3A translates ‘babe’ as ‘beste jongen’ where 3B reads only ‘jongen.’ The term ‘jongen’ is in itself not characteristic of any specialized non-standard variety in Dutch, but more of a general term a woman might use when speaking to a younger man. Translation 3B translates ‘Ignatius says’ with ‘Ignatius zei’, the correct form and thus not representative of a marked register or variety. Translation 3A does the same, but adds another ‘zei die’ within the remark. This double mentioning of ‘Ignatius zei’ plus ‘zei die’ resembles a lower register, because it is more representative of actually spoken speech, and thus adds a somewhat markedness to the sentence that is lacking in 3B.

#### Original 4:

'I come about that porter job you got advertise in the paper.'

'Yeah?' Lana Lee looked at the sunglasses. 'You got any references?'

'A po-lice gimme a reference. He tell me I better get my ass gainfully employ,' Jones said and shot a jet of smoke out into the empty bar.

'Sorry. No police characters. Not in a business like this. I got an investment to watch.'

'I ain exactly a character yet, but I can tell they gonna star that vagran no visible mean of support stuff on me. They told me.' Jones withdrew into a forming cloud. 'I thought maybe the Night of Joy like to help somebody become a member of the community, help keep a poor color boy outta jail. I keep the picket off, give the Night of Joy a good civil right ratin.'

'Cut out the crap.'

'Hey! Whoa!'

'You got any experience as a porter?'

'Wha? Sweepin and moppin and all that nigger shit?'

'Watch your mouth, boy. I got a clean business.'

'Hell, anybody do that, especially color peoples.'

(page 31-32)

#### Translation 4A:

'Ik kom voor die schoonmakersbaan uit die advertentie in de krant.'

'O ja?' Lana Lee keek tegende [sic] zonnebril aan. 'Heb je een getuigschrift?'

‘De politie is mijn getuigschrift. Die hebben me gezegd dat ik als de sodemieter een baan moet zoeken,’ zei Jones, en hij schoot een rookwolk de lege bar binnen.

‘Sorry. Geen bajesklanten. in mijn zaak. Ik moet aan mijn business denken.’

‘Ik ben helemaal geen bajesklant, maar ik kan je wel vertellen dat ik straks wel heel dat gelul over landloperij en geen duidelijke bron van inkomsten over me heen krijg. Dat hebben ze me beloofd.’ Jones hulde zich in een opkomende wolk. ‘Ik dacht, misschien willen ze bij de *Night of Joy* wel iemand helpen om lid van de samenleving te worden, misschien willen ze een arme kleurling helpen om uit de bajes te blijven. Ik hou het tuig buiten de deur, ik zorg dat de *Night of Joy* een goeie naam krijgt.’

‘Hou op met dat gelul.’

‘Hé! Kom nou!’

‘Heb je ervaring als schoonmaker?’

‘Wat? Schrobben en dweilen en al die andere nikkerklussen?’

‘Let op je woorden, knul. Ik heb een keurige zaak.’

‘Verrek, iedereen kan dat toch. En zeker kleurlingen.’

(page 37-38)

#### **Translation 4B:**

‘Ik kom voor dat portiersbaantje, van die advertentie.’

‘O ja?’ Lana Lee keek naar de zonnebril. ‘Heb je referenties?’

‘Ja, van de politie. Die smeris zei dat ik als de sodemieter een nuttig baantje moest gaan zoeken,’ zei Jones, en zond een fontein rook de lege bar in.

‘Sorry. Ik wil niet iemand die gedonder met de politie heeft gehad in een zaak als deze, ik moet om mijn investering denken.’

‘Ik heb niet direct iets met de politie te maken gehad, maar dadelijk beginnen ze over landloperij en geen aantoonbare bron van inkomsten en zo. Dat zeiden ze tenminste.’ Jones trok zich terug in een uitdijende rookwolk. ‘Ik dacht, misschien wil de Night of Joy wel iemand helpen een nuttig lid van de samenleving te worden, dat een arme zwarte jongen niet in de bak terecht komt. Ik hou de politie op een afstand, zorg ervoor dat de Night of Joy een goed burgerrechtencijfer krijgt.’

‘Hou op met die flauwekul.’

‘Hé! Kalm een beetje!’

‘Heb je ervaring als portier?’

‘Bedoel je vegen en dweilen en al die kutklusjes die voor zwarten overblijven?’

‘Pas op je woorden, jochie. Ik heb een nette zaak.’

‘Jezus, dat werk kan iedereen, vooral zwarten.’

(page 52)

#### **Example 4**

Example 4 consists of a conversation between Burma Jones and Lana Lee when Jones inquires about the job Lee is offering. This example is highly useful, because certain characteristics are well represented: Lana Lee’s directness, Jones’ use of non-standard elements and socially relevant idiomatic phrases as well as register issues such as swearing.

There are a few words and phrases that are most interesting in these translations, which are ‘porter job’, ‘references’, ‘police characters’, ‘color boy’, ‘member of the community’, ‘civil right ratin’, ‘nigger shit’, and ‘watch your mouth, boy.’ Translation 4A translates these as ‘schoonmakersbaan’, ‘getuigschrift’, ‘bajesklant’, ‘arme kleurling’, ‘lid van de samenleving’, ‘een goeie naam’, ‘nikkerklussen’, and ‘let op je woorden, knul’, respectively. Translation 4B translates these as ‘portiersbaantje’, ‘referenties’, ‘iemand die gedonder met de politie heeft gehad’, ‘arme zwarte jongen’, ‘nuttig lid van de samenleving’, ‘burgerrechtencijfer’, ‘kutklusjes voor zwarten’, and ‘pas op je woorden, jochie.’

Overall, translation 4B uses, again, more modern words and collocations. Translator B has rendered ‘police characters’ into a broader phrase, using ‘iemand die gedonder met de politie heeft gehad.’ ‘[G]edonder’ is a word that well resembles the overall style of Lee and thus adds to her characterization rather than ‘bajesklant.’ ‘Een goeie naam’ versus ‘een goed burgerrechtencijfer’ is interesting. ‘[B]urgerrechtencijfer’ seems extremely confounded and artificial, a word that Jones would most likely never use.

Lee’s usage of the word ‘boy’ is resonant of the slavery theme that permeates the book. In pre-civil rights US, slaves and African American men were often referred to as ‘boy’ when spoken to. In this instance, the reference can hardly go by unnoticed. Translation 4A uses ‘let op je woorden, knul’, where 4B uses ‘pas op je woorden, jochie.’ Both ‘knul’ and ‘jochie’ are correct translations of ‘boy’ but fail to realize the connection between Lee’s speech and overt slavery themes.

In both translations, all misspellings and orthographic changes to indicate a non-standard variety have been omitted and Jones speaks with correct grammatical words and sentences, albeit of a lower register.

**Original 5:**

‘Look at that **old gal**,’ Jones mused to his psyche as the bus bounced and threw him against the woman sitting beside him. **‘She think cause I color I gonna rape her. She about to throw her grammaw ass out the window. Whoa! I ain gonna rape nobody.’**

(page 53-54)

**Translation 5A:**

‘Moet je dat ouwe lijk zien,’ mijmerde Jones tot zijn psyche in de bonkende bus die hem tegen zijn buurvrouw aanwierp. ‘Ze denkt die zwarte wil me verkrachten. Ze gaat bijna met die verschrompelde kont buiten het raam zitten. O-jee! Ik rand helemaal niemand aan.’

(page 58)

**Translation 5B:**

‘Kijk dat ouwe lijk nou toch,’ zei Jones dromerig tegen zijn psyche, terwijl de bus een sprong maakte en hem tegen de vrouw wierp die naast hem zat. ‘Die denkt vast dat ik haar wil verkrachten omdat ik zwart ben. Ze zou haar eigen oma nog uit het raam gooien. Heus hoor, ik peins er niet over iemand te verkrachten.’

(page 77)

## Example 5

In this example, Jones describes a situation in which he analyzes the behavior of a lady on the bus, who he claims to be having racist thoughts. The use of non-standard elements representative of NOE and arguably stereotypical African American speech undoubtedly influences Jones' character representation and has thematic influence on the subject matter.

The more interesting elements are 'that old gal', 'She think cause I color I gonna rape her', and 'She about to throw her grammaw ass out the window.'

Translation 5A chooses to adapt 'that old gal' to 'dat ouwe lijk.' "Gal" is an American English informal slang word that roughly means "meid" or "griet" according to the Van Dale dictionary. Why the translator opted for 'lijk' may be to indicate Jones' mood more explicitly than would be stated with "meid" or "griet." The fact that translator B also chose the word 'lijk' indicates to me that he might have used translation A as an example for his own, though this is nowhere credited in translation B. It could, of course, be mere coincidence.

There is a significant difference between translation 5A and 5B in the way they translated 'She think cause I color I gonna rape her.' There are several non-standard elements present in this sentence; the loss of third person inflection, a covert predicate (cause I [am of] color) and the contraction of "going to" (gonna). Translation 5A translates 'Ze denkt die zwarte wil me verkrachten.' This would be a grammatically correct sentence were there a colon to indicate direct thought, but there is not. Therefore, this sentence

contains a lower register and can thus be seen to be somewhat representative of non-standard language, though not the full extent as the original. Translation 5B reads ‘Die denkt vast dat ik haar wil verkrachten omdat ik zwart ben.’ This is a completely grammatical sentence in which even a conjunction ‘omdat’ is added. This adds a more complicated syntactic layer to the sentence that is not present in the original. If anything, translation 5B makes Jones speak more formally here than he ever would.

When Jones says that ‘she about to throw her grammaw ass out the window’, he means that she is so scared of him that she would sooner jump out the window than sit next to him. Translation 5A reads ‘Ze gaat bijna met die verschrompelde kont buiten het raam zitten’, where translation 5B has ‘Ze zou haar eigen oma nog uit het raam gooien.’ Translation 5A does not incorporate the non-grammatical feature of ‘grammaw’ into the translation, but ‘verschrompelde’ does entail a negative judgment quality which the original also possesses. ‘Ze zou haar eigen oma nog uit het raam gooien’ in 5B is an absurd translation that clearly shows the translator’s lack of understanding this segment. Like before, with the ‘Berlijns water’, the translator seems to not have taken into consideration the effect of the non-standard elements on the interpretation of the subject matter.

**Original 6:**

‘[Lana Lee:] Take those glasses off. How the hell can you see all that crap on the floor?’

‘Who wanna look at all that crap?’

‘I told you to take the glasses off, Jones.’



'The glasses **stayin** *on*.' Jones bumped the push broom into a bar stool.  
'For twenty **dollar** a week, you **ain** running a **plantation** in here.'

(page 70)

#### **Translation 6A:**

'Zet die bril af. Hoe kan je zo godverdomme al die troep op de vloer zien?'

'Wie wil die troep nou zien?'

'Ik zei dat je die bril moet afzetten, Jones.'

'Die bril blijft *op*.' Jones stootte met de bezem tegen een barkruk. 'Je moet niet denken dat je hier voor twintig dollar per week de baas van een plantage bent.'

(page 74)

#### **Translation 6B:**

'Zet die bril af. Hoe kun je anders al die troep op de vloer zien?'

'Zou jij die troep soms willen zien?'

'Ik zei dat je die bril moet afzetten, Jones.'

'Die bril blijft *óp*.' Jones stootte met de bezem tegen een barkruk. 'Voor twintig dollar per week kun je hier geen plantage verwachten.'

(page 97)

### **Example 6**

In example 6, there is another conversation between Lana Lee and Burma Jones that incorporates elements characteristic of their styles as well as references to slavery.

Lane Lee is again direct and dominating, using swear words and imperatives to show her dominance over Burma Jones: 'How the hell can you see all that crap on the floor?' and 'I told you to take the glasses off, Jones.' Jones replies with his characteristic idiolect and uses non-standard elements such as 'wanna', 'stayin', and 'you ain running a plantation in here.'

Translation 6A translates both 'hell' and 'crap' with 'godverdomme' and 'troep', respectively, where 6B only translates 'crap' and omits a translation of 'hell.' The tone in this sentence is therefore much less forced and aggressive than it is in 6B and diminishes the slave owner versus slave relationship that is hinted at in the original. Jones himself is more assertive in 6B, however, when he directly asks Lee 'zou jij die troep soms willen zien?' versus the more general 'wie wil die troep nou zien?' in 6A. Both translations retain the reference to the plantation, though the use of the word 'baas' in 6A is somewhat awkward and 6B flows smoothly.

With regards to the explicit and concrete non-standard elements in orthography, it can be seen that Jones speaks without any prescriptively ungrammatical structures, which takes away from his character representation and again makes the slave/slaveholder relationship between himself and Lee less salient.

#### **Original 7:**

'Ignoring the eyes of the workers, I shuffled about beneath one of the loud speakers, twisting and shouting, mumbling insanely, 'Go! Go! Do it, baby, do it! Hear me talkin' to ya. Wow!' I know that I had recovered my ground with

them when several began pointing to me and laughing. I laughed back to demonstrate that I, too, shared their high spirits. *De Casibus Virorum Illustrum!* Of the Fall of Great Men! My downfall occurred. Literally. My considerable system, weakened by the gyrations (especially in the region of the knees), at last rebelled, and I plummeted to the floor in a senseless attempt at one of the more egregiously perverse steps which I had witnessed on the television so many times. The workers seems rather concerned and helped me up most politely, smiling in the friendliest fashion. I realized then that I had no more to fear concerning my *faux pas* in turning off their music.'

(page 122)

#### **Translation 7A:**

'Ik sloeg geen acht op de ogen van de werkers en stond zo ongeveer recht onder een van die grote luidsprekers te kronkelen, te schudden en te schuifelen, terwijl ik stompzinnig stond te mompelen: "Yeah, man. Go! Go! Do it baby, do it! Shake it up!" Ik merkte dat ik weer een raakvlak met hen had gevonden, want enigen van hen wezen naar me en begonnen te lachen. Ik lachte terug om te demonstreren dat ook ik hun vrolijke levenslust deelde. *De Casibus Virorum Illustrum!* Over de Val van Grote Mannen! Mijn val vond ook plaats. Letterlijk. Mijn omvangrijke constitutie, verzwakt door de draaiingen (vooral in de buurt van mijn knieën), rebelleerde ten slotte en ik sloeg tegen de vloer bij een vruchteloze poging om een van die ongehoord perverse passen te doen die ik zo vaak op de televisie had gezien. De werkers bleken heel bezorgd en hielpen me vriendelijk weer op de been, waarbij ze heel innemend lachten. Op dat moment realiseerde ik me dat ik niets meer te vrezen had aangaande mijn *faux pas* toen ik hun muziek uitzette.

(page 122)

### Translation 7B:

'Ik negeerde de blikken van de arbeiders en schuifelde rond onder een van de luidsprekers, draaiend en roepend, als een waanzinige [sic] mompelend: "O ja! Ja! Ja, baby! Kom! Kom! Swing it, baby! Woa!" Ik wist dat ik vaste voet aan de grond had gekregen toen ettelijke arbeiders lachend op me begonnen te wijzen. Ik lachte terug om duidelijk te maken dat ik hun opgewekte stemming goed aanvoelde. *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium!* Over de ondergang van grote mannen! Mijn ondergang vond ook plaats. Letterlijk. Mijn omvangrijke gestel, dat verzwakt was geraakt door de draaiende bewegingen (vooral ter hoogte van de knieën) kwam ten slotte toch in opstand en tijdens een zinloze poging tot uitvoering van een van de meer monsterlijke perverse passen waarvan ik via de televisie zo dikwijls getuige was geweest, tuimelde ik op de vloer. De arbeiders leken tamelijk bezorgd en hielpen me heel beleefd overeind, waarbij ze allervriendelijkst glimlachten. Ik besepte op dat moment dat ik ondanks mijn faux pas de muziek af te zetten niets meer te vrezen had.'

(page 161)

### Example 7

Example 7 is a piece of writing by Ignatius in which he recounts his experiences when trying to befriend the African American factory workers at Levy Pants. First, he turned off their music to ensure productivity, but when this led to disagreements, he turned it back on and tries to dance in the same way that the factory workers do. The more interesting line in terms of non-standard language is when Ignatius imitates the speech of the factory workers that is representative of terminology used when dancing. He refers to a television show, which is undoubtedly Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* on which children would

dance and that he learned both the moves and the lingo here. The original sentence is 'Go! Go! Do it, baby, do it! Hear me talkin' to ya. Wow!'

Translation 7A renders it as such: 'Yeah, man. Go! Go! Do it baby, do it. Shake it up!' and translation 7B as follows: 'O ja! Ja! Ja, baby! Kom! Kom! Swing it, baby! Woa!' It is interesting to see that the translation from 1980 retains a large part of the original and adding itself certain English phrases to the Dutch text. Translation 7B, from 2000, translates parts in English and parts in Dutch. 7A adds 'shake it up!' where 8B has 'Swing it, baby!' Where these phrases come from exactly is not sure. It is difficult to conceive of a motive to add English phrases other than the ones in the original to ascertain a desired effect such as establishing similar connotations where the original phrases, surely, would suffice.

The juxtaposition of this "non-standard" sentence with the overtly pompous and elitist speech/writing of Ignatius himself furthermore constitutes a differentiating factor between the characters. It shows that Ignatius is fully aware of different modes of speaking and he is capable of imitating them, but he does not use elements from these registers in his own idiolect. This is similar in the Dutch translations, where his speech is also overtly pompous.

**Original 8:**

'[Jones:] **Wha** you mean "sabotage"?'

‘You know, man,’ Mr Watson whispered. ‘Like the maid **ain bein** paid enough to throw too much pepper in the soup by accident. Like the **parkin** lot attendant **takin** too much crap skid on some oil and **crash** a car into the fence.’

‘Whoa!’ Jones said. ‘Like the boy **workin** in the supermarket suddenly get slippery fingers and drop a dozen **aigs** on the floor cause he **ain been pay** overtime. Hey!’

‘Now you got it.’

‘We really planning *big* sabotage,’ the other man at the bar said, breaking his silence. ‘We **havin** a big demonstration where I work.’

(page 133-134)

#### **Translation 8A:**

‘Hoe bedoel je “sabeteren”?’

‘Moet je horen, man,’ fluisterde meneer Watson. ‘Zoals die keukenmeid die onderbetaald werd per ongeluk te veel peper in de soep gooide. Zoals die parkeerhulp die een grote bek kreeg, in een olieplas slipte en de auto tegen de muur liet botsen.’

‘Tjee!’ zei Jones. ‘Zoals die knaap in de supermarkt die ineens gladde handen kreeg en een paar dozen met eieren op de grond liet lazeren omdat hij geen overwerk betaald kreeg. Hé!’

‘Je hebt het door.’

‘Wij gaan binnenkort *in het groot* sabotage plegen,’ zei de andere man aan de bar, zijn zwijgen verbrekend. ‘We krijgen een grote demonstratie waar ik werk.’

(page 136)

### Translation 8B:

‘Hoe bedoel je: “sabotage”?’

‘Je weet wel,’ fluisterde meneer Watson. “Zoals die meid die niet genoeg betaald krijgt en per ongeluk te veel peper in de soep doet. Zoals de jongen van een parkeerterrein die steeds wordt afgebekt en die over wat olie slipt en een auto tegen het hek op rijdt.’

‘Woa!’ zei Jones. ‘Zoals die jongen in de supermarkt die opeens gladde vingers krijgt en een doos eieren uit zijn poten laat vallen omdat zijn overuren niet worden betaald. Jezus!’

‘Jij snapt het.’

‘Wij maken plannen voor échte sabotage,’ verbrak de andere man aan de bar zijn zwijgen. ‘Waar ik werk gaan we een grote demonstratie houden.’

(page 176)

### Example 8

Example 8 is a conversation between three black men in a grocery store, including Burma Jones. The other two characters are not prominent. The three men talk about how they are unfairly treated as minorities and they discuss the different ways in which they could covertly stand up for themselves, which is by sabotaging their work until they are treated equally and/or fairly. The thematic undertone of this conversation thus includes their ethnic/racial background in relation to their treatment within workspaces, which is somewhat related to the slavery theme that comes forward in the conversations between Jones and Lana Lee. The non-standard elements in their speech are representative of this background and therefore adds significantly to the interpretation of this excerpt.

Translation 8A is devoid of a singular grammatical mistake, save for the misspelling of ‘sabeteren’, which should be “saboteren.” There are certain indications besides this one example that show the translator did take the non-standard elements into account, which is the use of very low register words like ‘lazeren’ en ‘knaap’, but these are the only two examples of such words in this excerpt, where the original is filled with non-standard elements. The only strange element in 8A is the fact that this translator chose to turn ‘a dozen aigs’ into ‘een paar dozen met eieren’ even though ‘a dozen aigs’ means just one box of eggs.

Translation 8B is similar to 8A with respect to the fact that it also contains no grammatical errors. It also spells ‘saboteren’ correctly where 8A managed to incorporate a certain level of non-standard influence. The translator of 8B also used fewer low register elements and constructions, which adds to a greater loss of the underlying theme of the unfair treatment of the ethnic minorities to which the three characters belong, because their speech is no longer saliently representative of their ethnic/racial background.

Next, I will conduct an analysis of the characteristics of AAVE and its use and function in *Push*, before moving on to discussing the most desirable translation strategy for a Dutch translation of *Push*, given the ideas and notions constructed in the previous chapters on translation theory.



## 8. Narratological analysis of *Push*

*Push* is a relatively short novel that focuses on the life and experiences of Claireece Precious Jones. The story is told from a first-person perspective and the focalization remains with Precious throughout the novel. The novel could be identified as a *Bildungsroman*, since the plot follows the progress of Precious as she moves forward from an abusive and neglecting home to an independent and semi-stable future.

The novel can be placed in the overall genre of African American literature, as it is written by Sapphire, an African American woman, and its plot and theme mostly center on the experiences of African Americans in an urban setting, in this case New York City. The best-known and most widespread independent African American sub-genre is the slave narrative, which is characterized by combining elements of autobiography and captivity tales with the experiences of slavery (Zapf 118 f. as paraphrased in Poklad 2015: 3). *Push* has been likened to a modernized slave narrative placed in a contemporary, urban setting. The way in which traditional, canonized slave narratives have been translated into Dutch throughout the years has been studied and written about by Marianne Kraai in her 2013 master's thesis and it might be interesting to juxtapose her findings with a more modernized exercise in translating AAVE.

Poklad identifies several features in *Push* that are reminiscent of traditional slave narratives, and also notes which differences are key in maintaining this link in a modernized way (*ibid.*). Whereas the concept of slavery is manifested through white slave owners in traditional slavery narratives, Precious' black parents can be considered her enactors of enslavement. Precious' father consistently rapes her, while her mother forces her to cook, clean, and take care of her.

There are four sub-themes which link *Push* to traditional slave narratives which are developed in a chronological order as Precious moves from being fully isolated and abused to having an independent life and a positive outlook on her future:

1. Abuse and exploitation
2. Literacy
3. Transformation
4. Escape

#### 8.1. Abuse and exploitation

Precious can be seen as a slave to her natural parents, as they exploit her physically, mentally, and sexually. In this sense, Lidell identifies this theme of *Push* to manifest the “physical and psychological holocaust inflicted on one of society's most innocent by those who should protect and nurture her” (1999: 137). This notion is most succinctly summarized by Precious herself when she says: “Mama give me orders, Daddy porno talk me” (Sapphire 1998: 62). Her mother, Mary, does not only give Precious orders, but she also completely isolates her from the outside world, because of which their apartment in Harlem is basically Precious’ entire world with four locks on the door keeping her in. These locks also keep out anyone wanting to come to Precious’ aid, such as the neighbor Ms. West, who yells “Mary! Mary! What you doing?! You gonna kill that chile! She need help not no beating, is you crazy?” (Sapphire 1998: 9) when Mary is kicking and beating Precious for being pregnant by her own father. Precious’ first child is born with Down syndrome, and the child is called Little Mongo because of it. Precious’ mother pretends to

take care of Little Mongo (while she has forced Precious' grandmother to raise the child) in order to receive more welfare checks. This is another link to traditional slave narratives, in which female slaves were generally separated from their children.

When, later on in the novel, Precious decides to go to a special needs school, Mary ridicules her and tells her she is too stupid to learn anything, and she should go down to welfare and make sure they receive another check. All this occurs as Precious' father occasionally comes to their apartment to rape Precious and makes her feel as if she enjoys and wants it. In this sense, her mother portrays her enslaver in a psychological way, whereas her father enslaves her sexually.

## 8.2. Literacy

Another major theme in the novel is literacy. Because of the constant neglect and abuse by her parents, Precious is incredibly set back in her reading and writing abilities — she is basically illiterate. It is only after starting attending classes at the alternative school that Precious starts learning how to read and write, which consequently enables her to start believing in herself. Dagbovie-Mullins describes this as 'both in her home and in her outside world, Precious is victimized until she writes herself into being' (2011: 436). Writing is a note-worthy device in the novel, as it is written in the first person, mentioned before. The entire novel is a kind of diary Precious keeps in which she relays her emotional and life journey. Halfway down the first page, it says: 'My name is Claireece Precious Jones. I don't know why I'm telling you that. Guess 'cause I don't know how far I'm gonna go with this story, or whether it's even a story or why I'm talkin'" (Sapphire 1998: 3). Her writing

abilities improve over the course of the novel and this is reflected in writing reports between Precious and Ms Rain, her alternative school teacher.

### 8.3. Transformation

The consequences of the ongoing abuse Precious endures are that she has an incredibly low self-esteem, self-image, and virtually no hopes for the future. She links her illiteracy and obesity with invisibility — nobody sees her, because she believes she is incapable of doing anything besides cooking, eating, and being raped by her father. She says: '[...] so stupid sometimes. So ugly, worth nuffin'. I could just sit here wif my muver everyday wif shades drawed, watching TV, eat, watch TV, eat. Carl come over fuck us'es' (*ibid.*: 34). Precious fantasizes about being white and skinny, qualities she considers paramount to obtaining a happy, successful life, since all she has known is neglect, abuse, and rape based on her being black and obese. Her mother's abuse ranges from physical beatings to verbal use, such as 'Fat cunt bucket slut! Nigger pig bitch!' (*ibid.*: 19). This extreme and overt verbal use have naturally had its effect on Precious, who says: 'I always thought I was someone different on the inside. That I was just fat and black and ugly to people on the OUTSIDE. And if they could see inside me they would see something lovely and not keep laughing at me. [...] But I am not different on the inside. Inside I thought was so beautiful is a black girl too.' (*ibid.*: 123). It isn't until she attends her alternative school, learns to read and write, and learns to socialize and empathize with her fellow students' problems that she starts attaining a feeling of self-worth.

#### 8.4. Escape

At a certain point in the novel, Precious has delivered her second baby, Abdul, and comes home to her mother with the child. When she arrives home, her mother attempts to kill her, because of which Precious grabs the baby, her bags and runs out the door. She ends up in a halfway house in Harlem where she can start gaining control over her own life. She leaves behind her oppressive and abusive home to become an independent woman capable of taking care of herself, her baby, and her life. This parallels traditional slave narratives in which the slave (not always successfully) flees from the oppressive master after witnessing a horrible event — in this case, Mary trying to kill Precious — from which they move forward and establish a successful life.

Even though the novel is told from the sole perspective of Precious, she does allow other people to speak through direct quotation. This way, her experiences are mitigated from a purely subjective telling to a more authoritative relay, since she bases her analyses of those experiences on real-life, objective occurrences. Precious' quoting of her mother, for instance, indicates directly the extent and atrociousness of the abuse she has endured, rather than merely expressing her feelings about the abuse without overly showing it. This needs to be taken into account when translating this text, because the content of the quotes Precious uses are paramount to understanding how Precious came to be the way she is and why she responds to situations in certain ways.

### 9. AAVE in *Push*

African American Vernacular English is a variety that is complex and varied, though it will be characterized to the extent it is relevant for the current exercise of translating *Push*, as not all features of AAVE will be necessarily taken into account in the translation, for that would simply be too broad. I will thus give an overview of the most salient features of AAVE that will most likely be overtly present in the novel *Push*. In her essay “The Lexicon of AAVE” Smitherman identifies two major areas in which the uniqueness of AAVE is evident in writing:

‘patterns of grammar and pronunciation; [...] and the lexicon, developed by giving special meanings to English words, a practice that goes back to enslavement and to the need for a system of communication that only those in the slave community could understand’

(Smitherman 1998: 207)

As Martin and Wolfram note, however, many of the so-called characteristics of AAVE overlap with the characteristics of many other language varieties (in Mufwene 1998: 11) — which means to say that though Smitherman notes the ‘uniqueness’ of AAVE, it shares many characteristics with other varieties. Ultimately, a language variety is ‘typically associated with a community of speakers’ (Mufwene in Lanehart 2001: 21) and it is the combination of linguistic features and a sociocultural and historical context of its speakers that

makes up the identification of AAVE. So, it is useful to first succinctly examine which features are characteristic of AAVE, to quote fragments from *Push* that incorporate these features, and to discuss how these might be treated in a Dutch translation.

### 9.1. Grammar

In terms of grammar, several key grammatical features can be identified as most evident within the use of AAVE: verbal markers, nouns and pronouns, negation, questions (Rickford 1999: 6-9). Each of these categories inhibit features that deviate from GA and which may be salient in the use of AAVE in *Push*.

#### *Verbal markers*

The use of verbs in AAVE is quite different from that in GA, often including omissions of certain verbal markers such as auxiliaries, and simplification of inflections. In terms of omissions, for instance, speakers of AAVE often leave out the present tense for states and actions, such as “he tall” for “he’s tall” and “they running” for “they are running,” or “he walk” instead of “he walks” (Rickford 1998: 6-7).

The omission of the third-person verbal inflection is used throughout *Push*, such as “This time I know Mama know. Umm hmmm, she know. She bring him to me. I ain’ crazy, that stinky hoe give me to him” (Sapphire 1996: 24). The Dutch language does not have this specific feature where the third-person inflection is systematically omitted. This means that this feature could not be directly recreated using existing rules but could be implemented when using an *artificial strategy* or *other type of strategy*, in case of Vandepitte’s terms, since these rely on creative use of non-standard target language. The

phrase “she bring him to me” could thus be translated with “ze breng hem naar mij,” which would recreate omitting the third-person inflection and is not necessarily linked to any specific existing variety. Whether this option is most desirable depends on the larger text at hand. Perhaps retaining the standard-form auxiliary in this phrase could prove best if other features were rendered non-standard, such as the question of using “ze” or “zij,” which is one of formality, and since *Push* is written in an extremely informal tone and style, it is reasonable to assume all elements that can be rendered informally, will be done so.

In AAVE, the auxiliary may also be omitted with the use of the present perfect, such as “he been sick,” in which case the auxiliary “has” has been left out. When the present simple is used in GA to denote a habitual aspect, AAVE speakers may opt for the word “be,” as in “he be walkin’ to school everyday” (Rickford 1998: 6). The use of a specific verbal marker may not only denote a marker in the sense of duration of completion, such as “been” and “done,” but may also inhibit a modal aspect that expresses a speaker’s indignation about an event or action, such as “he *come* walkin in here like he owned the damn place” (Spears 1982: 852). In *Push*, there are also many instances of such auxiliary omission, such as:

“I never seen anybody wif braids that don’t hang down” (*ibid.*: 26);

“It been a month now” (*ibid.*: 62).



Omitting the auxiliary is a technique often applied in AAVE, but the auxiliary verb is different in English than it is in Dutch. For instance, Dutch can use no auxiliary verbs where English does, such as the phrase “It [has] been a month now” which is most idiomatically translated into standard Dutch without an auxiliary through “het duurt nu al een maand.” Because auxiliaries function differently in these languages, the application of omitting it must be different as well. This does not need to be a problem, since the desired effect of the translation is recreating Precious’ speech in an informal, non-standard way. What matters most is the effect the translation has, rather than its inherent use of similar grammatical devices. So the translator can choose to omit an auxiliary where possible and where it could render the text more informal; or retain it and apply techniques elsewhere which make the text more informal. The phrase “het duurt nu al een maand” could be made more informal in other ways, such as the use of the word “nou” for “nu,” the use of “n” for “een,” and “t” voor “het.” It is important to keep in mind, however, that playing with auxiliaries could be useful in translations where both English and Dutch would use a form with auxiliaries.

### *Nouns and pronouns*

The second aspect of deviating grammatical features is the inflections in terms of nouns and pronouns. These are somewhat more straightforward than verbal markers, because there exist fewer ways in which these can deviate. Rickford lists several ways in which nouns and pronouns are characteristically used in AAVE (1998: 7-8), such using “John house” instead of “John’s house,” “two boy” for “two boys,” “that teacher, she yell

at the kids” versus “that teacher yells at the kids,” the use of “y’all” for “your” both plurally and possessively (Rickford 1998: 7-8).

Sapphire does not really inflect nouns as much as misspell them, such as ‘A girl wif little kitties whose self is luvlee just LUV-Vell-LEE!’ (Sapphire 1996: 112). These misspellings are more indicative of phonology, since Precious’ illiteracy makes her spell out words the way she would pronounce them, but more about that later. This means that Sapphire makes Precious write many nouns in a non-standard fashion, such as “chile” for “child,” “Down Sinder” for “Down Syndrome,” “usta” for “used to,” etc. The most frequent occurrence of pronoun alteration is the use of “they” for “their,” such as ‘I mean wifout trying I know some of they bizness’ (Sapphire 1996: 110). The idiomatic translation of this sentence would be “Ik bedoel, ik weet waar ze mee bezig zijn zonder dat ik het probeer.” It would be a stretch to find a corresponding translation in which this exact mechanism could be implemented in Dutch; that would be focusing on the microlevel too much. To indicate Precious’ non-standard speech, an idiomatic translation must be rendered in a conceivable non-standard Dutch way to present a truthful and credible recreation on the macro-level. In Dutch, plural possessive pronouns are often misused for plural pronouns, and since the idiomatic translation uses “waar ze mee bezig zijn” for “they bizness,” this common phenomenon can be implemented in a credible way. This way, the translation would be “Ik bedoel dat ik weet waar hun mee bezig zijn zonder dat ik het probeer.” Using only this mechanism in this particular translation would not distort the standardness of the language to a great extent, but adding non-standard features from

different characteristics (such as “da’k” for “dat ik” and “besig” for “ bezig”) could well improve on a non-standard adaptation of the source text.

### *Negation*

A frequent rhetorical feature of AAVE is negation, or the use of double negatives, called ‘negative concord’ by Martin and Wolfram (1998: 17). This also happens within auxiliary verbal structures, such as “He don’ do nothin” for GA “He doesn’t do anything.” AAVE goes even one step further and can even apply an inversion to this double negative: “Ain’ nobody home” for “Nobody is home” (*ibid.*). Wolfram et al. also name another way in which negation is used differently in AAVE from GA, which is the use of “ain’t but” and “don’t but” as substitutes for “only”. They state that an AAVE speaker might say “He ain’t but fourteen years old” where a GA speaker would say “He’s only fourteen years old” (Wolfram et al. 1993: 14). Sapphire makes frequent use of these features, such as these lines:

‘I don’t remember never doing no writing before’ (Sapphire 1996: 49);

‘I don’t pretend I’m not pregnant no more’ (*ibid.*: 62).

In this case, English and Dutch have relatively comparable devices available to maintain a degree of non-standard informality through double negation. In Dutch, a frequent informal phrase to indicate a double negation is “nooit geen.” This phrase can be used by a translator for the sentence “I don’t remember never doing no writing before” by translating

it with “Ik kan me herinneren dat ik nooit geen dingen heb geschreven.” This translation embellishes the English gerund “writing” somewhat, but it means to prove a point: that Dutch can generally input double negation where English uses this informally as well. This seems to be one of the less complicated translation problems of AAVE, though the translator need always take into account the extent to which double negation is effective in Dutch, or whether including double negation in combination with other non-standard features would be exaggerating the matter. For instance, the sentence above could also be translated with more non-standard characteristics, such as “kan me niet herinneren da’k nooit geen dingen heb geschreve.” These misspellings are not only based on corresponding features of AAVE, but also of the degree of Precious’ illiteracy inherent in the novel.

### *Questions*

According to Rickford, there are two ways in which the asking of question differs in AAVE use from the use of GA: formations of direct questions that omit an inversion of the subject and auxiliary verb, as in “why I can’t play?” in AAVE versus “why can’t I play?” in GA. The second difference he notes is the ‘auxiliary verb inversion in embedded questions’ such as “I asked him could he go with me” (1998: 8). This type of conversion is also used in *Push*, such as in the following fragment:

‘Girl foun’ my notebook next. “Jo Anne is my name, rap is my game. My color is beige. My ambition is to have my own record layer.”

Miz Rain look at her. I wonder myself what is a record layer?’

(Sapphire 1996: 45)

The question “I wonder myself what is a record layer” is indicative of this inversion, which could be recreated in Dutch through the same mechanism, where the idiomatic translation “Ik vraag mezelf af wat een platenlayer is,” would be inverted to “Ik vraag mezelf af wat is een platenlayer,” which is a colloquial way of expressing a question in Dutch. Cases in which this particular inversion might not work in Dutch, other mechanism discussed in this chapter could be employed to still indicate a level of non-standard language use in a such phrase.

## 9.2. Phonology

Phonology is a somewhat tricky aspect of any given language variety in terms of translating literature, since it is mostly, if not completely, an oral feature. Yet even an oral feature may be rendered evident in written literature through the use of non-standard spelling indicating an utterance of non-standard language, which is what Leech and Short call ‘eye-dialect’ (1981: 135). They do note, however, that graphological representations of phonology are not a matter of ‘absolute realisms,’ but that ‘[authors] are more interested in the illusion, the living flavour, of dialect, rather than with its exact reproduction’ (1981: 136).

Green (2002: 106-132) divides AAVE's phonological features in several subcategories: final consonant sounds, devoicing, sound patterns and *th*, and additional phonological patterns. These features are most clearly represented in her tables listing these features:

- Final consonant sounds:

<b>AAE</b>	<b>Phonetic transcription</b>	
a. pos	[pos]	'post'
b. was	[wɔs], [was]	'wasp'
c. mas	[mæs]	'mask'
d. gif	[gɪf]	'gift'
e. adop	[ədap]	'adopt'
f. conduc	[kand^k]	'conduct'
g. ban	[bæn]	'band'
h. bol	[bol]	'bold'

(*ibid.*:

<b>AAE</b>	<b>Phonetic transcription</b>		109)
a. push	[pUʃ]	'pushed'	
b. page	[pedʒ]	'paged'	
c. raise	[rez]	'raised'	
d. pick	[pɪk]	'picked'	
e. jump	[dʒ^mp]	'jumped'	
f. miss	[mɪs]	'missed'	

(*ibid.*: 110)

- Sound patterns and *th*:

<b>AAE</b>	<b>Phonetic transcription</b>	
a. thing	[θɪŋ]	‘thing’
b. think	[θɪŋk]	‘think’
c. dese	[diz]	‘these’
d. dat	[dæt]	‘that’
e. baf	[bæf]	‘bath’
f. wif, wit	[wɪf], [wɪt]	‘with’
g. mont, monf	[m^nt], [m^nf]	‘month’
h. Beflehem	[bɛfləhɪm]	‘Bethlehem’
i. bave	[bev]	‘bathe’
j. smooove	[smuv]	‘smooth’
k. mova <sup>8</sup>	[m^və]	‘mother’

(*ibid.*: 118)

- Additional phonological patterns:

<b>AAE</b>	
a. walkin	‘walking’
b. runnin	‘running’
c. spenin <sup>12</sup>	‘spending’
d. thinkin	‘thinking’
e. listnin	‘listening’
f. openin	‘opening’

(*ibid.*: 122)

An interesting feature that Sapphire employs is not only using these grammatical structures prevalent in AAVE, but also orthographically depicting such phonological characteristics in the text of *Push*. For instance, the word “nothing” is often depicted as “nuffin’,” the word “math” is represented as “maff,” the word “business” is written as “bizness,” etc.

Many of the characteristics outlined above are created in the novel through spelling that is much different from GA. Even though AAVE is not a variety with an official grammar in the narrower sense, Sapphire goes to great lengths in order to make sure that the language represented in the novel is unequivocally characteristically AAVE. These are some examples of the ways in which Sapphire incorporates phonology in the text:

‘I done passed it a hunnert times but never been in it’ (Sapphire 1996: 25).

‘[r]jest of the time I mine my bizness’ (*ibid.*: 35).

‘The air floats like water wif pictures around me sometimes’ (*ibid.*: 57).

‘I bress feeding Abdul’ (*ibid.*: 77).

‘Carl come in the night, take food, what money they is, fuck us bofe’ (*ibid.*: 85).

Naturally, Dutch does not follow the exact same rules for differentiating standard and non-standard phonological expressions. So how might these instances be translated into Dutch? Of course, all instances of non-standard phonology can be neutralized, but this would not do justice to the original text. As mentioned in the chapter on translatability, finding an equivalent variety is next to impossible. The strategies that give the translator the most options then are, again, *employing an artificial alternative* and *employing a different variety*, with which the translator can frame words in a more informal way and thus retain a sense of non-standardness. Where possible, the translator can choose to misspell certain words to give them a different phonology (as in *Push*), though such a direct



approach may not be the best option. In the example above, the word “hunnert” for “hundred” is misspelled to provide an approximation of how Precious would pronounce this word. The translation “honderd” for “hundred” could be written as “honnert,” which would indicate a non-standard spelling and pronunciation close to the original, but might not necessarily be enough to recreate Precious’ persona as in the source text. This is because there are far more AAVE features used in virtually every sentence. In the case of “honnert,” an easily comprehensible alternative turned out to be available, but this might be more difficult with other words, such as “bizness.” The idiomatic translation of “rest of the time I mine my bizness” would be “de rest van de tijd bemoei ik me met mijn eigen zaken.” Just because the word “business” is misspelled, does not mean its corresponding word in Dutch need be misspelled either. It could well be that another word in the sentence might prove more efficiently altered. The translator will need to assess each instance of non-standardness and consider to what degree non-standard alteration of the translation is useful in each particular phrase, which could combine different elements and leaving some out, depending on the context.

### 9.3. Lexicon

A lexicon can be seen as ‘an abstract dictionary in which meanings and other information such as pronunciation of words can be found’ (Green 2002: 12). AAVE, as a distinct language variety, thus also has a distinct lexicon. This lexicon is sometimes referred to as “slang,” which in itself connotes a negative stereotype, as slang words are generally considered to enjoy little prestige. Several scholars have undertaken to analyze and frame a lexicon of AAVE in order to not only lift AAVE from its slang reputation, but

also ‘to help bring to the language we call slang a better name, a better reputation; and also to suggest [...] how intrinsic it is to the quest of human culture to express and to renew itself’ (*ibid.*: 14).

Needless to say, a complete and exhaustive work acting as an AAVE dictionary does not exist, since most AAVE lexicons are mental — and as Green points out, an AAVE lexicon may not consist of entirely different words, since ‘African American and general American English lexicons vary in that there are lexical items that sound the same but have different meanings’ (*ibid.*: 20). Sapphire does incorporate certain phrases attributed to AAVE, for example “ain’t” for “isn’t,” “ax” for “ask” and the AAVE slang word “cracker,” used as a derogatory term for white people. She uses these in phrases such as “‘What you do good?’ Ronda ax’ (Sapphire 1996: 44) and ‘He say problem is not crack but the cracker!’ (*ibid.*: 83). These translation problems are most likely the most difficult, as lexical items generally have a clear lingual translation, but can differ significantly in terms of cultural transfer. The word “cracker,” for instance, is defined in Dutch by the Van Dale dictionary as a “armoedzaaier” or “armoedige blanke.” These are generalized terms that do not especially connote a black relation, though the addition of the word “blanke” does infer a dichotomy between black and white. These types of slang problems might thus ask for a more explicit translation to indicate the fact that it concerns a racial variety instead of simply an informal one, which most of the characters mentioned above connote in a more general way. So though these problems might prove more difficult, they also have more of a semantic capability to actively demonstrate race over informality.

#### 9.4. Importance of sociocultural and historical context

African American Vernacular English is an extremely varied language variety, not only in terms of its being culturally widespread, but also historically. These, on their own, are not separate contexts, but sociocultural contexts and historical contexts are necessarily linked, for the current realizations of AAVE would not exist without its overarching history. AAVE is also inextricably linked to the African American community and their personal history is also the history of AAVE itself. 'AAVE is, indeed, many things. It is a system by which African Americans communicate. It is a medium for African American thought. African American writers use it as "a vehicle for literary expression". It is a social institution' (Zeigler in Lanehart: 169). Since African American writers can choose to implement AAVE as a literary expression, what follows is that AAVE is a conscious device through which experiences can be relayed through a more authentic vocabulary. This itself makes it worthy of not only literary research, but also translation research. As it will become clear in the following chapter, the use of AAVE in *Push* is an integral part of its themes and plot. Ignoring these contexts would be ignoring the real-life situations which the literary text draws on. This is similar to neutralizing the functions and effects of Sapphire's use of AAVE in a Dutch translation, for failing to implement the connotations of these contexts into the translation means the representation of these situations disappear.

## 10. Function of AAVE in *Push*

Few novels have been written which focus is so clearly and overtly on urban, African American experiences. Sapphire augments the setting by having her protagonist live a quintessential idea of the life of, what Wilson has called, “black inner-city residents” (1996: xv). Function-wise, the most essential and relevant part of this is the use of AAVE. As mentioned before, AAVE is a non-standard language variety which encompasses not only distinct linguistic characteristics, but which is also representative of an important subculture of American history. In order to analyze the most desirable way to translate *Push*, regardless of whether this way of translating is feasible, it must first be outlined what the function of AAVE is within the novel.

Whereas *ACoD* is filled with juxtaposed varieties of language use, *Push* maintains a singular use of AAVE throughout the novel, with the exception of one particular episode. When Precious starts following classes lead by Ms Rain at the alternative school, she is forced to write a journal which Ms Rain then reads and replies to in writing in the same journal. Even though these passages are not in GA either, except for the writings and edits of Ms Rain, these episodes highlight Precious’ illiteracy. The following excerpt is representative of that:

[Ms Rain] tell everyone to not talk and to write for the next fifteen minutes.

Everybody is trying something. After time up Miz Rain come to my book  
ax me to read what I wrote. I reads: “Little Mongo on my mind.”

Underneaf what I wrote Miz Rain write what I said in pencil.

li Mg o mi m

*(little Mongo on my mind)*

Then she write:

Who is Little Mongo?

She read me what she wrote, tell me to *write* my answer to her question in the book. I copy Little Mongo's name from where Miz Rain had wrote it.

Litte mony is mi cie

Miz Rain read, "Little Mongo is my child?" She have question in her voice. I say, "Yes yes." Mix Rain know Little Mongo is my child 'cause I wrote it in my journal. I am happy to be writing. I am happy to be in school. Miz Rain say we gonna write everyday, that mean home too. 'N she gonna write back everyday. Thas great.'

(Sapphire 1998: 61-62)

Because the novel starts with Precious telling her story after she has been through the alternative school where she learned to read and write, there is not necessarily a progress

of her abilities from start to finish. The excerpts where she quotes and writes about the writing class show this progress saliently and this needs to be considered in the translation, but there is no definite progress of writing ability throughout the novel itself.

As with *ACoD*, the use of a non-standard variety probably has a note-worthy feature within the context of the novel. In the case of *Push*, the entire novel is written with the overt use of AAVE characteristics, which is of course a simplistic argument for it being of importance. The absolute intent of the author can never be established nor is it very fruitful to discuss, but what can be discerned is that the use of AAVE has a definite effect on a possible reader. The style of the novel is so different from GA that one cannot but notice a distinctive writing style pervading throughout the pages. The use of such a non-standard variety in literary can be explained as such:

‘[a] literary dialect is, accordingly, related to the meaning and shape of dialect systematically explored in the grounds of literature in a way that can methodically embrace the cultivation of linguistic diversity and dialect variability in the field of literature: a valuable source to examine speech patterns that represent social niches of dialect speakers in, say a literary genre, the novel.’

(Ilhem 2003: 102)

The operative words most relevant to translation in this quote are, in my view, “the cultivation of linguistic diversity” and “[to] represent social niches.” The African American community, especially in poorer areas such as Harlem, is underrepresented in the media. By giving AAVE, which is inextricably linked to this community, a platform through which a young protagonist raises herself up from horrible circumstances, this community is highlighted as well. Sapphire herself has described this as such:

‘What is so tragic is that this is a large part of America. The fact that it's still so invisible to mainstream America says something about the country. People know nothing about the life of someone like Precious or Abdul but they know everything about Britney Spears or Paris Hilton. You set up this one tiny stratum of society, the white rich blondes and their neuroses, and then you have this vast universe of African Americans, Latin American kids and women who are invisible and disenfranchised from the culture.’

(Sapphire interview in *The Guardian* 2011)

One can infer from Sapphire’s personal explanation that the use of AAVE in the novel is undoubtedly a device through which this “invisible” part of society is rendered more accessible. This means that the use of AAVE is consciously employed to provide an empowering platform through which the real-life struggles of some African Americans within the overall US culture is highlighted.

Next, I will discuss the most desirable strategy to be employed when translating *Push*, given the findings and analyses provided in the previous chapters.



### 11. Most desirable/suitable strategy for translating AAVE

In this chapter, I want to explore what would theoretically be the most desirable strategy to translate *Push*, given both the narratological, stylistic, and functional characteristics discussed in the previous chapters. Contemporary translation norms in the Netherlands generally seem to favor *acceptable* translations over *adequate* translations, which Federici has dubbed ‘foreignization’ (2003: 10) when related to the translation of non-standard varieties of language. Provided that the plot of the novel *Push* focuses on the struggles of a specifically African American girl in a specifically African American neighborhood in New York, the most logical conclusion would be the to retain the values that incorporate these ideas in the novel in some form or another, to not only adhere to the qualities and values of the novel itself, but to also adhere to the supposed demands of the target audience. This African American context is most clearly signified in the novel through the use of AAVE — which means that the first notion about a translation strategy entails retaining these values through, in turn, also maintaining a certain level of non-standardness in the translation.

As explored in the previous chapters, negation of the non-standard elements in the source text would do no good in attaining this goal. There are several translation strategies available to maintain a level of non-standardness in the target text, each with specific advantages and disadvantages for certain situations. The next step in ascertaining the most suitable translation strategy for *Push* means asking which of these strategies could be best, and most successfully, applied to this particular context. Given the advantages and disadvantages discussed in the previous chapter, it would seem that using either the

“different type of variety” or the “artificial alternative” strategy are best suited to the translation of AAVE in this particular context. These two strategies move away from linguistically linking Precious to a specifically different location than Harlem, which the other strategies would more likely do. Equivalency can never be obtained in a translation, though approximating cultural connotations as much as possible is what would render the most successful translation, given the premise that these connotations are desirable to maintain in this context.

Then, what are the specific differences that a “different type of variety” and an “artificial alternative” would have on the translation of *Push*? As explored in the previous chapter, “an artificial alternative” would enable the translator to take characteristics from more different non-standard varieties in the target language as opposed to more general colloquial language using the “different type of variety”-strategy. Yet the use of “a different type of variety” would, in this particular context, make Precious’ language easier to adapt in Dutch, as the translator could use spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, punctuation flaws, lexical items, etc., where they are fit in the target text, rather than having to rely on a constricted non-standard grammar of pre-existing varieties, as diverse as those might be. Given that Precious not only speaks in AAVE, but also in her idiosyncratic, more illiterate variety than standard AAVE, using a more general colloquial variant, through which the translator would paradoxically have more freedom to apply non-standard characteristics, seems to be most desirable in this particular context. The results of these findings can be seen in the Dutch translation of the first four thousand words of *Push*, provided as appendix 1.



## 12. Discussion and conclusion

As the qualitative analyses of the results show, the overall strategy employed in the translation of the non-standard elements in both translations of *ACoD* is either to completely neutralize non-standard elements in the target text, or to use an ‘artificial alternative’ to come to similar effects in the target text as they exist in the source text (Vandepitte 2010: 106). This artificial alternative is realized by having certain characters use phrases that are representative of a lower register variety in Dutch, which are not necessarily regionally or ethnically marked. The intention of this research is not to say which translation is qualitatively sounder or to investigate as to how they might be improved within themselves, but merely to indicate the way this novel was translated and the effects these translations have on the macro level of the text, the way that the ideational level is realized (with respect to the function that the non-standard elements have) in the translations (Leech and Short 2007: 109). Lowe suggests that the function of these non-standard elements is to construct more clearly different characters’ stances within the plot and to make the relationships between the characters themselves and the relationships between the (individual) characters and society (as it is represented in the novel) more exaggerated and thematic (2008: 173). This is in line with the result of which strategy would prove most desirable for translating AAVE, which also seemed to be using an *artificial alternative*, as this gives the translator the most options to choose from and to create a text representing the non-standard elements of the source text while still providing an intelligible translation.

It is clearly shown that the *ACoD* translations either neutralize or artificially adapt the non-standard elements to a low register that is not necessarily regionally, socially, or ethnically marked. It is difficult within the scope of this thesis to assess the ways in which these differences in the use of non-standard elements between the source texts and the translations - and between the translations themselves - have a measurable effect on the reader. What can be seen in the results of this thesis, however, is that the different characters are presented with fewer differences in their styles and idiolectal characteristics in the Dutch translations than they are in the source text to an arguably significant level. As has been argued, these differences have significant purposes for the construction of the underlying theme of societal satire and ethnic/racial confrontations and inequality. The fact that Burma Jones speaks with a more or less standardized lect in the translations compared to his undoubtedly (stereotypically) ethnically and racially marked language in the source text, does constitute the inference that his background and thematic purpose in the novel is not as highlighted in the two Dutch translations as it is in the source text. There is the occasional misspelling to indicate a possible different pronunciation of a certain word, and there are grammatical structures and use of register that could arguably be considered non-standard, but definitely not to the extent that the source text has incorporated non-standard language in its construction of its (and Jones') macro level.

Without attempting to start a purely prescriptive critical discussion, the question can be posed: is this desirable or not? This fully depends on the goals which were tried to be accomplished by publishing the translations. Publishers have financial motives and the more easily accessible books are, evidently, the more popular they might become

with mainstream audiences. Had Burma Jones (and other characters) spoken with distinct non-standard varieties that possibly took away from an easy and pleasurable reading experience, the translations may not have been as commercially successful as they have been, though this is of course conjecture to a certain extent. In my translation of an excerpt from *Push*, I have tried to retain this sense of non-standard language more so than in the existing translations of *ACoD*, though it has proven extremely difficult to maintain 1) lingual consistency, 2) cultural connotations, and 3) an authentically Dutch text.

It is interesting to see, though, that the overall supposed differences in translation norms throughout different periods seem to suggest that more modern translations are more likely to retain or reconstruct non-standard elements than previous works. The results of this thesis counter that notion, since the 2000 translation does not explicitly use more corresponding non-standard elements in the target text (quantitatively speaking), nor does it adapt the source text elements more explicitly artificial than the 1984 translation does. If anything, the 2000 translation uses fewer corresponding non-standard elements than the 1984 translation, or translates source text non-standard elements either wrongly (e.g. 'Berlijns water') or in a strange fashion (e.g. 'haar eigen oma'). This seems to indicate that from a literary point of view, the effects of the non-standard language on the macro level of the text have not been taken into account as much as they were in 1984. The 2000 translation does very clearly use more modern language and is, for its time, more idiomatic than the 1984 publication would be. This is in line with Kraai's findings when she concluded that modern translations of AAVE seem to be more attuned to

political correctness and therefore either neutralize AAVE elements in order to not compose negative stereotypical elements in a Dutch text; or they calque the AAVE elements, which adds an exotic atmosphere to the translation which may 'detach the reader' or which the 'reader may find intriguing' (Kraai 2010: 77).

Overall, both translations of *ACoD* show some sensibility to the effects of the non-standard elements of the source text, but were incapable of realizing a corresponding macro level that fully pays tribute to the racial, ethnic, and regional markings of the source text. The question is not whether this is good or bad, but simply whether this is attainable. Research has shown that the translation of non-standard elements is extremely difficult given the fact that they often inhibit strong cultural and regional connotations and the findings of this thesis cannot show the differences in effect when a work has been translated in both an adaptive style and neutralizing style, since both translations of *ACoD* are highly neutralizing and somewhat adaptive.

If I had used a similar approach in translating *Push*, it would have been less obvious to what extent Precious inhibits and represents black culture, since her speech is so integrally linked with her blackness. I found that a more colloquial style of language (in the sense of more colloquial than the translations of *ACoD*) was a good way to represent non-standard language in Dutch, though it does of course take away from a fully culturally-conscious strategy. As discussed earlier, it is virtually impossible to find a target language alternative that represents the original non-standard language in both a lingual and cultural sense, but I have come to the conclusion that by employing a certain overlapping of the strategies of 'using a different of variety' and 'using an artificial alternative,' the

translator can find enough freedom in the target language to locally decide which adaptations prove desirable and which do not. Restricting a translator to using one particular variety may increase the level of linguistic consistency but would make it more difficult to find solutions for the wide variety of translation problems that arise when dealing with non-standard language. The level of colloquial language I attained in my translation of *Push* could well be accepted by the Dutch transcultural stance on cultural transfer but might not be commercially acceptable for perhaps being “too non-standard,” though that is a different matter altogether. I can conclude from my translation that there are options available to translators to more creatively deal with non-standard language than to simply neutralize it, but that it is extremely difficult to compose a unified framework that would predict which options are more desirable than others, since each non-standard variety comes with its own linguistic, cultural, regional, and historical connotations. This does not, of course, mean we should not try to represent the source non-standard language as truthfully as possible, but, more importantly, that we should be conscious of these mechanisms and keep them in mind when translating.

Further research could be undertaken on works that incorporate much non-standard language and which have been translated in many different ways to the extent that a feasible framework might be realized in which different translation strategies could be analyzed. Unfortunately, such an analysis did not fit within the scope of this thesis, but I believe that this thesis is a small step towards such an undertaking. Not just by translating, but also by investigating source texts and target texts that exhibit much non-standard



elements, can our understanding of the workings of such elements be enhanced, and might also qualitatively improve the way we deal with them.

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## 14. Appendices

### 14.1. Appendix 1: *Push* translation

'K moest blijven zitte toen ik twaalf was omda'k een kind kreeg van me vader. Dat was in 1983. 'K ging een jaar naar school. Dit word me tweede baby. Me dochter heeft Down Sindro. Ze is debiel. In de tweede klas bleef'k ook zitte, toen ik zeven was, omdak nog kon lezen (en ik plaste nog in me broek). Ik zou in de elfde klas moeten zitte, bijna klaar om naar de twaalfde klas te gaan om dan af te studere. Maar da zik niet. K zit in de negunde klas.

Ik moest van me school af omdak zwanger ben wat ik echnie eerlijk vind. Kheb niks gedaan! Ik heet Claireece Precious Jones. Weet ik veel wrom ik je da vertel. Ik denk omdak niet weet hoe lang ik dit verhaal ga vertellen, of of het wel echt een verhaal is of waarom'k wat zeg; of'k moet beginnen bij het begin of vanaf hier of vanaf twee weken vanaf hier. Twee weken vanaf hier? Tuurlijk je kunt doen wat je maar wil als je praat of schrijft, tis als leven dat je alleen kunt doen wat je aan het doen ben. Soms vertelle mensen een verhaal'n tis logisch of tisnie waar. Maar kga proberen logisch te zijn en de waarhijd te vertelle, wat maakt het verdomme anders uit? Zijn dr overal nog niet genoeg leugens en shit?

Dus, OK, tis donderdag, 24 september 1987 en k loop door de gang. Zie dr goed uit, ruik goed — fris, schoon. Tis warm maar ik doe me leren jassie uit ook al ist warm, word anders misschien wel gestolun of verlore. Indische zomer, zegt meneer Wicher. Kweenie waarom ie het zo noemt. Wat hij bedoel is, tis heet, 30 graden, net zomer dagen. En dr is geen, niks, k bedoel nul airco in dit kut gebouw. t gebouw waar ik het over heb

is, natuurlijk, I.S. 146 in 134th Street tussen Lenox Avenue en Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. K loop de gang door van mentor les naar het eerste uur wiskunde. Waarom ze zoiets kuts als wiskunde op t eerste uur doen week ook niet. Misschien zodat ut dan sneller voorbij is. Ik vind wiskunde eigenlijk helemaal zo erg alsk gedacht had. Kslenter gewoon meneer Wieners klas in ga zitten. We hebben geen vaste plekken in meneer Wieners klas, kunnen zitte waar we willen. Ik zit elke dag op dezelfde plek, achterin, laatste rij, naast de deur. Ook al weet ik wel da die achterste deur op slot is. 'K zeg niks tegen hem. Hij segt niks tegen mij. Eerste dag zegt-ie, "Iedereen, open jullie boeku naar pagina 122 alsjeblief." Ik beweeg niet. Hij segt, "Miss Jones, ik zei open je boek naar pagina 122." 'K zeg, "mutherfucker lijk ik doof?" De hele klas lacht. Hij word rood. Hij smijt ze hand op het boek en zeg "probeer wat discipline te hebben." Hijs een dunne, kleine witte man van ongeveer 1.65. Een spichtje, zoals me moeder zou zegge. Ik kijk em aan en zeg "Ik kan ook smijte. Wil je smijten?" 'N ik pak me boek en ik smijt het hard op me bureau. De klas lach nog meer. Hij segt, "Miss Jones ik zou het waarderen als je het lokaal NU zou verlaten." Ik zeg, "Ik ga nergens heen mutherfucker tot de bel gaat. K ben hier om wiskunde te leren en jij gaat me lere." Hij kijkt 'sof ie zojuist als een bitch is doorgeneukt. Hij weetnie wat ie moet doen. Hij probeer normaal te doen, kalm, segt, "Nou, als je wilt leren, doe dan normaal—" "Ik doe normaal," zeg ik hem. Hij zeg, "Als je wilt leren, hou dan je mond en open je boek." Ze gezicht is rood, hij trilt. Ik hou op. Ik heb gewonnen. Denk ik.

'K wilde hem pijn doen of vernedere op die manier, weet je. Maar 'kon hem niet, of niemand, laten weten dat pagina 122 lijkt als 152, 22, 3, 6, 5— alle paginas lijken



hetzelfde. En ik wil echt lere. Elke dag vertel ik meself er gaat iets gebeuren, zoals die shit op TV ik ga doorbreken of iemand breekt door tot mij — ik ga lere, bijkomen, normaal zijn, voor in de klas gaan zitten. Maar dit was weer die dag.

Maar das de eerste dag wat ik je over vertel. Vandaag is niet de eerste dag and zoals 'k zij was ik op weg naar wiskunde toen mevrouw Lichenstein me uit de gang grisde naar haar kantoor. Dat maakt me kwaad, omda'k wis eigenlijk leuk vind ook al doe'k niks, open me boek niet eens. Zit d'r gewoon voor vijftig minuten. Ik doe niks verkeerd. Weet je als sommige andere mensen gaan klooien zet ik ze recht. Dan zeg'k, "Hou je kop mutherfuckers ik probeer hier iets te lere." Eerst lachen ze alsof ze willen da'k meedoe om meneer Wicher te pesten en de klas te verstooren. Dan sta ik op'n zeg, "Hou je bek mutherfuckers ik probeer hier iets te lere." Die aanklotende roetmoppen kijke verbaast, meneer Wicher kijk verbaast. Maar 'k ben groot, 1,70 - 1,75, ik weeg meer als 90 kilo. Die kids zijn bang voor me. "Ga zitte, kap met raar doen." Meneer Wicher kijk me verbaast maar dankbaar aan. 'K ben een soort politie voor meneer Wicher. Ik bewaar het gezag. Ik mag hem wel, doe net alsof hij me man is en dat we samenwonen in Weschesser, waar dat ook is.

Ik kan aan ze ogen zien meneer Wicher mij ook mag. 'K wou da'k hem kon vertellen over alle paginas die hetzelfde zijn maar het lukt niet. Ik haal best goeie cijfers. Meestal wel. 'K wil verdomme gewoon weg uit I.S. 146 en 'k wil naar de bovenbouw en me diploma halen.

Nou ik zit dus in mevrouw Lichensteins kantoor. Ze kijk me aan, ik kijk naar haar. Ik seg niks. Uiteindelijk zeg ze, "Dus Claireece, ik zie dat we een kleine bezoeker kunnen

verwachten.” Maar het klinkt niet als een vraag, ze vertelt me dit. ‘K zeg nog steeds niks. Ze staart me aan, daar achter haar groote houten buro, ze heb d’r witte kuthanden gevouwen bovenop haar buro.

“Claireece”

Ied’reen noemt me Precious. ‘K heb drie namen—Claireece Precious Jones. Alleen mutherfuckers die ik haat noeme me Claireece.

“Hoe oud ben je, Claireece?”

Witte kuthoer heeft me dosjee op d’r buro. Ik zie het. Zo achterlijk ben’k ook weer niet. Bitch weet wel hoe oud ik ben.

“Zestien is uh een beetje uh”—ze schraap d’r keel—“oud om nog in de onderbouw te zitten.”

‘K zeg nog steeds niks. Laat haar maar lulle als ze zoveel weet.

“Kom op, je bent zwanger, Claireece, toch?”

Nu vraagt ze ’t wel, paar seconden geleden wist die hoer zelf nog wa’k was.

“Claireece?”

Nu gaat ze helemaal lief praten en shit.

“Claireece, ik praat tegen je.”

‘K zeg nog steeds niks. Door deze hoer mis ik wiskunde. ‘K vind wiskunde leuk. Meneer Wicher wil me daar hebben, heb me nodig om die wilde negers in toom te houden. Hij’s aardig, draagt elke dag een cool pak. Hij kleed zich niet zoals sommige van die andere ranzige leraren.

“‘K wil niet meer missen van wiskunde,” zeg ik tegen die trut mevrouw Lichenstein.

Ze kijk me aan alsof ik zij da'k een hond wil pijpen of zoiets. Wat is er mis met dat kutwijf? (Da's hoe me moeder vrouwen noem die ze niet mag, kutwijven. 'K begrijp het wel, maar toch ook niet, maar het klinkt leuk dus ik seg het ook.) 'K sta op om weg te gaan, mevrouw Lichenstein vraag me om asseblieft te blijven zitten, ze is nog niet klaar met me. Maar 'k ben wel klaar met haar, da's wat ze snapt.

"Is dit je tweede baby?" vraag ze. Ik vraag me af wat er nog meer in dat dosjee staat met mijn naam d'rop. Ik haat haar.

"Het lijkt mij verstandig om een oudergesprek te hebben Claireece — ik, jij en je moeder."

"Hoezo?" zeg ik. "Ik heb niks gedaan. 'Kdoe gewoon me werk. 'Kdoe niks verkeerd. Me cijfers zijn goed."

Mevrouw Lichenstein kijk me aan alsof ik drie armen heb of dat er een meur uit me poes komt ofzo. Wat me moeder ga doen wil'k zeggen. Wat gaat ze doen? Maar dat zeg'k niet. Ik seg gewoon, "Me moeder heeft 't druk."

"Nou misschien zou ik bij jullie thuis kunnen komen—" 'T lijkt alsof de blik in me ogen d'r een klap in d'r gezicht heeft gegeven, en dat is p'cies wat ik ga doen als ze ook nog maar één woord zegt. Bij mij thuis komen! Nieuwschierige blanke bitch! 'K dacht het niet! Wij kommen toch ook niet naar jouw in Weschesser of waar de fuck jullie freaks wonen. Schiet mij maar lek, dit slaat alles, die blanke bitch wil buurten.

"Nou, Claireece, ik ben bang dat ik je dan moet schorsen—"

"Waarvoor!"

"Je bent zwanger en—"

“Je kunt me niet schorsen omdat ik zwanger ben, ik heb rechten!”

“Je houding getuigt van totaal nul samenwerking —“

Ik greep over het bureau. Ik zou de dikke reet wel eens uit die stoel rukken. Ze viel achterover toen ze van me probeerde weg te komen en begon te schreeuwen, “BEVEILIGING! BEVEILIGING!”

Ik was naar buiten en op straat en ik kon die domme bitch nog steeds horen schreeuwen, “BEVEILIGING! BEVEILIGING!”

“PRECIOUS!” Dat is mijn moeder die me roept. ‘K zeg niks. Ze staart naar me buik. Ik weet wat er dan gebeurt. ‘K blijf gewoon afwassen. Als dinee aten we gegrilde kip, aardappelpuree, jus, boontjes, en toast. ‘K weet hoe veel maanden ik al zwanger ben. ‘K wil hier niet staan en aanhoren hoe mamma me een slet noemt. Dingen naar me schreeuwen en roepen net zoals de vorige keer. Slet! Ranzige hoer! Wat heb je lopen doen! Wie! Wie! Wieeeeeee! Als ‘n uil die ik ooit in een Walt Disney film heb gezien. Wieeee? Wil je weten wie — “Claireece Precious Jones ik praat tegen je!” ‘K antwoordde de nog steeds niet. Ik stond aan dit aanrecht vorige keer toen ik zwanger was en de krampen kwamen, womp! Aah womp! Had nog nooit iets gevoeld als die shit. Had ineens zweet op me voorhoofd, pijn als vuur at me op. ‘K stond daar gewoon toen de pijn me greep, toen ging de pijn weer zitten, toen stond de pijn weer op en greep me nog harder! En zij stond daar maar en schreeuwde naar me, “Slet! Gore slet! Jij dikke koe! Ik geloof dit niet, recht onder me neus. Je hebt hier gewoon een beetje lopen hoeren.” ‘T voelt alsof de pijn me mept, dan mept zij me. Ik lig op de vloer en kreun, “Mammie asseblieft, Mammie asseblieft, asseblieft Mammie! Mammie! Mammie! MAMMIE!” Daarna SCHOPT ze me zijkant van me gezicht.

“Hoer! Hoer!” schreewt ze. Dan komt mevrouw West die op de gang woont op de deur bonken, en roept “Mary! Mary! Wat doe je! Je vermoord dat kind nog! Ze heb hulp nodig, niet een pak slaag, ben je gestoord!”

Mama zeg, “Ze had moeten zeggen dat ze zwanger was!”

“Jesus Mary, je wist het niet. Ik wist het, de hele flat wist het. Ben je gestoord—“

“Waag het me iets over me eigen kind te vertellen—“

“Eén-één-twee! Eén-één-twee! Eén-één-twee!”

“Mevrouw West schreewt nu. Se noemt Mama een gek. De pijn loop nu over me. Stompt me gewoon. Kan niks zien horen, ‘k kan alleen maar schreeuwen, “Mammie! Mammie!”

’N paar mannen, van die ambulance mannen, ‘k zie of hoor ze niet binnen komen. Maar ik kijk omhoog van de pijn en hijs daar. Deze Spaanse vent in een ambulance uniform. Hij duw me achterover op een kussen. Ik ben zowat opgerolt van de pijn. Hij seg, “RELAX!” De pijn blijf me steken met een mes en deze tacovreter heb het over relaxen.

Hij raak me voorhoofd aan leg ze andere hand op de zijkant van me buik. “Hoe heet je?” segt hij. “Huh?” zeg ik. “Je naam?” “Precious,” zeg ik. Hij zeg, “Precious, het is er bijna. Ik wil dat je perst, hoor je me momi, als je die shit weer voelt, moet je er in meegaan en persen, Preshecita. Pers.” En dat deed ik.

En altijd daarna zoek ik iemand met zijn gezicht en ogen in Spaanse mensen. Hij heb de kleur van koffiemelk, mooi haar. Dat weet ik nog. God. Ik denk dat-ie god was. D’r was nog nooit een man aardig tegen me geweest op die manier. In ’t ziekenhuis na hem

vraag ik, “Waar was die vent die me hielp?” Ze seggen, “Stil, meisje je heb net een baby gekregen.”

“Maar ‘k kan niet stil zijn want ze vragen me steeds dingen. Me naam? Precious Jones. Claireece Precious Jones om precies te zijn. Geboortedatum? 4 november 1970. Waar? “Hier” zeg ik, “gewoon hier in Harlem Hospital.” “Negentien zeventig?” zegt de zuster rustig en verbaasd. Dan zegt ze, “Hoe oud ben je?” Ik seg, “Twaalf.” Ik was ook dik toen ik twaalf was, niemand snap dat ik twaalf ben tot ik ze vertel. ‘K ben lang. ‘K weet dat ik meer dan negentig weeg want de naald op de weegschaal in de badkamer stopt daar kan niet verder. Laaste keer dat ze me wilde wegen op school zeg ik nee. Waarom, ‘k weet dat ik dik ben. Nou en. Volgende onderwerp.

Maar di’s niet de schoolzuster, dit is Harlem Hospital waar ik geboren was, waar me baby en ik heen werden gebracht toen het geboren was op de keuken vloer op 444 Lenox Avenue. Deze suster slanke boter-kleur vrouw. Ze is lichter dan sommige Spaanse vrouwens maar ik weet zij is zwart. Dat zie ik. Heeft te maken met dat je niet alleen een nikker ben door kleur. Deze zuster zelfde als ik. Veel zwarte mensen met zusterkapje of dikke auto of lichte huid net als ik maar weten het niet. ‘K ben zo moe dat ik gewoon wil verdwijnen. Wou dat Mevrouw Boter me alleen zou laten maar ze staar alleen maar naar me, haar ogen worde groter en groter. Ze seg dat ze wat meer informatie nodig heb voor de geboorte akte.

Het verbijster me nog steeds da’k een baby heb gekregen. Ik bedoel ik wist dat ik zwanger was, wist hoe ik zwanger was geworden. Ik wist al lang dat een man ze lul in je stopt, wit spul in je reet gutst je zwanger kon worden. Ik ben nu twaalf, wist dat al sinds

ik vijf of zes was, misschien wist ik altijd al wel over kutjes en pikken. Kan me niet herinneren da'k het niet wist. Nee, kan me geen tijd herinneren da'k het niet wist. Maar da's alles wat ik wist. 'K wist niet hoe lang het duurt, niet wat'r gebeurt van binnen, niks, ik wist nergens niks van.

De zuster segt iets wat ik niet hoor. Ik hoor kids op school. Jongen zeg da'k belachelijk lelijk ben. Hij segt, "Claireece is zo lelijk zij is belachelijk lelijk." Ze vrienden zeggen, "Nee, die dikke bitch is zo lelijk dat je moet janken." Lach, lach. Waarom 'k nu over die stomme jongens nadenk weet ik niet.

"Moeder," zeg ze. "Hoe heet je moeder?" Ik zeg, "Mary L Johnston" (L voor Lee maar me moeder vind Lee niet mooi, klink teveel als het platteland). "Waar is je moeder geboren?" zeg ze. Ik zeg, "Greenwood, Mississippi." Zuster zegt, "Ooit geweest daar?" Ik zeg, "Nah, ben nooit nergens geweest." Ze zegt, "Ik vraag dat omdat ik uit Greenwood, Mississippi kom, zelf." Ik zeg, "Oh," want ik weet niet da'k iets hoor te zeggen.

"Vader," zeg ze. "Hoe heet je vader?"

"Carl Kenwood Jones, geboren in de Bronx."

Ze zegt, "Wat is de naam van de baby's vader?"

Ik zeg, "Carl Kenwood Jones, geboren in dezelfde Bronx."

Ze is stil stil. Zegt, "Jammer, da's heel jammer. Twaalf jaar oud, twaalf jaar oud," segt ze over en over 'sof ze gek is (of in shock ofzo). Ze kijk me aan, boter huid, lichte ogen—weet zeker dat jongens gek op d'r zijn. Ze zeg, "Was je ooit, ik bedoel ben je ooit kind geweest?" Da's een domme vraag, ben ik ooit kind geweest? Ik ben een kin.

Ben in de war, moe. 'K zeg haar dat ik wil slapen. Ze doet het bed omlaag, ik ga ook slapen. Iemand anders is er als ik wakker word. 'T is de politie ofzo. Wille me wat vragen stellen. 'K vraag, "Waar is me baby? Ik weet da'k er een gekregen heb. Dat weet ik." Nieuw iemand in zuster kapje lach lief naar me en zegt, "Ja, dat klopt Miss Jones, dat klopt zeker." Ze zorgt dat de mannen van me bed gaan. Zeg me baby is in een speciale intensieve verpleeging en ik zie haar snel en wil ik graag de vragen van de aardige mannen beantwoorden. Maar dat zijn geen aardige mannen. 'T zijn honden. 'K ben niet gek. Ik zeg ze niks.

"Precious! Precious!" roep me Mam maar me hoofd is er niet bij, denk aan de vier jaar dat ik de eerste baby kreeg. 'K stond toen aan dit aanrecht toen de pijn me mepte, en toen mepte zij me.

"Precious!"

Me hand glijdt het vieze water in, grijpt het snijmes. Oh wee asse me slaat, 'k lieg niet! Als ze me slaat steek ik die bitch dood, snap je!

"Precious! Ben je gek geworden? Staat daar maar en staart maar een beetje de wereld in. Ik praat tegen je!"

Alsof dat wat betekent.

"'K stond te denken," zeg ik.

"Aan het denken terwijl ik tegen je praat?"

Ze segt dat alsof ik briefjes van honnerd dollar in de fik steek.



De bel gaat. Vraag me af wie dat is. Belt nooit iemand aan behalve crackhoofden die de flat in proberen te komen. Ik haat crackhoofden. Ze geven het ras een slechte naam.

“Zeg tegen die klootzakken dat ze moeten kappen met aanbellen,” zeg ze. Ze is dichterbij de deur dan ik maar ik bedoel me moeder beweeg niet tenzij het echt moet. Dat meen ik. Als ik naar de bel loop merk ik dat ik nog steeds het mes vast heb. Soms haat ik me moeder. Ze is lelijk denk ik soms. Ik druk op praat op de bel en roep, “Kappen met die klote bel, mutherfucker!” en ik ga terug naar de keuken om de afwas af te maken.

De bel gaat weer. Ik loop terug. “Kappen met die klote bel,” zeg ik weer. De mutherfucker belt weer. “Kappen!” Belt ie weer. “KAPPEN!” roep ik weer. Belt ie weer. Me moeder onderbreekt me en zeg, “Druk op luisteren dom kind!” ‘K wil zeggen da’k geen dom kind ben maar ik weet da’k het wel ben dus ik seg niks, want ik wil ook niet dassen me gaat slaan, want ik weet door me hand in het water met het snijmes dat ik klaar ben met geslagen worden. Ik steek d’r neer als ze Precious Jones ooit weer slaat. Ik druk op luister. “Dit is Sondra Lichenstein voor Claireece Precious Jones en Ms Mary Johnston.” *Mevrouw Lichenstein!* Wat wil die hoer? Ze wil dat ik d’r nu echt voor d’r bek ram.

“Wie’s daar Precious?” zeg me moeder. Ik zeg, “Blanke bitch van school.” “Wat wil ze?” zeg me moeder. “Weet ik niet.” “Vraag d’r,” zeg me moeder. Ik druk op praat en zeg, “Wat wil je?” Dan druk ik op luister en mevrouw Lichenstein seg, “Ik wil het met je hebben over je onderwijs.” Dat wijf is goed. ‘K ging elke dag naar school tot deze fucking bleekscheet me uit de gang plukte, fuckte met me hoofd, maakte mij boos op haar, schorste me van school alleen omda’k zwanger ben—je weet wel, kapte met me onderwijs. Nu

loop ze met d'r blanke reet op Lenox Avenue segt dat ze met me wil praten over mijn onderwijs. God waar zijn de crackhoofden als je ze nodig hebt. "Waar gaat dit allemaal over Precious?" vraag me moeder. Me moeder wil niet dat zoon blanke hoer als mevrouw Lichenstein de maaschappelijk werkster lerares nieuwsgierige kut beetje rond loop te neuzen. Me moeder wil niets kwijt raken, d'r uitkering bedoel ik. En da's wat er van komt als een blanke hoer als mevrouw Lichenstein langs komt. Als 'k zwanger was en geen moeite met de trap had, was'k naar beneden gegaan en d'r in elkaar geramt. Me moeder segt, "zorg dat je van die bitch af komt." Ik zeg tegen de intercom, "*Hasta la vista, baby.*" Da's Spaans voor vaarwel, maar als negers het zeggen, is het meer van, lik me reet. De bel gaat weer. Ik snap die debiele hoer niet. Ik drup op praat en zeg, "Rot op mevrouw Lichenstein voor'k je in elkaar ram." De bel gaat. Ik druk op luister. "Claireece het spijt me zo van donderdag. Ik wilde je alleen maar helpen. Ik... meneer Wicher zegt dat je een van zijn beste leerlingen bent, dat je begaafd bent met wiskunde." Ze stopt alsof ze moet nadenken over wat ze dan moet zeggen, en dan zeg ze, "Ik heb gebeld met een mevrouw McKnight bij de *Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One*. Dat is een alternatieve school." Ze stopt weer, zegt, "Claireece, luister je?" Ik druk op praat. "Yup," zeg ik. "Oké, zoals ik zei heb ik gebeld met mevrouw McKnight bij *Each One Teach One*. Dat bevindt zich op de negentiende verdieping van het *Hotel Theresa* op 125th Street. Dat is niet zo ver van hier." Ik druk op praat. "Ik weet waar het *Hotel Theresa* is," zeg ik haar. Bitch, zeg ik tegen mezelf. Ik druk weer op luister, die bleekscheten denken altijd dat je niks weet. Ze zegt, "Het telefoonnummer is 555-0831. Ik heb ze over je verteld." Mevrouw Lichenstein zegt niks. "Bel ze of loop gewoon naar binnen, de negentiende verdieping—

“ Ik druk op praat en zeg d'r dat ik haar de eerste keer ook wel verstond. Me hart voelt helemaal warm — de helft tenminste — als ik er over nadenk dat meneer Wicher zeg da'k een goede leerling ben. De andere helft zou zo uit m'n borst kunnen springen en mevrouw Lichenstein in elkaar rammen. Geen gebel meer... dus ik denk dat ze de hint begrepen heb.

Ik ga slapen en denk over de negentiende verdieping van *Hotel Theresa*, een alternatief. 'K weet wat een alternatief is maar ik geloof da'k het wil weten. Negentiende verdieping, dat is het laatste waar ik aan denk voor 'k ga slapen. Ik droom dat ik in een lift zit die steeds hoger gaat, hoger, hoger da'k denk dat ik dood ga. De lift gaat open en ik zie de koffie-melk-keurige man uit Spaanse taal land. Ik herken hem van toen ik me baby kreeg op de keuken vloer. Hij doet ze hand weer op me voorhoofd en fluistert, “Pers, Precious, je zal moeten persen.” Ik word wakker, denkend aan de laatste keer dat ik perste. Het duurde twee hele dagen voor ze de baby naar me toe brachten, en ik kon zien wat “een beetje last met ademen” betekenen. 'K probeer me armen uit te strekken maar 'k ben moe, meer moe dan ik ooit ben geweest. Zuster Boter en 'n kleine zwarte zuster staan naast me bed. De zwarte zuster houd de baby vast. Zuster Boter strekt d'r handen onder de dekens en pakt me handen vast. Ik knijp ze tot vuisten. Ze wrijft met d'r handen over me vuisten tot ik ze open doe. Zuster Boter kijkt de andere zuster aan en de zuster met de donkere huid gaat me me baby geven maar Boter springt op en neemt het van d'r aan.

“Er is iets mis met je baby,” seg Zuster Boter heel zacht zoals duiven praten, heel zacht, roekoe, “maar ze leeft. En ze is van jou.” En ze geef me me baby. Baby's gezicht

is platgedrukt als een pannekoek, ogen staan omhoog zoals Koreanen, tong gaat naar buiten en binnen as een soort slang.

“Mongolide,” zeg de andere zuster. Zuster Boter kijkt d’r boos aan.

“Wat is er gebeurt,” vraag ik.

“Nou, veel dingen,” zeg ze. “De dokter zal je meer uitleggen, mevrouw Jones. Het lijkt erop dat je baby misschien het syndroom van Down heeft en dat ze een zuurstoftekort had tijdens de geboorte. En je bent ook nog zo jong, er gebeurt meer bij jonge mensen—  
“ Ze vraag me, “Ben je eigenlijk wel bij een dokter geweest toen je zwanger was?”

#### 14.2. Appendix 2: *Push* source text, pages 1-17

I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my fahver. That was in 1983. I was out of school for a year. This gonna be my second baby. My daughter got Down Sinder. She's retarded. I had got left back in the second grade too, when I was seven, 'cause I couldn't read (and I still peed on myself). I should be in the eleventh grade, getting ready to go into the twelf grade so I can gone 'n graduate. But I'm not. I'm in the ninfe grade.

I got suspended from school 'cause I'm pregnant which I don't think is fair. I ain' did nothin'! My name is Claireece Precious Jones. I don't know why I'm telling you that. Guess 'cause I don't know how far I'm gonna go with this story, or whether it's even a story or why I'm talkin'; whether I'm gonna start from the beginning or right from here or two weeks from now. Two weeks from now? Sure you can do anything when you talking or writing, it's not like living when you can only do what you doing. Some people tell a story 'n it don't make no sense or be true. But I'm gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what's the

fucking use? Ain' enough lies and shit out there already? So, OK, it's Thursday, September twenty-four 1987 and I'm walking down the hall. I look good, smell good—fresh, clean. It's hot but I do not take off my leather jacket even though it's hot, it might get stolen or lost. Indian summer, Mr Wicher say. I don't know why he call it that. What he mean is, it's hot, 90 degrees, like summer days. And there is no, none, I mean none, air conditioning in this mutherfucking building. The building I'm talking about is, of course, I.S. 146 on 134th Street between Lenox Avenue and Adam Clayton Powell Jr Blvd. I am walking down the hall from homeroom to first period maff. Why they put some shit like maff first period I do not know. Maybe to gone 'n git it over with. I actually don't mind maff as much as I had thought I would. I jus' fall in Mr Wiener's class sit down. We don't have assigned seats in Mr Wiener's class, we can sit anywhere we want. I sit in the same seat everyday, in the back, last row, next to the door. Even though I know that back door be locked. I don't say nuffin' to him. He don't say nuffin' to me, now. First day he say, "Class turn the book pages to page 122 please." I don't move. He say, "Miss Jones, I said turn the book pages to page 122." I say, "Mutherfucker I ain't deaf." The whole class laugh. He turn red. He slam his han' down on the book and say, "Try to have some discipline." He a skinny little white man about five feets four inches. A peckerwood as my mother would say. I look at him 'n say, "I can slam too. You wanna slam?" 'NI pick up my book 'n slam it down on the desk hard. The class laugh some more. He say, "Miss Jones I would appreciate it if you would leave the room right NOW." I say, "I ain' going nowhere mutherfucker till the bell ring. I came here to learn maff and you gon' teach me." He look like a bitch just got a train pult on her. He don't know what to do. He try to recoup, be cool, say, "Well, if you

want to learn, calm down—" "I'm calm," I tell him. He say, "If you want to learn, shut up and open your book." His face is red, he is shaking. I back off. I have won. I guess. I didn't want to hurt him or embarrass him like that you know. But I couldn't let him, anybody, know, page 122 look like page 152, 22, 3, 6, 5— all the pages look alike to me. 'NI really do want to learn. Everyday I tell myself something gonna happen, some shit like on TV I'm gonna break through or somebody gonna break through to me —I'm gonna learn, catch up, be normal, change my seat to the front of the class. But again, it has not been that day. But thas the first day I'm telling you about. Today is not the first day and like I said I was on my way to maff class when Mrs Lichenstein snatch me out the hall to her office. I'm really mad 'cause actually I like maff even though I don't do nuffin', don't open my book even. I jus' sit there for fifty minutes. I don't cause trouble. In fac' some of the other natives get restless I break on 'em. I say, "Shut up mutherfuckers I'm tryin' to learn something." First they laugh like trying to pull me into fuckin' with Mr Wicher and disrupting the class. Then I get up 'n say, "Shut up mutherfuckers I'm tryin' to learn something." The coons clowning look confuse, Mr Wicher look confuse. But I'm big, five feet nine-ten, I weigh over two hundred pounds. Kids is scared of me. "Coon fool," I tell one kid done jumped up. "Sit down, stop ackin' silly." Mr Wicher look at me confuse but grateful. I'm like the polices for Mr Wicher. I keep law and order. I like him, I pretend he is my husband and we live together in Weschesser, wherever that is.

I can see by his eyes Mr Wicher like me too. I wish I could tell him about all the pages being the same but I can't. I'm getting pretty good grades. I usually do. I just wanna gone get the fuck out of I.S. 146 and go to high school and get my diploma. Anyway I'm in Mrs

Lichenstein's office. She's looking at me, I'm looking at her. I don't say nuffin'. Finally she say, "So Claireece, I see we're expecting a little visitor." But it's not like a question, she's telling me. I still don't say nuffin'. She staring at me, from behind her big wooden desk, she got her white bitch hands folded together on top her desk.

"Claireece."

Everybody call me Precious. I got three names— Claireece Precious Jones. Only muth-erfuckers I hate call me Claireece.

"How old are you Claireece?"

White cunt box got my file on her desk. I see it. I ain't that late to lunch. Bitch know how old I am. "Sixteen is ahh rather ahh"—she clear her throat — "old to still be in junior high school."

I still don't say nuffin'. She know so much let her ass do the talking.

"Come now, you are pregnant, aren't you Clair- eece?"

She asking now, a few seconds ago the hoe just knew what I was.

"Claireece?"

She tryin' to talk all gentle now and shit. "Claireece, I'm talking to you."

I still don't say nuffin'. This hoe is keeping me from maff class. I like maff class. Mr Wicher like me in there, need me to keep those rowdy niggers in line. He nice, wear a dope suit every day. He do not come to school looking like some of these other nasty ass teachers.

"I don't want to miss no more of maff class," I tell stupid ass Mrs Lichenstein. She look at me like I said I wanna suck a dog's dick or some shit. What's with this cunt bucket? (That's what my muver call women she don't like, cunt buckets. I kinda get it and I kinda don't get it, but I like the way it sounds so I say it too.)

I get up to go, Mrs Lichenstein ax me to please sit down, she not through with me yet. But I'm through with her, thas what she don't get.

"This is your second baby?" she says. I wonder what else it say in that file with my name on it. I hate her.

"I think we should have a parent-teacher conference Claireece—me, you, and your mom."

"For what?" I say. "I am' done nuffin'. I doose my work. I am' in no trouble. My grades is good." Mrs Lichenstein look at me like I got three arms or a bad odor out my pussy or something.

What my muver gon' do I want to say. What is she gonna do? But I don't say that. I jus' say, "My muver is busy."

"Well maybe I could arrange to come to your house—" The look on my face musta hit her, which is what I was gonna do if she said one more word. Come to my house! Nosy ass white bitch! I don't think so! We don't be coming to your house in Weschesser or wherever the fuck you freaks live. Well I be damned, I done heard everything, white bitch wanna visit.

"Well then Claireece, I'm afraid I'm going to have to suspend you—"



"For what!"

"You're pregnant and—"

"You can't suspend me for being pregnant, I got rights!"

"Your attitude Claireece is one of total uncooperation—"

I reached over the desk. I was gonna yank her fat ass out that chair. She fell backwards trying to get away from me 'n started screaming, "SECURITY SECURITY!" I was out the door and on the street and I could still hear her stupid ass screaming, "SECURITY SECURITY!"\*

"Precious!" That's my mother calling me.

I don't say nothin'. She been staring at my stomach. I know what's coming. I keep washing dishes. We had fried chicken, mashed potatoes,

gravy, green beans, and Wonder bread for dinner. I don't know how many months pregnant I am. I don't wanna stand here 'n hear Mama call me slut. Holler 'n shout on me all day like she did the last time. Slut! Nasty ass tramp! What you been doin'! Who! Who! WHOoooo like owl in Walt Disney movie I seen one time. Whooo? Ya wanna know who—"Claireece Precious Jones I'm talkin' to you!" I still don't answer her. I was standing at this sink the last time I was pregnant when them pains hit, wump! Ahh wump! I never felt no shit like that before. Sweat was breaking out on my forehead, pain like fire was eating me up. I jus' standing there 'n pain hit me, then pain go sit down, then pain git up 'n hit me harder! 'N she standing there screaming at me, "Slut! Goddam slut! You fuckin' cow! I

don't believe this, right under my nose. You been high tailing it round here." Pain hit me again, then she hit me. I'm on the floor groaning, "Mommy please, Mommy please, please Mommy! Mommy! Mommy! MOMMY!" Then she KICK me side of my face! "Whore! Whore!" she screamin'. Then Miz West live down the hall pounding on the door, hollering "Mary! Mary! What you doin'! You gonna kill that chile! She need help not no beating, is you crazy!"

Mama say, "She shoulda tole me she was pregnant!"

"Jesus Mary, you didn't know. I knew, the whole building knew. Are you crazy—"

"Don't tell me nothin' about my own chile—" "Nine-one-one! Nine-one-one! Nine-one-one!" Miz West screamin' now. She call Mama a fool. Pain walking on me now. Jus' stomping on me. I can't see hear, I jus' screamin', "Mommy! Mommy!"

Some mens, these ambulance mens, I don't see 'em or hear 'em come in. But I look up from the pain and he dere. This Spanish guy in EMS uniform. He push me back on a cushion. I'm like in a ball from the pain. He say, "RELAX!" The pain stabbing me wif a knife and this spic talking 'bout relax.

He touch my forehead put his other hand on the side of my belly. "What's your name?" he say. "Huh?" I say. "Your name?" "Precious," I say. He say, "Precious, it's almost here. I want you to push, you hear me momi, when that shit hit you again, go with it and push, Preshecita. Push." And I did.

And always after that I look for someone with his face and eyes in Spanish peoples. He coffee- cream color, good hair. I remember that. God. I think he was god.

No man was never nice like that to me before. I ask at the hospital behind him, "Where that guy help me?" They say, "Hush girl you jus' had a baby."

But I can't hush 'cause they keep asking me questions. My name? Precious Jones. Claireece Precious Jones to be exact. Birth date? November 4, 1970. Where? "Here" I say, "right chere in Harlem Hospital." "Nineteen seventy?" the nurse say confuse quiet. Then she say, "How old are you?" I say, "Twelve." I was heavy at twelve too, nobody get I'm twelve 'less I tell them. I'm tall. I jus' know I'm over two hundred 'cause the needle on the scale in the bathroom stop there it don't can go no further. Last time they want to weigh me at school I say no. Why for, I know I'm fat. So what. Next topic for the day.

But this not school nurse now, this Harlem Hospital where I was borned, where me and my baby got tooked after it was borned on the kitchen floor at 444 Lenox Avenue. This nurse slim butter-color woman. She lighter than some Spanish womens but I know she black. I can tell. It's something about being a nigger ain't color. This nurse same as me. A lot of black people with nurse cap or big car or light skin same as me but don't know it. I'm so tired I jus' want to disappear. I wish Miss Butter would leave me

alone but she jus' staring at me, her eyes getting bigger and bigger. She say she need to get some more information for the birth certificate. It still tripping me out that I had a baby. I mean I knew I was pregnant, knew how I got pregnant. I been knowing a man put his dick in you, gush white stuff in your booty you could get pregnant. I'm twelve now, I been

knowing about that since I was five or six, maybe I always known about pussy and dick. I can't remember not knowing. No, I can't remember a time I did not know. But thas all I knowed. I didn't know how long it take, what's happening inside, nothing, I didn't know nothing.

The nurse is saying something I don't hear. I hear kids at school. Boy say Fm laffing ugly. He say, "Claireece is so ugly she laffing ugly." His fren' say, "No, that fat bitch is crying ugly." Laff laff. Why Fm thinking about those stupid boys now I don't know. "Mother," she say. "What's your mother's name?" I say, "Mary L Johnston" (L for Lee but my mother don't like Lee, soun' too country). "Where your mother born," she say. I say, "Greenwood, Mississippi." Nurse say, "You ever been there?" I say, "Naw, I never been nowhere." She say, "Reason I ask is Fm from Greenwood,

Mississippi, myself." I say, "Oh," 'cause I know I'm spozed to say something. "Father," she say. "What's your daddy's name?" "Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the Bronx." • She say, "What's the baby's father's name?" I say, "Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the same Bronx."

She quiet quiet. Say, "Shame, thas a shame. Twelve years old, twelve years old," she say over 'n over like she crazy (or in some shock or something). She look at me, butter skin, light eyes—I know boyz love her. She say, "Was you ever, I mean did you ever get to be a chile?" Thas a stupid question, did I ever get to be a chile? I am a chile. I'm confuse, tired. I tell her I want to sleep. She put the bed down, I do go to sleep. Somebody else there when I wake up. It's like the police or something. Wanna ax me

some questions. I axes, "Where's my baby? I know I had one. I know that." New somebody in nurse cap sweet-smile me and say, "Yes, you did Miss Jones, you surely did." She moves the men in uniform suits back from my bed. Say my baby is in special intense care and I will get to see her soon and won't I please answer the nice men's questions. But they ain' nice men. They pigs. I ain' crazy. I don't tell them nothing.

"Precious! Precious!" my muver hollering but my head not here it in four years when I had the first baby. I was standing at this sink when the pain hit me, and she hit me.

"Precious!"

My hand slip down in the dishwater, grab the butcher knife. She bedda not hit me, I ain' lyin'! If she hit me I will stab her ass to def, you hear me! "Precious! You done lost your mind? Just standing up there staring into spaces. I'm talkin' to you!" Like thas something.

"I was thinkin'," I say.

"You thinkin' while I'm talkin' to you?"

She say this like I'm burnin' hunnert dollar bills. The buzzer ring. I wonder who it could be. Don't nobody ring our bell 'less it's crack addicts trying to get in the building. I hate crack addicts. They give the race a bad name.

"Go tell them assholes to stop ringing the bell," she say. She closer to the door than me but I mean my muver don't move 'less she has to. I mean that. When I go to answer the buzzer I realize I'm still grabbing the knife. I hate my muver sometimes. She is ugly I think

sometime.

I press talk on the intercom and holler, "Stop ringing the goddam buzzer mutherfucker!" and go back to the kitchen to finish the dishes.

The buzzer ring again. I go back. "Stop ringing the goddam buzzer," I say again. The mutherfucker ring again. "Stop it!" It ring again. "STOP IT!" I shout again. It ring again. My muver jump in and say, "Press listen stupid!" I wanna say I ain' stupid but I know I am so I don't say nothin', 'cause also I don't want her to go hit me, 'cause I know from my hand in the dishwater holding the butcher knife, I am through being hit. I am going to stab her she ever hit Precious Jones again. I press listen. "It's Sondra Lichenstein for Claireece Jones and Ms Mary Johnston." Mrs Lichenstein! What that hoe want? She want me to hit her for real this time.

"Who that Precious?" my muver say. I say, "White bitch from school." "What she want?" my muver say. "I don't know." "Ask her," my muver say. I press talk 'n say, "What you want?" Then I press listen and Mrs Lichenstein say, "I want to talk to you about your education." This bitch crazy. I was going to school everyday till her honky ass snatch me out the hall, fuck with my mind, make me go off on her, suspend me from school jus' because I'm pregnant—you know, end up my education. Now her white ass out on Lenox Avenue talkin' 'bout she wanna talk to me about my education. Lord where is crack addicts when you need 'em. "What all this about

Precious?" my muver asks. My muver don't want no white shit like Mrs Lichenstein social worker teacher ass nosing around here. My muver don't want to get cut off, welfare that

is. And that's what white shit like Mrs Lichenstein comin' to visit result in. If I wasn't pregnant and having trouble with the stairs, I run down and kick her ass. My muver say, "Eighty-six that bitch." I says into the intercom, "Hasta la vista, baby." That's Spanish for good-bye but when niggers say it, it's like, kiss my ass. Ring go buzzer again. I don't believe this retarded hoe. I press talk 'n say, "Git outta here Mrs Lichenstein 'fore I kick your ass." The bell go ring. I press listen. "Claireece I am so sorry about Thursday. I had only wanted to help you. I..." Mr Wicher says you're one of his best students, that you have an aptitude for math." She pause like she thinking what to say next, then she say, "I've called a Ms McKnight at Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One. It's an alternative school." She pause again, say, "Claireece, are you listening?" I press talk. "Yeah," I say. "OK, as I was saying I've called Ms McKnight at Each One Teach One. It's located on the nineteenth floor of the Hotel Theresa on 125th Street That's not too far from here." I press talk. "I know where the Hotel Theresa is," I say to her, Bitch, I say to myself. I press listen again, these crackers think you don't know nothin'. She say, "The phone number is 555-0831. I told them about you." Mrs Lichenstein stop. "Call or just drop in, the nineteenth floor—" I press talk tell her I heard her the first time. My heart is all warm — half of it at least—thinking about Mr Wicher say I'm a good student The other half could jus' jump out my chest and kick Mrs Lichenstein's ass. No more rings—so I guess that mean she got the message.

I go to sleep thinking nineteenth floor Hotel Theresa, an alternative. I don't know what an alternative is but I feel I want to know. Nineteenth floor, that's the last words I think before I go to sleep. I dream I'm in an elevator that's going up up up so far I think I'm dying. The

elevator open and it's the coffee-cream-colored man from Spanish talk land. I recognize him from when I was having my baby bleeding on the kitchen floor. He put his hand on my forehead again and whisper, "Push, Precious, you gonna hafta push." I wake up remembering the last time I pushed. It was two whole days before they brought the baby to me, 'n I git to see what "a little trouble breathing" mean. I try to hold out my arms but I'm tired, more tired than I ever been in my life. Nurse Butter and this little black nurse is standing there by my bed. The black nurse holding the baby. Nurse Butter reach under the covers and take my hands. I ball 'em in fist. She rub her hands over my fist till I open them. Nurse Butter look other nurse in eye and the dark- skinned nurse go to hand me my baby but Butter jump up and take it from her.

"Something is wrong with your baby," Nurse Butter make talk like how pigeons talk, real soft, coo coo, "but she's alive. And she's yours." 'N she hand me baby. Baby's face is smashed flat like pancake, eyes is all slanted up like Koreans, tongue goin' in 'n out like some kinda snake. "Mongoloid," other nurse say. Nurse Butter look hard at her. "What happen?" I ax.

"Well, a lot of things," she say. "The doctor will talk in more depth with you, Ms Jones. It looks like your baby may have Down's syndrome and have suffered some oxygen deprivation at birth. Plus you're so young, things happen more to the very young—" She ax me, "Did you see a doctor at all while you were pregnant?" I don't answer her nuffin', jus' hold out baby for her to take. Nurse Butter nod to little black nurse who take baby away. Nurse Butter hike herself up on side of the bed. She tryin' to



hole me in her arms. I don't want that. She touch side of my face. "I'm so sorry Ms Jones,  
so so sorry."