

# **Translating French Slang: A Study of Four French Novels and Their English Translations<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the translation of French slang and nonstandard French forms into English. This topic is investigated through a study of four contemporary French novels and their English translations. I use the idea of preserving lexical complexity in slang translation from Mattiello 2007 to measure the relative successfulness of different practices for translating slang. The study's results show that a substantial proportion of the slang in the French novels is translated into Standard English. Consequently, the English versions exhibit lower slang density than do the original French works. While the loss of slang register in translation appears to be inevitable in some cases, it also occurs in situations where it is demonstrably avoidable. The translators occasionally use the practice of compensation, whereby standard language is translated into slang to compensate for places where slang is translated into standard language. In the four novels examined, however, the use of compensation is not sufficient to offset the sharp reduction in slang density from French to English. From this study, it seems that English translations are consistently less slang-rich than the original French texts from which they are derived.

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## **1. Introduction**

This thesis is an analysis of the ways in which slang in French novels is translated into English. Within the realm of literary translation, slang translation poses a particular problem. This is because slang is even more specific to the language and culture in which it is found than standard language is. The linguistic and cultural specificity of slang means that slang terms, to an even greater extent than standard terms, do not have perfect equivalents in other languages (Linder 2000, Mattiello 2007). Given the special challenge it presents, it is worthwhile to explore how translators approach slang translation. I consider this question through a study of four contemporary French novels and their English translations. I investigate what becomes of the French slang in the original texts in the English versions and how translators succeed or do not succeed in reproducing the source text slang in their translations.

I begin with an overview of my corpus, which includes the novels *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, and *Lignes de faille*. Then I discuss the nature of slang as a linguistic phenomenon and explain how I define it for the purposes of this study. After evaluating two possible theoretical frameworks for examining slang translation, I present my methodology in carrying out this study. I conducted a comprehensive investigation of the translation of the French novels' slang and also looked at the translation of a narrower set of nonstandard French constructions. Finally, in the Results section, I analyze the practices used in the four novels to translate both French slang and French nonstandard forms into English.

## **2. Overview of the Corpus**

### **2.1 The Choice of Medium**

This thesis examines the phenomenon of slang translation in literature only, excluding other domains such as film. In this section, I outline the reasons behind this choice. It is likely

that French films would provide rich and perhaps more plentiful material for the study of French slang. In my experience, it is much easier to find a French film featuring an abundance of slang than it is to find a French novel that uses slang liberally. Nevertheless, I chose to study literary translation because it is my impression that it is a more careful enterprise than the foreign subtitling of films. Firstly, a book's translator is named on the title page while the person who writes English subtitles for a French film may go nameless. I believe the relatively prominent crediting of literary translators may be indicative of a general practice of holding literary translation to a higher standard than foreign-language subtitling. Secondly, from what I have seen, the English subtitles of French films often exhibit certain flaws that would make it difficult to rely on them to study the translation of French slang. These flaws include mistranslating words or phrases, omitting words or entire sentences, and completely changing lines of dialogue so that there is no correspondence between the words spoken in the film and the subtitles. My experience is corroborated in part by Hamaida (2007:7), who notes that "[a]n examination of the subtitling of the *verlan* [a specific type of French slang] and other slang used in *La Haine* [a 1995 French film] reveals a number of incorrect and inappropriate translations, which could confuse and mislead the audience". I did not wish to rely on what I perceived to be error-ridden subtitles to carry out a study of the translation of French slang, and so I decided to restrict my study to books.

As it turns out, the flaws listed above are not limited to film. After beginning my data collection, I discovered that the English translation of *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* omitted certain passages of the French novel. Additionally, there were a few instances of mistranslation of French slang in this book, and one instance in the translation of *Du rêve pour les oufs*. Even so, my sense is still that these issues are less prevalent in literary translation than in film subtitling.

## 2.2 The Four Novels

I now describe in more detail the four French novels from which I collected the data analyzed in this thesis. All four books were published in metropolitan France, and all came out within the last decade, except for *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, which was published in 1983. Its author, Mehdi Charef, is a writer and filmmaker who was born in Algeria and grew up in Paris (Charef 1989). Of the three remaining novels, two are by Fa ŷa Gu ène, a young writer and filmmaker who grew up outside of Paris. Like Charef, she comes from an Algerian immigrant background (Gu ène 2006a; Gu ène 2006b). The first Gu ène novel, a young adult book called *Kiffe kiffe demain*, was published in 2004. The second, *Du r ˆve pour les oufs*, was published in 2006. The last novel included in this study is *Lignes de faille*, by Nancy Huston. It was also published in 2006.

My choice of English translation for each of these novels was partly dictated by availability and partly shaped by my preferences. As a speaker of American English only peripherally familiar with British English, I had hoped to use American English translations of my selected French novels. My primary criterion for choosing the French works was the frequency with which slang appeared in the text, though, not the availability of an American translation. Thus the four translations in my study encompass more than one variety of English.

For Charef's novel, I used the English translation entitled *Tea in the Harem*, translated by Ed Emery and published in London in 1989. As far as I am aware, this British English translation is the only translation of *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*. Gu ène's novel *Kiffe kiffe demain* was originally translated into British English by Sarah Adams with the title *Just Like Tomorrow*. I drew my data, however, from a version of Sarah Adams' translation edited for a U.S. readership

and released in 2006 as *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*. I do not know who edited this U.S. version of the British translation.

For the second Guène novel, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, I had the choice between independent British English and American English translations, and so I chose the latter. This U.S. translation, by Jenna Johnson, is entitled *Some Dream for Fools* and was published in 2009. The earlier British English translation, *Dreams from the Endz*, is by Sarah Ardizzone and came out in 2008. Finally, *Lignes de faille* has only one English edition, *Fault Lines*, which was translated by the author herself. Nancy Huston is originally an Anglophone Canadian, but she resides in France and writes in French. A native English speaker, she produces her own English translations of her works (Klein-Lataud 1996). *Fault Lines* was published in London in 2008. Since Huston is Canadian, this work might be said to be in Canadian English. Given that I detected no discernable difference between Huston's English and my own, however, and given that many of *Fault Lines*' characters are in fact American, it seems reasonable to lump this book into the category of North American English together with the American English versions of Guène's novels. My corpus of translations, then, consists of one book in British English and three books in North American English.

### **2.3 Some Remarks on the Language of the Four Novels**

For three of the four novels in my study, the language exhibited in the text is closely tied to the same particular social milieu. The young adult characters in Mehdi Charef's and Faïza Guène's works are immigrants or the children of immigrants from Francophone North Africa. They live in disadvantaged communities on the outskirts of Paris where immigrant populations are concentrated. Though Mehdi Charef's novel is set in the 1980s and Guène's are set in the early 2000s, their characters share a common social, economic, and cultural background. The

fact that both authors portray youth growing up in marginalized immigrant communities in France influences both the prevalence and the type of slang that appears in their novels. These two writers' books contain a high density of French slang and nonstandard forms, reflecting the actual speech style of French youth, particularly those from disadvantaged immigrant communities. The pervasiveness of slang in these novels makes them especially fertile sites for the study of slang translation.

Charef and Guène's books also contain certain kinds of slang that are associated with these youth. These include slang words with etymological origins in other languages such as Arabic, slang words referring to people of a particular race or ethnicity, and *verlan*, a specific type of slang in which the sounds or syllables of a French word are reversed to create a new word (see Goudailler 2002, Hamaida 2007). An example of *verlan* is *meuf* 'woman'. According to my analysis, inspired by Hamaida 2007, this word is derived from Standard French *femme* 'woman' through the following process of phonetic reversal: [fam] → [famø] → [møfa] → [møf]. Even within the domain of slang translation, *verlan* presents particular difficulties. If one attempted to reproduce this mechanism of word formation in English, the result would most often be incomprehensible<sup>2</sup>. At the very least, the English item would not convey the same meanings or produce the same effect as the French *verlan* item.

The commonalities of the Guène and Charef books are not shared by the fourth novel in my corpus. Nancy Huston's *Lignes de faille* is different from the other three works in that it does not depict urban immigrant French youth and thus for the most part does not contain the kind of language associated with that demographic. Relative to the other books, Nancy Huston's text has

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<sup>2</sup>Mattiello 2005 does cite some examples of back-slang, a similar process of word formation in English. These examples include *ecaf*, derived from *face*, and *yob*, derived from *boy*. In my experience, though, English back-slang is not as widespread or as widely known as French *verlan*. Even if a process analogous to *verlan* exists in English slang, it remains likely that in most cases *verlan* cannot be comprehensibly translated into English by attempting to reproduce the mechanism of phonetic reversal in English.



a lower slang density. Additionally, there is less overlap between *Lignes de faille* and the other three novels in the actual slang items used than there is overlap in slang items among the other three novels. For instance, Charef's and Guène's books have many verlan words in common while Huston's novel contains very little verlan. The inclusion of *Lignes de faille* in my corpus is useful for assessing whether similar slang translation patterns occur in novels other than those that portray marginalized French youth.

### **3. Slang**

In Section 2, I introduced my corpus of novels. In this section, I examine the concept of slang and discuss how to identify it. As a linguistic phenomenon, slang is largely taken for granted in the literature. Despite the fairly widespread use of the term, few linguists have offered precise definitions of slang, and as Dumas and Lighter (1978) and Mattiello (2005) have pointed out, those definitions that have been proposed are largely vague and inadequate. For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to have a concrete definition of slang as my goal is to examine the English translation of French slang items. I particularly wish to investigate the extent to which slang is preserved in translation, and in order to do so at the book level, I need to be able to quantify the incidence of slang in a given book, whether in French or in English. Such quantification requires a consistent definition of slang rather than vague notions which classify expressions as slang or non-slang based on their "feel".

To identify slang items in my corpus, I adopted the test proposed in Dumas and Lighter 1978 as it was the most precise and systematic scheme I could find in the literature. Dumas and Lighter define as slang any word or expression that fulfills at least two of the following four established criteria:

1. Its presence will markedly lower...the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing. [...]
2. Its use implies the user's special familiarity either with the referent or with that less statusful or less responsible class of people who have such special familiarity and use the term. This "special familiarity" usually implies disdain for what is conventionally accepted or esteemed, or an overfamiliarity with what the dominant society finds unseemly or unacceptable. [...]
3. It is a tabooed term in ordinary discourse with persons of higher social status or greater responsibility. (1978:14-15)

Dumas and Lighter (1978:15) acknowledge that the third criterion is "functionally similar" to the first. As I see it, any word or expression that fulfills the third criterion also necessarily fulfills the first because taboo terms lower the dignity of discourse. The third criterion thus describes a subset of terms already covered by criterion one. Dumas and Lighter (1978) might not have needed this criterion in their definition of slang at all but for the fact that it makes explicit their inclusion of vulgar terms under the umbrella of slang.

The fourth and final criterion for identifying slang is as follows:

4. It is used in place of the well-known conventional synonym, especially in order
  - (a) to protect the user from the discomfort caused by the conventional item or
  - (b) to protect the user from the discomfort or annoyance of further elaboration.
 (Dumas and Lighter 1978:15)

To clarify the meaning of the fourth criterion, I offer examples of its fulfillment. The following example features a word that satisfies the conditions of criterion 4a:

- (1) His uncle croaked. (Dumas and Lighter 1978:15)

In (1), the word *croaked* replaces the “well-known conventional synonym” *died*. It allows the speaker to avoid saying *died*, which might be unpleasant for her, but it does not soften the blow for the interlocutor(s), for whom *croaked* still expresses the same sense as *died* with as much bluntness. Thus, *croaked* fulfills criterion 4a. According to Dumas and Lighter, the characteristic of protecting the speaker but not the interlocutor(s) is what distinguishes a word like *croak* from ordinary euphemisms (1978:15).

The next example gives a word that fulfills criterion 4b:

(2) How was the movie? Super! (Dumas and Lighter 1978:15)

In (2), the word *super* could be standing in for all manner of other adjectives one might use to describe a movie. The point here is that the use of *super* relieves the speaker of any burden of “further elaboration”. It is *super*’s lack of precision that makes it satisfy criterion 4a.

I used the four criteria presented above to identify slang both in the English and French texts. I applied these criteria based on my own familiarity with each language, judging whether a particular item fulfilled a given criterion according to my own impression of the item’s function in the language and in the specific context.

While I identified slang items strictly using the four criteria from Dumas and Lighter 1978, two other characteristics struck me as particularly relevant to the discussion of what slang is. Firstly, Mattiello (2005:9) characterizes slang as a “time-restricted ephemeral phenomenon” and emphasizes its quality of “freshness”. These two traits are related. Often tied to the speech of a particular generation, slang terms are coined, experience a golden age, and then pass out of use. Slang can have freshness precisely because it is transient. In general, slang that has lost its freshness is no longer slang. It may have become archaic, merely informal, or even standard. I see this question of freshness as linked to Dumas and Lighter 1978’s first and second criteria for

slang, though they make no explicit reference to freshness. An expression that stops fulfilling criterion 1, because it is no longer seen as detracting from the dignity of formal speech, does so because it has lost its freshness. Similarly, when an expression no longer indicates some sort of special familiarity, it is no longer fresh because it has gained too widespread a currency.

The concept of freshness is useful when considering slang, but I do not treat it as a necessary condition for slang. Some words that qualify as slang according to the four-criterion definition do not exhibit freshness. In particular, vulgar terms, which are especially singled out in criterion 3, have often been in use for long periods of time. Though they are not as “time-ephemeral” as other types of slang and may not have a quality of freshness to many speakers, they are nevertheless counted as slang in this study. It is possible that slang terms of this type may sometimes pose less of a problem for translation than other kinds of slang because there may be accepted established equivalencies between long-lived vulgar terms in different languages.

In addition to freshness, a second important characteristic often exhibited by slang is intentionality. Dumas and Lighter (1978:12) call this slang’s “most crucial feature,” namely, that “it is used deliberately, in jest or in earnest, to flout a conventional social or semantic norm”. In other words, speakers use slang on purpose, and choosing to use a slang word connotes a certain defiance of norms. I agree with Dumas and Lighter to the extent that I think slang is never purely denotative, while standard language can be. It seems to me, though, that it is possible for speakers to use slang without consciously intending to flout social norms, for instance if a particular slang term is one they grew up with and use often without thinking about it. Intentionality is also not an explicit component of the criteria-based definition of slang outlined above, though criterion 4 does imply that the speaker is making a deliberate choice to protect

himself from either discomfort or annoyance. In the end, intentionality is a useful guideline to bear in mind when seeking to identify slang, but it is not an absolute requirement for an expression to be considered slang.

#### **4. Translation Theory and Slang Translation**

In investigating the ways in which French slang is rendered in English, I have looked to currents in translation theory to inform my evaluations and analyses. I first consider the distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, an overarching framework for discussing translation first formulated by Eugene Nida. Then I introduce the notion of lexical complexity and its preservation in translation. I explore how slang translation might fit into these two theories of translation and argue that lexical complexity is more effective for evaluating instances of slang translation. After offering some remarks on slang's relation to group identity and the implications for translation, I finish by looking at how translators approach slang.

##### **4.1 Formal and Dynamic Equivalence**

One of the principal ways of characterizing translations is through the dichotomy of formal vs. dynamic equivalence. Eugene Nida (2004[1964]) was the first to formulate the distinction in these terms. Formal and dynamic equivalence differ in how closely the translation cleaves to the original text and in the principle goal of the translator. Formal equivalence is associated with literal translation. According to Nida, formal equivalence has as its primary focus the original, or source language (SL), text. In this approach, the translator translates literally, striving to the extent possible to replicate the elements of the SL text in the translation, or target language (TL) text, in both form and content. A literal translation renders the SL text word-for-word, attempting to follow the syntax of the SL, but there are gradations of literal translation. A stricter literal translation may follow the SL words and structures perfectly, at the

expense of the meaningfulness and grammaticality of the TL text, while a freer literal translation may follow the SL text word-for-word only as far as it is possible to do within the rules of the TL. The stricter the adherence to the principles of formal equivalence is, the more literal the translation is. Nida also describes formal equivalence as pointing to the SL text behind the TL translation. It seeks to reveal as much as possible about the SL original and thus highlights the translated nature of the TL text, sometimes allowing readers to sense that the translation was not originally written in the TL.

Dynamic equivalence, also called functional equivalence, has a goal different from that of formal equivalence. While formal equivalence gives primacy to the SL text, dynamic equivalence is focused on the effect of the TL text on its reader (Nida 2004[1964]). That is, instead of seeking to replicate the elements of the SL text, the dynamically equivalent translation attempts to replicate the SL text's effect on its readers. Under the principles of dynamic equivalence, the effect of the translation on its readers should be the same as the effect of the original text on its readers. Dynamic equivalence also permits deviations from literal translation because reproducing a similar effect is more important than rendering the SL text word-for-word. A translator can completely change words, referents, or sentences in the TL in order to achieve an effect in the TL text equivalent to that produced by the SL text. Consequently, while formal equivalence can draw attention to the translated nature of a text, dynamic equivalence naturally tends to hide that sense of translatedness. In this approach, the TL text should feel as though it were originally written in the TL.

Just as there are gradations of literal translation, there are gradations of equivalence between the formal and the dynamic. A translation may contain some passages, sentences, and expressions translated according to the principles of formal equivalence and some translated

according to the principles of dynamic equivalence. Also, the approach used in translating a single item may lie somewhere between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, exhibiting qualities of each. The dichotomy might therefore be better conceived of as a spectrum.

#### **4.2 Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, and Slang Translation**

Having introduced the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence, I next explore how they might apply to translating slang. Is slang translation inherently more closely tied to one end of the formal-dynamic spectrum? When Linder (2000:280) proposes that nonstandard language, in which he includes slang, should “be rendered into the target language creating an effect on the target reader which is equivalent to that which the original text had on readers in its own culture,” the translation practice he describes by definition constitutes dynamic equivalence. Frame (1989:80) also seems to situate nonstandard translation within dynamic equivalence when he talks about seeking to achieve “comparable effects” in translating nonstandard items from 17<sup>th</sup> century French literature.

It seems reasonable to think that slang translation would generally exhibit dynamic equivalence. The criteria for slang given in Section 3 all relate to the effects of language. Slang may diminish the dignity of speech, signal special familiarity, or break taboos when used in certain contexts. Additionally, the qualities of freshness and of the intention to flout norms also emphasize how slang, by its very nature, is defined by the effects it produces. This is truer of slang than it is of standard language, as the latter is often more neutral and can be merely denotative, producing few effects beyond the transmission of meaning. Because slang is an especially “effect-ful” type of language, the ideal translation of a slang expression should follow the principles of dynamic equivalence.

To illustrate how formal and dynamic equivalence might work in practice in slang translation, I now consider an example. The French word *blé* is slang for ‘money’, but its literal meaning is ‘wheat’. A strict formally equivalent approach would translate *blé* ‘money’ literally into English as *wheat*. Properly contextualized, such a literal translation might work, but it seems inadvisable as the meaning of ‘money’ would be totally lost in English. A translator might instead translate slang *blé* with Standard English *money*. This rendering appears to lie somewhere between formal and dynamic equivalence. It exhibits a quality of formal equivalence in that it directly translates the SL word’s content, but it does not reflect the SL word’s form in the way the formally equivalent translation *wheat* does. On the other hand, it does not constitute dynamic equivalence either because *money* does not have the same effect as *blé*. *Money* is a neutral term of Standard English while *blé* is a slang word that signals the use of a less formal register and may imply the speaker’s identification with the kind of people who refer to ‘money’ as *blé*. Translating *blé* as *money*, then, represents an approach located somewhere between formal and dynamic equivalence.

A third possible translation of *blé* ‘money’ is *dough*<sup>3</sup>. As a slang word for ‘money,’ *dough* should produce an effect on English readers similar to that produced by *blé* on French readers. Thus *dough* is a dynamically equivalent translation of *blé*. At the same time, English *dough* and French *blé* belong to a common semantic field of terms related to bread and grain. In this sense, translating *blé* as *dough* demonstrates characteristics of formal equivalence in that the TL word reveals something of the SL word. It appears then that as a translation of *blé*, *dough*, like *money*, occupies a position somewhere between formal and dynamic equivalence. The translation *money* seems to lie closer to the formal equivalence pole while the translation *dough*

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<sup>3</sup> Another word that would work similarly to *dough* as the translation of *blé* is *bread*, which, like *dough*, is an English slang word for ‘money’.



seems to lie closer to the dynamic equivalence pole. Their relative positions on the formal-dynamic spectrum, however, do not fully explain the different ways in which they convey aspects of the same French word. This suggests it might be worthwhile to go beyond formal and dynamic equivalence in examining slang translation.

### 4.3 Lexical Complexity and Slang Translation

In this section, I present another framework in which to consider slang translation. In the previous section, I explained why it makes sense to take a dynamically equivalent approach to translating slang. I then offered *wheat*, *money*, and *dough* as three potential translations of French slang *blé* meaning ‘money’. To me, *dough* is the best translation as it conveys the same meaning as the French word and, like *blé* is slang. As I demonstrated, though, *dough* exhibits qualities of both dynamic and formal equivalence. If following the principles of dynamic equivalence is not what makes *dough* the best translation of *blé* then what is?

In order to overcome the limitations of the formal vs. dynamic equivalence spectrum, I borrow the framework of lexical complexity and its preservation in translation from Mattiello 2007. Lexical complexity is a measure of the extent to which a lexical item is multifaceted or multifunctional. A more lexically complex item features more facets or more layered functions. For instance, a word may exhibit polysemy, the phenomenon whereby a single form corresponds to more than one meaning. A lexical item’s “extra socio-pragmatic functions,” such as signalling intimacy between speakers or special familiarity with some referent, also add to its lexical complexity (Mattiello 2007:7). I would argue that slang register itself adds to the lexical complexity of a word or expression because the characteristics of slang outlined in Section 3 constitute “extra socio-pragmatic functions”. Lexical complexity is a useful concept for evaluating the different attributes of a lexical item. Thus another way to judge whether the

translation of a particular item is successful or not is to consider whether lexical complexity has been preserved (Mattiello 2007). It is likely very difficult most of the time to translate an item in such a way that it is lexically complex in the exact same way as the original item, but a translator can try to preserve comparable lexical complexities.

This theoretical approach is helpful in illuminating why *dough* is an effective translation of *blé*. Firstly, polysemy is maintained from French to English. As we have seen, French *blé* means both ‘wheat’ and ‘money’. Similarly, English *dough* has two meanings, that of ‘paste that becomes bread when cooked’ and that of ‘money’. In this case, even the semantic fields of the two meanings are preserved, since *blé* and *dough* are both related to grain and bread. Secondly, the slang register is carried over from French into English, as both *blé* and *dough*, when they mean ‘money,’ are slang terms in their respective languages. I stated above that I consider slang register a component of lexical complexity. Thus translating a French slang word with an English one also preserves lexical complexity. As compared to the framework of formal vs. dynamic equivalence, the framework of lexical complexity strikes me as one in which one can better evaluate the effectiveness and identify the weaknesses of a particular instance of slang translation. Lexical complexity allows us to determine in more detail what a TL translation has carried over from the SL item, whether that is referential meaning(s), register, or other associations the original item may possess. It can be a useful methodological approach to translating slang, and it is helpful in judging the success of slang translation.

#### **4.4 Group Identity and Slang Translation**

One characteristic of slang I have not yet delved into much is its tendency to be associated with a certain group within society. As Mattiello (2005) points out, speakers may use slang to “show their belonging to a group and establish solidarity or intimacy with the other

group members” (15). A corollary to this observation is that particular slang words may be perceived by the rest of society as being tied to a particular sub-community. I alluded to this in Section 2.3 when I described *verlan* as a kind of French slang associated with immigrant youth. This aspect of slang creates additional difficulties for translation, since the specific group a given slang term evokes is proper to the society that uses the language in which the slang term occurs. Translators must contend with carrying a text over not only into another language but into another culture and society, with a different network of correspondences between slang terms and subgroups. In addition to trying to translate slang with slang, translators may have to confront the question of whether a slang term in the target language relates to the right sort of group when compared to the original slang term in the source language text. Ideally, for instance, *verlan* terms would be translated with English terms that are similarly associated specifically with young people, especially those from a low-income, immigrant background. I am not sure that there is a group in the U.S. that could be considered analogous to French *verlan* speakers though. It is likely impossible most of the time to translate slang from one language into another and still have it be associated with the same kind of people, just in another society.

Gregory Rabassa (1989) cautions against even attempting to establish a correspondence between a group in the original text’s society and one in the society for which the translator is creating the new version. That is, the translator should not use terms used by the latter group to translate words specific to the former group, even if the two groups seem equivalent. Rabassa illustrates this using the example of the *gauchos* of the pampas, whose speech an American translator might be tempted to capture in translation using the vocabulary of American cowboys. Rabassa insists that “[d]espite their similarities, the gaucho and the cowboy are two completely different creatures” and consequently *gauchos* should not sound like cowboys of the American

West in translation (10). His concern is the cultural specificity of language in general, but his point applies to the translation of slang associated with a particular group in society. The elaborate solution Rabassa proposes to the gaucho-cowboy problem is the invention by the translator of “a kind of artificial yet authentic-sounding gaucho or rustic speech in English” (10-11). Since it is impossible to find a group in another culture that truly corresponds to the special group in the source text, the translator cannot really find a set of terms, slang or otherwise, in the target language that relates to the same type of group the terms in the source language did. Instead, he or she should create a new vocabulary that will evoke the right kind of people to readers of the translated text, even if this vocabulary is unlike anything they have actually heard before.

This is similar to what Anthony Burgess did not in a translation but in an original work. In his novel *A Clockwork Orange*, the English-speaking characters pepper their dialogue with Nadsat, an invented vocabulary of Russian-inspired slang words. Though the slang is made up, readers pick up on its meaning as they read, proving that invented expressions need not ultimately be a barrier to understanding. Also, the new sets of terms Rabassa suggests translators invent need not be derived from a language foreign to their readers. They should just not be existing words associated with a particular group in the society of the speakers of the target language. Rabassa’s proposal is an ingenious one, but it strikes me as an ideal to which few actually aspire. Creating a whole new system of special terms for a particular group of speakers requires a great deal of work on the translator’s part and may not always seem reasonable or feasible. Nevertheless it is an interesting possibility to contemplate.

#### 4.5 Practical Strategies for Slang Translation

In the preceding sections, I examined two theoretical frameworks in which to examine the translations of slang items. I also raised the question of how to ensure slang is associated with the right group in translation and presented Rabassa's original solution to this problem. Now, I briefly discuss the methods of slang translation that have been most commonly observed in the actual practice of translators.

According to Linder (2000), translators can use two main techniques to reproduce slang from the SL text in the TL text. The first technique is to render slang with slang when "equivalent slang terms exist in the target language" (280). When such equivalents are not available, translators can resort to a second technique, that of compensation. In this practice, SL slang is translated with TL non-slang, but translators compensate for this loss by adding TL slang elsewhere in the translation, where slang is not present in the SL text.

By drawing on both techniques in a two-pronged approach, translators may achieve the ultimate goal of "produc[ing] an equivalent number of slang terms and, hopefully, an equivalent effect of those terms" (Linder 2000:280). This represents the ideal scenario in which a translation features the same density of slang as the original text while still allowing for that slang not to appear in exactly the same places in both texts. Though translators do use both slang-to-slang translation and compensation, they do not necessarily do so consistently or to the extent necessary to maintain slang density from SL text to TL text. In his study of Spanish translations of American detective fiction, Linder (2000) discovers that much of the original slang in the American novels is in fact neutralized in translation. It seems, then, that actual translations do not always live up to the ideal of equivalent slang density.

## 5. Methodology

Having provided background on my corpus, the phenomenon of slang, and some theories and practices that apply to slang translation, I now present my own study of slang translation. In this section, I describe the methodology I used to examine the ways in which slang terms and nonstandard items in French novels are translated into English. I first explain the process by which I identified French slang items and classified their English translations. Then, since I also looked at the translation of certain nonstandard items, I discuss the types of nonstandard constructions I investigated and explain how I categorized their English translations as well.

### 5.1 Slang

To collect the slang data for this study, I read the four French novels described in Section 2.2 and extracted every item I identified as being slang according to the criteria from Dumas and Lighter 1978. I then located and extracted the corresponding translations of these items from the English versions of the books. Together, the four novels yielded a total of 2,541 French slang items. Of these, 2,382 appeared translated in the English texts. The 159 French slang items for which there were no corresponding English items lacked them because the translators omitted the expressions in the English texts. The vast majority of these omitted slang items (138 out of 159) were in *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, and they were often missing due to a larger span of text (up to a paragraph) being omitted in translation.

Table 1 below gives a rough idea of the slang density of each French novel by providing the approximate word count of each book and the number of French slang items each book contained.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Approx. Word Count<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Number of Slang Items</b>
<i>Kiffe kiffe demain</i>	33,454	627
<i>Du r �ve pour les oufs</i>	37,769	714
<i>Le th� au harem d'archi Ahmed</i>	36,600	993
<i>Lignes de faille</i>	90,428	207

**Table 1: Book Word Counts and Slang Items per Book**

The first three novels in Table 1 have roughly comparable word counts and each feature at least 600 slang items. *Lignes de faille* is more than two and a half times longer than the other three books but contains only about 200 slang items. These figures quantify my claim in Section 2.3 that *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Du r  ve pour les oufs*, and *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed* have relatively high slang densities while *Lignes de faille* has a relatively low slang density.

I classified the 2,382 French slang items that did have corresponding translations according to the register of their English translations. The possible categories for the English items were slang, informal, standard, nonstandard, or other. *Slang* designated any expression that qualified as such under the criterion-based definition given in Section 3. *Informal* expressions met one criterion for slang (typically the first), but not the required two, and thus they did not qualify as slang. *Standard* designated expressions that are considered Standard English. *Nonstandard* designated constructions native English speakers use but which are not considered Standard English. Slang itself is of course a type of nonstandard language, but here I define *nonstandard* as a narrower and quite specific category. The designations *slang*, *informal*, and *standard* apply to lexical items, while *nonstandard* expressions qualify as nonstandard by virtue of their phonological or grammatical characteristics. While I think it entirely possible for an

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<sup>4</sup> Approximate word counts were obtained by counting the number of words on one page and multiplying by the number of pages in the book.

expression to both contain slang lexical items and exhibit nonstandard characteristics, I treat the slang-to-standard spectrum and the nonstandard category as separate for my purposes. That is, I did not ever find it necessary to label a single translated item as both slang and nonstandard. This is due to the fact that there were very few French slang items rendered with nonstandard English and these nonstandard items did not contain English slang. Hereafter, when I use the term *nonstandard* in the context of my study, I am referring to nonstandard non-slang items.

*Other* exclusively designated items rendered using the translation procedures that Vinay and Darbelnet (2004 [1958/1995]) call *borrowing* and *calque*. Borrowing consists simply of using the SL word or phrase in the TL text. In a calque, a SL phrase is translated word-for-word into the TL, exactly following the SL structure without regard to the syntactic rules of the TL (Vinay and Darbelnet 2004 [1958/1995]). Thus, the translations I labeled *other* were either non-English or unnatural English, precluding their categorization as standard, informal, slang, or nonstandard.

## 5.2 Nonstandard Language

In addition to looking at slang terms and their translation, I also considered how some of the nonstandard language in the French novels was rendered in the English translations. My study of nonstandard expressions was on a smaller scale, however. While I thoroughly catalogued all the French slang items, I only extracted a set of representative examples of nonstandard French forms from the books. While the occurrence of nonstandard French items was very widespread, three types in particular stood out as being by far the most common. The first type is the dropping of the first (*ne*) of the two negative particles (*ne* and *pas*) required for negation in Standard French. The second type is the dropping of the subject of a clause or sentence. The third type is the phonetic reduction of subject clitic pronouns. Other kinds of



nonstandard expressions do occur, such as *wh-in-situ* questions, which contrast with the *wh*-movement questions of Standard French (e.g. nonstandard *Tu manges quoi?* ‘What are you eating?’ (literally ‘You eat what?’) versus Standard French *Que manges-tu?* ‘What are you eating?’ (literally ‘What eat you?’)). While my corpus of nonstandard items includes some examples of other types of nonstandard forms, I focus on the three types highlighted above as they are the most prevalent in the novels. In the following three subsections, I explain each type in more detail.

### 5.2.1 *Ne Dropping*

In Standard French, basic negation is marked with both the pre-verbal particle *ne* and the post-verbal particle *pas* (Ashby 1981:674). In spoken French, omitting *ne*, the first negative particle, is very common, but it is still considered nonstandard usage. When the omission of *ne* began to spread widely in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was largely a phenomenon of the speech of the lower classes. Today, *ne* dropping is a generalized practice and is no longer associated with lower social status (Martineau and Mougeon 2003). Ashby (1981) observes that *ne* is a redundant marker of negative polarity in French and suspects that the particle is going out of use in the language. Thus, the decline of *ne* is a case of linguistic change in progress, but from a societal point of view, its omission is still an indicator of nonstandard French. In (3), I illustrate *ne* dropping with an example from *Du r  ve pour les oufs*:

(3) je sais pas

In Standard French, *je sais pas* (‘I don’t know’<sup>5</sup>) would be *je ne sais pas*, with both markers of negation present. The sentence in (3) is nonstandard because *ne* is omitted.

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<sup>5</sup> This and other translations that appear in single quotes hereafter are my own translations and not those that appear in the published English translations of the French novels.

### 5.2.2 Subject Dropping

A second type of nonstandard usage prevalent in the French novels was the omission of the subject of a clause or sentence. Sometimes, this was the dropping of the dummy *il* (equivalent to English dummy *it*), a nonstandard phenomenon noted by Armstrong and Smith (2002) in negative constructions, though it also occurs in nonnegative constructions. Like *ne* dropping, the dropping of dummy *il* may be a sign of language change in progress but is still viewed as nonstandard (Blanche-Benveniste 2010). An example of dummy *il* dropping from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* is in (4):

(4) Faut que j'aïlle chercher mon père

The sentence in (4) means 'I have to go look for my father'. In Standard French, it would begin *Il faut que j'aïlle* instead of *Faut que j'aïlle*. The omission of dummy *il* before *faut* renders (4) nonstandard and makes it closer to something like English 'Gotta go look for my father'.

A non-dummy subject can also be dropped, as in (5), also drawn from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*:

(5) savent plus rigoler<sup>6</sup>

In Standard French, *savent plus rigoler* ('don't know how to have fun anymore') would have the pronoun *ils* ('they') present in subject position before the verb *savent* ('know'). The fact that *ils* has been dropped in (5) makes it nonstandard.

### 5.2.3 Subject Reduction

The third nonstandard phenomenon I examined was the phonetic reduction of clitic pronouns in subject position. Culbertson and Legendre (2008:7) characterize the phonetic

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<sup>6</sup> The example in (5) is also a nonstandard negative construction. Instead of *pas*, the post-verbal negative polarity item *plus* ('no longer' or 'anymore') is present here. Standard French negation also requires *ne* with *plus*. Since the pre-verbal marker *ne* is omitted in (5), (5) is nonstandard through *ne* dropping as well as through subject dropping. The full Standard French version of (5) would thus be *ils ne savent plus rigoler*, restoring both the subject and *ne*.

reduction of clitic pronoun subjects as a feature of spoken French. This nonstandard shortening of clitic subjects is conveyed in written texts through contractions or phonetic renderings. I illustrate this with two examples inspired by Culbertson and Legendre 2008. Standard French *je suis* [ʒə sɥi] ('I am') becomes [sɥi] when its clitic subject is phonetically reduced. This nonstandard form is written as *j'suis*. Similarly, Standard French *il va* [il va] ('he goes') can be reduced in nonstandard usage to [i va], which is typically written as *y va*. The choice of the orthographic form *y va* rather than *i va* is likely motivated by two factors. The first is that *y* is a real French word (the pronoun 'there') while *i* is not, so it looks less "wrong" in a French text even when it is conveying nonstandard speech. The second factor involves another frequent case of reduction whereby standard *il y a* [il i a] ('there is') becomes nonstandard *y a* [i a] or [ja]. Here it is difficult to tell whether the subject *il* is being entirely omitted, as in subject dropping, or if *il* is being phonetically reduced to [i] and then merging with *y* (also [i]) (see Blanche-Benveniste 2010). In this thesis, I include the transformation of *il y a* into *y a* in this section on subject reduction rather than in the previous section on subject dropping. However it is analyzed, this phenomenon seems to influence the writing of reduced clitic subject *il* as *y*.

Below I give an example of the phonetic reduction of a clitic subject from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*:

(6) *y peuvent pas et courir les gonzesses et compter leur pognon*<sup>7</sup>

The meaning of (6) is 'they can't run after girls and count their money'. The subject, written *y* and representing the pronunciation [i], is a phonetically reduced form of the pronoun *ils*, which in Standard French is realized as [il]. Thus (6) contains an example of nonstandard usage.

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<sup>7</sup> The words *gonzesses* and *pognon* are French slang terms, but in using this example my only concern is the nonstandard nature of the reduced subject.

The next example, from *Du rêve pour les oufs*, illustrates phonetic reduction with an *il y a* phrase:

(7) y en a des tas

In Standard French, *y en a des tas* ('there are piles of them') would be *il y en a des tas*. In (7), if I apply the analysis I chose above, standard *il y* becomes nonstandard *y* through the reduction of *il* [il] to [i] and the merging of this [i] with *y* [i].

I have now presented the three types of nonstandard French examined in this study. In the next section, I explain how I collected and classified nonstandard items from the four French novels.

#### 5.2.4 The Nonstandard Items

*Ne* dropping, subject dropping, and subject reduction make up most of the nonstandard French forms in the four books I read. Their frequency of appearance, particularly in the case of *ne* dropping, would have made it impractical and prohibitively time-consuming to extract every instance of their occurrence. Furthermore, I quickly discovered that in my corpus there was little variation in the methods used to translate these nonstandard French forms into English. For these reasons, I chose to extract only representative examples of nonstandard forms instead of every single example. Thus my study of nonstandard language was much less exhaustive than my study of slang.

In addition to the 2,541 slang items, then, I also extracted 94 nonstandard items from the four French novels. Of the 94, 79 had corresponding items in the English translations. The other 15 items, like the 159 slang items mentioned in Section 5.1, were somehow omitted in translation. All of these omissions were found in *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, except for one in *Du rêve pour les oufs* and one in *Lignes de faille*. I classified the 79 nonstandard French expressions with

corresponding English translations according to whether the translations were slang, informal, standard, nonstandard, or other. This is the same categorization scheme I used for the translations of slang items and which I described in Section 5.1.

### 5.3 The Difficulties of Categories

Before presenting the results of my study, I would like to take a moment to comment on my classification scheme dividing language into categories like standard, nonstandard, slang, and informal. These labels are not as cut-and-dried as they may appear, and it is important to acknowledge the somewhat problematic nature of these categories. For instance, the distinction between standard and nonstandard can become fuzzy. When I discussed *ne* dropping in French, I noted that this phenomenon is widespread in speech but still called it nonstandard. It could be argued that, while the presence of the pre-verbal negation particle *ne* is required in written Standard French, it is not so much required in spoken Standard French. That is, whether a linguistic feature is considered standard or nonstandard may be related to questions of written vs. spoken language.

The interactions between slang, informal language, and standard/nonstandard language can also be complex. As discussed in Section 5.1, I have made a distinction between nonstandard and slang items for the purposes of my study, but slang itself belongs to the realm of nonstandard language. This raises the question of how the category of informal language intersects with standard or nonstandard language. The three types of nonstandard French items described above seem characteristic of speech that might also be called “informal,” perhaps in a way that suggests a gray area between standard and nonstandard usage. As with slang, though, I use the informal category for lexical items and the nonstandard label for expressions that deviate phonologically or syntactically from standard language.

Another issue is that different speakers of the same language may have different perceptions of a given word or expression. Even if speakers agree to define slang according to Dumas and Lighter's criteria, as I have, they may disagree about whether a particular term fulfills one of the criteria or not. Additionally, when I discussed the freshness of slang, I mentioned how as language changes slang terms can shift into the informal or even standard categories. This further complicates the interactions of slang, informal, and standard language, as it can be difficult to pinpoint when a given term has passed from one category to another.

In sum, it is not easy to sort out all these different types of language. In this section, I have brought some of these complexities to the fore as a reminder of the potential ambiguities involved in trying to categorize items as slang, informal, standard, and nonstandard. It is important to bear all this in mind as we consider the results of this study.

## **6. Results**

In Section 5, I detailed my methodology in carrying out this study of the translation of French slang and nonstandard language. In this section, I present and discuss my results.

### **6.1 Slang**

I first discuss the French slang items and the ways in which they were translated into English. I describe the patterns that emerge from the data and analyze the practices translators use to render French slang in English.

As described in the Methodology section, I classified the translations of 2,382 French slang items according to their register in English. The breakdown by register of all translated items is given in Table 2.

<b>Register</b>	<b># of Slang Items</b>	<b>% of All Slang Items</b>
Slang	1,142	47.9%
Informal	116	4.9%
Standard	1,075	45.1%
Nonstandard	8	0.3%
Other	41	1.7%
TOTAL	2,382	

**Table 2: Register of Translated Slang Items**

In Table 2, we see that 47.9% of French slang items have corresponding English translations that also qualify as slang. This means that the retention rate of slang register from French into English is less than fifty percent. To put it another way, a little over half the French slang in these novels is lost in translation.

The translation of 4.9% of French slang items into informal English can be understood as slightly mitigating this loss. The informal label designates translated items that meet one of the criteria from Dumas and Lighter 1978 but not the two required for them to count as slang. Thus, rendering slang with informal language is a halfway point between completely maintaining slang register and completely losing it. In (8), I give an example of slang-to-informal translation from *Kiffe kiffe demain*:

(8) Fr: il **s'est cassé**

En: he **took off**

French *se casser*, meaning 'leave,' is slang, but it is here translated with *take off*, an English term that is merely informal. I consider *take off*, meaning 'leave,' to fulfill only the first criterion for slang presented in Section 3. Thus it does not qualify as slang. The translated items classified as

informal represent a partial success in maintaining register from French to English. They exhibit a register below that of Standard English while not fully conveying the slang register of the original French items.

Very few of the translations of French slang items fall into the category of nonstandard. Translating French slang into nonstandard English may help maintain register because the departure from Standard English in translation in a way reflects the departure from Standard French in the original. The following example of slang-to-nonstandard translation is drawn from *Du rêve pour les oufs*:

(9) Fr: j'**me barre**

En: I'm **outta** here

French *se barrer*, which also means 'leave,' is slang. The English translation of the French sentence in (9) does not contain any slang items, but the spelling *outta* for Standard English *out of* signals that the utterance is meant to be phonologically nonstandard. Thus I count the example in (9) as a case in which a French slang item is translated into a non-slang but nonstandard English expression. Given that there are only eight examples of this phenomenon, however, its ability to contribute to the preservation of register in the translated books is almost negligible.

Combining the categories of slang, informal, and nonstandard from Table 1 reveals that 53.1% of French slang items are translated into an English register below standard language. It remains the case, though, that roughly half of all French slang is neutralized in translation: 45.1% of French slang items are translated into Standard English. Translated items consisting of Standard English completely erase the slang register of the original French item. The high rate of slang-to-standard translation indicates that the four English translations fall short of the ideal of maintaining equivalent slang density.



Only 1.7% of translated slang items fall into the category designated *other*. As I explained in Section 5.1, these items are essentially expressions not native to English. Thus their function in the translated text is to provide “local color,” a sort of French flavor. The following is an example from *Kiffe kiffe demain*:

(10) Fr: Je te **kiffe** grave

En: I **kiffe** you for real

Here, the translator has kept the French slang word *kiffe* ‘like’ in the English version instead of replacing it with an English word. As lexical items or constructions foreign to English, items like *kiffe* are not taken as slang by readers of the translation. A French slang word inserted directly into an English translation no longer functions as slang but as a foreign word. From this point of view, the items in the *other* category also constitute a loss of slang register because the English reader does not perceive them as adding to the slang density of the translation.

So far this discussion has dealt only with the aggregate slang data. Now I further break down the data by novel in order to see how the four different works compare in terms of patterns of register maintenance and loss. Table 3 below classifies the translated slang items by register for each book.

	<i>Kiffe kiffe demain</i>		<i>Du r �ve pour les oufs</i>		<i>Le th �au harem d’archi Ahmed</i>		<i>Lignes de faille</i>	
Slang	304	49.4%	387	54.5%	359	42.0%	92	46.0%
Informal	36	5.8%	30	4.2%	34	4.0%	16	8.0%
Standard	265	43.0%	261	36.7%	458	53.6%	91	45.5%
Nonstandard	1	0.2%	2	0.3%	4	0.5%	1	0.5%
Other	10	1.6%	31	4.4%	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	616		711		855		200	

**Table 3: Register of Translated Slang Items by Book**

Looking at translation patterns in each book largely confirms the tendencies I observed in the aggregate data above. Across the board, only about half of French slang items are translated into English slang, and a sizable proportion of slang in the original is translated into Standard English. The exact percentages vary from book to book. For *Lignes de faille*, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, and *Du r  ve pour les oufs*, the proportion of slang translated into slang is greater than the proportion of slang translated into standard language. *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed*, on the other hand, exhibits a higher percentage of slang items translated into Standard English than of slang items translated with slang. The percentage of translated items that retain slang register ranges from as low as 42.0% for *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed* to as high as 54.5% for *Du r  ve pour les oufs*. The percentage of French slang items translated into Standard English ranges from as low as 36.7% for *Du r  ve pour les oufs* to as high as 53.6% for *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed*. Additionally, combining the slang, informal, and nonstandard categories reveals that *Kiffe kiffe demain* (55.4%), *Du r  ve pour les oufs* (59.0%), and *Lignes de faille* (54.5%) all translate over half of French slang items into a register of English below that of standard while *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed* does not. Conversely, only in *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed* is more than half of the French slang (53.6%) rendered with Standard English.

These numbers highlight some of the differences between the four translations. *Du r  ve pour les oufs* stands out as having the translation that minimizes the translation of French slang into Standard English and retains slang register to the greatest extent. At the other end of the spectrum, *Le th  au harem d'archi Ahmed* is notable for having the lowest rate of slang retention and the greatest incidence of slang-to-standard translation. *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Lignes de faille* lie somewhere in between. It is difficult to account for these differences since so much seems to depend on the approaches of the individual translators, about whom little is known. The fact that

the translation of *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* exhibits the greatest reduction in slang density may be attributable to its being older than the other works and their translations. It was published in the 1980s, whereas the rest of the books came out in the 2000s. Possibly it was less common for books to contain a great deal of slang in the 1980s than it is today, and so the translator of *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* chose to create an English version less slangy than its French original. Older translators or translators otherwise less familiar with a wide range of contemporary English slang may also tend to translate more slang with standard language, but it is not always possible to find information about a translator's age or linguistic knowledge.

Despite the differences described above, the translation patterns in all four books point to a substantial loss of slang density from French novel to English translation. With between 36.7% and 53.6% of French slang items rendered with Standard English, over a third to over half of French slang is lost in translation.

## 6.2 Slang Translation Practices

Having quantified how the French slang items in my corpus were translated into English according to register, I now examine translation practices from a more qualitative perspective. In the following sections, I discuss translators' use of slang-to-slang translation, slang-to-standard translation, and compensation.

### 6.2.1 Slang-to-slang Translation

I have emphasized the substantial loss of slang from French text to English text, but the translators of the four French novels do in fact translate a good deal of French slang into English slang. In this section, I look more closely at how they do this. To begin with, I give an example of a French slang item translated into English slang, from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*:

(11) Fr: La **nana** avait le chemisier d'boutonné

En: The **chick** had her blouse unbuttoned

*Nana*, a French slang word for ‘girl’, is translated with *chick*, an English slang word for ‘girl’. This is a straightforward case in which an English slang equivalent is available for the French slang item. It illustrates the ideal situation in which the translator is able to preserve the register of the French item in the English text.

Not all slang-to-slang translation is created equal, however. Here I bring in the idea of lexical complexity from Section 4.3. As I stated then, the more a translation preserves the lexical complexity of the original item, the more successful it is. Since lexical complexity includes register, it is necessarily lost in slang-to-standard translation, but it can be lost in slang-to-slang translation as well. This is because lexical complexity encompasses not only register but also features such as polysemy. I first give an example of slang-to-slang translation from *Kiffe kiffe demain* in which lexical complexity is preserved:

(12) Fr: il faudrait pas qu’il la **largue**

En: he’d better not **dump** her

French *largue* and English *dump* are both polysemous lexical items. In (12), they are used as slang to express the meaning of breaking off a relationship with a girlfriend or boyfriend. In a standard register, both words can also mean ‘to drop’ in their respective languages. Because *largue* and *dump* both qualify as slang in (12) and also share a common alternate meaning in standard language, this example represents quite a successful instance of the preservation of lexical complexity.

In the next example, drawn from *Kiffe kiffe demain*, I show how lexical complexity may be lost in slang-to-slang translation:

(13) Fr: pour que toutes ces **tronches de cake** au bahut me voient partir

‘so that all those cake-faces at school see me leaving’

En: so all those **jerks** could see me leaving

Both *tronches de cake* and *jerks* are slang terms that refer to individuals the speaker does not like, so register is maintained in the translation. French *tronches de cake*, however, is a composite expression containing the word *tronche*, slang for ‘face’. Thus it literally means something like ‘cake-faces’. *Jerks* does not have this kind of alternate literal reading, one which also contains a slang term whose meaning is distinct from that of the entire slang expression. Additionally, *tronche de cake* involves a play on words in French, since *tranche de cake* means ‘slice of cake’. Because *tronches de cake* has these layers of meanings and associations that the corresponding English word *jerks* lacks, the English translation in (13) does not carry the full complexity of the French.

The framework of lexical complexity can also be fruitfully applied to the translation of *verlan*, a special kind of French slang described in Section 2.3. Since *verlan* cannot be replicated in English to produce intelligible forms, the relationship between a *verlan* word and the word from which it is derived cannot be preserved in translation. Additionally, the culturally specific association between *verlan* and French youth, particularly those from disadvantaged, immigrant backgrounds, cannot be reproduced in an English translation even if English slang is used to render *verlan*. These difficulties mean that the translation of *verlan* inevitably involves the loss of lexical complexity to some degree. Consider an example of *verlan* translation from *Du r  ve pour les oufs*:

(14) Fr: je m’adresse   un **keuf** gras et pervers

En: I speak to a chubby, perverted **cop**

Verlan *keuf* ('policeman') is derived from French slang *flic* (also 'policeman') according to the following phonetic process: [flik] → [flikø] → [køfli] → [køf] (Hamaida 2007:6). English *cop* is a good translation of *keuf* in that it is also slang for 'policeman,' but unlike *keuf*, it is not derived from another word through phonetic reversal, much less through a process that is indexical of a certain social milieu. In this sense, there is a partial loss of lexical complexity in the translation in (14).

In this section, I have shown that there exist different gradations of successful translation even within slang-to-slang translation. When a French slang item is translated with an equivalent English slang item, register is maintained. Lexical complexity may be lost to a greater or lesser extent, however, if, for instance, a French slang term is polysemous while its English slang translation is not. Verlan is another case in which complexity is reduced through translation. This loss may sometimes be insurmountable, in which case the translator must simply accept it. In these situations, the preservation of register at least constitutes a partial success. Register often *is* lost in my corpus of translation examples, and it is these cases I examine next.

### 6.2.2 Slang-to-standard Translation

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, a substantial proportion of French slang items in all four books are rendered with Standard English. This translation practice has the obvious disadvantage of failing to preserve the register of the French text in the English version. We might expect a slang-to-standard translation when no equivalent English slang term exists for a French one, and sometimes this is the case. In (15) and (16), I give two French slang items for which there are no English slang equivalents and which are hence translated into Standard English. They are taken from *Du rêve pour les oufs* and *Kiffe kiffe demain*, respectively:

(15) Fr: attendre trente **piges** un mec

En: waiting thirty **years** for a guy

(16) Fr: c'était pas fait pour **bossier** 'it wasn't made for working'

En: women weren't made for **working**

It is in fact difficult to claim with absolute certainty that no English slang terms exist for *piges* 'years' and *bossier* 'working'. Some English speakers may have at their disposal a slang word meaning 'year'. I was not able to find such a word, however, and if it exists, it may only be understood by a small number of speakers. This would make it unsuitable as a translation both because most readers of the English version might not understand it and because *piges* is not so obscure in French. The same holds for *bossier*. Thus the use of slang-to-standard translation in (15) and (16) is understandable.

Quite often, though, French slang words are translated into Standard English when a common English slang term is available. In (17)–(19), I provide three examples of French slang items with their actual Standard English translations, as well as proposed alternative translations that would preserve slang register:

(17)<sup>8</sup> Fr: je vois les copains de mon **frangin**

En: I see my **brother**'s friends                      Alt. En: bro

(18) Fr: la prochaine fois il pr éviendra les **flics**

En: next time he'll call the **police**                      Alt. En: cops

(19) Fr: un nuage de fum ée de **clopes**

En: a cloud of smoke from their **cigarettes**      Alt. En: cigs

In (17)–(19), the French slang terms in bold could have been translated with the English slang terms I suggest, but instead they were translated with standard terms. These examples

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<sup>8</sup> The examples in (17) and (19) are taken from *Du rêve pour les oufs*; (18) is taken from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*.

demonstrate that the substantial loss of slang density observed in the four translated works is not wholly attributable to a lack of English slang equivalents for French slang items.

In the previous section, I pointed out that slang-to-standard translation necessarily involves a loss of lexical complexity. The examples in (17)–(19) further show that slang-to-standard translation and its accompanying loss of complexity are sometimes entirely avoidable. In contrast, there was no similarly obvious way to avoid the loss of lexical complexity exhibited in the slang-to-slang translations in (13) and (14) above. In those cases, the constraints of English were a more genuine barrier to the preservation of full lexical complexity. While there could conceivably be cases of slang-to-slang translation in which the loss of lexical complexity is easily preventable, my data supports the idea that the preventable cases occur principally in slang-to-standard translation. It is unclear why a translator would opt for the erasure of the French slang register when preserving that register in English presents no difficulties. Oddly, both *Du rêve pour les oufs* and *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* feature instances in which French slang *flics* is translated by English slang *cops* as well as instances in which *flics* is translated by Standard English *police*. I cannot explain why the translators of these books did not choose to consistently translate the French slang term with the English slang term.

In sum, the considerably diminished slang density in these English translations is attributable both to a lack of equivalent slang terms in English and to apparent decisions by the translators to choose Standard English terms when slang ones were available. Translating French slang into Standard English need not result in a much less slangy English version, however, provided the loss is made up for somehow. In the next section, I look at the role of compensation in the four novels.



### 6.2.3 Compensation

I have noted that, depending on the work, between 36.7% and 53.6% of French slang is translated into Standard English. This represents a great loss at the level of the book as a whole, as a slang-rich French novel can become an English novel in which standard language is more dominant. To avoid or at least mitigate this loss, translators can use the technique of compensation, whereby a standard form in the original is rendered with a slang form in the translation. This helps maintain equivalent register at the macroscopic level while allowing more freedom and flexibility at the word and sentence level. According to Linder (2000), the use of compensation should ideally result in a translation's slang density being equivalent to the original text's. While they do contain instances of compensation, the translations in my study do not live up to this ideal.

The following example of compensation is drawn from *Du rêve pour les oufs*:

(20) Fr: La **fille** est venue pour se faire épiler

En: The **chick** came in to have some hair removed

French *fille* 'girl' is standard, but the translator renders it with English slang *chick*, apparently to compensate for other times when she translated French slang words with Standard English ones.

Compensation is sometimes done at the sentence level. This means that when a French slang item in a given sentence is rendered with Standard English, a Standard French word in the same sentence is translated with an English slang item to compensate. The following example from *Lignes de faille* illustrates this:

(21) Fr: —*Vous faites encore une **plaisanterie à la con**, crie le fermier, et j'appelle la police.*

En: '**You assholes** make one more **wisecrack** and I'm calling the police,' yells the farmer.

Here, the French slang expression *plaisanterie à la con* (where *à la con*, meaning roughly 'idiotic,' is the slang modifier of Standard French *plaisanterie* 'joke') is translated with *wisecrack*, which is standard or at most informal. To compensate for this erasure of slang register, the translator takes Standard French *vous* 'you' and expands it into English slang *you assholes*, so that ultimately both the French and English sentence contain the same amount of slang.

Compensation also occurs at the suprasentential level. This is the case when a French slang item is translated into Standard English in one sentence and a Standard French item in a nearby sentence is translated with an English slang term. An example from *Kiffe kiffe demain* demonstrates this phenomenon:

(22) Fr: En fait, elle m'a donné un chèque-lire pour avoir des **bouquins gratos**. Je me sens r égresser avec tous ces gens qui me traitent comme une **assist ée**.

En: Turns out, she gave me a reading coupon so I can get **free books**. I feel like I'm going backwards with all these people treating me like a **welfare junkie**.

Here, the French slang item *bouquins gratos* 'free books' is translated with Standard English *free books*, representing a loss of slang content in translation. The translator compensates in an adjacent sentence, though, by translating Standard French *assist ée* 'person on welfare' with English slang *junkie*. *Junkie* must be modified by *welfare* to convey the content of the corresponding French item, but by working in a slang term in the English expression when it is not present in the French expression, the translator compensates for the loss in the previous sentence. The net effect is equal slang density in the French and English versions of this two-sentence portion of text.

Very often, though, the loss of French slang is compensated for neither at the sentential level nor at the suprasentential level. Below, I quote a longer passage from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* and its English translation in order to give an idea of how little compensation is actually taking place. French slang items and their corresponding English translations appear in bold. The item underlined in the English text represents a potential case of compensation, as will be discussed below, and the original expression that inspired its addition is also underlined in the French text. All corresponding items are co-indexed for ease of comparison.

- (23) Fr: D'è à **môme**<sub>1</sub>, surpris à **taxer**<sub>2</sub> ses petits **copains**<sub>3</sub>, Balou avait é é jet é de l'école. Ce qui fait qu'à treize ans il se retrouvait sur le macadam à **apprendre la vie sur le tas**<sub>4</sub>. Son père l'**avait fourgué**<sub>5</sub> à un pâtissier véreux qui le faisait **bosser**<sub>6</sub> jusqu'à quinze heures par jour. Il rentrait le soir épuisé, après avoir traversé à pied toute la sordide banlieue ouest, son petit paquet de gâteaux sous le bras, pour ses frères et sœurs. Ils étaient neuf **gosses**<sub>7</sub>. Et leur père, un cafetier, les avait quittés pour vivre avec une **minette**<sub>8</sub> de comptoir<sub>9</sub> dans une chambre d'hôtel. (Charef 1983:86)

En: It had probably all started when Balou had been thrown out of school at **an early age**<sub>1</sub> when they found him **extorting**<sub>2</sub> money from his **classmates**<sub>3</sub>. As a result, at the age of fourteen he was already out on the streets having to **fend for himself**<sub>4</sub>. His dad **had sent**<sub>5</sub> him to work for a miserly old pastrycook, who had him **working**<sub>6</sub> upwards of fourteen hours a day. He would get home in the evenings, worn out, after having walked halfway across the western suburbs of Paris, with a little packet of cakes under his arm for his brothers and sisters. There

were nine **children**<sub>7</sub> in the family. Their father ran a café. He had left them and gone to live with a **girl**<sub>8</sub> he'd picked up in a bar<sub>9</sub>. (Charef 1989:74)<sup>9</sup>

In this extended example, the French passage contains eight slang items. The corresponding English expressions all consist of Standard English, constituting a total loss of slang from French to English. The only expression in the translation that might in some way mitigate this loss is the phrase *picked up in a bar*. This is a figure of speech that, while not quite slang, probably counts as informal. Although the French text does not specifically say the father met the girl in a bar, the phrase *minette de comptoir* ‘bar girl’ implies that this is the case. The translator uses *de comptoir* as a jumping off point to insert the informal expression *picked up in a bar* in the English version. If we accept the addition in the translation of an informal item not present in the original as a weak form of compensation, then the insertion of *picked up in a bar* constitutes compensation at the sentence level. It partially makes up for translating slang *minette* ‘girl’ as standard *girl* in the same sentence.

This instance of partial compensation is not sufficient to offset the loss of slang density from the French passage to the English passage, however. In this translated paragraph, there are eight occurrences of slang erasure and one of weak compensation. Over the same portion of the novel, the French text features eight slang items while the English translation features no slang items and only one informal expression. The net effect is a loss of seven, or arguably eight, slang items. The rate of compensation here does not even come close to making up for the rate of slang-to-standard translation. The passage in (23) is representative of the translation of *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* as a whole. Therefore it is unlikely that compensation is mitigating the

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<sup>9</sup> There are some discrepancies in the translation of numbers in this excerpt: French *treize ans* ‘thirteen years’ is translated as *age of fourteen* and French *quinze heures* ‘fifteen hours’ is translated as *fourteen hours*. I give these texts as they were published, and I cannot explain why Emery changed these numbers in his English translation.

loss of French slang by a very great extent. The translation still exhibits a substantial reduction in slang density even when compensation is taken into account.

Of the four novels I looked at, *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed* has the highest rate of slang-to-standard translation. I have shown that, for the most part, the translation does not compensate for this loss of slang density. It is also worth looking at compensation in *Du rêve pour les oufs*, though, as it has the lowest rate of slang-to-standard translation. The following passage is from that novel:

(24) Fr: On arrive enfin. Il gare la **caisse**<sub>1</sub> et me donne un baiser pudique. Je vois d'ici la file d'attente. Il y a une centaine de personnes. **La flemme**<sub>2</sub> de faire toute cette queue. Au final, c'est même pas sûr qu'on puisse entrer. En plus, j'ai mal aux pieds, je porte des **pompes**<sub>3</sub> du magasin. Je me rends compte que je passe mes journées à vendre des chaussures de mauvaise qualité (Guène 2006:210-11)

En: We finally arrive. He parks the **car**<sub>1</sub> and gives me a sweet, polite kiss. From here I can see the line. There are a hundred people. I'm too **lazy**<sub>2</sub> to deal with that whole line. In the end we're not even guaranteed to get in. And now my feet hurt, I'm wearing **shoes**<sub>3</sub> from the store. I have to remember that I spend my days selling low-quality shoes. (Guène 2009:155)

All three slang items in the original French paragraph are translated into Standard English, and no additions have been made to the English version to compensate for this loss. As with *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, it appears that much of the slang loss exhibited in the translation of *Du rêve pour les oufs* is not compensated for through standard-to-slang translations or the insertion of additional slang in English. The same holds true for the other two works in my corpus. The

considerable loss of French slang in the English translations stands despite the occasional use of compensation as a translation practice.

### 6.3 Translation of Nonstandard Language

In the previous sections, I discussed the treatment of French slang items in English translation. In this section, I look at the nonstandard French items I extracted from the four novels and at the ways in which translators approach the three types of nonstandard forms presented in Section 5.2. As stated in Section 5.2.4, I examined the translations of 79 nonstandard French items and classified them according to register. This breakdown is given in Table 4 below.

<b>Register</b>	<b># of Nonstandard Items</b>	<b>% of All Nonstandard Items</b>
Slang	5	6.3%
Informal	2	2.5%
Standard	61	77.2%
Nonstandard	11	13.9%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	79	

**Table 4: Register of Translated Nonstandard Items**

These results show that a large majority of nonstandard French constructions (77.2%) are rendered with Standard English constructions. Just 13.9% of nonstandard French items are translated into nonstandard English expressions. It is interesting that 8.8% of the nonstandard French items I looked at were translated into English in a way that incorporated slang or informal lexical items while not featuring any nonstandard characteristics. In Section 6.1, I noted that eight translations of French slang items did not qualify as slang but did contain elements of nonstandard language. I suggested that this made a very small contribution to register

preservation in translation by exchanging one type of departure from standard language for another. The same applies here in nonstandard-to-slang and nonstandard-to-informal translation.

The fact remains that most of the nonstandard French constructions I extracted from the novels become entirely standard in translation. In the following subsections, I return to the three types of nonstandard French I described in the Methodology and investigate how the translators treat each one.

### 6.3.1 *Ne Dropping*

Cases of *ne* dropping in the French novels are almost always translated in a way that erases the nonstandard quality of the original expression. The following example from *Du rêve pour les oufs* illustrates this practice:

(25) Fr: **j'ai pas besoin** de descendre jusqu'à la cave pour ça

En: **I don't need** to go to the basement for that

In Standard French, *j'ai pas besoin* ('I don't need') would be *je n'ai pas besoin*, with the preverbal marker *ne* present. Because *ne* is omitted in (25), the French item is nonstandard, but its English translation *I don't need* is standard. English expresses negation with only one marker, *not*, so it is not possible to omit it and retain the negative sense.

I recognize that English *I don't need*, with its contraction, is a less formal variant of *I do not need*. From this perspective, both French *j'ai pas besoin* and its translation *I don't need* are alternatives to a more formal construction in their respective languages. However, while Martineau and Mougeon (2003) maintain that *ne* dropping constitutes nonstandard French, my sense is that *I don't need* is not considered nonstandard usage in English. It is merely less formal than *I do not need*. Moreover, *I don't need* has a neutral quality, whereas *I do not need* is emphatic. Similarly, to me, *I do not need* sounds more formal in English than standard *je n'ai*

*pas besoin* does in French. I believe contracted *I don't need* could also translate Standard French *je n'ai pas besoin* because the latter is neither emphatic nor seen as so formal in French as to require its translation as *I do not need*. Looking at (25), then, while both the French and the English are alternatives to more formal constructions, the French item is nonstandard and the English item standard. In most cases of *ne* dropping, this may simply be the best translators can do.

I did find one example in which the translator took a creative approach to translating *ne* dropping. It comes from *Kiffe kiffe demain*:

(26) Fr: je devais dire “**j'aime**” ou “**j'aime pas**”

En: I had to say “**like it**” or “**don't like it**”

Actually, (26) contains two nonstandard French items. The first is *j'aime* ‘I like,’ and it does not exhibit *ne* dropping. It is still nonstandard, though, because the verb *aimer* ‘like’ is here used intransitively when it must normally be used transitively. The second nonstandard item, *j'aime pas* ‘I don't like,’ is nonstandard in the same way as the first item and also features *ne* dropping. The translator succeeds in translating these two nonstandard expressions with English nonstandard expressions, but the translated items are nonstandard in a different way than the original items are. English *like it* and *don't like it* exhibit subject dropping, which is also nonstandard in English. Thus nonstandard language is preserved in translation despite the impossibility, in the case of *j'aime pas*, of replicating *ne* dropping in English.

### 6.3.2 Subject Dropping

The case of (26) demonstrates that subject dropping is a nonstandard construction that can occur in English too. Unlike *ne* dropping, then, French subject dropping should be replicable



in translation. Sometimes French subject omission is maintained in the English translation. I illustrate this in (27) by reproducing (5) along with its corresponding English translation:

(27) Fr: *savent plus rigoler*

En: can't take a joke anymore

Here, the omission of the subject of French *savent* ('know') is reproduced in English with the omission of the subject of *can't take*. Subject dropping should be a situation in which the differences between French and English syntax do not prevent the preservation of nonstandard language across translation. Despite this, the dropping of a subject is not always retained in translation. Consider the following example from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*:

(28) Fr: *Faut que j'aille chercher mon père*

En: I've got to go look for my dad

The subject of *faut* ('be necessary') is omitted; in Standard French it would be dummy *il*. In the English translation, though, the pronoun subject *I* is present. I agree it is more natural to translate the French dummy *il* construction with an English construction that does not use a dummy subject, even though one is possible. It would be something like *It is necessary that I go look for my dad*, which would sound very formal, even stilted, in English. Despite the different French and English constructions in (28), though, it would still be possible to replicate subject dropping here by reducing the English sentence to *Got to (or gotta) go look for my dad*. Thus, in (28), the loss of nonstandard language in translation is avoidable.

Further emphasizing the preventability of the loss in (28), the translated books also contain examples in which the dropping of dummy *il* in French is reproduced in English despite the fact that the corresponding English construction does not use a dummy subject. I provide an example from *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmedin* (29):

(29) Fr: Faut bien pointer

En: Ought to check it out, though

As in (28), the dummy *il* that would precede *faut* in Standard French is here dropped. In the English translation, the subject of *ought to* is also dropped, thus reproducing the nonstandard quality of the original French even though the subject of this sentence in Standard English would be a pronoun and not dummy *it*. In light of (29), then, (28) is clearly a case in which the translator could have preserved nonstandard usage from French to English but did not. This is a situation parallel to that in which French slang is translated into Standard English despite the availability of an English slang equivalent for the French item.

### 6.3.3 Subject Reduction

The final type of nonstandard French construction I look at is the phonetic reduction of clitic pronoun subjects. As with *ne* dropping and in contrast with subject omission, this phenomenon does not appear to be replicable in English. English subject pronouns cannot be shortened or merged with the following verb as their French counterparts can. For instance, while French *il va* [il va] ('he goes') can become nonstandard [i va], the English subject pronoun *he* cannot be reduced in *he goes*. It might seem as though English contractions, which are possible in some cases, correspond to this phonetic reduction in French. Standard French *je suis* [ʒə sɥi] ('I am') can become nonstandard *j'suis* [ʃɥi]; English *I am* can be shortened to *I'm*. However, as is the case with contractions in the translation of *ne* dropping, English *I'm* remains standard while French *j'suis* is considered nonstandard. In other situations, an English contraction may not even be available to translate a phonetically reduced French subject. Considering these factors, I did not expect to find nonstandard English translations of this particular nonstandard French construction. My data confirms that reduced subject pronouns in

French are essentially always translated with Standard English forms. In (30) and (31), I reproduce (6) and (7), this time with their corresponding English translations:

- (30) Fr: y peuvent pas et courir les gonzesses et compter leur pognon  
 En: they can't run after chicks and count their money at the same time
- (31) Fr: y en a des tas  
 En: they're all over

In (30), French subject pronoun *ils* [il] 'they' is reduced to [i], but in English, the subject *they* is fully present and consequently the nonstandard quality is lost. In (31), dummy *il* is reduced to [i] and merges with *y* [i] in French, but again, in English, the subject pronoun *they* is present without reduction. It is true that *they are* is contracted to *they're*, but as previously discussed, this type of contraction remains Standard English while *y en a* is considered nonstandard usage in French. It should be noted that, as in (28) and (29), the English translation in (31) does not use a dummy subject while the French construction does. In the case of (31), though, losing the nonstandard element in translation is not preventable. This is due to constraints on pronoun subject reduction in English, not to the fact that the English does not use a dummy subject construction where the French does.

In both (30) and (31), the nonstandard quality of the French item is not preserved in translation. The phonetic reduction of French subject pronouns is a type of nonstandard usage whose loss in translation appears to be inevitable. The relative frequency of its occurrence in the French texts means that a fair amount of nonstandard French is bound to be lost in translation.

I have shown in Section 6 that nonstandard French constructions tend to be translated into Standard English constructions, thereby erasing some of the original text's nonstandard quality.

This erasure appears to be less avoidable in cases of *ne* dropping and subject reduction than in cases of subject dropping.

## 7. Conclusion

In examining the treatment of slang in the English translations of four contemporary French novels, I have found that there is consistently a substantial loss in slang density from French to English. Similarly, most of the nonstandard constructions present in the French novels are rendered with Standard English, further erasing the ways in which the original texts depart from standard language. Lexical and syntactic differences between French and English justify some of this loss but do not fully account for the neutralizing of French slang and nonstandard forms in translation. Instead, the translators sometimes inexplicably choose a neutralizing rendering even when a slang equivalent or a similar nonstandard construction is readily available in English. Additionally, while I observed the use of compensation in the translations, it did not appear to be extensive enough to fully mitigate the loss of slang and achieve equivalent slang densities in the original and translated texts.

The results of this study may point to a general pattern in which the slang density of a French novel is always reduced in its English translation. The four novels I included represent the work of three different authors and four different translators (with one translator also the author of the original work). Therefore, slang loss does not just occur in the work of a single, less skilled translator but rather appears to be a widespread phenomenon. There is also some variation in slang density among the French novels, as *Lignes de faille* features far less slang than the other three books. Regardless of the amount of slang in the original text, though, the English version always contains less. The fact that *Le thé au harem d'archi Ahmed*, published some twenty years earlier than the other works, exhibits the highest rate of slang loss suggests

that more recent translations may be preserving slang content more effectively. It is difficult to extrapolate from such a small sample, however, and more books from more eras would have to be analyzed to determine whether slang retention rates in English novel translations are improving over time.

As far as possibilities for further research go, it would also be useful to study whether the loss of slang density I have found here is a universal trend in novel translation. I suspect that this loss is not unique to translation from French to English. Is there then always a tendency for slang register to be lost in translation no matter what the combination of source language and target language? Or is this tendency more likely to be observed with certain language combinations than with others? These questions are worth exploring and should be of interest to linguists, translators, and scholars of literature alike.

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