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The translation of young adult fiction featuring prominent transgender characters

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Bachelor thesis



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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the intersection between translation and the representation of transgender identities by focusing on the translation of young adult fiction featuring transgender characters. The following research question informs this study: Does a young adult novel with (a) transgender character(s) present particular translation problems in respect of the representation of gender identities through characterization? This thesis is motivated by the fact that this area of research is still significantly unexplored. In order to contribute to the existing research, this thesis centers around the identification of translation problems in and the translation of fragments of *I Wish You All The Best*, a young adult novel featuring a transgender protagonist. This was done by means of a translation-oriented text analysis with a focus on characterization. In order to establish typical solutions to the identified translation problems, a discussion of two existing translations of novels featuring transgender characters is carried out. The analyses will be preceded by a discussion of important theoretical aspects, which involve the concept of gender and how this intersects with representation and translation, as well as an investigation of the nature of (transgender) young adult fiction in the Dutch and English literary systems and its translation dynamics. This study shows that characterization plays an important role in young adult novels featuring transgender characters. Therefore, translation problems need to be approached with careful consideration of the characterization of the characters.

## **1. Introduction**

This thesis aims to contribute to the still significantly unexplored intersection between translation and the representation of transgender identities through focusing on the translation of young adult fiction featuring prominent transgender characters. In particular, this thesis will be centered around my own Dutch translation of fragments of the English book *I Wish You All The Best* by Mason Deaver. This book was published in May 2019 and it is a coming-of-age story about someone who comes out as non-binary and all the consequences that has for their life, both positive and negative. To date, no Dutch translation has been published. The following research question informs this study: Does a young adult novel with (a) transgender character(s) present particular translation problems in respect of the representation of gender identities through characterization?

The field of translation studies has only started examining possible intersections with transgender identities in the past decade. Therefore, my aim is to contribute to the small amount of existing literature by identifying particular issues in translating a transgender

themed young adult novel, namely *I Wish You All The Best*, and to propose some solutions. In order to do so, I will first carry out a translation-oriented text analysis of the English source text to identify potential challenges. For the purpose of exploring solutions that are typically viewed as acceptable in the Dutch receiving system, I will consider existing translations of novels in the young adult genre, namely *Every Day* (2012) by David Levithan and *Birthday* (2019) by Meredith Russo and their Dutch translations *Elke Dag* (2013) and *Birthday* (2019) by Suzanne Braam en Margot Reesink respectively. Based on this identification of potential problems and typical solutions, I will then carry out a translation of selected passages of *I Wish You All The Best*, containing the challenges identified in the analysis.

The analysis and translation are preceded by a discussion of pertinent theoretical aspects. In the first part of the theoretical background (Section 2.1), I will explain the construct of gender and how it intersects with representation and translation. The second part (Section 2.2) focuses on the contextualization of my study by investigating the nature of (transgender) young adult fiction in both the English and the Dutch literary systems. I will explore how books with transgender characters feature in this genre in the two systems, drawing primarily on data and reviews from Goodreads (goodreads.com), the world's largest online community for book reviews and recommendations. I will also consider the translation dynamics from English to Dutch in (transgender) young adult fiction. Chapter 3 first presents the translation-oriented text analysis of *I Wish You All The Best* with particular emphasis on how the author has approached the characterization of the protagonist, as a key aspect of the representation of transgender identities in the novel (Section 3.1). This is followed by a discussion of the existing translations of *Every Day* and *Birthday* in order to establish what typical solutions the problems I identified earlier have in the Dutch system (Section 3.2). Chapter 4 consists of an annotated translation of two fragments of *I Wish You All The Best*. The thesis concludes with a summary of findings and reflections on the translations, and possible ideas for future research.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Gender, representation and translation**

#### **2.1.1 The construct of gender**

In order to define what exactly is meant by transgender identities in this thesis, it is important to first establish what is meant by the term *gender*. Over decades, *gender* has become a term to refer to the socially constructed roles and identities of men, women, and gender diverse people. When it comes to gender identities, these can be categorized under two umbrella

terms, namely cisgender and transgender. Cisgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. These people either identify as a cisgender man or a cisgender woman. Other than cisgender, one can also identify as transgender. Within the umbrella term of transgender exist two more umbrella terms, namely those of non-binary transgender people and binary transgender people. Binary transgender people are either transgender women (male to female) or transgender men (female to male).

The gender identity of non-binary transgender people does not fit within the traditional binary system of male and female the same way the identities of binary transgender people do. There are various gender identities that are encompassed under this descriptor, for example non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid and agender. Within the umbrella term of transgender identities, this thesis focuses specifically on people identifying as non-binary and transgender, which is why the term transgender identities is the commonly used phrase throughout this thesis.

### **2.1.2 Gender and representation**

The idea for this Bachelor's thesis draws upon the notion that translations may play an important role in the lives of a minority group such as transgender youth. Through publishing translations, translators contribute to creating more representation by bringing role models for transgender youth to life in more languages. But why is representation so important? Stuart Hall (1996) asked a similar question by asking, "Who needs identity?", noting that "precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (p. 4). Television, social media, but also fiction are examples of such discourses. In the case of fiction, the narratives that exist in fictional stories are the historical and institutional site for these conversations and identities to be addressed. Representation through these discourses should be handled with care as media representations of LGBTQ+ people in both traditional media and new media have the potential to facilitate LGBTQ+ young people's development (Craig and McInroy, 2014).

Not only can representation support marginalized groups, it can also help people from majority groups understand marginalized groups better. A recent study by Orellana et al. (2020) investigated whether exposing cisgender individuals to transgender-related fiction was associated with reduced trans negativity. From their results became clear that those participants who encountered transgender characters reported lower trans negativity than those who read the control story.

Thus, representation becomes important but at the same time particularly complicated when translation comes into play. Translation, in its simplest conceptualization, involves converting words from one language to another in order to share information with audiences of different language backgrounds. However, translation is rarely ever that simple in reality. When it comes to gender identity, different cultures have different words for matters of gender identity. Difficulties are caused not only because of a lack of appropriate words in the target language; different cultures and groups also have different attitudes towards gender identity. Translation rarely ever involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems, yet it is still is one of the main means through which texts of one culture are made available in another (Faiq, 2008). The LGBTQ+ communities have rich and varied terminology for matters relating to gender sexuality, across languages. Each term has its own intricate definition, and translating such terms across cultures requires particular awareness, sensitivity, and familiarity with the LGBTQ+ discourse across languages.

When it comes to translating non-binary gender matters, literal, word-for-word translation usually will not suffice. The translator must have a detailed understanding of how such matters are viewed in the target culture and language. Cultural and social perspectives have to be considered and even legal matters need to be kept in mind for translations for certain audiences.

### **2.1.3 Gender and translation**

The field of translation studies has only started examining possible intersections with transgender identities in the past decade. The special issue of the journal *Transgender Studies Quarterly* dedicated to translation (Gramling and Dutta, 2016) was the first elaborate work on the topic. Later, it was followed by a number of chapters exploring transgender and non-binary identities in two collected volumes on queerness in translation (Baer and Kaindl, 2018; Epstein and Gillet, 2017), as well as a book from Douglas Robinson (2019) on the link between transgender and translation. A recent study by Spišiaková (2020) contributed to the literature by highlighting the role of translators and editors in creating meaningful changes in the lives of invisible minorities through the comparison of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which is considered to be a groundbreaking work in lesbian literature, and its Czech translation. However, it can also be read as a narrative with a transgender protagonist. This is in part supported by the fact that the hero of the story is born with a female body but is named Stephen, creating a sense of gendered dissonance throughout the novel. This article asks what happens when this masculine name changes into a feminine one

in translation, and explores the socio-political circumstances and publishing norms that have motivated this change.

Section 2.1 has focused on explaining the concept of *gender* in order to understand what *transgender* means and why it is used throughout this thesis. Furthermore, its intersections with representation and translation have been explored. Section 2.2 will further contextualize the current study by exploring transgender young adult fiction in the English and the Dutch literary systems, and what is known about the translation dynamics between the two.

## **2.2 Contextualization**

### **2.2.1. The nature of (transgender) young adult fiction in the English and the Dutch literary systems**

*I Wish You All The Best, Every Day* and *Birthday* can all be categorized as young adult novels. No set definition of the young adult genre exists, but in general it refers to novels targeted at a teenage audience, and including teenage protagonists who go through typical teenage problems regarding love, sex, school, friends and parents for example; problems that are regarded as coming of age themes (Stephens, 2007). Such themes are what makes these novels contemporary and realistic, since they are set in the current age and deal with present issues. In addition, most young adult fiction includes all kinds of cultures, genders and sexualities, as is the case for the novels investigated in this thesis. Other aspects that are often prominent in young adult fiction are that the story is often told from the teenage perspective and is often stylistically easily accessible for young adults. Kokesh and Sternadori (2015) found that young adult fiction can be of great influence on teenage readers' gender identity construction and social attitudes.

As the three books studied in this thesis are all written in English by American authors and the target language is Dutch, it is relevant to investigate the nature of young adult fiction in both the American-English and the Dutch literary system.

### **2.2.2 Young adult fiction featuring transgender characters in the English literary system**

The number of English young adult novels featuring transgender characters has significantly risen over the past five years or so. This becomes clear from, for example, a list of young adult books featuring transgender characters on Goodreads in 2013 that featured 63 books (Goodreads, YA books with Transgender Characters, 2013) while a similar list from 2018

featured 104 books (Goodreads, Trans YA Fiction, 2018). To gain a better understanding of how such novels are received by the public, I have selected three novels that frequently appeared in lists of young adult novels featuring transgender characters, namely *Gracefully Grayson* (2014) by Ami Polonsky, *I Am J* (2011) by Cris Beam and *Felix Ever After* (2020) by Kacen Callender. I draw information from reviews that are available on Goodreads to construct the reception of these novels.

*Gracefully Grayson* (2014) by Ami Polonsky, which has received a total of 5659 reviews on Goodreads, was, in general, positively rated with 39% of reviews scoring it five out of five stars and 40% four out of five stars (Goodreads, *Gracefully Grayson* by Ami Polonsky, 2014). The book tells the story twelve-year-old Grayson and the challenges she faces as she reveals she is transgender to the world and follows her in her search for identity and acceptance. It is mostly praised for the honest and realistic way in which Polonsky portrays Grayson's struggle. Interestingly, many readers who rated the book either one or two stars seemed to disagree. Readers suggest that Polonsky did not have a full understanding of what it truly means to be transgender because she did not fully address certain issues that were introduced. Readers blamed this on the fact that she is cisgender herself. It was also often brought up that it would be more interesting to read a book about transgenders written by an author who is transgender themselves. Furthermore, the story came across as "depressing" as it put the emphasis on the struggles Grayson faces, which makes the books acceptable if the goal is to introduce the concept of transgender to cisgender teenagers. According to some readers, for the sake of transgender readers who might be struggling, it would have been more useful to include more representation of positive (adult) support for Grayson.

*I am J* (2011) by Cris Beam has received a total of 6876 ratings on Goodreads and was generally positively received: 31% of the ratings are five out of five stars and 30% of the ratings are four out of five stars (Goodreads, *I Am J* by Cris Beam, 2011). The book tells the story of how 17-year-old J tries to come to terms with the fact that he is transgender. What is significant about many of the reviews that came with five star ratings is that the book is often praised for being informative about those who struggle with their gender identity, especially for people who are unfamiliar with the topic. However, the reviews with one or two stars should be taken seriously here as well. The majority of the negative reviews focused on the behaviour displayed by J in the story: It was often pointed out by readers who identify as transgender themselves how this book is not a good representation of a transgender person, as J is too stereotypical and has no depth to his character. Furthermore, J uses his frustration and

the prejudice he faces as a transgender teenager as a justification for being “a total jerk.” This includes him being homophobic, biphobic and misogynistic; behaviour which he is never challenged for. As with *Gracefully Grayson* (2014), the portrayal of transgender people is seriously criticized by transgender readers, whereas many cisgender readers seem to feel positive towards the story.

*Felix Ever After* (2020) by Kacen Callender tells the story of a seventeen-year-old transgender teenager who tries to deal with figuring out his gender identity while also falling in love for the first time. Interestingly, this book, released in 2020, has received a total of 8398 ratings, which is more ratings than both *Gracefully Grayson* (2014) and *I Am J* (2011) have received (Goodreads, 2020, *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender). It is also worth mentioning that the book has received no one or two star ratings on Goodreads. A possible explanation for this is that currently, books about transgender identity receive more (positive) media attention as being transgender has become more accepted than it was six and nine years ago. The book deals with difficult topics such as transphobia and being bullied, but the overall opinion seems to be that the topics were expertly handled by the author, who is transgender themselves. In general, whether or not the author identifies as transgender themselves seems to be important for the credibility of this book. It is also clear that readers focus strongly on characterization in their response to young adult novels featuring transgender characters.

### **2.2.3. Young adult fiction featuring transgender characters in the Dutch literary system**

When researching Dutch young adult books featuring transgender characters, it became clear that there are significantly fewer books available than there are in English. Part of the explanation is that the Dutch book market in general is much smaller than the English book market – a size difference which naturally also transfers to the young adult market. However, it also appears that the genre is less well established in the Dutch literary system than in the English. In order to find out whether another part of the explanation is that Dutch young adult books featuring transgender characters are not as positively received, I will expand on the Goodreads reviews of two Dutch young adult books featuring transgender characters.

*Meisje van Mars* (2011) by Anna Woltz and Vicky Janssen tells the story of the transition of a teenage girl who was born in a boy’s body. From the 14 reviews available on Goodreads it becomes clear that readers see the book is easy to read and highly educational for teenagers who want to learn more about gender identity (Goodreads, *Meisje van Mars* by Anna Woltz, 2011). Furthermore, the book is based on a true story, namely that of Vicky Janssen, a transgender woman.

*Jongensdroom* (2007) by Lorna Minkman is about a teenage boy who deals with the insecurities, doubts and feelings that come with being transgender. Having read the book myself, I would argue that the author has done a good job when it comes to sketching the topic of being transgender as an introduction to cisgender teenagers. It does not delve very deep into the issues that come with being transgender, which seems to be a tendency for most Dutch books in the genre.

Compared to the English literary system, Dutch books featuring transgender characters still seem to be massively underdeveloped when it comes to the storylines, are much less common, and much less widely read and commented on. It therefore appears that the English literary system has a significantly bigger market for books featuring transgender characters, and a much wider and more vocal readership, than the Dutch literary system has, which has certain implications for translations of such books from English to Dutch.

#### **2.2.4 The translation dynamics from English to Dutch in (transgender) young adult fiction**

Translating literature is a challenging practice for every genre. It requires a translator capable of mediating, among others, between cultures, different text types and translation purposes. This means that it is not enough for the target text to be merely understandable to its reader, but it also has to mirror the literary value and the effect on the audience of the original. No other audience, however, is as dynamic and diverse as the category of young adults. As quite little research has been done so far, however, it is difficult to determine the exact translation problems of young adult literature (Tempert, 2013). This lack of research stems from the fact that young adult literature in itself is quite a recent phenomenon and as Hunt (1996) points out, when a phenomenon such as young adult literature has only recently developed, it takes some time for criticism and research to get started (p. 5). As a result, Hunt (1996) argues that what has been written about the challenges of translating young adult literature is derived from scholarship on children's literature. However, young adult literature is different from children's literature, although it is not clear to what degree assumptions about children's literature can simply be transferred to young adult literature.

Tempert (2013) offers two principles of translating children's literature that should also be taken into account for young adult literature. The first principle entails the adjusting of a text to make it appropriate and useful for the receiving audience, namely children. The second principle entails adjusting the text and plot to enable to child to understand and read it. However, it should be noted that these principles are not quite self-evident. Adjustment and

simplification, for example, could be seen as patronising to the receiving audience and does an injustice to the literary integrity of the source text. Thus, perhaps the most important issue relating to translating novels for an audience of children is to what extent there is a need to translate didactically.

The same tensions are likely to apply to the translation of young adult literature. When the literature includes the topic of gender identity, this could further complicate matters.

In addition, young adult literature, like children's literature, finds itself in the periphery of the literary polysystem, which means that the translator cannot only allow himself greater liberties in terms of translating, but also that texts are often translated according to target culture norms (Tempert, 2018). The theory, introduced by Itamar Even-Zohar (1978), proposes that a literary work is a part of a literary system and is thus not studied in isolation. When a subgenre is positioned in the periphery of the literary polysystem, this means that the translation of the literature of that subgenre is influenced by the cultural norms of the works that occupy the central position of the literary polysystem. Against the background of the discussion in the preceding section, it seems likely that young adult novels are more peripheral in the Dutch literary system than in the English literary system, suggesting that pressures towards conforming to target-system norms may be particularly strongly felt in the Dutch system.

There are several translation problems that do not occur in children's literature, but do arise in young adult literature and are mainly related to youth language (Tempert, 2013). Youth language is a non-standard variety of languages which does not possess a set of rules and does not (yet) occur in dictionaries if it has recently developed. An important problem related to youth language is its high circulation rate. Particularly dialogue has the ability to date a text very quickly, and may cause it to lose its appeal with the readers. However, it is important to maintain youth language as much as possible in the translation, as it is characteristic for the young adult genre. Code-switching is a relevant problem as well, and two important aspects of this problem should be kept in mind: It is often used as a stylistic device, and thus an important part of the text, and code-switching may have many pragmatic functions.

Additionally, young adult fiction often features contentious topics which may pose challenges for the translator who might find themselves trapped between two conflicting sets of norms regarding how such a topic should be handled for teenage audiences. Struggling with gender identity is an example of such a topic.

Translators working on the translation of young adult novels (featuring transgender characters) from English to Dutch are therefore likely to encounter numerous problems relating to language, characterization, and the treatment of contentious topics. However, besides the fact that few original Dutch books featuring transgender characters are available (see Section 2.2.3), the number of English books featuring transgender characters translated into Dutch available is also quite small. This means that translators do not necessarily have very widespread “models” for how to deal with this genre, which makes their decisions all the more interesting.

### **2.2.5 About *I Wish You All The Best* by Mason Deaver**

*I Wish You All The Best* was written by Mason Deaver and published by Push in May of 2019 and is considered to be one of the first young adult books featuring a non-binary protagonist written by a non-binary author. Born and raised in a small North Carolina town, Mason Deaver is an award-nominated, bestselling author and designer living in Charlotte, North Carolina. One of their main motivations to write *I Wish You All The Best* was that they wanted to put out a book that would have helped them massively when they were a teenager. They are also an advocate for the importance of queer young adult fiction.

*I Wish You All The Best* is written in the first person from the perspective of 18-year-old Ben DeBacker. The story follows them from the moment they come out to their parents as non-binary. They are thrown out of their house and forced to move in with their estranged older sister, Hannah, and her husband, Thomas, whom Ben has never even met. Struggling with an anxiety disorder worsened by their parents’ rejection, they come out only to Hannah, Thomas, and their therapist and try to keep a low profile in a new school. But Ben's attempts to survive the last half of senior year unnoticed are disturbed when Nathan Allan, a funny and charismatic student, decides to take Ben under his wing. As Ben and Nathan's friendship develops, their feelings for each other begin to change, and what started as a disastrous turn of events looks like it might just be a chance to start a happier new life. At turns heartbreaking and joyous, *I Wish You All the Best* is both a celebration of life, friendship, and love, and a shining example of hope in the face of hardship.

### **3. Analysis of the case studies**

As has already been suggested in the preceding discussion, the way in which transgender characters are represented is a crucial dimension of young adult novels’ engagement with gender issues, and a key focus of readers’ responses (see Section 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). At the level

of the narrative, characterization is therefore of key importance. Thus, in the analyses of the source text as well as other translated novels that follow, characterization will be a key focus.

Any character in a story can be described in terms of a network of character traits. These traits, however, may not always appear as such in the text. Rimmon-Kenan (1994) argues that, in principle, any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character. She differentiates two basic types of textual indicators of character, namely direct definition and indirect presentation (p. 59). The first type names the trait by an adjective, a noun or a part of speech. The second type, on the other hand, does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving to the reader the task of inferring the quality they imply. This can be done through, for example, an action, speech, or environment. The power of young adult novels featuring transgender characters in particular lays in the way the author has approached characterization because of the importance of positive representation of minority groups.

In the first section of this chapter (Section 3.1), I will establish whether the characterization of characters with transgender identities poses any particular translation problems through a translation-oriented text analysis of *I Wish You All The Best*. Here, Christiane Nord's method for source text analysis will be used to categorize the pragmatic, socio-cultural, linguistic and source text specific translation problems (Nord, 2010, p. 147) found in the text, with links made to questions of characterization. An important principle of Nord's method is the Laswell formula, which is "who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" (p. 145). This exemplifies the emphasis Nord puts on the relationship between source text analysis and target text function within a functional translation concept. Nord's model of text analysis in translation consists of extratextual and intratextual factors which should be analyzed both in the source and the target text and, subsequently, compared.

Pragmatic translation problems involve the differences between the setting (time and place) of the source text and the target text. In addition, the pragmatic level also includes the differences of knowledge between the source and the target audiences (p. 147). Nord's socio-cultural level includes translations problems that are specific to two cultures and consists of differences in norms and conventions between the source and target culture (p. 147). The linguistic category consists of differences between the target and source language (p. 147). The last category includes source text-specific translations problems. Solutions to these problems are not always straightforward, because every element has to be looked at separately and the translation often depends on the context (p. 147).

In order to establish what typical solutions the problems that were identified in the

translation-oriented text analysis have in the Dutch system of translated youth novels, the second section will consist of a discussion of the existing translations of *Every Day* and *Birthday*.

### **3.1 Translation-oriented text analysis of *I Wish You All The Best***

#### **3.1.1 Pragmatic translation problems**

*I Wish You All The Best* is set in North Carolina in the United States, which means that it is possible that certain laws and attitudes regarding transgender people are different compared to the Netherlands. The Netherlands has some of the most progressive LGBTQ+ rights in the world. Since 2013, transgender people have been allowed to legally change their gender on birth certificates and other official documents without undergoing sex reassignment surgery. In 2020, it was announced that the Netherlands will be the first country in the world to abolish gender markers on official identity document from 2025. In the United States, however, there is more division when it comes to transgender rights. Part of the reason for this is that states are allowed to make their own laws about, for example, birth certificates. Most states permit name and sex changes, although some require sex reassignment surgery to do so.

Furthermore, transgender people in the United States face two major legal issues within the healthcare system: access to health care for gender transitioning and discrimination by health care workers. Therefore, generally, young adults in the United States are more likely to have negative attitudes towards transgender people compared to young adults in the Netherlands. The translator will usually decide that the translated novel also takes place in the United States, which means that the laws and attitudes can remain the same and do not have to be changed. However, the translator still has to deal with the problem of having to find a way of bridging the gap in the knowledge of the source and the target audiences. Knowledge of the context is not necessarily a given for the target audience, and so the translator will need to consider ways of filling in the picture for the reader of the translation. This is particularly important since the main character is drawn against this background, and readers of the translation thus require this contextual knowledge in order to gain comparable information regarding the character and their challenges.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Deaver did not randomly choose North Carolina as the setting of the book (Lewis, 2019). Deaver grew up in North Carolina and has experienced first-hand that the south of America is generally not very queer-friendly. As a consequence, they wanted to write a mostly happy queer book set in North Carolina to show queer teenagers who live there that they are not alone.

The second pragmatic aspect is the difference between the time the novel was written and when it was published in translation. However, *I Wish You All The Best* was published in 2019 and the difference in time will therefore currently not pose a problem when translating the novel.

### 3.1.2 Socio-cultural translation problems

*I Wish You All The Best* is set in the United States and because of this the story includes certain culture-specific elements (CSEs) that are specific to the American culture. In order to be able to translate CSEs accurately, the translator should be familiar with both the source and the target culture and know whether or not a certain CSE from the source language is known in the target language. CSEs are usually a large part of the characterization in young adult novels, because culture plays a big role in the lives of teenagers and is often used as a way to express themselves in the form of music, television and movies, and certain customs and traditions.

There are different ways to deal with the translation of CSEs. Some CSEs are known in the target language and do not have to be translated in order for the reader to know what they mean. Examples of such CSEs would be Twitter, Youtube (Deaver, 2019, p. 34) and Facebook (p. 37), as these are widely known apps in the Netherlands and Dutch teenagers will most likely be familiar with them. The same goes for the mention of a movie such as *Home Alone* (p. 3). In some cases, however, the translator could decide to naturalize the translation and choose a Dutch equivalent for their translation. The American school and grading system, for example, differs from the Dutch school and grading system.

### 3.1.3 Linguistic translation problems

The difference between English and Dutch verb tenses is a frequently occurring translation problem in the text. In English, the past simple is often used to refer to something that has happened in the past:

“For ten years **you left** me with them. With a note and a phone number, which might as well have been a big ‘fuck you, I’m done, you’re on your own now, kid!’” (Deaver, p. 267)

In some cases, the translator could choose to translate the past simple with a present perfect, as this is more common in Dutch. However, the translator could also choose to preserve the past simple, when it does not refer to a specific incident in the past.

The translation of the present continuous should also be carefully considered:

Fifteen minutes later, **I'm sitting** in Thomas's car, wearing the still too-big shirt, jeans that are so long I have to roll them up three times, and socks that **are slowly pooling** around my ankles. (Deaver, p. 23)

A possible solution is to try and maintain the present continuous, but this can result in sentences that become forced in Dutch as the present continuous does not have a directly corresponding verb form in Dutch. At the linguistic level, a more logical solution would be not to focus on keeping the continuous in the translation, but to change the sentence structure and thus make the sentences sound more natural in Dutch. Sometimes, however, there may be an effect in how the reader experiences the events, the other characters, and the perspective of the character (the characterization). The use of the present continuous, especially in combination with the first-person narration in this case, allows the reader to feel as though they are in the moment with the main character. Possibly, moving away from the progressive aspect alters how the reader identifies with the experiences of the character.

### 3.1.4 Source text-specific translation problems

Source text-specific translation problems are problems that only occur when translating a certain text. This means that the solutions to these problems cannot necessarily be applied to other texts (Nord, p. 147). In the case of this novel, this category includes terminology related to transgender people and their transition,

One of the most prominent translation problems encountered when translating young adult fiction with transgender protagonists is the specific transgender related terminology that is used in reference to the character. Because of the first person perspective in *I Wish You All The Best*, Ben DeBacker often mentions certain transgender terminology in reference to themselves, and this terminology thus becomes an important means of characterization. There are multiple ways to translate terminology, and they are similar to the way in which CSEs can be translated. The most straightforward option is to use the Dutch equivalent for the English word. This can generally be used for most of the terminological units. First of all, there is the more general terminology that refers to being transgender, such as “non-binary” (Deaver, 2019, p. 14) and “queer” (p. 21), which are also the terms for which a Dutch equivalent exists: “non-binair” and “queer” respectively.

Secondly, there are the words that do have a Dutch equivalent, but it is not one that can easily be found. An example of such a word is “gender binary” (p. 225) and “gender dysmorphia” (p. 165). Especially the translation of gender dysmorphia is one that is up for debate. The Dutch equivalent is “ingebeelde lelijkheid”, but it is often left untranslated as

well. The same goes for the abbreviation “LGBTQIAP+” (p. 51).

Another possible solution to translate terminology is to make the translation more explicit by adding more information than is given in the source text. This is a more didactic approach to translation, but because the novels have been written for a young adult audience this may sometimes be the best solution (see Section 2.2.4). On the other hand, because the novels are not only written for a transgender audience, much terminology is explained in the text already. This has to be kept in mind when translating the passages, because sometimes adding information might seem to be a logical solution, but certain terminology could have been explained earlier in the novel already.

Ben uses “they/them” pronouns, which are often used by non-binary people. However, the translation of “they/them” pronouns poses a problem in the highly binary Dutch language: Whereas in English, “they” and “their” are commonly used when talking about someone who does not identify as either male or female in the third person, there is no neutral pronoun available in Dutch. Non-binary Dutch people often use “hen/hun”, “diegene/diens” or “die/diens”, but these pronouns have not yet found their way into daily language use. The most important reason for this is that the pronouns are grammatically incorrect in the Dutch language.

In conclusion, there is not one way to translate all transgender terminology. Every single terminological unit has to be considered individually and a decision has to be made about which solution is the best choice in a certain situation, also given how such a decision is likely to impact characterization. The seemingly most desirable solution is to find a Dutch equivalent if possible, also to facilitate the identification of the reader with the character who is described using these terms.

### **3.1.5 Conclusion**

The translation-oriented source text analysis shows that transgender terminology is an important aspect of the characterization of Ben DeBacker in *I Wish You All The Best*, which is also likely to be the most difficult aspect to translate. There is more than one way to translate the terminology and every term has to be considered individually, but also in relation to its contribution to the discursive construction of the character. In contrast, the pragmatic elements and the linguistic elements are relatively easy to tackle. However, it should be noted that because of the differences in transgender laws between the United States and the Netherlands, attitudes towards and therefore knowledge about transgender people of the source text audience and the target text audience can differ. The translator has to find a way to

bridge this gap. Translation choices at the pragmatic and linguistic levels may introduce subtle shifts in characterization. Finally, the socio-cultural problems include the CSEs, which all have to be looked at individually: some can remain the same, other have to be changed into a Dutch equivalent – again, with the aim of ensuring believable and relatable characterization for Dutch readers.

Overall, the most desirable solution would be to maintain as much of the source text as possible, but this is not always doable since it is possible that some terms do not exist in the target language. It is not entirely clear to what extent it is necessary to translate references to transgender people without being more explicit. The knowledge the source and target audience have regarding transgender aspects is likely to be the same. Both the source and the target audiences include teenagers between the age of about fourteen and twenty who do not necessarily have any knowledge of what being transgender is or what a transgender person has to go through in life. Even though the age range is very broad and the novel has to be accessible for everyone in this age range, there could always be teens that have more prior knowledge about transgender people than others.

It can be concluded that in the case of many translation problems in *I Wish You All The Best*, especially those related to transgender (terminology), the solution is not always self-evident. Therefore, Section 3.2 will present an analysis of the existing Dutch translations of two transgender young adult novels.

### **3.2. Discussion of the existing translations of *Every Day* and *Birthday***

In order to examine what typical solutions specifically the transgender related translation problems identified in *I Wish You All The Best* have in the Dutch literary system, this section will present a discussion of such problems in *Every Day* and *Birthday* and their existing Dutch translations, with a particular emphasis on matters of characterization.

#### **3.2.1 *Every Day***

*Every Day* was written by David Levithan and published in 2012. The novel has been translated by Suzanne Braam and was published in the Netherlands as *Elke Dag* in 2013. It tells the story of A who, instead of being a person with their own body and gender, wakes up in different body every day. One day, A wakes up in the body of a transgender boy named Vic.

Even though there is only one chapter in this book that involves a transgender person

and it is not necessarily the focus of the novel, I still decided to use it for my analysis because the translator has made some interesting choices regarding the translation of the occurring transgender terminology, which may be indicative of approaches to the translation of terminology identified as a translation problem in Section 3.1.

In general, Braam has added more information than is given in the source text. The explicit translation is already apparent in the first sentence of Vic's chapter:

Even before I open my eyes, I like Vic. **Biologically female, gendered male.** Living within the definition of his own truth, just like me. (Levithan, 2012, p. 293)

This has been translated as:

Nog voor ik mijn ogen open mag ik Vic al. **Biologisch vrouwelijk, maar volkomen mannelijk in zijn doen en laten. Voor zijn gevoel is hij ook een jongen.** Hij leeft binnen de definitie van zijn eigen waarheid, net als ik. (Levithan, 2013, p. 199)

Here, Braam has chosen to translate “gendered male” as “maar volkomen mannelijk in zijn doen en laten. Voor zijn gevoel is hij ook een jongen”, which adds much more information. It appears to be an attempt to provide an accessible definition of what “gendered male” means which could be seen as a didactical approach. Furthermore, translating the sentence the way Braam has done seems to misrepresent what being transgender means and makes the sentence somewhat more periphrastic, as “volkomen mannelijk in zijn doen en laten” does not necessarily seem to specify that he is transgender. Females that act and dress as men do not necessarily identify as transgender. Therefore, I argue that the translation misrepresents what *transgender* means.

The next time Braam translates a variation of “gendered male” she chooses a more simplistic translation:

“My name's Vic. I'm a biological female, but my **gender** is male” (Levithan 2012: 298).

This has been translated as:

“Ik heet Vic. Biologisch ben ik vrouwelijk, maar mijn **geslacht** is mannelijk” (Levithan, 2013, p. 202).

If the translator had used this in the first example, the meaning would have been clear too and there was no need to make the translation more explicit, and thereby (probably unintentionally) ambiguous. Furthermore, Braam's translation of “gender” is also interesting in this passage. In Dutch, “geslacht” is used to refer to the biological sex – and not to “gender”. Therefore, this is potentially a problematic choice.

In the following passage, A enters Vic's memories and finds out how life was for him

when he was younger:

Some of Vic's friends understood, even at thirteen and fourteen. Others were freaked out – the girls more than the boys. To the boys, Vic had always been the tagalong, the **nonsexual** friend. This didn't change that. (Levithan, 2012, p. 295)

This has been translated as:

Een paar vrienden van Vic begrepen het, zelfs toen ze dertien en veertien waren. Anderen werden hysterisch – de meisjes meer dan de jongens. Voor de jongens was Vic altijd al de **aseksuele** vriend geweest. En dit veranderde er niets aan. (Levithan, 2013, p. 200)

Here, “nonsexual friend” has been translated as “aseksuele vriend.” Translating “nonsexual” as “aseksueel” is not wrong by definition, but it depends on the context whether it is the right decision. The term “aseksueel” is used to refer to a person who has no sexual attraction to anyone, but can still fall in love, which is not accurate in this passage. The other definition originated from biology and refers to animals that can asexually reproduce. Nonsexual means “not of, relating to, or characterized by sex or sexuality” and in this case refers to the fact that Vic's friends do not see his gender, but just a person. The term “asexual” is not used in Dutch to describe nonsexual people.

The analysis presented here shows that the characterization of Vic contains a relatively large amount of transgender terminology. The translator tackles this by using a more didactical approach than has been used by the source text, but this sometimes results in less than optimal translation choices, which may alter the reader's understanding of the character in the target text, compared to the source text.

### **3.2.2 Birthday**

*Birthday* was written by Meredith Russo and published in 2019. The novel has been translated by Margot Reesink and was published in the Netherlands in the same year. Inspired by Russo's personal experiences as a transgender woman, the story follows Eric and Morgan, a young transgender woman. Two kids, born on the same day, at the same time, in the same place. They have always shared this one day together, but as they grow up they begin to grow apart. The reader meets them once a year on their birthday for six years, starting at thirteen and ending at eighteen. The story is told from both Eric's and Morgan's perspective, which shows how both of them are struggling during their teenage years: Eric is figuring out who he is and how he fits into the world while Morgan is trying to come to terms with her gender identity. Over the years, they drift apart, come together, fight, make up, and ultimately, realize

how they will always be a part of each other.

Despite the fact that we only get to meet with Eric and Morgan once a year, Russo has done a tremendous job at pulling the reader into the emotional rollercoaster Morgan in particular is going through as a closeted transgender woman:

I peeked around the couch, cookie hanging from my teeth, and saw one of the men running for something – president maybe – say that of course he would consider nominating gay person to the Supreme Court, not only that, but a lesbian, a bisexual, or even a transgender person. I didn't know what transgender meant, but I felt what it meant, and I knew part of e felt good to hear a man that important say something like that (Russo, May 2019, p. 141-142).

This passage has been translated as:

Met het koekje tussen mijn tanden gluurde ik om de bank heen en zag een van de mannen die zich ergens kandidaat voor hadden gesteld – voor het presidentschap misschien. Hij zei dat hij natuurlijk zou overwegen om iemand te nomineren voor het Hoogerechtshof als diegene homoseksueel was, en dat niet alleen, maar ook als diegene lesbisch, biseksueel en transgender was. Ik wist niet wat transgender betekende, maar ik voelde aan wat het betekende, en ik wist dat ik het op de een of andere manier fijn vond om zo'n belangrijk man zoiets te horen zeggen (Russo, October 2019, p. 119).

Except for the word transgender, this passage does not necessarily include terminology related to being transgender; it is, however, an example of how Russo tries to make the reader feel what the character is going through. Such passages are what makes the character realistic and relatable. It is important to translate such passages as accurately as possible because, after all, the reader of the target text has to experience a similar feeling as the reader of the source text.

The following passage includes a similar example, albeit less hopeful than the previous example:

This way that I feel, this... obsession, it's not a thing that I want and it's not a thing that I am, it's something I have. Like a disease. Mom had cancer. I have *autogynephilia* – I saw that word online. Lots of people hate that idea and say it's **transphobic**, that it makes it a disease, but this feels like a disease (Russo, May 2019, p. 153).

This has been translated as:

Zoals ik me nu voel, die... obsessie, dat wil ik niet en dat ben ik niet, het is iets wat ik heb. Net als een ziekte. Mam had kanker. Ik heb *autogynefilie* – dat woord ben ik

online tegengekomen. Er zijn veel mensen die het een rotwoord vinden en zeggen dat het neerkomt op **transseksuelenhaat**, dat transseksualiteit daarmee een ziekte wordt, maar dit voelt ook als een ziekte. (Russo, October 2019, p. 129)

Again, this passage shows Morgan's psychological struggle with her coming to terms with her identity. In this passage, she is specifically dealing with internalized transphobia. The descriptions of these internal battles she is fighting are what makes the character realistic and relatable for transgender readers, but at the same time understandable for cisgender readers as well.

Furthermore, "transphobic" has been translated as "transseksuelenhaat." This translation conveys the same 'experience' of Morgan, namely that what they experience is like a disease. Furthermore, the translator has chosen to make the translation more explicit, as she could also have chosen to use, for example, the words "transhaat" or "transfobie."

The following passage contains a conversation that takes place right after Morgan has come out as transgender to Eric.

"If you ask something I don't wanna answer, I'll tell you. And like I was saying, surgery is expensive and.. whatever. For now my plan is to start taking hormones, have the little bit of facial hair I've got removed, get my name changed, and see how I feel." "What will the hormones do?" he says, and now there's a naked innocent curiosity in his eyes. (...) "It varies," I say. (...) "From person to person. Less body hair. Softer skin. My hair won't fall out like Dad's. Uh. You know. Fat distribution. Thighs...boobs..." (Russo, May 2019, p. 262-263).

This has been translated as:

"Als je iets vraagt waar ik geen antwoord op wil geven, dan zeg ik het wel. En zoals ik zei, een operatie is duur en... nou ja. Voorlopig ga ik beginnen met hormonen, ga dat kleine beetje haar in m'n gezicht laten verwijderen, mijn naam veranderen en dan kijk ik hoe ik me voel." "Wat voor effect hebben die hormonen?" vraagt hij en nu zie ik pure, onschuldige nieuwsgierigheid in zijn ogen. (...) "Het verschilt per person. Minder lichaamshaar. Een zachtere huid. Mijn haar gaat niet uitvallen zoals dat van pap. Eh. Je weet wel. Vetverdeling. Dijen... borsten..." (Russo, October 2019, p. 221)

Here, Russo uses Morgan to explain something to Eric and indirectly to the reader, by making Eric ask Morgan what hormones do to your body. By making transgender terminology an explanation from another character, it does not feel as if it is explained to the reader but rather to another character.

It has become clear that in order to establish the characterization of Morgan, Russo has

made use of Morgan's speech as a way of presenting her feelings and character traits to the reader. Furthermore, Morgan's human environment, especially Eric, their friendship as well as Eric's individual thoughts about Morgan, helps the reader get to know Morgan. Therefore, it seems to be important for the annotated translation to ensure that these thoughts and feelings are conveyed correctly.

### 3.2.3 Conclusion

The strategy of the translators seems to depend on the way in which the writers of the two discussed novels have filled in the characterization of the transgender characters. In *Birthday*, not many gender-related terms have been used and most of them have been incorporated into the story and explained in the context. Sometimes, Russo has a character explain the terminology to another character, so that it comes across as a natural element in the novel rather than as an explanation to the reader. Morgan's speech and her interaction with her environment especially seem to be important factors in the way she is established as a transgender protagonist, as it clearly conveys her feelings. As a result, it seems as if Reesink did not find it necessary to use a didactical approach and for many of the transgender terminology units, a Dutch term seems to exist. In *Every Day*'s chapter about Vic, significantly more transgender terminology is used in order to portray Vic. When analyzing the translation of the transgender terminology, it became clear that Braam has used a more didactical approach in her translation in comparison to the source text. It seems as if she would rather make sure that readers understand every word or passage, instead of finding a Dutch word that means something similar. There are some questions about the translator's familiarity with LGBTQ+ terms, evident in some problematic translations.

## 4. Annotated translations

For the annotated translation, two passages from *I Wish You All The Best* have been chosen (see Appendix A). The passages have been selected on the basis of the fact that they pose particular challenges for the representation of transgender identity through the use of terminology in characterization, identified in the preceding sections as of key importance (and posing specific challenges) for young adult novels dealing with transgender identities. Each section in this chapter will start with a contextualization of the translation passage. In addition, the most prominent translation problems present in the passage will be outlined beforehand; there are also the problems attended to in the footnoted annotations to each translation. As the translation is Dutch, the footnotes are written in Dutch as well.

#### 4.1 Sexuality and identity (177-178)

This passage takes place when Ben sits down with their sister, Hannah, to let her paint their nails. It is important to note that at this point, Ben already has come out to Hannah. Out of pure curiosity, Hannah asks Ben if they want to talk about cute boys, and if they are even into boys at all. This results in an honest conversation about sexuality and identity in which Ben expresses their thoughts and doubts about who they are attracted to. It gives the reader an idea of how complicated it can be for people who fall outside of the gender binary to label their sexuality, both through Ben's thoughts and their conversation with Hannah.

Translation problems specific for this genre in this passage include the terminology Ben uses regarding sexuality and gender identity.

“Dus, hoe zit het met het hele seksualiteit ding<sup>1</sup>?” vraagt Hannah.

“Eerlijk gezegd ben ik daar nog steeds niet over uit.” Ik voel me namelijk aangetrokken tot meer mannelijk presenterende mensen, maar een non-binaire identiteit<sup>2</sup> is niet iets wat meteen duidelijk is, dus de leuke jongen in het café zou ook zomaar non-binair kunnen zijn.

Maar dan<sup>3</sup> voel ik me nog steeds tot hem aangetrokken. En trouwens, ik heb niet bepaald een gender<sup>4</sup> en homoseksualiteit houdt in dat je geïnteresseerd bent in hetzelfde geslacht.

Zoals ik al zei. Het is ingewikkeld.

“Dus je bent niet meer homoseksueel?”

“Dat is de grote vraag.” Ik zie mezelf als biseksueel. Ik ben geïnteresseerd in jongens

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<sup>1</sup> Hier stond “So what about the sexuality thing?” in de brontekst. In de eerste instantie zou ik ervoor hebben gekozen om het woord “thing” te vertalen met, bijvoorbeeld, “gebeuren” omdat het woord “ding” naar mijn idee te onduidelijk is in het Nederlands. Echter, uit de rest van de passage blijkt dat vage woorden zoals “thing” en “stuff” typisch zijn voor Hannah's taalgebruik, en dus voor haar personage. Dit is karakteristiek voor het young adult genre, zoals ook genoemd in Sectie 2.2. Vandaar dat ik ervoor gekozen heb om “thing” te vertalen met “ding.”

<sup>2</sup> In de brontekst stond “non-binaryness,” wat, net zoals “non-binairheid” niet echt een woord is, vandaar de uiteindelijke vertaling als “een non-binaire identiteit.”

<sup>3</sup> In het Nederlands worden partikels, vooral in de spreektaal, meer gebruikt dan in het Engels, en om de tekst idiomatisch correct en vloeiend te laten klinken heb ik af en toe in mijn vertaling dan ook partikels toegevoegd, in dit geval “dan.” Daarbij zorgt het typisch Nederlandse gebruik van partikels ervoor dat de Nederlandse lezer zich gemakkelijker kan identificeren met het personage.

<sup>4</sup> Waar Braam er in haar vertaling van *Every Day* voor heeft gekozen om “gender” te vertalen met “geslacht,” heb ik ervoor gekozen om “gender” te behouden. Het vertalen van “gender” met “geslacht” komt vaak voor in het Nederlands, maar is incorrect. De reden van deze veelgemaakte fout is het feit dat van oudsher het woord “gender” in het Engels werd gebruikt als identiek aan het woord “sex,” wat “geslacht” betekent. Dit omdat “sex” ook kon verwijzen naar “sexual intercourse” en dit te verwarrend zou zijn. Pas in het einde van de vorige eeuw werd de term “gender identity,” geïntroduceerd, wat verwijst naar de sociaal geconstrueerde rollen en identiteiten van mannen en vrouwen. De term “gender” wordt nog steeds vaak verkeerd gebruikt, denk bijvoorbeeld aan “gender reveal parties.”

en meer mannelijk presenterende mensen. Maar er zijn mensen die stellen dat biseksualiteit betekent dat je je aangetrokken voelt tot twee genders<sup>5</sup>, en dat die twee genders man en vrouw moeten zijn. Ik heb dat argument nu al zo vaak gehoord, dus ik heb geleerd om dit gewoon voor mezelf te houden. “Om het simpel te houden zeg ik gewoon dat ik queer<sup>6</sup> ben, en dat ik een type heb.” Dat is een stuk gemakkelijker dan uitleggen dat ik me identificeer als biseksueel. Ook een stuk minder beperkend<sup>7</sup>.

“En wat voor type is dat dan?”

“Knappe mensen?” probeer ik, wetende waar ze naartoe probeert te gaan.

“Ongelooflijk hoe oppervlakkig jij bent,” plaagt ze.

“Houd je mond.”

“Denk je dat “hetero” en “homo” ooit achterhaald zullen zijn?<sup>8</sup>”

Ik probeer mijn lach te onderdrukken. “Het doel van elke queer persoon is de uitroeiing van cisgender<sup>9</sup>, heteroseksuele, allooseksuele mensen.”

“Dus dát is de *gay agenda*<sup>10</sup>?” Hannah lacht. “Nee, even serieus, al dat gedoe rondom seksualiteit en identiteit is constant aan het veranderen, het binaire denken ding wordt steeds meer uitgedaagd – heb je niet het idee dat labels een beetje nutteloos zijn?<sup>1112</sup>”

“Niet echt. Labels kunnen mensen helpen om gemeenschap te vinden, om verbinding te maken, met zichzelf en met anderen.

“Je weet hier veel over.”

“Het internet.” En Mariam.

## 4.2 Transphobia (225-226)

<sup>5</sup> “Bisexuality is only two genders” vond ik vrij vaag, daarom heb ik biseksualiteit in mijn vertaling iets duidelijker uitgelegd.

<sup>6</sup> Aangezien de term “queer” in het Engels maar ook in het Nederlands veel vaker gebruikt wordt, heb ik ervoor gekozen om dit zo te laten staan.

<sup>7</sup> In de brontekst stond “And less gatekeeping involved too.” Het woord “gatekeeping” heeft, behalve de letterlijk vertaling, geen equivalent in het Nederlands. Een “gatekeeper” is iemand die controle heeft over in welke mate iemand toegang heeft tot iets of iemand. Uit de context blijkt dat Ben zich liever als queer identificeert dan als biseksueel, omdat hier minder “gatekeeping” bij komt kijken, oftewel: De term “queer” is minder beperkend.

<sup>8</sup> De brontekst bevatte “are gonna.” Dit is de informele versie van “am going to” en opnieuw een voorbeeld van Hannah’s informele, jeugdige taalgebruik. Het Nederlands bevat geen soortgelijk informeel werkwoord.

<sup>9</sup> In de brontekst stond “cis.” Ter verduidelijking heb ik ervoor gekozen om in mijn vertaling “cisgender” te gebruiken.

<sup>10</sup> Ik heb ervoor gekozen om “gay agenda” uit de brontekst te laten staan en in cursief te zeggen. Een andere optie was om het te vertalen met “roze agenda,” maar deze term is vrij onbekend in het Nederlands, wordt niet vaak gebruikt en is dus onduidelijk.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah’s typische taalgebruik komt opnieuw naar voren in deze zin, vandaar dat “stuff”, “sort of” en “kind of” heb ik zoveel mogelijk proberen te vertalen om de informaliteit en het jeugdige karakter van haar taalgebruik te behouden.

<sup>12</sup> Hier is de volgorde van de zin aangepast om het zo beter te laten lopen in het Nederlands.

This passage includes a conversation Ben has with their parents. Ben's parents had asked Ben to meet up and talk in a restaurant, which Ben had agreed to because they were curious to hear what their parents had to say. Ben's friend Nathan is waiting for them nearby because they are quite nervous and they feel safer knowing Nathan is close in case they need him. It is the first conversation they have since they kicked Ben out of their house.

This passage includes a depiction of transphobia, seeing that Ben's parents refuse to believe that their child can be non-binary. There are a few terminology units that form translation problems in this passage, however, it is especially important for the translation to bring across how Ben deals with their parents' close-mindedness and how this shows the process that they have made in terms of self-acceptance. |

“Waar wilden jullie het over hebben?” vraag ik opnieuw. “Stop met het ontwijken van de vraag.”

“Nou.” Mama drukt haar handen tegen elkaar. “We wilden wat meer met je praten over dit hele “nonbinair zijn””

Het is ontzettend vreemd om mijn moeder het woord “nonbinair” hardop te horen zeggen. Het past niet echt, alsof het een woord is waarvan je nooit zou verwachten dat zij het kent. “Okay.” Ik leun een beetje voorover. Misschien is dit niet zo erg als ik dacht dat het zou zijn.

“We, uhm... We zijn gewoon in de war.” Mama probeert zich te ontspannen. “Dus we hebben geprobeerd om dingen online op te zoeken, en dat hielp ons niet echt.”

“En?” Ik kijk naar hen beiden.

“Lieverd<sup>13</sup>.” Mama zucht. “We hebben het geprobeerd, echt waar. We zijn nog steeds aan het proberen om het te begrijpen.”

“Het is geen theoretische natuurkunde,” zeg ik. “Ik identificeer me niet als man of vrouw, ik pas niet in de tweedeling man en vrouw<sup>14</sup>. Ik gebruik hen/hun<sup>15</sup> voornaamwoorden.” Ik ga zachter praten zodat Nathan me niet kan horen. Ik denk niet dat dat mogelijk is vanaf de andere kant van het restaurant, maar je weet maar nooit.

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<sup>13</sup> Vertederende termen zoals “honey” vormen een cultureel specifiek vertaalprobleem (“honey” is typisch Amerikaans). In dit geval heb ik er dus voor gekozen om een soortgelijke term uit het Nederlands te kiezen, in plaats van het woord weg te laten.

<sup>14</sup> De brontekst bevatte het woord “gender binary.” Dit is een voorbeeld van een woord die wel een Nederlandse equivalent heeft, maar die niet zo vanzelfsprekend is. In dit geval is dat de tweedeling man en vrouw.

<sup>15</sup> Ik heb ervoor gekozen om “they/them” te vertalen met “hen/hun” omdat uit een verkiezing georganiseerd door Transgender Netwerk Nederland (TNN) is gebleken dat de voorkeur uit gaat naar hen/hun als genderneutrale voornaamwoorden: <https://onzetaal.nl/nieuws-en-dossiers/taalnieuws/transgender-netwerk-kiest-geslachtloze-voornaamwoorden/>

“Nou, zoon, je moet toch toegeven dat dit alles nogal vreemd is,” zegt papa. Ik weet niet zeker of de “zoon” met opzet is of niet.

“Ik ben niet jullie<sup>16</sup> ‘zoon,” zeg ik. “En wat is er zo vreemd aan? Dit is gewoon wie ik ben. Waarom kunnen jullie dat niet begrijpen?”

“Weet je zeker dat je niet gewoon in de war bent?” vraagt papa. “Misschien ben je gewoon homo ofzo en is dit gewoon een moeilijke tijd geweest voor je?”

Papa laat “homo” klinken als een belediging.

“Homoseksueel en nonbinair zijn twee verschillende dingen!” Ik kan het weten; ik heb het mezelf vaak genoeg verteld<sup>17</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the intersection between translation and the representation of transgender identities in young adult novels by exploring the existing literature, transgender young adult fiction in Dutch and English, and translated transgender young adult fiction. This was done with a focus on the characterization of the as transgender-identifying protagonist and the findings were applied in an annotated translation. The portrayal of transgender characters has proven to be a key component of young adult novels featuring transgender characters. Therefore, any translation problem should be approached with the intention of ensuring realistic and relatable characterization for Dutch readers. Further research is needed in order to further investigate and categorize gender-related translation problems and to expand this area of research.

## 6. Works cited

### 6.1 Primary sources

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<sup>16</sup> Deze zin bevat een cultuurspecifiek vertaalprobleem: de vertaling van het woord ‘you’. Dit woord kan vanuit de beleefdheidsconventie namelijk worden vertaald met ‘jullie’, ‘jouw’ of ‘uw’. In dit geval is de keuze gevallen op “jullie” omdat ik ‘your’ begreep als een verwijzing naar beide ouders, aangezien Ben niet alleen het kind is van hun vader. Tegelijkertijd is het ook een linguïstiek vertaalprobleem: Het Engels heeft geen apart voornaamwoord om een verschil te maken tussen de enkelvoudige/meervoudige tweede persoon, of een “beleefd” voornaamwoord in de tweede persoon. Het Nederlands heeft deze twee opties wel.

<sup>17</sup> Hier heb ik ervoor gekozen om de verleden tijd in het Engels te vertalen met een voltooid tijd in het Nederlands, aangezien dit gebruikelijker is.

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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 Source Text Excerpts: *I Wish You All The Best*

#### 177-178

“So what about the sexuality thing?” Hannah asks.

“In all honesty, I’m still working through that.” Because I’m still attracted to the more masculine-presenting people, but nonbinary-ness isn’t something you can tell outright so the boy at the coffee shop who I think is cute could actually be nonbinary,

But I’m still attracted to him. And besides, I don’t exactly have a gender, and being gay implies being interested in the same gender.

Like I said. It’s complicated.

“So, you’re not gay anymore?”

“That’s the million-dollar question.” I think of myself as bisexual. I’m interested in guys and more masculine-presenting people. But then there are people who argue that bisexuality is only two genders, and that those two genders have to be men and women. I’ve heard that argument too many times now, so I’ve learnt to just keep it to myself. “For simplicity, I just say that I’m queer, that I have a type.” And definitely a lot easier than explaining that I identify as bisexual. And less gatekeeping involved too.

“And what type would that be?”

“Hot people?” I offer, knowing what she’s trying to get at.

“Can’t believe you’re so shallow,” she teases.

“Shut up.”

“You ever think that ‘straight’ and ‘gay’ are gonna be obsolete one day?”

I try to stifle a laugh. “The goal of every queer person is the extermination of the cis, straight, allosexual people.”

“So that’s the gay agenda?” Hannah laughs. “But no, seriously, with all this stuff sort of evolving – sexualities and identities, the binary stuff being challenged more and more – don’t you feel like the labels are kind of pointless?”

“Not really. Labels can help people find common ground, can help them connect, with themselves and other people.”

“You know a lot about this stuff.”

“The internet.” And Mariam.

## 225-226

“What did you want to talk about?” I ask again. “Stop avoiding the question.”

“Well.” Mom presses her hands together. “We wanted to talk with you more about this whole ‘being nonbinary’ thing.”

It’s awfully strange hearing my mother actually say the word “nonbinary” aloud. It doesn’t really belong, like it’s the kind of word you’d never expect someone like her to know. “Okay.” I lean forward a little. Maybe this won’t be as bad as I thought.

“We, um... We’re just confused.” Mom tries to relax. “So, we tried to find things online, and that didn’t really help us.”

“And?” I look at the two of them.

“Honey.” Mom sighs. “We tried, we really did. We’re still trying to wrap our heads around it.”

“It’s not exactly theoretical physics,” I say. “I don’t identify as male or female, I fall

outside the gender binary. I use they/them pronouns.” I keep my voice low so Nathan won’t hear me. I doubt he could anyway, all the way across the restaurant, but you never know.

“Well, son, you have to admit that it’s all very strange,” Dad says. I can’t tell if the “son” is deliberate or not.

“I’m not your ‘son,’” I say. “And what’s so strange about it? This is just who I am. Why can’t you two understand that?”

“Are you sure you aren’t just confused?” Dad asks. “Maybe you’re just gay or something and this has just been a difficult time for you?”

Dad makes “gay” sound like an insult.

“Being gay and being nonbinary are two different things!” I should know; I spent enough time having to tell myself that.