

Voices and/of Places: The English translation of Helga Ruebsamen's *Het lied en de waarheid* (The Song and The Truth) as a case study of identity and plurality in translation

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Abstract

*After Indonesia's independence was officially recognised by the Netherlands in 1949, several former members of the colonial élite repatriated. Many among the Indies-born repatriatees' generation used writing to come to terms with their own controversial, multifaceted identity. While they belonged to the colonial élite, they can be studied as writers geographically and temporally displaced as their colonial land of birth no longer exists. Their desire for belonging is arguably exemplified in the way their novels' protagonists' linguistic identity is depicted. While these authors write in Dutch, their characters are embedded in local cultures, languages, traditions, questioning fixed labels and dichotomies. Taking as example Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid* [The song and the truth], this article explores how linguistic identity is represented in Dutch literature of repatriation and how this is tackled in translation into English. This novel is chosen not only because it allows to explore plurality in literature and translation in the selected context, but also because it takes the issues of linguistic plurality in literature and translation a step further: the five-year-old Dutch protagonist leaves the tropical (colonial) environment with its enchanting nature behind and arrives with her family in the Netherlands in 1939 as the daughter of a Jewish doctor, unveiling a third identity layer beyond the Dutch-East Indian dichotomy. After positioning this novel within Dutch literature of repatriation by means of a close reading analysis, this article discusses why and how it can be studied as a heterolingual, diasporic (in this specific case, neither colonial, nor postcolonial) text. The translation strategies used to tackle representations of cultural and linguistic hybridity into English are then analysed by means of a comparative textual analysis. Looking for recurring trends, the results are finally briefly related to the findings of a*

doctoral project about the English and Italian translations of Dutch-East Indian novels by Hella S. Haasse, which suggest that shared tendencies to generalisation may risk distorting images of linguistic hybridity.

Keywords: culture-bound items; Dutch repatriated literature; Helga Ruebsamen; heterolingual texts; identity; linguistic hybridity; plurality; translation strategies

Introduction

The Netherlands's official recognition of the Indonesian Republic's sovereignty in 1949 marked the turning point for the former Dutch colonial empire in the East Indies. Despite widespread anti-colonial sentiments among the local population in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation (1942-45), Indonesia's 1945 declaration of independence seemingly came as unexpected for the Dutch people, who had controversially perceived themselves as 'model colonists' (cf. **De Mul, 2011; Salverda, 2011a, 2011b**) and was conceded only years later after violent colonial struggles and the so-called 'police actions', unsuccessful Dutch military operations in 1947 and 1948-49 to regain power in their former colony (cf. **Allofs et al., 2011; Beekman, 1996; Salverda, 2011a; Van Zonneveld, 1995, 2002**). In this period, an estimated 300,000 people decided or were forced to 'repatriate' to the Netherlands: for many members of the colonial élite, however, this meant leaving their childhood homeland for what often was a 'distant', 'foreign' land (**De Mul, 2010: 416, 2011: 50; Doomernik, 2011: 569; Heering et al., 2002: 251; Koch, 2012: 713; Penninx et al., 1993: 8-9; Van Zonneveld, 1995: 59, 2002: 150**).

Writing helped many younger repatriates cope with such a 'collective trauma' and with their controversial, socio-historical position: the generation born in the colony before its independence spent their childhood as part of the privileged colonial élite; however, they use literature to come to terms with issues of involvement in the colonial oppression as children of colonisers and the difficult definition of personal identities. In their works, they question the traditional 'colonial vs postcolonial' dichotomy with their experience of spatial and temporal *displacement*, as their land of birth no longer exists (cf. **Van Gemert, 2013, 2016**). They are only able to access it through recollections of the past which yet appear *distorted* and *uncritical*, as they inevitably *filter* the historical developments through colonisers' eyes, mixing memory with imagination (cf. **Pattynama, 2012; Salverda, 2001, 2011c**). Literature can thus become a tool to reflect on and accept the events and feelings of guilt for their colonial past.

This is exemplified in the works of Hella S. Haasse (1918-2011), for instance, one of the internationally best-known and most translated Dutch-East Indian authors, who can be taken as a case in point. The daughter of a Dutch colonial government official, Haasse was born in Batavia, today's Jakarta, in 1918, later moving to the Netherlands to study. In her 2002 psychological novel *Sleuteloo*g [The Eye of the Key], the protagonist's painful recollections of life in the former Dutch East Indies are symbolically hidden in a chest to which she lost the key. Once the container (metaphorically, her memory) finally gets opened, it is found empty, as to demonstrate that her childhood reminiscences are untrustworthy and that what she experienced as a child was not reality but her interpretation of it as a member of the colonial élite (as argued in Peligra, 2020). This generation's tropical homeland is in fact generally portrayed by these authors as an exotic, 'enchanted' paradise lost (Salverda, 2011c: 591-592): these authors 'present us with an escapist longing for a past place and time, which is highly idealized' (Pattynama, 2012: 98), recalling a sentimentalised and idealised colonial past in line with the colonial concept of *tempo doeloe* (Malay term for 'good old days') (De Mul, 2010: 413-414, 2011: 55) and therefore offering readers an image of the past which is inevitably partial and nostalgic (cf. Meijer, 1996 on Haasse).

Yet, the works of many Dutch-East Indian authors who share a similar experience are still underresearched – particularly the works of other female authors, such as for example Helga Ruebsamen (1934-2016), Aya Zikken (1919-2013) or Margaretha Ferguson (1920-1992). More specifically, what remains largely underexplored is how this generation's problematic position as children of colonists takes shape in their novels at the textual level and the problems this poses to translators. In fact, while these authors write in Dutch, their characters are embedded in local cultures and traditions, and therefore languages, expressing their identities and sense of belonging – and therefore questioning fixed colonial representations – through the way in which they speak. From this perspective, these novels can arguably be studied as multilingual, or better, applying Grutman's (2006) terms, as 'heterolingual' (cf. Peligra, 2019a, 2019b). This helps go beyond definitions which draw from sociolinguistics to look at *literary* 'foregrounding' (Grutman, 2006): in this sense, terms such as bi- or multilingual may in fact not fit literary analysis as literary fiction not necessarily aims to show an accurate picture of reality and of the depicted (or imagined, or, in this case study, *recalled*) society (cf. Grutman, 2006; Meylaerts, 2006) but rather how it is subjectively perceived or portrayed by an author.

In (post)colonial contexts the depiction of linguistic identities can unveil power relations and stereotypes (cf. for example **Aschroft et al., 1989**). The protagonists of these works in fact mix and play with colonial and local languages to give voice to a *claimed* hybrid self: agreeing with Johnson that the way in which languages are interwoven in a literary text should be analysed as ‘a statement of identity [...]’ (**Johnson, 2018: 428**), it thus becomes crucial to study how these novels are translated. As ‘translators must make choices’ (**Tymozcko, 2000: 24**) when transposing a text to another language and culture, it is important to explore how they act when facing not just one but two source cultures and languages (here: the Dutch and the East Indian one, which interact in the colonial environment) as the applied strategies might affect the representation of characters’ identities (as argued in **Peligra 2019a**).

This article aims to explore further how linguistic identity, as expressed in Dutch-East Indian novels by repatriated writers, is tackled in translation, taking Helga Ruebsamen’s 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid* [*The song and the truth*] as a case study. Ruebsamen’s text is chosen because it arguably pushes the notion of heterolingualism in literature and translation beyond the classic Dutch (coloniser’s) vs. local languages (colonised people’s) dichotomy, allowing us to explore depictions of cultural and linguistic *plurality* from a more comprehensive point of view. More specifically, the author adds a third layer to the main character’s identity, who is not only a Dutch child living in the colonial East Indies but also has a Jewish family background.

In the following sections, Ruebsamen’s novel is firstly positioned within the context of Dutch-East Indian literature by means of a close reading analysis (see section **Helga Ruebsamen and Het lied en de waarheid**). Specifically, it is justified why and how *Het lied en de waarheid* should be read as a heterolingual text. It is also questioned whether this novel should be studied as a colonial or a postcolonial text, arguing that neither label fully applies. Secondly, the Dutch source text is compared with its 2000 English translation by Paul Vincent (titled *The Song and the Truth*) (See section **The Song and the Truth**). In particular, different instances of heterolingualism are identified and categorised according to my own categorisation. A comparative analysis of the translation strategies applied to tackle images of cultural and linguistic identity is then pursued, applying Aixelá’s (1996) translation strategies taxonomy for culture-specific items. Finally, the findings are briefly compared with those of previous doctoral research on the translation of Dutch-East Indian novels to look for recurring patterns regarding the translation of instances of heterolingualism in the studied context.

Helga Ruebsamen and *Het lied en de waarheid*: a case study

Helga Ruebsamen was born in Batavia in 1934 to a German father and a Dutch mother. She lived in the Indies with her family until the age of six, when they moved to The Hague. She later worked as a journalist and writer, debuting in 1964 with the short stories collection *De Kameleon* [The Chameleon] (Raat, 1991; Van Bork & Verkrujse, 1985: 501-02). Her 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid*, i.e., the fictionalised account of her early years in the former Dutch East Indian colony, is considered her literary masterpiece.

The novel is firstly presented in the following section (**Voices Through Places**) paying particular attention to the meanings attributed to the different *places* described throughout the narration and their role in shaping the protagonists' identity. The significance of this preliminary analysis is twofold. On the one hand, it allows us to clearly frame the novel as the work of a Dutch repatriated writer and thus define cultural hybridity in this particular context. On the other hand, it helps us give specific meanings to the different *languages* spoken by the novel's characters and to how they relate (later explored in the section **Intertwining Voices**), which is the focus of the subsequent translation strategies analysis (see section **The Song and the Truth**).

Voices Through Places: Multi-layered hybridity in Het lied en de waarheid

Ruebsamen's *Het lied en de waarheid* narrates the tangled and tragic story of the young Louise (Lulu) Benda and her family in the late 1930s in the former Dutch East Indies, and, later, in Europe. The novel is divided into four parts, presenting different stages of Lulu's life (from 1938 to 1945), which are also set in four different *places*. Part 1 (1938 – March 1939), is set in Bandung, Java. Lulu is only five years old. She lives in her fantasy world and is too young to yet fathom adults' actions. However, she soon has to grow up and face the cruel historical reality as she travels back to Europe with her family as the daughter of a Jewish doctor right before the outbreak of the Second World War. After a 6 weeks-long sea journey (Part 2: April – May 1939) and a stay in France, the family arrive in The Hague. There, they stay at Lulu's paternal grandmother (Part 3: Summer 1939 – March 1942), but, after the latter passes away, Lulu and her father move in with the maid outside of the urban area to avoid persecution (Part 4: 1942 – May 1945). In this final section of the novel, Lulu recalls their three years of hiding until the end of the war.

Places are attributed specific meanings throughout the novel. In Part 1, Lulu's relationship with the luxuriant Indonesian environment takes the foreground. In line with the typical representation of the former colony's nature in Dutch-East Indian novels, this is described as an 'enchanted',

‘mysterious’ and ‘imagined’ idyll (see the introduction above, **cf. Salverda, 2001, 2011c**). Yet, as argued above regarding the works of Dutch repatriatees such as Hella S. Haasse, while this depiction of the tropical landscape is undeniably exoticising, colonial, these recollections are presented as *deceitful* through several literary devices. Firstly, recollections of the past are doubted (**cf. Pruis, 2020**): in occasional flashforwards, an adult Louise tries putting together the pieces of her complicated life puzzle, probing her interpretation of the events of her childhood. In the novel’s first chapter she wonders: ‘[Or] are these memories false?’ (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 9**), and later confirms: ‘My memories are like crows, they land in swarms, wherever and whenever they choose’ (**Ibid: 304, cf. Raat, 1998**). Secondly, this wariness is taken to the extreme by the fact that all events are told and thus focalised by the *child* protagonist, blurring the boundaries between truth and imagination even further.

The childhood idyll (arguably representing Lulu’s *innocence*) is abruptly interrupted by a family crisis. The moment Lulu naïvely gives away the liaison between her mother and uncle by describing to her aunt the strange ‘game’ she sees them ‘play’ during the night on the black table, her life changes forever. This affair provides Lulu’s father, who is already worried about the political developments in the old continent and fears for his relatives there, with the ultimate reason to travel back. The ship they board and the sea they cross (Part 2) can possibly be seen as places *between* past and present, where identities first get questioned, and, as will be explained further below, *between* dream (childhood: the Indies) and the harshness of reality (adulthood: the Netherlands).

Although the author and her young protagonist are unarguably recognisable as what we can define as colonial subjects, as descendants of white colonists who interpret the world from an inevitably partial perspective, much more needs to be taken into account to fully understand their controversial position. In fact, it can be questioned whether Ruebsamen is trying not to fixate her characters on the colonial vs postcolonial dichotomy, to contextualise and possibly justify the controversial position of her repatriatee generation, as Haasse seemingly does too in her East Indian novels (**cf. Peligra, 2019a**). In the case of Dutch East Indian literature, there is still ongoing debate about whether labels such as colonial or postcolonial should be used (**D’Haen, 2002: 8-9**), as neither can fully apply (**also cf. Peligra, 2019a**). I therefore ask whether a different framework should be considered, focusing instead on the personal experience of *dislocation*. While, in these works, the events are clearly filtered through the coloniser’s perspective (**D’Haen 2002: 9**), writers of repatriation express their inability to define their own sense of identity, as they are ‘outsiders’ in both the country they repatriate to and

their childhood homeland which no longer exists (cf. Van Gemert, 2013, 2016). If we see identity as ‘a category of *belonging*’ to a particular group (Bielsa, 2018: 49, **emphasis added**) formed in confrontation (cf. Bhabha, 2012), the identity of this generation of authors is arguably *denied* at multiple levels. And such denied belonging is reclaimed in literature through images of multiple ‘embeddedness’, hybridity in a very unique sense. If hybridity is generally defined as the denial of fixed and homogenised identities to deconstruct imperialist viewpoints (Ibid; Young, 1995), it can be seen here as to mean the ‘coexistence’ of multiple selves.

Ruebsamen’s protagonist’s self is indeed portrayed in this way. On the one hand, while Lulu is a Dutch girl born and raised in the former colony, she is brought up in an extensively international, multicultural, multifaith environment, which is also, as discussed in detail in the next section, multilingual. Her relatives live scattered around the colony and Europe, bringing together their different backgrounds. On the other hand, her Dutch (colonial) identity is shaped by her early years in the Dutch East Indies, where she is strongly influenced by the local culture, spirituality, and, as introduced above, its environment and climate.

It is in fact by comparing the European *nature* with the tropical one she is more familiar with that ‘otherness’ first strikes her once in the old continent: Part 3 opens with Lulu’s surprise at seeing ‘big hats, long coats, black umbrellas’ (Ruebsamen, 2000: 187), dead leaves and pale sunlight. We read for example:

...It was as if we were traveling by moonlight, but it wasn’t the light of the moon. It came from the sun, which hid behind a veil of clouds. It wasn’t our burning sun: this one was small and pale (Ruebsamen, 2000: 188).

In particular, *distance* from nature is now stressed (cf. Pruis, 2020, Raat, 1998):

Black and gray and brown houses and towers and streets and squares and statues, all stone, no trees with leaves on anywhere—it was impossible (Ruebsamen, 2000: 198).

According to Pruis (2020), the opposition between the enchanting tropical nature and ‘grey’ Europe coincides with that between *freedom* and *restriction*. More specifically, the former is embodied by memories of the Indies, arguably a metaphor of childhood and carelessness; while the latter is to be understood as the limits of the new reality, possibly also the *unreachability* of the past. These two aspects could perhaps also be seen in terms of freedom of self-expression and of fluid identity formation which no longer appear possible once in Europe, and which might

therefore become a metaphor of growing up, confronting a colonial past and questioning loyalties. Hybridity and plurality are challenged once the little girl experiences the 'real' world. On the one hand, that is when she is firstly confronted with colonial geographies and labels. Trying to grasp meanings which still go beyond her comprehension from conversations with her parents, Lulu makes statements as for example 'Holland was the old country for [my mother] and hence for me too [...]' (Ruebsamen, 2000: 157) or '[t]he tropics, I learned, were where we came from' (Ibid: 203). On the other hand, in Europe her identity and that of her young, mixed-race aunt Cristina, who travels with them, are seen as 'problematic'. They are perceived as 'different' – Cristina will even feel so homesick and unwelcome to walk into the sea to end her own life. In the Netherlands they are named 'tropical children', 'brownies' (Ibid: 240-241), they are outsiders with 'mixed and exotic' blood (Ibid: 236).

As previously introduced, Ruebsamen's novel is taken as a case study here because it adds further complexity to the typical Dutch-East Indian literary representation of identity. In light of the historical situation described in the novel, readers slowly find out that Louise is also Jewish. It is crucial to note, however, that this additional layer must not necessarily be understood as an autobiographical trait. Ruebsamen's claimed Jewish background remains unconfirmed, in fact: her brother denied it and disputed her version of the narrated events a few years after the novel's publication (Ettly, 2018; Jensen, 2006: 67; Pruis, 2020).

This additional layer of the novel's protagonist's cultural identity (which thus gains a *literary* rather than a historical meaning), can therefore arguably be seen as an authorial fictional device to stress a generation's unexpected clash with the (post-)colonial truth even further. As introduced above, the family voyage across the ocean and their European experience may arguably symbolise the repatriatee generation's need to come to terms with past and present after 1949. At the end of the novel, in fact, the now ten-year-old girl, traumatised but matured, no longer hides in her dream world of childhood and no longer fears the harshness of *reality* – emblematically associated here with something as concrete and fathomable as the war – now saying to herself, while listening to her father's voice:

I hoped he would tell me what was going to happen to us next. I didn't want any more fairy tales. It had to be reality (Ruebsamen, 2000: 339).

Intertwining Voices: Linguistic plurality in Het lied en de waarheid

Claiming that the protagonists of Dutch-East Indian novels by repatriated authors are depicted as culturally hybrid implies that they are also depicted as linguistically hybrid. Generally speaking, in the works by Dutch

repatriated authors, the children of colonists born in the East Indies speak Dutch with their parents and at school, and the local languages, Sundanese and Malay, with the servants and in the streets (**Peligra, 2019a, 2019b**). It can be argued that this representation of linguistic identity emphasises the generational clash and distances the younger, Indies-born generation from their colonist parents. These protagonists, as children who are portrayed as still too young to be conscious of colonial relations and meanings shaped through language use, often openly claim to be more familiar with the local languages than with Dutch, for example. It is not unusual to read that their (highly hybridised) Dutch needs to be improved to be admitted to (the Dutch colonial) school (**ibid**).

This particular relationship between the young protagonists and the local languages can also be found in Ruebsamen's novel: at the beginning of the narration, Lulu is also shown as more at ease with the language of the servants, referred to as 'the night people' (**Ruebsamen, 2000**), who introduce her to the local customs and traditions. We read:

They were my best friends, the night people. I knew their turns of phrase and their ways of doing things almost better than those of my mother, my aunt, and my father (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 27**).

The former colony, as a symbol of the innocence of childhood, as explained in the previous section, is where colonial boundaries blurry for the child protagonist. While a separation in the use of space and time on part of the colonisers and the servants is introduced, this has implications little Lulu is not yet able to understand. She instead identifies with the language of the 'night people' – whose perspective is, however, never acknowledged (**also see Meijer, 1996** on Haasse's *Heren van de thee*). This is the language she speaks with her mixed-race aunt Cristina – who is at one point given Dutch lessons to improve her position within the colonial society – and which she calls 'our language' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 228**) but starts to forget after some time in the Netherlands. Interestingly, while through the character of Cristina a mixed-race character is somehow given a 'voice', she belongs to the protagonist's family and her feelings are not fully comprehended by the still young and naïve Lulu.

Before exploring how linguistic hybridity is tackled in translation, it is important to identify how linguistic identity is represented in these novels at the textual level. While, as explained above, we define these works as heterolingual to stress the *literary* function of such representations (which do not necessarily aim to mirror society, **cf. Grutman, 2006: 18-19**), what type of instances of heterolingualism can be found in these texts must be discussed. What said so far shows us that, at the textual level, linguistic hybridity is exemplified in three ways. Firstly, these novels' characters say sentences or phrases directly in languages other than Dutch. This is mainly

noted in dialogues, revealing the characters' natural way of speaking. Secondly, they insert words in a foreign language within their Dutch sentences, arguably positioning themselves inside a liminal (linguistic) space. In the third line of the novel, for example, opening with a view on the tropical landscape from the family's veranda, we read '[l]ook, the *tjtjaks* [lizards] are here' (Ruebsamen, 2000: 3, translation added). Or, in Chapter 7 Lulu witnesses a sad scene with her drunk uncle, who adds Yiddish borrowings to his speech:

"We chose our own Persian life carpets again," he grumbled. "*Meshugge* [crazy] as we were! (Ruebsamen, 2000: 116, translation added) [...] Our own carpet. Our own very own *nebbish* [poor, unfortunate] carpet." (Ibid: 119, translation added).

Finally, language use is described qualitatively. In the case of *Het lied en de waarheid*, it is actually more often just hinted at within the narration. For example, Louise's family members seem to be polyglots, having lived in different countries or because of their personal history and origin. However, readers are often sent clues about people's linguistic identities. It can be argued that this may allow to recreate the sense of the child's lack of understanding of complex concepts such as religion or culture. At the beginning of the novel, in fact, Lulu struggles to label languages and identities. The most evident case regards the hints given as regards to the family's Jewish background. We are told by the child protagonist, for instance, that her father and paternal grandmother, of German origin, speak a language she does not recognise. As soon as the family disembark after their sea journey, Lulu explains that her father:

[...] embraced his family, serious gentlemen [...] who [...] talked in singsong tones in a language I couldn't understand (Ruebsamen, 2000: 187).

Later, when Lulu and her father lie at his mother's bedside, it is hinted that:

They murmured to each other in a language that was like German but wasn't, which sounded soft and floppy, toothless, so mysterious that I understood little of it, although I'd heard it spoken so often above my head, at the big table, by the men with the hats, who could also sing and shout in it (Ruebsamen, 2000: 294).

As argued in the previous section, this additional cultural ‘voice’, which makes Ruebsamen’s novel unique among other ones by Dutch-East Indian repatriated writers, could emphasise the author’s clash with the historical reality. It can also be said that it allows the writer to query the definition of identity even further, by contrasting fixed stereotypes (here: colonial vs postcolonial) with images of plurality (here: a multicultural, multilingual family). Analysing how these representations of the characters’ linguistic identities are approached in translation (see section **The Song and the Truth**) helps us give answer to whether and how these meanings can be duplicated when transposed for a new audience. Taking for granted that manipulation is ‘unavoidable’ when facing specific linguistic features (**Dukate 2009: 104**) and when translating literary texts which can be interpreted differently by translators (**Ibid: 122**), it becomes important to question what *effects* are created by such inevitable shifts in the analysed context.

In the following sections, the 2000 English translation of Ruebsamen’s novel by Paul Vincent (*The Song and the Truth*) is explored, focusing on how it represents the characters’ linguistic identities. For the purpose of the analysis, the heterolingual instances considered are divided in two groups: (A) non-Dutch language references to material and non-material culture and (B) utterances or speech acts in languages other than Dutch. In practice, these appear as (A) isolated words depicting identifiable elements in a foreign language within the source text or (B) speech or idioms in languages other than Dutch, including ways of saying and both longer phrases and short idioms or one-word intensifiers.

The Song and The Truth: Translating plurality into English

In Translation Studies literature, the items that have been grouped in Category A are referred to as ‘culture-bound’ (**Florin, 1993: 123**), ‘culture-specific’ (**Aixelá, 1996**) elements, or ‘realia’ (**Grit, 2004, Florin, 1993, Leppihalme, 2011**), defined by Aixelá as:

textually actuali[s]ed items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text (**Aixelá 1996: 58**).

Although, considering their relatively low number and the fact that they are found in isolation within the Dutch text, it could be questioned whether these borrowings can be studied as true heterolingual instances, this does not appear to be uncommon in literary texts (**Grutman, 2006, 2009**). Zabus’ notion of ‘visible traces’ (**1991**) can be applied here. According to her, ‘words or phrases describing culturally bound objects

and occurrences' (**ibid: 157**) do highlight the presence of other languages within the colonial one (**ibid, also cf. Batchelor, 2009**). This means that the protagonists' use of terms from a specific (non-Dutch) cultural background in their speech can be seen as a sign of embeddedness in that same culture.

For the purpose of the analysis, these elements have been divided into three different thematic categories, with own subcategories (**see Table 1 below**): nature (A1), material and non-material culture (A2) and markers of colonial relations (A3). It is important to note that in the source text there are considerably more references to the East Indian culture, particularly the Indonesian environment, than to the Jewish culture – the latter also only appearing as references to religion in particular (A2.2). This quantitative disparity does not appear surprising, firstly as Part 1 of the novel is entirely set in the Indies. Secondly, Lulu's family is arguably presented as multifaith or non-religious. Thirdly, the latter can also be explained considering that the protagonist is not yet able to identify and name her family's cultural religious practices. The fact that their Jewish background is mostly 'hinted at' in the novel arguably stresses Lulu's age and naivety. Finally, it must be said that the child embeddedness in the Indonesian culture and nature in particular is arguably a literary device to question stereotypes and give voice to a generation's diasporic experience and which symbolises the (lost) carelessness of childhood. In fact, references to the tropical nature appear most frequently, emphasising in this way the child's (partial, naïve) perspective. One of the most repeated terms is (A1.1) *waringin* [banyan tree]: one of the most central elements in Dutch-East Indian literature, this plant is considered sacred by locals and is thought to have magical powers. While in the former colony the *waringin* in Lulu's garden is personified, being the central figure in her fantasy world, this contrasts with the fact that in the Netherlands she finds a little banyan tree in the house of a relative and watches it dying slowly, as a metaphor for the loss of innocence and her growing disillusion (**Raat, 1998**). **Table 1** below shows the full taxonomy applied, with an illustrative example per subcategory.

Table 1: Categories of culture-bound terms (definitions: Van der Sijs, 2010).

Culture-specific references		Examples	
		Colonial identity	Jewish identity
(A1) Nature	(A1.1) Flora	<i>melati</i> (jasmine flower)	
	(A1.2) Fauna	<i>tijtjaks</i> (lizard)	
(A2) Culture	(A2.1) Objects	<i>goeling</i> (bolster)	
	(A2.2) Tradition	<i>gamelan</i> (Javanese ensemble)	<i>Mischnajoth</i> (Mishnayot)
	(A2.3) Food	<i>ketan</i> (sticky rice)	
	(A2.4) Urban	<i>kampong</i> (local village)	
(A3) Colonial	(A3.1) Status	<i>djongos</i> (houseboy)	
	(A3.2) Ethnicity	<i>belanda</i> (Dutch)	

Looking at how these elements are translated, applying Aixelá’s (1996) translation strategies taxonomy it can be said that culture-bound references (A) referring to the East Indian colonial environment are at times ‘substituted’ with their target language equivalent (Ibid: 63-64), but mainly ‘repeated’, meaning they are kept in their original form (Ibid: 61). Repeated references are at times italicised and at times explained by the addition of a very short ‘intratextual gloss’ (Ibid: 62) within the main text. They are always adapted orthographically (Ibid: 61) to the target language’s conventions. An example of an element transposed in both ways is the term *slendang* [shawl/sling], firstly translated with an explanatory gloss as ‘the carrying sling or *selendang*’ (Ruebsamen, 2000: 8) and later substituted with its English equivalent ‘sling’ (Ibid: 88).

The choice of strategy seems to depend both on the textual context and on the element type and function (cf. Aixelá, 1996: 69-70). Firstly, references which are kept appear not to be italicised in two cases: when they can be considered as part of the English vocabulary (this is the case of *sarong*, for instance) or when job-related terms identify a specific person (servant), as for example in the case of *baboe* [governess]. The sentence ‘a *babu* sponged me down’ (Ruebsamen, 2000: 110) (meaning ‘one of the many’ governesses) is italicised, while ‘Babu Susila who always forgot the shoes when she dressed me’ (Ibid: 7) (that specific *baboe*) is not. Secondly, it seems that repeated references often appear coupled with a gloss to ensure that they are comprehended by the readers. For example, the term *waringin* is transposed as ‘*waringin* tree’ at his first appearances, while it is never glossed afterwards. Also, in line with what I argued just above, this term is not italicised when it is personified. Lulu explains: ‘This tree is not lifeless. It is sacred and everyone will call it the Holy Waringin’ (Ibid: 57). The two terms *tijtjak* [lizard] and *tokeh* [night

lizard] are never glossed, instead. However, their translation supports what hypothesised here as their meaning is clear the first time they appear in the source text. With the former, its non-Indonesian equivalent is introduced right above the Indonesian word, avoiding ambiguity: 'Every day, as soon as the sun went down, tiny **lizards** climbed up the walls of our veranda. "Look, the *tjitjaks* are here"' (*Ibid*: 3). Similarly, the first time *tokeh* is introduced, its meaning is explained to the readers: 'I waited for the *toké* every night. He was **the big brother of the *tjitjaks***' (*Ibid*: 4).

Thirdly, it is argued that the choice of substitutive strategies aims at keeping manipulative interventions as invisible as possible to ensure a pleasant reading experience. It may be hypothesised that references are not repeated extensively when deemed as unnecessary or perhaps overburdening. On the one hand, it seems that highly recurrent elements are at times 'naturalised' (*Aixelá, 1996: 63-64*). *Tokeh*, for instance, is translated as 'lizard' in passages where it occurs frequently (*cf. Ruebsamen, 2000: 70*). On the other hand, the (very few) terms that are *only* substituted are elements appearing sporadically or arguably identifying objects with no central meaning.

With regard to the identified culture-bound references (A) to the protagonists' Jewish identity, these items are very few and do not yet allow generalisations. However, they nevertheless help raise interesting points. On the one hand, the terms *Sjabbes* [Sabbath] and *Sabbat* [Sabbath] are both 'repeated', although only the former is italicised. Previously mentioned explanations seem to apply. The non-italicised term is commonly used in the target culture, therefore presenting neither comprehension issues nor the need to be somehow highlighted as 'foreign' for the readers. While the italicised term may however not be as transparent for the average reader, as the Yiddish-derived Dutch term for Sabbath, its contextual position at the beginning of chapter twenty-one makes understanding unproblematic: 'On Friday evenings **Sabbath** was celebrated in the mill. Selma and old Mrs. de Vries insisted. "*Sjabbes* in a cupboard," muttered my father in astonishment' (*Ruebsamen, 2000: ch. 21*). Furthermore, considering the fact that a short dialogue is reported here, it could be argued that italicising the term considered emphasises the cultural and linguistic mix as it makes it more 'detectable' for the readers. On the other hand, the term *Mischnajoth* (*Ruebsamen: 1997: 328*) shows the application of an isolated translation strategy. In this case, instead of using its target language equivalent (Mishnayot) or a gloss, for example, the reference has arguably been 'generalised' (using a term by *Grit, 2004: 283*) as 'Talmud' (*Ruebsamen: 2000: 295*), referring to a whole (Talmud) instead of to a part (Mishnayot).

The analysis of the translation of speech acts (B) in local Indonesian languages shows similar patterns: the majority of the analysed utterances are repeated in their original form, with or without the addition of an explanatory gloss within the main text. These elements *always* appear italicised in translation if kept, as to visually emphasise that the speech is being expressed in a different language (as discussed above for items located within a dialogue). The repetition of such elements is arguably crucial for the representation of the protagonists' identities. As already argued, the translator however makes sure that readers' comprehension is not affected (e.g. with a gloss). In the following example, aunt Margot's speech is characterised as Dutch-East Indian, rightly tracing the textual description of her and Lulu's mother cultural identities, indeed without any effort on the readers' part:

“ . . . hasn't cried for days, *njang ketjil*, little darling,” Auntie Margot joined in and burst out laughing. “You see? *Terlalu bagus*, very good” (Ruebsamen, 2000: 23).

It is important to note that, on the one hand, the translator has endeavoured to alternate different glosses for the same expressions to recreate the *effect* of speech and dialogue. For instance, the intensifier *betoel* [really] is firstly glossed as 'certainly' (Ruebsamen, 2000: 12) and later as 'yes, indeed' (Ibid: 159). On the other hand, when these expressions are not openly explained, their meaning, or, more precisely, their impact, is still made clear in other ways. *Betoel* is not glossed in the following sentence, but its change in position in the target text recreates the sought-after effect:

'Dat is *betoel* geen pretje om op haar te moeten letten' (Ruebsamen, 1997: 200).

'It's no fun looking after her, *betul*' (Ruebsamen, 2000: 180).

Or again, in the following example, Lulu's narrating voice introduces the foreign expressions' translation:

“Better not,” said Auntie Margot too, and she usually nipped the quarrel in the bud by explaining to my father at length what was wrong with Dutch food. “*Makanan belanda* doesn't taste right here and it swells up and makes us feel bloated” (Ruebsamen, 2000: 19).

As in the case of culture-bound elements (A), certain East Indian utterances are also 'naturalised', again because perhaps not considered central or useful but therefore potentially overburdening.

As above, Yiddish or Yiddish-derived utterances (B) within the Dutch text are very few and do not yet allow generalisations. However, the analysis of how they are tackled in translation provides again interesting examples

and cases in point. Different characters from Lulu's father's side of the family use Yiddish borrowings such as *mesjogge(nazen)* (crazy) (Ruebsamen, 1997: 113, 229, 282) or *aggenebisj* (poor, unfortunate) (Ibid: 134) in their speech. Apart from the term *gannef* (thief) (Ibid: 328), naturalised as 'gangster' (Ibid: 2000: 295), these expressions appear to tend to be repeated and italicised, therefore arguably visually stressing the character's linguistic hybridity. However, a higher number of references needs to be considered to be able to look for actual recurring patterns.

Interestingly, this article backs up the results from a doctoral research project (as Peligra 2019a) showing that in the 'attempt to balance faithfulness to the source text[...] and readability of the target text[...] (Ibid: 212), translators follow trends which appear to be universal of translations (Baker, 1993): i.e., the tendencies to both explain (ibid.) and generalise (cf. Vanderauwera, 1985, for a study on the translation of Dutch literature into English). In the mentioned doctoral research (Peligra, 2019a), which compared how cultural references and depictions of colonial, ethnic and linguistic identity are transposed into English and Italian translations of selected Hella S. Haasse's East Indian novels, it was observed that different translators followed a comparable approach when tackling the texts analysed, which actually seems similar to the one identified above in this article. Specifically, results from previous research (cf. Peligra 2019a) on the translation of culture-bound terms (A) and textual images of linguistic hybridity (B) show that translators balance between conserving and substituting terms on the basis of their centrality and to favour conventions, comprehension and readability (Ibid: ch. 6), which clearly aligns with what just discussed above regarding the translation of East-Indian references (A) in *The Song and the Truth*.

On the one hand, explanatory trends arguably risk distorting or softening depictions of linguistic hybridity. This is because the total number of expressions kept in the local languages is reduced (Peligra, 2019a). On the other hand, it should be questioned whether the extensive use of italics generally applied in the translations of such texts when foreign references are kept does not emphasise cultural and linguistic *difference* (as stressing 'distance') rather than hybridity (cf. Batchelor, 2009: 50). As typical of Dutch-East Indian literature (cf. Peligra, 2019a), East Indian references are in fact not italicised in the source text. While, according to Batchelor (2009: 69-71), stressing their status as something 'different' may distort images of identity, and while current research is now starting to offer new professional frameworks in an attempt to decolonise (Jones: 2022), it must be acknowledged that a text such as the one analysed in this article presents manifold difficulties which may require that it is treated and studied differently. One of these is Lulu's identity additional layer. While the final number of borrowings and utterances in languages other than

Dutch is lower inevitably lower than in the source text, the reasons behind the chosen translation strategies choices generally seem to converge regardless of what culture is being portrayed. Furthermore, the examples analysed above in this section generally suggest that the translator is both stressing and clarifying the protagonist's background. One crucial thing must be considered to this regard: while Dutch-East Indian novels often come in translation with an explanatory end matter glossary of non-Dutch terms, *The Song and the Truth* does not, thus leaving the translator with no paratextual explanatory device and therefore arguably justifying the detected occasional tendency to explication.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how linguistic identity is represented in Ruebsamen's novel *Het lied en de waarheid* and in its English translation, aiming to justify the need to explore such topic further within the study of literature by Dutch-East Indian writers. The authors of the generation born in the former Dutch colony who repatriated after Indonesia's independence explore in their works their controversial, multifaceted identity. While they grew up as part of the colonial élite, they can no longer access their land of birth. Furthermore, they cannot fully belong to their land of repatriation as their identity was formed elsewhere, influenced by a different environment. Hella S. Haasse said in 2013:

Ik beschouw mezelf absoluut als een niet-Hollandse Nederlander. Ik heb natuurlijk de Nederlandse nationaliteit, maar mijn bewustzijn heeft zich ergens anders gevormd en ontwikkeld. [...] [I consider myself absolutely a non-Dutch Netherlander. I have the Dutch nationality, of course, but my consciousness formed and developed elsewhere]. (**Pattynama, 2013: 157-158**)

In this article it is argued that, because of this double impossibility to belong, these writers should be studied as displaced subjects, rather than trying to place them in the colonial vs postcolonial framework, which cannot fully apply (cf. **Peligra, 2019a; Van Gemert, 2013, 2016**).

Helga Ruebsamen's 1997 novel *Het lied en de waarheid* [*The Song and The Truth*] has been taken as case study here to explore how plurality is depicted and translated. As explained in this article, the literary representation of the experience of lesser-known authors, how they explore their sense of identity and how they claim belonging at the textual level, still remain underexplored. In particular, it is maintained here that these texts should also be studied as heterolingual ones, as issues of identity and belonging are seemingly exemplified in the way in which different languages interact in the novels. If we define translation as the act of transferring information from a source language to a target one

(**Hatim & Munday 2004: 6**) it becomes clear that adding a source language complicates the picture, especially if the relationship between these source languages entails specific cultural, colonial as well as literary meanings. Ruebsamen's novel is therefore chosen for the analysis because it even adds a third layer to the protagonist's identity, who is also Jewish, repatriating to the Netherlands right before it is invaded by Germany in 1940.

Comparing Ruebsamen's text with its 2000 English translation by Paul Vincent has allowed to qualitatively analyse how so called culture-specific items referring to both her backgrounds and speech acts in languages other than Dutch have been translated. On the one hand, both elements referring to the protagonist's East-Indian experience and utterances in the local Indonesian languages mainly seem to have been kept in their original form, and at times italicised and explained intratextually, arguably on the basis of their function within the text and their level of transparency for average readers. On the other hand, when these references have not been kept, this appears to be because of their less central role in the text or because they are recurring references. These tendencies, which overlap with the results from previous research on the topic (**cf. Peligra, 2019a**) actually seem to be universal ones in translation.

On the other hand, although references to the protagonists' Jewish background and Yiddish borrowings are very few, it is possible to say that these have also generally been repeated when they are comprehensible for readers and have not been kept on the basis of their textual function. Comparing the detected overall trends with the results of the specific analysis of examples relating to the protagonist's Jewish identity arguably helps hypothesise that the translator is focusing on the readers' experience, managing this without paratextual help. This can be for instance supported by the fact that arguably less well-known Jewish terms are made clear by the application of substitutive strategies. Furthermore, it has been noted that the translator is generally making an effort to recreate the effect of heterolingual speech regardless of the language in question visually too, thus giving the characters' linguistic plurality textual prominence. An overall tendency to explication has in fact been detected. An example is the following phrase: '*gelovig te worden*' (literally: to become a believer, to believe) (**Ruebsamen, 1997: 371**), which is translated into English as 'to become a practicing Jew' (**Ruebsamen, 2000: 333**), making its meaning clearer for the novel's readers. As previous research (**cf. Peligra, 2019: 212-219**) highlights the importance of also considering paratextual tools and framing when analysing translation strategies, a paratextual analysis of this translation's different editions (**Harvill, 2000; Alfred A. Knopf, 2000; Vintage, 2002**) would shed light on how the representation of the characters' plurality is introduced to the

readers in the books' packaging and contextualise the translator's choices further.

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