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**The Urbanization of American English in Entertainment and  
Translation.**

**The Social, Cultural and Linguistic Implications of Chappelle's Show  
in German.**



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## The Urbanization of American English in Entertainment and Translation.

### The Social, Cultural and Linguistic Implications of Chappelle’s Show in German.

**Abstract:** The following article examines a seldom addressed, yet growingly pertinent issue in Translation Studies: the usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in entertainment as a form of intercultural communication. Here, the difficulties of accurate contextual transmission in the use of German subtitles will be discussed. Using the popular syndicated television series *Chappelle’s Show* as a practical example, the German subtitles in three sketches from the show will be analyzed for the contextual relevance, the treatment of controversial issues, concepts and language and the transcultural communicability of racial and political satire and references to popular culture in German translation. Furthermore, insights into the authenticity of the portrayal of AAVE in the show will be discussed, as the differentiation between the use of authentic AAVE and unauthentic AAVE will directly affect the quality of the target translations. The contributive value of the syndication of this particular show in Germany will be critiqued, followed by the conclusion that the need for more accuracy and representation of AAVE in German translation becomes increasingly greater as various popular forms of entertainment (e.g. music, cinema and television) which make use of AAVE are being presented to young German audiences, often in accompaniment with inaccurate and misleading German subtitles. In order to improve upon this deficiency, more attention must be paid within Translation Studies to the existence of AAVE as a form of intercultural communication, as well as the need for the education of translators in order to comprehend and accurately translate AAVE.

**Keywords:** African American Vernacular English; AAVE; translation; subtitles; *Chappelle’s Show*; intercultural communication; contextual transmission; Translation Studies

#### Contents:

|     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 1   | Common Associations with African American Vernacular English (AAVE).....                   | 2 |
| 1.1 | AAVE in American Society, the Media and in Linguistics.....                                | 2 |
| 1.2 | The Presence of AAVE in Texts Translated into German .....                                 | 3 |
| 1.3 | The Authentic and Unauthentic Representation of AAVE in Entertainment .....                | 4 |
| 2   | Translating for Television Viewers: The Use of German Subtitles in <i>Chappelle’s Show</i> | 5 |
| 2.1 | Contextual Discrepancies within the German Subtitles .....                                 | 5 |
| 2.2 | Chappelle’s Show as a Form of Intercultural Communication.....                             | 6 |
| 2.3 | Translating Language and Culture Using German Subtitles.....                               | 7 |

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 2.3.1 | Analysis of Transcript 1: “Black Bush” .....  | 8  |
| 2.3.2 | Analysis of Transcript 2: “Rick James: Charlie Murphy’s True Hollywood Stories” ..... | 16 |
| 2.3.3 | Analysis of Transcript 3: “When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong [Vernon Franklin]” .....   | 24 |
| 2.4   | Understanding the Need for Further Studies in AAVE within Translation Studies.....    | 28 |
| 3     | References.....   | 30 |

## 1 Common Associations with African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

### 1.1 AAVE in American Society, the Media and in Linguistics

The phrase “African American Vernacular English” invokes many associations. Most often, these associations revolve around the societal situation of many young urban African Americans, so-called inner-city youths, and the disproportionate opportunities for them in their adult lives due to the lack of quality education afforded them in the public school system. Many African American youths consistently earn lower scores on national standardized tests when directly compared to peers of other ethnic backgrounds (w<sup>1</sup>). Often, the speech of African American youths is used as a glaring example to educators that something is wrong with the way the children are taught, for they are often unwilling or unable to speak Standard American English, which in turn, affects the individual’s chances of succeeding in schools and later on in the work force (McClendon 2004).

While many fallacies within the American education system are undisputedly in dire need of reform, the predominately negative associations with African American Vernacular English should also be dispelled – to a certain degree. The fact is, AAVE is a distinguishing factor within the African American community, and in many ways, this form of communication is a celebrated aspect of the African American culture (Smitherman 1994: 18). Moreover, terms originating from African American Vernacular English, or AAVE, have been adopted into mainstream or Standard American English (here, SAE) more rapidly than ever in recent years. This is evident not only in television and film but also in leading national newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. As a result, such lexemes as “bling-bling”, “phat” and “break beat” have since been added to both the Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam

Webster Unabridged Dictionary (w<sup>2</sup>). The tendency of adopting trendy AAVE terms into Standard American English is not new, yet the recent recognition by such well-respected scholarly sources has drawn attention to this fact. Therefore, whether viewed positively or negatively, it must be surmised that AAVE is not only actively contributing to the living language of American English; it is also shaping and influencing the language in its reflections of contemporary American society.

## 1.2 The Presence of AAVE in Texts Translated into German

Kornelius has conducted extensive research in the Translation Sciences, including the existence of Irishisms in English drama and the authenticity of its representation within selected works (Kornelius 1976). Until now, the presence of AAVE in entertainment and translation has been a relatively unaddressed issue within the Translation Sciences. In Germany, the general public is exposed to portrayals of African Americans primarily through the media and literature, very seldom through first-hand experiences. Portrayals are derived only on very rare occasions from literature written by African Americans. Although many novels written by African Americans which address the African American culture have been translated into German, exposure to these works is extremely limited due to many factors, including limited publicity and sales (w<sup>3</sup>). Two exceptions include Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize winning *Song of Solomon (Solomons Lied)* and Walker's 1983 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple (Die Farbe Lila)*. If at all, it would fall on literary scholars and critics to question the authenticity of the language used in the translation of these works, none of whom would be likely to specifically query the authentic representation of AAVE reflected in the translation of the works. Furthermore, the version of AAVE in these works must be considered a literary interpretation, as there is currently no standardized spelling for the representation of the unique pronunciation of many words in AAVE.

More commonly, in Germany, images of African Americans are portrayed in music videos, films and television shows. Among many others, actors such as Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Queen Latifah and Halle Berry are easily recognizable and celebrated performers; family-oriented television shows such as *The Cosby Show*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and *My*

*Wife and Kids* (in Germany “*What’s Up, Dad?*”) have appeared on German television in syndication for years. Because the original dialogue in all of these shows typically employs the use of SAE with the integration of mild to moderate variants of AAVE, dubbing the episodes into German involved only standard procedures. Furthermore, precedence was apparently given in these shows to positive depictions of African Americans and their families – a presentation of another social reality for many unknowing viewers – over the theatrical representation of AAVE.

### 1.3 The Authentic and Unauthentic Representation of AAVE in Entertainment

In recent years, however, controversial reality shows including *The Flavor of Love* and comedy shows such as *Chappelle’s Show* have been presented to German audiences via the two international networks MTV and Comedy Central. Both of these extremely popular shows are broadcast with German subtitles and employ the use of AAVE; yet the degree of authenticity of its use differs. Flavor Flav, the star of the reality television show *The Flavor of Love* (original run in the United States on MTV 2006-2008; 39 episodes), appears to habitually communicate in an extreme variant of AAVE heavily laden in slang and in an often indecipherable manner of speech (the latter attribute is unique to his speaking style and should not be interpreted as a characteristic of AAVE).

On the other hand, comedian Dave Chappelle, the star of the comedy sketch show *Chappelle’s Show* (original run in the United States on Comedy Central 2003-2006; 33 episodes), intentionally communicates in various degrees and interpretations of AAVE on the show. The authentic use of AAVE most consistently takes place in assumedly unscripted guest narratives and interviews with musical guests. Additionally, Chappelle’s personal speaking style and rather unique delivery with mild to moderate use of stylized vocabulary when addressing a live audience or musical guests may also be considered an authentic form of AAVE. However, the primary mode of communication in the show must be considered an unauthentic version of AAVE. This theatrical version was used in almost every sketch, and due to the extremely exaggerated and profane delivery combined with the use of contemporary slang and popular cultural references and catchphrases of the time,

Chappelle’s comedic style of communication was readily embraced by a national audience, of which most members were savvy to the fact that Chappelle’s satirical presentation of culturally sensitive topics and his theatrical version of AAVE was employed for comedic purposes only. Likewise, in many other sketches, Chappelle’s employment of an overly articulated version of SAE was reserved for the stereotypical depiction of Anglo Americans, and was, in turn, also unauthentic – a theatrical representation of Standard American English used for comedic purposes. *Chappelle’s Show* has never been free of controversy; in fact, the popular show lasted for only two and a half seasons before the comedian himself abandoned it: “I was doing sketches that were funny, but socially irresponsible” (Dave Chappelle on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* 2006). Nevertheless, the show’s popularity continues unabated, and DVD sales of *Chappelle’s Show* have been record-breaking on both national and international levels (w<sup>A</sup>).

## 2 Translating for Television Viewers: The Use of German Subtitles in *Chappelle’s Show*

### 2.1 Contextual Discrepancies within the German Subtitles

Currently, *Chappelle’s Show* appears in syndication on MTV in Germany. The episodes appear in the original language with German subtitles; yet, frequently, only the essence of the original dialogue spoken in the sketches is conveyed in the text. Through this action, the transference of the show’s intention has been directly affected and distorted, for the satirical presentation of the use of an unauthentic version of AAVE in many of the comedy sketches - a factor that had contributed to the popularity of the show in the United States - has been eliminated. Moreover, the profane delivery used frequently throughout many skits is often translated with euphemisms, thus implying to impressionable viewers that many extremely profane and derogatory words are equivalent to less offensive words in German. Furthermore, without the contextual support of the use of a theatrical or unauthentic version of AAVE coupled with the often controversial representation of ethnic groups – most frequently African Americans – in the show, the intentional use of racial satire to promote

commonality and discredit racial stereotypes is in inherent danger of being lost due to the inadequacy of the German subtitles.

This inadequacy directly results in the farcical rather than satirical portrayal of race relations in America to an international audience largely unaware of one of the primary underlying intentions of the show: to depict the ludicrousness of racial stereotyping by portraying ludicrous racial stereotypes (w<sup>5</sup>). The main ingredient of the show – satire – was used to simultaneously entertain and idealistically educate American audiences of social and political issues affecting the nation infused with popular culture.

## 2.2 Chappelle’s Show as a Form of Intercultural Communication

Just as some music genres such as hip hop, rap, Rhythm & Blues, gospel and jazz are closely associated with the African American community and have often been used to address social issues and trends affecting African Americans, AAVE has often been used in staged entertainment in a similar fashion, all the while directed toward an African American audience. However, *Chappelle’s Show* uses both authentic and unauthentic variants of AAVE for another reason – primarily to achieve a “cross-over” effect by entertaining an audience including both African American and Anglo American members with sketches about controversial issues and perspectives. The result is the wide-spread usage of coined terms and phrases generated from either direct or indirect influences of the African American community and the unique comedic talents of Dave Chappelle.

Some unforgettable sketches such as “Clayton Bigsby” or “Racial Pixies” have incited serious debate and controversy in America for various reasons, primarily however, due to the intense (and more frequently overlooked) use of racial satire and blatant offensiveness contained in each scene. The broadcasting of such sketches to an international audience that has no cultural connection the majority of the themes addressed in the show often results in a lack of crucial contextual connections to the racial satire or parodies made in the sketches; this leads to the unintentional perpetuation of racial stereotypes to an impressionable youthful German audience (the target viewership of MTV ranges between the ages of 12 and 24) (w<sup>6</sup>). Many of the most popular sketches from the show however, are less jarring and

deal more with popular culture than race relations and politics. For example, parodies of encounters with entertainers such as Prince, Lil' Jon, Oprah Winfrey and Rick James are among the most popular skits from the series.

While the German syndication of *Chappelle's Show* has indeed brought more exposure to the *conceptual* use of AAVE in entertainment, the quality of entertainment presented must firstly be questioned concerning its usefulness as a form of intercultural communication. It has been proven that texts extracted from programs have the ability to strongly influence a youthful audience whose primary impressions of citizens of the United States may very well stem from such representations in television (Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-v. Ditfurth 2009: 115-120). Compounding the issue of broadcasting *Chappelle's Show* in Germany is the fact that the Translation Sciences have paid little attention to the translation of AAVE; furthermore, because within Germany the most popular and widely-used form of translation in television and film entertainment is the method of dubbing, more concentration is focused on perfecting this form of translation, leaving the translation method of subtitling less attended to (Cedeño Rojas 2006: 13). In turn, due to this deficiency, common features of subtitling can also prove to be a disadvantage to the proper transmission of content in such a controversial form of entertainment as *Chappelle's Show*.

### 2.3 Translating Language and Culture Using German Subtitles

Firstly, it is important to know that the ultimate goal of subtitling is to provide texts which allow for simple and fast reading in the target language in order to make it possible for viewers to understand the content of a show or film. Due to the fact that there is little time or space for the subtitles to be displayed, this goal is ideally achieved by use of the following methods (Cedeño Rojas 2006: 88):

- the use of simplistic syntax and punctuation
- the omission or re-wording of dialogue
- the simplification of vocabulary
- the correct timing of the appearance of the subtitles
- the correct position of subtitles on the screen

In many ways, the German subtitles used in *Chappelle's Show* perpetuate the gross misinterpretation of African Americans and AAVE. Through the inconsistent translation of phrases frequently used in the sketches, fabricated word-use for the translation of nonsensical terms, the incorrect transmission of meaning or cultural context in relation to the many delivered lines within numerous sketches, as well as the poor timing of the display of subtitles in conjunction with the verbal delivery of the translated text, impressionable German audiences are being introduced to unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts in a haphazard manner under the premise that the use of such speech is common at best – or *acceptable* at worst – among Americans of any ethnicity.

This postulation can best be supported by reviewing a few sketches from the show's most popular season. Three sketches have been selected from the second season of the series: "Black Bush" ([Season 2, Episode 13](#)), "When Keeping It Real Goes Wrong" ([Season 2, Episode 7](#)) and "Rick James: Charlie Murphy's True Hollywood Stories" ([Season 2, Episode 4](#)). Here, complete transcriptions of the skits will appear on the left, and the German subtitles will appear on the right; offensive words used are represented by the first letter of the word followed by an asterisk. These three examples – all of which employ the use of either authentic or unauthentic AAVE – will then be assessed for authenticity in contextual coherence, equivalency, and accuracy based on the German subtitles provided. In order to provide more comprehensibility for the reader unfamiliar with many of the popular catchphrases or terms, brief explanations and a short synopsis of each sketch will be provided for more clarity. It is important to note that a more extensive analysis of each sketch is beyond the scope of this article.

### 2.3.1 Analysis of Transcript 1: "Black Bush"

The first comedy sketch, "Black Bush", is according to Chappelle, a critical "interpretation" of then-president George W. Bush and his administration. ([Chappelle's Show, Season 2](#)) According to Chappelle, had the president and the most influential supporters of his administration been African American, the public would have been less willing to blindly support the rationale of the Bush administration for initiating the War in Iraq.

|                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Dave Chappelle:                 | Ladies and Gentlemen, I bring to you now: Black Bush.  | Ladys und Gentlemen, hier kommt der schwarze Bush.  |
| (Still shot)                    | (President Black Bush)   | (Der schwarze Präsident Bush)   |
| Female reporter:                | What about people who say you're only interested in the Middle East for oil?   | Sie sind nur wegen des Öls am Nahen Osten interessiert?   |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush:   | What? Huh, oil? Who said somethin' about oil, b*; you cookin'?   | Was? Was? Öl? Wer redet denn hier vom Öl?   |
|                                 | Oil?   | Öl?   |
| (Still shot)                    | British Intelligence   | Britischer Geheimdienst   |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush:   | This n* very possibly has weapons of mass destruction.<br>I can't sleep on that. "Not on my watch." That's not how I roll; that s* is serious.<br>Now, if you don't take my word for it, why don't you ax Tony Blair.<br>He got a whole 'nother set of intelligence.<br>What's up, Tony? | Er hat sicher Massenvernichtungswaffen.<br>Das bereitet mir schaflose Nächte.<br>Die Lage ist sehr ernst.<br>Sie glauben mir nicht? Fragen sie doch Tony Blair.<br>Er hat seine Informanten.<br>Was gibt's, Tony? |
| Jamie Foxx as Black Tony Blair: | We don't know much about Hussein. But we can't trust random n*s with things like that – as George so eloquently put it.<br>I'm with him one hundred percent of the way.<br>We don't know what he has.  | Wir wissen nicht viel über Hussein. Aber wir können nicht einfach irgendwelchen N*n trauen, wie George so schön sagte.<br>Und ich stimme ihm zu.<br>Wir wissen nicht, was er hat.                                 |
| (Still shot)                    | (Proof)  | (Der Beweis)  |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush:   | The n* bought aluminum tubes!<br>Do I need to tell you, what the f* you can do with an aluminum tube?<br>Aluminum!<br>That don't scare you? Fine.<br>I didn't want to say this but...  | Er hat Aluröhren gekauft.<br>Muss ich erklären, wofür Aluröhren benutzt werden?<br>Aluminium!<br>Sie haben keine Angst? Okay.<br>Ich wollte es ja nicht sagen,  |

|                                   |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
|                                   |   | aber...  |
|                                   | The mf* bought some yellow cake, OK? In Africa.   | Der Wichser kaufte „Yellow Cake“. In Afrika.   |
|                                   | He went to Africa, and he bought yellow cake.   | Er kaufte „Yellow Cake“ in Afrika.   |
| Female reporter:                  | Are you sure?   | Sind Sie sicher?   |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush:     | Yes, I'm sure, b*! I got the head of the CIA right here. He'll tell you.  | Natürlich bin ich sicher! Der CIA-Chef wird es bestätigen.   |
| Mos Def as Black Head of the CIA: | “Are you sure?” “Are you sure?”<br>I can't believe you mf*s. These people are ridiculous.<br>Ridiculous!<br>Me and Jeb just coming back from Africa – | „Sind Sie sicher?“<br>Ihr Wichser seid einfach unglaublich.<br>Das ist doch lächerlich.<br>Jeb und ich sind gerade aus Afrika zurückgekommen – |
| “Some Black Dude”:                | The cradle of f*in' civilization!   | Der Wiege der Zivilisation!  |
| Mos Def as Black Head of CIA:     | An' this n* out there buying yellow cake.   | Und dieser N* kauft „Yellow Cake.“   |
| “Some Black Dude”:                | From the Motherland.  | Vom Mutterland.  |
| Female Reporter:                  | Are you sure it was yellow cake?  | War es wirklich „Yellow Cake“?   |
| Mos Def as Black Head of CIA:     | Y'all n*s don't believe me, I got some yellow cake right here. Look, see? You believe me now?   | Ich habe das Zeug dabei.<br>Hier, glauben Sie mir jetzt?   |
| “Some Black Dude”:                | Don't drop that s*.   | Lass das Zeug nicht fallen.  |
| Mos Def as Black Head of CIA:     | I know! I know what to do with it. Got it wrapped up in this special CIA napkin.  | Ich hab es extra in diese CIA-Serviette gewickelt.   |
| “Some Black Dude”:                | Just don't drop that s* here.   | Lass es nicht fallen.  |
| Mos Def as Black Head of CIA:     | I won't drop this s*!   | Ich halte es gut fest.   |
| “Some Black Dude”:                | Pray to God you don't drop that s*.   | Bloß nicht fallen lassen.  |
| Mos Def as Black Head of CIA:     | Yellow Cake.  | „Yellow Cake“.   |
| (Still shot)                      | (U.N.)  | (UNO)  |
| Orator:                           | President Bush met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan   | Präsident Bush traf UNO-Generalsekretär Kofi Annan   |

|                               |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
|                               | and made it clear that the US will act – even if the UN is reluctant.  | und machte klar, dass die USA handeln werden, auch wenn die UNO noch zögert.               |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush: | UN, you have a problem with that? You know what you should do? You should sanction me. Sanction me with your army. | Wenn die UNO damit Probleme hat, sollte sie mir Sanktionen mir ihrer Armee auferlegen.     |
|                               | Oh! Wait a minute – you don't have an army!  | Halt! Sie hat ja gar keine Armee.  |
|                               | I guess that means you need to shut the f* up.   | Dann sollte sie gefälligst das Maul halten.  |
|                               | That's what I would do if I ain' had no army.  | Das würde ich machen, wenn ich keine Armee hätte.  |
|                               | I would shut the f* up. Shut. The. F*. Up. That's right.   | Ich würde mein Maul halten.  |
|                               | Kofi Annan – now you think I'm a take orders from an African?  | Glaubt Kofi, dass ich Befehle eines Afrikaners akzeptiere?                                 |
|                               | You might speak sixteen languages, but you won't need 'em when you in Times Square sellin' fake hats.              | Seine 16 Sprachen nutzen nichts, um auf dem Times Square gefälschte Hüte zu verkaufen.     |
|                               | I know Gucci when I see it, n*; I'm rich.  | Ich kenne Gucci, ich bin reich.  |
|                               | I got a Coalition of the willing. I got – forty nations!   | Ich habe eine ganze Koalition und 40 Nationen hinter mir.                                  |
|                               | Ready to roll, son!  | Die wollen loslegen!   |
| Unidentified Male Reporter:   | Like who?  | Wer denn?  |
| Dave Chappelle as Black Bush: | Who the f* said that? Huh?   | Wer hat das gesagt?  |
|                               | Huh? Like who?   | „Wer denn?“  |
|                               | England. Japan's sending Playstations. Stankonia says they're willing to drop bombs over Baghdad.                  | England. Japan schickt Playstations. Stankonia sagte, sie wollen Bomben auf Bagdad werfen. |
|                               | Riggity Row is coming!   | Die ganze üble Meute kommt!  |
|                               | Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation.  | Afrika Bambaataa und die Zulu Nation.  |
|                               | That means I am not doing this by myself.  | Das mache ich nicht allein.  |

|      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 3:13 | <p>And I'm not disrespecting the UN. Even though they don't got no army.</p> <p>Go sell some medicine, b*s!</p> <p>I'm tryin' to get that oil – uh, haul!</p> | <p>Ich habe Respekt vor der UNO. Auch wenn sie keine Armee hat.</p> <p>Die sollen Medikamente verkaufen.</p> <p>Ich versuche, an das Öl ranzukommen.</p> |
|------|---|--|

Only a select number of phrases can be assessed here. One of the first impressions gained by reading the transcript is the gratuitous use of profanity. While using profanity is not uncommon among speakers of various races and nationalities, this is not a characteristic of any dialectal or English variant usage, including AAVE. The use of such words is considered offensive, unnecessary and unsuitable for underage viewers. Interestingly, while the original text contains twenty-three profane words, the German subtitles contain only four. This leads to two problems: by eliminating almost all of the profane words, the German subtitles indirectly acknowledge that much of the language used in the original script is inappropriate for their target viewership; therefore, self-censorship was employed. However, by providing euphemisms or omitting references to the offensive words used, the German subtitles indirectly indicate to impressionable viewers that the use of such words may be mildly offensive to native speakers, yet not to the degree of profanity that is truly the case. Furthermore, while there are equivalent terms in German for many of these foul words, almost none were used in the subtitles, further distorting the reality of the seriousness of the matter. This is further evidenced by the sporadic translation of the profuse use of what is euphemistically referred to as the “N-word”. This extremely offensive word was used six times in the sketch, one fourth of the profane words used throughout. The German subtitles employed the offensive equivalent twice, encompassing one half of all offensive words used in the subtitles. Clearly, the examples could have easily been translated differently. Even more disturbingly, the first example containing the offensive term was incorrectly translated:

- 
- But we can't trust random n\*s *with things like that* – as George so eloquently put it.
  - Aber wir können nicht einfach irgendwelchen N\*n trauen, wie George so schön sagte.

The German subtitles completely ignore a pertinent phrase in the original text – “with things like that” – implying that Saddam Hussein could not be trusted with material that could aid in the production of weapons of mass destruction. By ignoring the implied reference made specifically to Hussein and the possibility that he possessed weapons of mass destruction and choosing to keep the offensive term, the German subtitles have firstly misled the audience, as the members must determine for themselves to whom the character “Black Tony Blair” is actually referring; secondly, the translation implies that no African Americans can be trusted at all, which starkly alters the meaning of the original text. This translation, in turn, propagates negative stereotypes concerning African Americans which did not even appear in the original text.

The second reference containing the offensive term could equally have been eliminated by making a direct reference to Saddam Hussein. By doing so, the offensive language transmitted in the German subtitles would have been reduced by fifty percent; moreover, the political references which were current events in 2004 would be more accurately understood by audience members six or seven years later, including the fact that some of the phrases used by Chappelle were actually spoken by former President Bush himself. For example, “Not on my watch” (w<sup>7</sup>) was a catchphrase attributed to Bush during his presidency, as was the “coalition of the willing” (w<sup>8</sup>) — nations that were prepared to support the Bush administration in waging war on Iraq. By ignoring many of the contextual implications in the original text, audience members today are presented with subtitles that can be interpreted as simplistic dialogue lacking context. This point is accentuated in the fact that the punch line of the entire sketch, when Black Bush tries to cover up his true intention for the war after misspeaking (“[I’m] tryin’ to get that oil – *haul!*”), is not translated. This practice is a direct contradiction of the primary purpose of translation in the form of subtitles.

For example, the entire scene depicting yellowcake is completely devoid of contextual comprehensibility in the German subtitles. Instead of translating “yellowcake” – a common reference to partially refined uranium ore, which is used in uranium fuel for nuclear reactors (w<sup>9</sup>) – the German subtitles simply ignore the need to localize this lexeme, and instead

interject the term in quotation marks. By doing so, the contextual aspect of the use of the term has been eliminated, the political satire has been lost and most importantly, the double entendre “yellow cake” the dessert and “yellowcake” the chemical compound is lost to the audience members who rely on the subtitles for orientation.

A further example is the fact that the “coalition of the willing” – as presented by “Black Bush” – consists of references to many hip hop artists of the 1990s and 2000s.

- Stankonia says they’re willing to drop bombs over Baghdad.
- Riggity Row is coming!
- Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation.

*Stankonia* is the name of the fourth album released by the hip hop and neo soul duo *Outcast* in 2000. “Bombs Over Baghdad” was the first single released from this album; when the Iraq war began in 2003, the song resurged in popularity. “Riggity Row” is a nonsensical phrase attributed to the hardcore hip hop duo *Das EFX*, who gained fame in the early 1990s by creating fast-paced stream of consciousness lyrics often with nonsensical words which frequently ended in “-iggity”. “Afrika Bambaataa” is one of the originators of break-beat deejaying and largely contributed to the development of hip hop in the 1980s; he is also credited with having contributed to the spread of hip hop around the world. The Universal Zulu Nation (w<sup>10</sup>) was a creation of Afrika Bambaataa, consisting of politically and socially responsible members who used their creative talents for positive contributions to the African American community.

Without the explanation of the cultural references, such dialogue spoken in the sketch cannot possibly function in the use of German subtitles, for the satirical references to popular culture must be well known by the majority of the audience; otherwise the dialogue is merely infused with nonsensical words lacking context. For example, the German subtitles leave the assumedly uninformed audience ignorant of any of the pop-culture-infused jokes:

- Stankonia sagte, sie wollen Bomben auf Bagdad werfen.
- Die ganze üble Meute kommt!
- Afrika Bambaataa und die Zulu Nation.

To provide a translation for “Riggity Row” – a nonsensical word – is irresponsible and leads to further nonsense, especially to interpret the phrase to mean “die ganze üble Meute”.

Lastly, to interpret the original sketch as an example of the use of authentic AAVE in entertainment would be a fallacy, for many references, phrases and terms used in the sketch are nonsensical, and most importantly, are not considered to be commonly used by those who actually speak AAVE. As previously mentioned, the usage of English variants employed in the sketches should be interpreted as a theatrical interpretation – or an unauthentic version of AAVE.

The features of AAVE which have been presented in a more authentic manner include the following lines.

- 1. Now, if you don't take my word for it, why don't you ax Tony Blair.
- 2. That don't scare you?
- 3. Me and Jeb just coming back from Africa –
- 4. You might speak sixteen languages, but you won't need 'em when you in Times Square sellin' fake hats.

The first example indicates the metathesized pronunciation of the word “ask”. As explained by McClendon (2004: 17) the inversion of the “s” and “k” sounds is a common pronunciation variant of the word; this is a perceived problem among many speakers of AAVE. The second example indicates the lack of agreement between the subject and verb. While this characteristic is common among various English language variants and is, therefore, not an exclusive feature of AAVE, this type of sentence formation is prone to occur often in AAVE. The third example once again refers to a unique pronunciation pattern used in AAVE: the devoicing of voiced stops in stressed syllables (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2003: 171). “Jeb” – the younger brother of George Bush is pronounced [tʃɛp](with the insertion of a diphthong) instead of [dʒɛb] (Yule 2006: 38). The fourth example, “sellin'”, is also a feature largely ascribed to AAVE – the reduction of final consonant clusters. Frequently, in AAVE the “g” in words ending in “-ing” is eliminated in pronunciation; this is often the case in words which end in “t” as well.

It is important to note that much of the “slang” used by the performers in the skit cannot be attributed to more common slang usage employed in AAVE – many phrases, some of which have already been referred to in this article – were created by Chappelle solely for comedic effect. Interestingly, almost all phrases which employed elements of authentic AAVE were translated as though the original text had been spoken in SAE:

- Sie glauben mir nicht? Fragen sie doch Tony Blair.
- Sie haben keine Angst?
- Jeb und ich sind gerade aus Afrika zurückgekommen –
- Seine 16 Sprachen nutzen nichts, um auf dem Times Square gefälschte Hüte zu verkaufen.

### 2.3.2 Analysis of Transcript 2: “Rick James: Charlie Murphy’s True Hollywood Stories”

The second comedy sketch, “Rick James: Charlie Murphy’s True Hollywood Stories,” pertains to the recounting of an incident which took place between Charlie Murphy – the older brother of the famed actor Eddie Murphy – and Rick James, an eccentric funk and R&B artist who was most popular during the late 1970s and 1980s. While both of the two men recall a common experience that they had, Charlie Murphy plays himself in the sketch and Dave Chappelle appears as Rick James. This scene makes use of authentic AAVE based on the assumedly unscripted retelling of events by both Murphy and James. The unauthentic or theatrical version of AAVE was employed most frequently by Chappelle while performing the role of Rick James in the sketch.

|                 |   |  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Dave Chappelle: | Ladies and gentlemen, make some noise: Charlie Murphy’s True Hollywood Stories.   | Ladys and Gentlemen, Applaus für „Charlie Murphy’s Hollywood Stories“.   |
| (Still shot)    | Charlie Murphy’s True Hollywood Stories<br>I get out the navy; my brother’s famous. His fame is exploding.<br>I’m real proud of that. You know what I mean, and uh, I’m gettin’ to hang out with people that I’d only read about in magazines or seen, you know, on the screen somewhere. | (no translation)<br>Als ich von der Navy zurückkam, war mein Bruder berühmt.<br>Ich war sehr stolz auf ihn.<br>Ich traf Leute, die man sonst nur in Zeitschriften oder auf der Leinwand sieht. |

|                               |  |   |
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|                               | <p>And so I'm like, standing next to them and being at dinner tables with them, and you know,</p> <p>it was a bug out, man! You know.</p> <p>I was a huge Rick James fan. That's the first person that I would say out of all the celebrities that I'd met, that I was star struck.</p> <p>We gonna hang out with Rick James tonight, know what I'm sayin'.</p> <p>And here he comes out the room and I look at him, and I'm not bs*in' man; I seen like a orange – his aura or whatever – I, I seen it. It was orange.</p> <p>We started kickin' it, and he was mad n*ish, man, which was, you know, right up my alley.</p> | <p>Ich stand neben ihnen und hab mit ihnen gegessen.</p> <p>Es war total abgefahren.</p> <p>Ich fand Rick James toll. Unter all den Stars war er der Größte für mich. Ihn zu treffen, hat mich umgehauen.</p> <p>Wir haben mit Rick James abgehangen.</p> <p>Er kam raus und ich sah ihn. Ich verarsch euch nicht; ich hab alles orange gesehen... Seine Aura oder irgendwas war orange.</p> <p>Er war einfach obercool, das war genau mein Ding.</p> |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | <p>I'm one of the baddest mf*s of all time. I'm one of the best singers, one of the best-looking mf*s you've ever seen.</p> <p>Hold my drink, b*.</p>  | <p>Ich bin voll der geile Macker. Ich bin ein total genialer Sänger.</p> <p>Halt mal, B*.</p>   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | <p>He walked up to any chick and licked the whole side of her face, man.</p>   | <p>Er ging zu jeder Tussi und schlabberte ihr Gesicht ab.</p>   |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | <p>I'm Rick James, b*.</p> <p>Enjoy yourself.</p>  | <p>Ich bin Rick James, B*.</p> <p>Amüsier dich gut.</p>   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | <p>We got closer, started hangin' out.</p> <p>My brother – didn't do any of this s*. So at night, when Eddie would break out, we would all be doin'... gettin' crazy and wild. If I was hangin' with Rick, he had this thing with me where he used to always, like, f* with me, man.</p>   | <p>Wir wurden Freunde.</p> <p>Mein Bruder hat sich aus dem Ganzen rausgehalten. Wenn Eddie nach Hause gegangen ist, haben wir richtig aufgedreht. Ich hab mit Rick abgehangen, aber er hat mich ständig fertig gemacht.</p>   |

|                               |  |  |
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|                               | I don't know what, what started it.  | Ich weiß nicht, warum das so war.  |
| (Caption)                     | RICK JAMES / SUPERFREAK  | (no translation)   |
| Rick James:                   | You know, he was hangin' with the big dogs. You know, you know. Charlie, you know, was doing crazy things and I had to straighten him out.<br><br>Sometimes I had to go upside his head...   | Er hing mit großen Stars ab.<br><br>Charlie hob irgendwann ab, und ich musste ihm zeigen, wo's langgeht.   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | Things... escalated to the point where, you know, my man got too familiar, and I ended up havin' to whip his a*, man, you know, because man, you know, he would step across the line. Habitually. He is a habitual line-stepper.<br><br>First time, where I had ended up whippin' his a*, uh – we went to Studio 54.<br><br>We were walking up to the VIP section, and, um, I'm looking around and seeing who's there and at the girls and everything...<br><br>And all of a sudden, I heard somethin' go: | Die Situation ist eskaliert, als mein Freund mir zu nahe getreten ist und ich ihm eine verpassen musste.<br><br>Er ist einfach zu weit gegangen.<br><br>Er ist ein notorischer Zu-Weit-Geher.<br><br>Das erste Mal, hab ich ihm eine reingehauen, als wir im Studio 54 waren.<br><br>Wir gingen in den VIP-Bereich und ich guckte, wer so alles da ist und checkte die Girls ab.<br><br>Plötzlich hörte ich: |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | Charlie Murphy!<br>That was... cold blooded.   | Charlie Murphy!<br>Eiskalt erwischt.   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | He had this ring on to commemorate the song he had put out called "Unity".   | Er trug den Ring, der an seinen Song „Unity“ erinnert.   |
| Rick James                    | And this was imprinted in that black head of his. For at least a week.   | Der Abdruck von dem Ring war auf seiner schwarzen Stirn. Eine Woche lang.  |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | Unity!   | „Unity!“   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | Eddie and everybody else thought that was the funniest s*.<br>And so that threw me in a weird space, 'cause I'm like,  | Eddie und alle anderen fanden das total lustig.<br>Was soll ich machen?<br>Einerseits dachte ich:  |

|                               |  |  |
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|                               | “Yeah, this is Rick James; he’s a star...”   | „Das ist Rick James, er ist ein Star.“   |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | I’m Rick James, b*.<br>This is a celebration, b*.  | Ich bin Rick James, B*.<br>Jetzt wird gefeiert, B*.  |
| Charlie Murphy:               | Maybe I’m overreacting. I actually went there; like, “Maybe I shouldn’t do nothin’.<br>But my ghetto-side was going, “yo, stomp this mf* out right here. What the f* is wrong with him?”   | Ich dachte: „Vielleicht bin ich zu empfindlich und sollte gar nichts machen.“<br>Aber dann dachte ich: „Hau dem Arsch eine rein.“<br>“Der spinnt doch.”  |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | I’m just unwindin’ and I’m just getting’ started, b*.  | Ich leg gerade erst richtig los, B*.   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | He totally just rolled me off, like I’m that n* to steal on, you know what I’m sayin’?   | Er hat mich behandelt wie seinen kleinen Prügelknaben.   |
| Rick James:                   | What? He goin’ smack me back? I’m Rick James; he’s Charlie Murphy.   | Der kann mir nichts tun. Ich bin Rick James; er Charlie Murphy.  |
| Charlie Murphy:               | I waited, ‘cause I knew what hotel he was stayin’ at.<br>Eddie and them went home. I said, “I’ll be right back.”<br>I shot over to the hotel, went up to his room and knocked on the door. | Ich habe gewartet, ich kannte seine Hoteladresse.<br>Eddie ging nach Hause. Ich sagte, „Ich komme nach.“<br>Ich fuhr zum Hotel und klopfte an seine Tür. |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | ...So then he comes in there and I said, “Look b*, I’m Rick James.” Smack.<br><br>Oh, Charlie Murphy!  | ...Und als er reinkam, sagte ich: „Hey, B*, ich bin Rick James.“ Ich habe ihm eine verpasst.<br><br>Oh, Charlie Murphy.                                  |
| Charlie Murphy:               | He had his hand cocked, to throw another right hand. When he was coming forward, I just came... POW! Caught him in the front.  | Er wollte mir noch eine reinhauen.<br>Als er näher kam, hab ich zugetreten und ihn voll erwischt.  |
| Rick James:                   | Look at Charlie, like he gave me some kinda Bruce Lee cross kick or something.   | Er behauptet, er hat mir einen Bruce-Lee Tritt verpasst.   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | I kicked the s* out of him.  | Dem hab ich’s gezeigt.   |

|                               |  |   |
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|                               | The wind was knocked out of him.   | Der war total fertig.   |
|                               | And then he screams out...   | Und dann schrie er los...   |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | Security!  | Security!   |
| Charlie Murphy:               | The one in the front, he had crooked eyes and s*; one eye was looking at me, the other one was looking at Rick.  | Der eine hat geschielt. Ein Auge war auf mich gerichtet, das andere guckte Rick an.   |
|                               | Rick had edged over by the window.   | Rick hatte sich ans Fenster verkrümmelt.  |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | Now, Darkness, the tables have turned. Do with him whatever you like.  | Jetzt wird der Spieß umgedreht.<br>Er gehört euch.  |
| Charlie Murphy as himself:    | Mf*s take one more step, I'm kickin' this n* out the mf*ing window.  | Wenn ihr näher kommt, fliegt das Arschloch aus dem Fenster.   |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | (unintelligible)   | Kommt her!  |
| Charlie Murphy as himself:    | You know you was wrong for what you did to me earlier.<br>Look at what you did to my face.   | Was du gemacht hast, war scheiße.<br>Guck dir mein Gesicht an.  |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | I'm sorry Charlie Murphy. It was an accident.<br>I was having too much fun.<br>I'll offer you a truce. The stickiest of the icky. You wanna smoke with the old boy Rick James? | Tut mir Leid, das war ein Unfall.<br>Ich war im Spaßrausch.<br>Wie wäre ein Waffenstillstand? Das Beste vom Besten. Rauchst du mit dem alten Rick James?          |
| Charlie Murphy as himself:    | Yo, man, my forehead is bumpin', man.  | Ich habe voll die üblen Kopfschmerzen.  |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | Now that you mention it, I think I'm bleeding inside my chest.<br>But I got the medicine.<br>B*, come over here and have sex with Charlie Murphy.<br>I'm Rick James, b*.       | Wo du es sagst... Ich glaub, ich hab innere Blutungen.<br>Aber ich hab ein Heilmittel.<br>B*, komm her und treib's mit Charlie Murphy.<br>Ich bin Rick James, B*. |
| Charlie Murphy:               | That was how that particular incident ended.   | So ist dieser Zwischenfall ausgegangen.   |

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| Charlie Murphy:               | But that wasn't the last time I had to whip his a*.   | Aber ich musste ihm öfters mal eine verpassen.  |
| Rick James:                   | Don't you think Charlie's a little too old to be taking karate? He's probably taking it with little kids.<br><br>Yeah, Charlie whipped my ass in his dreams. I told you, Charlie has delusions of grandeur in his head. I'm telling you what's happening. | Ist Charlie nicht zu alt für Karateunterricht? Er sollte Kinderkurse besuchen.<br><br>Er hat mich nur im Traum verprügelt. Charlie hat Wahnvorstellungen. |
| Dave Chappelle as Rick James: | I'm Rick James, b*.   | Ich bin Rick James, B*.   |
| (Still shot)                  | TO BE CONTINUED...  | Fortsetzung folgt...  |
| (Still shot)                  | Charlie Murphy's True Hollywood Stories   | (no translation)  |

5:21

The catchphrase “I'm Rick James, b\*” was coined by Chappelle, who notoriously uses the derogatory term to address females throughout his entire series (the first sketch presented in this article also reflects this tendency). This particular sketch contributed to the immense popularity of the comedian and his show. Once again, the German subtitles reduce the amount of profane word use, and also avoid using direct equivalents for almost all of the foul words, with the exception of the word included in the popular catchphrase. In this sketch, the use of racial epithets was avoided completely in the German subtitles – an indication of inconsistency in the translation process.

In this sketch, the original text relies primarily on the narrative form in order to progress the action. The German subtitles reflect this by focusing less on providing a direct translation of the dialogue and focuses more on transmitting the context of the story, a method common in German subtitling, despite some opposing views to this tendency ([Cedeño Rojas 2006: 131-134](#)). This comedy sketch makes use of authentic AAVE more frequently than the first; this is primarily attributed to the assumedly unscripted narrative accounts presented by both Charlie Murphy and Rick James. This sketch provides more insight to many idiomatic expressions and collocations used in AAVE, which also serve to provide humorous elements,

yet the German subtitles avoid acknowledging the majority of them. A number of these examples will be discussed below.

- 1. You know what I mean... / Know what I'm sayin'...
- 2. hangin' out / kickin' it
- 3. I seen it.
- 4. It was a bug out, man.
- 5. Right up my alley.
- 6. Eddie would break out
- 7. Sometimes I would have to go upside his head
- 8. My man got too familiar
- 9. I actually went there
- 10. Maybe I shouldn't do nothin'
- 11. You know you was wrong for what you did to me earlier

The first examples are direct reflections of what Smitherman refers to as “talking and testifying” (Smitherman 1994: 1), in which the same concept of *call and response*, often used in the church and in music, is also employed in conversation among African Americans.

These phrases provide the ebb and flow in a conversation, ensuring that both an active speaker and an active listener may participate in conversation. The second examples “hangin' out” and “kickin' it” are synonymous with one another. Today, both phrases have been assimilated into the mainstream vernacular English. It is interesting to note that the German translations never refer to these phrases at all, although they were used numerous times throughout the sketch, indicating that Murphy and James spent much time together. The third example portrays a common occurrence among speakers of AAVE – the nonstandard conjugation of verbs (Smitherman, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes). This is not a unique feature of AAVE. The German subtitles modified the phrase to reflect SAE and used standardized grammar to transmit this phrase in German.

Examples four through nine are all examples of the use of slang within AAVE. The fact is, although Oxford has undertaken the task of compiling a dictionary of modern slang terms with terms deriving from mainstream British and American English (Handmark, Inc. 2010), an exhaustive up-to-date compilation can never exist, especially concerning slang terms used within AAVE. The primary purpose of slang is to communicate in coded speech; this practice has proven useful and necessary among African Americans over the years for many reasons,

especially during times of oppression (Hirsch, Jr., Kett and Trefil 1993). As soon as certain words have been decoded, another coded term will be created to replace it. Additionally, there remains a generational divide within AAVE, just as is the case in any other form of English. That is, the phrases and terms used by Murphy and in many cases, Chappelle, are dated, making it more difficult to provide an accurate German translation, especially for target viewers who may easily have been as young as seven at the time when the show was originally aired. It should be acknowledged that some of these phrases are not exclusive to AAVE.

In this case, "It was a bug out" may be understood as "It was an unbelievable night of partying" and should not be confused with the British English slang "to bug out" – to evacuate from somewhere quickly; if something is "right up your alley", it is something you're interested in and enjoy doing. "To break out" can mean a number of things; in this case, Murphy indicates that his brother left the crowd because he did not want to be associated with the activities that would later take place. "To go upside someone's head" crosses all generational boundaries and was correctly translated, meaning to hit someone. "To get too familiar" is to feel too relaxed around someone to the point where one becomes disrespectful without fear of retaliation. The German translation "zu nah getreten" actually more accurately reflects another slang phrase used in AAVE, "to step too closely". However, both terms reflect a similar, although not exact, meaning. "To go there" is a phrase that generally indicates that something has been addressed which should not have been. In this case, Murphy indicates that to even consider that he was in the wrong was an incorrect action. The tenth example is a reflection of the common use of double negatives. While not a unique feature of AAVE, it is a characteristic of it. The last example typifies the nonstandard use of the verb form "be".

Although the translation of many collocations and popular culture phrases has been omitted, the German subtitles succeed in transmitting a logical sequence of events in this sketch. However, the representation of AAVE has been completely omitted in the subtitles, thus distorting the original text by not serving to be an interpretation of AAVE, but a secondary translation of AAVE to SAE to German vernacular.

### 2.3.3 Analysis of Transcript 3: “When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong [Vernon Franklin]”

The final sketch reviewed in this article is also from the second season, the most popular of the short-lived series. “When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong: Vernon Franklin” is a direct and satirical interpretation of the consequences that could be suffered when one overuses extreme forms of AAVE in inappropriate situations. This sketch intentionally contrasts SAE with unauthentic AAVE spoken by the character Vernon; its purpose is to illuminate the ludicrousness of the forms of communication used to indicate acceptance among social groups. McClendon (2004 : 6) addresses a conceptual fallacy among many African Americans: to speak SAE in order to succeed in society is considered by some to be in direct opposition to being African American. In the comedy sketch, the implied question asked by the character is: where do I belong? For more insights into this perspective, see DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* and the concept of “two-ness” in the African American psyche (w<sup>11</sup>).

|                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Dave Chappelle: | [...] You know, our generation has a phrase we like to say. That phrase is “Keep it real.”                                  | Unsere Generation liebt einen Satz ganz besonders. Und zwar: „Bleib dir treu.“                    |
|                 | People say it to me all the time: “Dave, you got that show – remember, brother: keep it real.”                              | Viele sagen: „Dave, du machst die Show. Aber denk dran, bleib dir treu.“                          |
|                 | Very good advice. Not always as easy as it seems.   | Ein sehr guter Rat. Oft leichter gesagt als getan.  |
|                 | Sometimes, folks, “keeping it real” works against you.  | Manchmal ist “sich treu bleiben” gar nicht so leicht.   |
|                 | So now, ladies and gentlemen, we’d like to show you one of those times in a new segment: “When keeping it real goes wrong.” | Und jetzt, Ladys and Gentlemen, sehen wir eine Situation, in der “sich treu bleiben” schief geht. |

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|--------------|---|--|
| (Still shot) | When keeping it real goes wrong                     | “Wann ‚sich treu bleiben‘ schief geht. „         |
| Narrator:    | You’re watching: “When keeping it real goes wrong.” | (no translation)                                 |
|              | Vernon Franklin was an exceptional young man.       | Vernon Franklin war ein außergewöhnlicher junger |

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|                               | <p>He was the Valedictorian of his high school class, won several scholarships and became the first person in his family to attend college.</p> <p>He got a good job and worked 14 hour days, six days a week</p> <p>– quickly becoming the youngest vice president in the history of the VIACORP Corporation –</p> <p>Ending the cycle of violence and drug addiction that had plagued his family for generations.</p> <p>The officers of his company were wrapping up the usual Thursday meeting in the South Conference Room when Frank Murphy, the man who had mentored Vernon, made an awkward comment:</p> | <p>Mann.</p> <p>Er war Abschiedsredner seines Jahrgangs, erhielt mehrere Stipendien und besuchte als erster in seiner Familie das College.</p> <p>Er hatte einen guten Job und arbeitete 14 Stunden am Tag, 6 Tage pro Woche.</p> <p>Er wurde schnell zum jüngsten Vizepräsidenten in der Geschichte von VIACORP.</p> <p>Er endete die Spirale von Gewalt und Drogensucht, in der seine Familie gefangen war.</p> <p>Seine Kollegen beendeten gerade das wöchentliche Meeting im Konferenzraum, als Frank Murphy, Vernons Mentor, eine unpassende Bemerkung machte.</p> |
| Vernon's Mentor Frank Murphy: | Vernon; great job, buddy. You the man.<br>Gimme some skin. Huh!  | Vernon, du hast gute Arbeit geleistet. Du bist der Größte. Schlag ein!  |
| Narrator:                     | <p>Vernon got along with all of the people he worked with, which in his heart of hearts made him feel like an Uncle Tom.</p> <p>Though he could have ignored the simple comment his mentor made, Vernon decided to keep it real.</p>   | <p>Vernon kam mit allen seine Kollegen gut klar. Dadurch war er für sie ein bisschen wie ein Onkel Tom.</p> <p>Obwohl er die Bemerkung seines Mentors hätte ignorieren können, beschloss Vernon sich treu zu bleiben.</p>   |
| Vernon:                       | <p>Get your mf*ing hand out of my face. You heard me, mf*, get your hands outta my face!</p> <p>What you think this is, man; just shake my hand like a man.</p> <p>“Gimme some five on the backhand side and all this crazy jive.”</p>   | <p>Pfoten weg, Mann!<br/>Nimm deine verdammten Pfoten weg!</p> <p>Gib mir die Hand, wie ein richtiger Mann.</p> <p>„Schlag ein.“</p>  |

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|                   | That's bs*.<br>Want a little soft-shoe? Shall I jump some watermelons for you folks?<br>F* all that, n*!   | Das ist doch idiotisch.<br>Alles Mist.<br>Soll ich vielleicht steppen?<br>Das ist doch scheiße, Mann.  |
| Vernon's Mentor : | Hey Vernon, buddy...   | Vernon, beruhige dich.   |
| Vernon:           | Get your mf*ing hands off me, Frank!<br>This ain't a game.   | Pfoten Weg!<br>Das ist kein Spiel.   |
| Vernon's Mentor:  | This isn't the Vernon I know.  | So kenne ich dich gar nicht.   |
| Vernon:           | "Allow me to re-introduce myself: My name is HOV!"<br>(intelligible)<br>Black people dangerous.<br>I used to beat mf*s up – just like you, just for walking 'round my way, n*.             | Darf ich vorstellen, mein Name ist HOV.<br>Das hast du noch nicht gehört, was?<br>Schwarze sind gefährlich.<br>Wichser wie euch schlage ich zu Brei, wenn sie mir bloß im Weg stehen.        |
| Vernon's Mentor:  | Vernon, buddy.<br>You better sit the f* down, Frank. I said, sit down, b*!<br>Thug life! Think this a game, n*?<br>Wu-Tang!  | Vernon, hör auf.<br>Setz dich hin, Frank.<br>Setz dich gefälligst hin!<br>Glaubst du, das hier ist ein Spiel?<br>Wu-Tang!  |
| Narrator:         | Today, Vernon works at Sonny's Fill 'er Up on Route 80 in New Jersey.<br>He makes \$6.45 an hour and stinks of gasoline even when he's not at the station.<br>It's as "real" as it can be. | Heute arbeitet Vernon in einer Tankstelle in New Jersey.<br>Er verdient 6,45 Dollar pro Stunde und riecht nach Benzin, auch wenn er nicht arbeitet.<br>Es ist so real, wie es nur sein kann. |
| Vernon:           | A dollar?<br>What I'm gonna get with a dollar, n*; I got kids!<br>And that's real.   | Ein Dollar?<br>Nur ein lausiger Dollar?<br>Ich hab Kinder.<br>So sieht's aus.  |
| Narrator:         | Vernon Franklin – once a heartwarming story of   | Vernon Franklin war einst ein gutes Beispiel für   |

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
|         | perseverance –  | Beharrlichkeit.   |
| Vernon: | Wu-Tang!  | Wu-Tang!  |
|         | Today, a startling example of:<br>When Keeping it real goes<br>wrong. | Heute ist er ein gutes für:<br>Wenn sich treu bleiben schief<br>geht. |
| 3:05    |   |   |

Once again, it is interesting to note that almost all profanity was eliminated in the German subtitles. Five phrases, sentences or cultural references in the dialogue require explanations, especially because the German subtitles do not provide them.

- 1. Keep it real
- 2. You the man / Gimme some skin
- 3. Which in his heart of hearts made him feel like an Uncle Tom
- 4. Dadurch war er für sie ein bisschen wie Onkel Tom.
- 5. "Allow me to re-introduce myself. My name is HOV."
- 6. Wu-Tang!

The first example is a phrase that has been popular for a number of years. There are many interpretations for this phrase, and it is interesting to note that the German translation "sich treu bleiben" is a direct translation of the standardized interpretation – to be true to oneself. However, the implications of this translation are not correct. To "keep it real" does not necessarily mean to be true to oneself in AAVE, as it has multiple meanings; another interpretation includes properly representing a specific concept, ideal or group, regardless of one's personal beliefs. The second examples "You the man" and "Gimme some skin" have become cross-over cliché terms. In this case, "you the man" is to indicate that Vernon is a man of distinction ([Smitherman 1994: 158](#)).

Concerning examples three and four, this sentence (in English and in German) has less to do with AAVE – for it was delivered in SAE – but more with the transcultural implications of the reference to Uncle Tom. While the intention of Beecher Stowe's novel was well meant, the representation of the character Uncle Tom is perceived as extremely negative by African Americans. Therefore, the sentence "[...] which in his heart of hearts made him feel like an Uncle Tom." infers that Vernon felt as though *he* was betraying his own race based on his

behavior, which in no way indicates how his colleagues perceived him. Yet the German translation distorts the original meaning of the sentence: “Dadurch *war er für sie* ein bisschen wie ein Onkel Tom.” The German translation indicates that Vernon’s colleagues *did* look down on him and had no respect for him – which is not the case. The incorrect translation of this pivotal sentence destroys the punch line of the entire comedy sketch: due to Vernon’s own perceptions, he retaliated against an innocent group of people who considered him to be a respectable colleague (as indicated by the line delivered by Vernon’s mentor: “This isn’t the Vernon I know,” as well as the fact that Frank had only intended to congratulate Vernon) and ruined his career due to his own misconceptions and insecurities. The German translation implies that Vernon was indeed *correct* in his perception that he was considered to be a tool for his colleagues, and his retaliation must be interpreted as a desperate attempt by Vernon against the unjust mentality of his peers, which ultimately led to his downfall.

Examples five and six are phrases which are direct quotations from music performers in popular songs of the time when the show was originally aired. The phrase “Allow me to re-introduce myself. My name is HOV” is a direct quote from rapper Jay-Z in an Interlude called “Public Service Announcement” from *The Black Album*, which was released in 2003 and was extremely popular at the time. Chappelle makes frequent references to “Wu-Tang” in many of his sketches in the show; the hip hop group Wu Tang Clan has maintained popularity since its creation in 1992. These popular cultural references are lost in the German subtitles, and when translated into e.g. “Darf ich vorstellen: Mein Name ist HOV,” appears nonsensical without any contextual connection.

#### 2.4 Understanding the Need for Further Studies in AAVE within Translation Studies

While many in the Translation Sciences focus solely on the translations of written contributions in the scholarly world, youths and young adults are being schooled in inappropriate and inadequate methods of communication in English with the support of substandard explanations in such socially and linguistically complex shows as *Chappelle’s Show*. Lack of attention to this newer form of intercultural communication will lead to

ignorance at home breeding ignorance abroad. While the popularity of the show cannot be disputed, based on numerous Internet forums with German viewers requesting contextual explanations for jokes which were ineptly translated in the subtitles, there is a valid need for the accurate translation and interpretation of such a show, despite its inappropriate content. Furthermore, cultural explanations should be made available to viewers; for example, an online website could be created so that interested viewers can educate themselves further concerning the entire transcript of the show (a censored version of the show does exist, although this version has not been broadcast on MTV). Without access to such guides, misinterpreted versions of both AAVE and the African American culture will continue to be exploited by the entertainment industry and misrepresented abroad, with such projections being made on *all* African Americans, thus enforcing invalid and outdated stereotypes – despite the fact that the United States currently has one of the most eloquent presidents in American history who identifies himself as being African American (w<sup>12</sup>).

The German subtitles fail to inform unaware viewers of the popular culture implications, political and racial satire in the show by providing inadequate information. This leads to the farcical representation of the characters in the sketches and the enforcement of stereotypical behavior carelessly interspersed throughout the show. Unfortunately, the show has been introduced to German audiences in a very irresponsible manner. It is quite questionable what contribution this show could possibly make to a German audience ranging between 12 and 24 years of age, especially when one considers the immense vulgarity and references to many inappropriate themes and activities throughout a majority of the sketches. The presentation of AAVE is not homogenous and is therefore misleading due to its inconsistency, which indirectly contributes to the inaccurate and inconsistent translation of the sketches. Ideally, the show should no longer be broadcast in Germany; at the very least, a guide should be provided for each episode so that interested viewers may be able to inform themselves properly of the meanings of the phrases, jokes and references expressed throughout the show.

This show does not serve to appropriately represent the African American culture or AAVE to an international audience that is wholly unaware of the difference between “authentic” and

“unauthentic” AAVE; it cannot differentiate between parodies of stereotypical African American behavior and the presentation of authentic issues facing all minorities in America; the common disrespectful address of females throughout the show is presented as being humorous instead of degrading. Instead, the German subtitles gloss over the ugliness and vulgarity of the source text and replaces it with a self-censored version which grossly reduces the amount of offensiveness in the original text. Because the original text can be still be *heard*, however, the impressionable viewer who relies on the subtitles for contextual orientation will unknowingly be misled and inevitably attempt to integrate catchphrases and once-popular slang terms and popular culture references into his or her active vocabulary. While the introduction to German audiences of entertainment forms that make use of some variants of AAVE are welcomed in theory, there are better, more tasteful and more useful contributions deriving from television, the stage and cinema; with careful selection and the employment of translators schooled in both SAE and AAVE for such tasks, more opportunities to expand and enhance possibilities for intercultural learning regarding the African American culture and AAVE can be achieved in Germany, thereby gaining more insight into the multifaceted aspects of American English and American culture.

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