

A Shakespearean translation of the last rap battle in *8 Mile*, with a subsequent analysis of its quality

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INTRODUCTION

The movie *8 Mile*, which chronicles the rise of aspiring rapper Jimmy ‘B-Rabbit’ Smith (played by Eminem), has been translated into over 15 languages including Russian, Dutch and Japanese. Noticeably absent from this list is Elizabethan-Era English (EEE), the language used by William Shakespeare. From a commercial perspective, this omission is perfectly understandable, as there seems to be few native EEE speakers alive today. However, from an historical and academic perspective, this omission is unfortunate, as Shakespeare’s works have often been compared to rap lyrics (Brock 2009, Bradley and duBois 2011, Lars 2012, Akala 2012), and a recent analysis lists Shakespeare as having the 15th most unique vocabulary among rappers (Daniels 2014). Thus it would be interesting to see just how easily *8 Mile* translates into EEE.

The goal of this paper is to jumpstart that translation of *8 Mile*. We focus on the movie’s climax: [B-Rabbit’s last rap battle with Papa Doc](#). In addition, we analyze the quality and fidelity of our translation using the methods of [Taivalkoski-Shilov \(2008\)](#), which we describe below.

METHODS

Background – The climax of *8 Mile* is a rap battle between B-Rabbit and members of the “Leaders of the Free World”. B-Rabbit faces off against three of these members in successive battles, but here we translate just the last battle against Papa Doc, the leader of the “Leaders of the Free World”.

Translation – There are no real set methods for translating, although we tried to keep true to the original meaning behind each rhyme complex. To help us in obtaining Shakespearean phrases and words, we read *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* (i.e., watched the movies). The website [Shakespeare’s Words](#) was also an enormous help.

Quality Analysis – Taivalkoski-Shilov (2008) assessed the quality and fidelity of three *8 Mile* translations (Finnish, French, and Russian) by using 5 different criteria:

- **Obscenity** – you know what these are (sfw example: “ass”).
- **Wordplay** – anytime a pun is used, or any play on words (e.g., Hamlet’s first words after his Uncle refers to him as his son: “A little more than kin and less than kind” 1.2.65).
- **Cultural references** – References to the culture of the time period in which the piece is written (an example for B-Rabbit could be ‘313’, a reference the area code for a Detroit neighborhood; an example for Shakespeare might be ‘The New World’, a reference to America).
- **Rhyme** – We were only interested in end rhymes. We also accepted imperfect rhymes (e.g., suspicious/bitches) as well as perfect rhymes.
- **Slang/Colloquialism** – Mostly refers to language below standard educated speech, or language that is common for that time period (an example for B-Rabbit could be ‘gonna’; an example for Shakespeare could be ‘methinks’).

Following the methods of Taivalkoski-Shilov (2008),

we first analyzed each rhyme complex of B-Rabbit's lyrics and counted whenever one of the five criteria above was used. We then analyzed our own translation for the same criteria. In the end, we calculated an 'omission rate' which describes the proportion of the translated rhyme complexes that lacked a certain criteria (i.e., an omission rate of 0.0 for Obscenity means that the translation included a swear word whenever B-Rabbit had a swear word). It is also important to note that our translation was not biased by

these criteria (we created our translation before we came across Taivalkoski-Shilov's paper).

RESULTS

Box 1 contains both B-Rabbit's lyrics (obtained from [rapgenius](#)) and our EEE translation. We've also highlighted the instances of each of the five criteria below in the Appendix. These, we realize, are fully open to opinion.

Our omission rates for each criteria are given in

Box 1. English (left) and Elizabethan Era (right) versions of the last rap battle in *8 Mile*.

Now, everybody from the 313,
put your motherfucking hands up and follow me.
Everybody from the 313, put your motherfucking hands up.
Look, look.

Now, while he stands tough,
notice that this man did not have his hands up.
This Free World's got you gassed up.
Now, who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf.
1, 2, 3 and to the 4, 1 Pac, 2 Pac, 3 Pac, 4,
4 Pac, 3 Pac, 2 Pac, 1, You're Pac, he's Pac, no Pac, none.
This guy ain't no motherfucking MC.
I know everything he's bout to say against me.
I am white, I am a fucking bum,
I do live in a trailer with my mom.
My boy Future is an Uncle Tom.
I do got a dumb friend named Cheddar Bob
who shoots himself in his leg with his own gun.
I did get jumped by all six of you chumps.
And Wink did fuck my girl.
I'm still standing here screaming, Fuck the Free World!
Don't ever try to judge me, dude.
You don't know what the fuck I've been through.
But, I know something about you.
You went to Cranbrook, that's a private school.
What's the matter, dog, you embarrassed?
This guy's a gangster? His real name's Clarence.
And Clarence lives at home with both parents.
And Clarence's parents have a real good marriage.
This guy don't wanna battle, he shook
'Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks!
He's scared to death, he's scared to look in his fucking yearbook.
Fuck Cranbrook.

Fuck a beat, I'll go a cappella.
Fuck a Papa Doc, fuck a clock, fuck a trailer, fuck everybody.
Fuck y'all if you doubt me,
I'm a piece of fucking white trash, I'll say it proudly.
And fuck this battle, I don't wanna win, I'm outtie.
Here, tell these people something they don't know about me.

If thou art loyal to some heretofore unnamed region of the New World,
do as me likewise and extend thy hand into the air.
Yay, thou spirits art high and thine clamour is great, so I shall repeat:
If thou art loyal to some heretofore unnamed region of the New World,
extend thy hand into the air.

Behold! This knave afore me doth not signal his duty,
a spite of his vain attempts to appear so shrewdly.
Methinks his rabble hath impressed upon him
a false reckoning of the odor of his bottom.
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino.
Thou a low, He a low, but a Marlowe? No!
This rascal here, he resembleth not a poet.
So stale be his act, e'en the groundlings know't.
I am but a peasant swain, I do hath pale skin.
I liveth with my mother in but a small cabin.
My coz Future doth act as a vassal.
My boorish friend, Cheddar Bob, hath a pistol,
and with great fortune hath missed his missile.
'Gainst thine company, I alone dost battle.
And my once dear Wink didst cuckold me true.
Yet, 'fore you I stand, I still bite my thumb at your crew!
Judgeth me not, thou whoreson mountebank.
Thou knowest not my torments and cruel pains.
Howbeit of some knowledge, I am privy.
Thou attendeth Cranbrook University.
Lo, how his face changed to a rotten medlar!
His true title is Clarence, not ne'er the Bard.
Thine parents of Clarence his apparent landlords.
But, soft, it that thine tool or thy mother's cord?
Thine eyes betray fear, for near is thine defeat,
'cause there existeth nothing like in-'twixt thieves!
Afeard is he, afeard to peep at his life so sweet.
Fie on Cranbrook.

The music hath vanish, yet I will still finish.
A pox on Papa Doc, a pox on thy clock, a pox on a cabin.
A pox on all if me thou believeth not in.
I say I am trash with force of young Phaethon!
Victory beest not my intent, I shalt exeunt.
Inform thy followers of all my private events.

Fig. 1. For comparison, we also plot the omission rates for the Finnish, French, and Russian translations, obtained from Taivalkoski-Shilov (2008).

DISCUSSION

Fig.1 shows that we performed the best in mimicking the Slang and Rhyme of B-Rabbit’s original lyrics. Shakespeare is known for creating many common words and phrases (like ‘obscene’), so it’s not much of a surprise that we were able to translate much of the slang (in fact, some of B-Rabbit’s slang words originated with Shakespeare).

In comparison with the other 4 translations, we

were the 3rd most faithful overall. Apparently, our translators are experts in Shakespearean swear words, as we were the best performer in the Obscenity criteria. Our translation was the worst in Culture-Specific references, so we apologize for not being experts in Elizabethan-Era culture.

Overall, though, we were able to show that an EEE translation of *8 Mile* is very possible, especially for the complicated rap-battle scenes. Unfortunately, there really isn’t a market for such a translation, which makes this paper much ado about nothing (although that was a foregone conclusion...). Good night, sweet Prince!

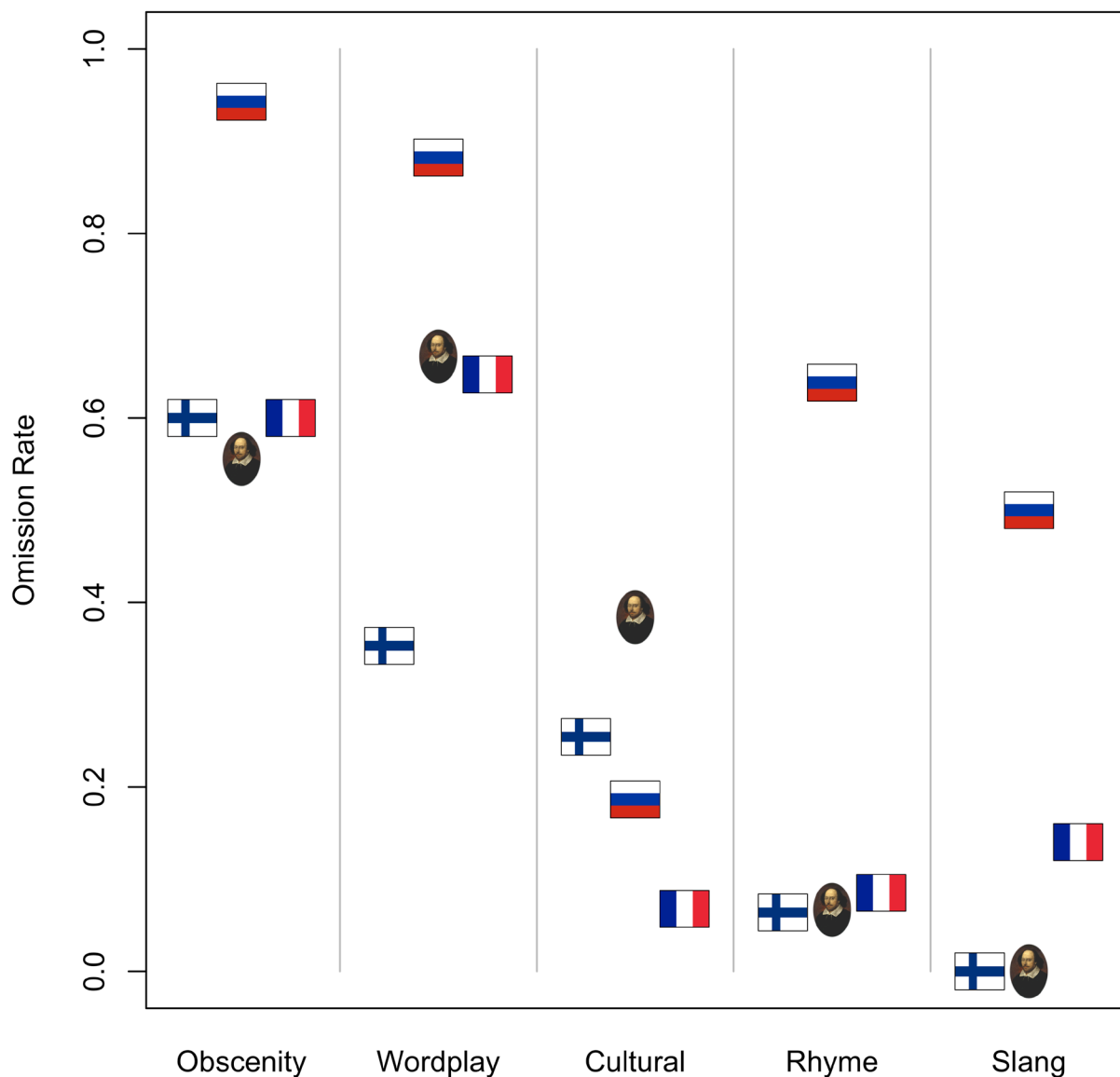


Figure 1. Omission rates for each criteria for the four translations: Finland (blue cross on white background), Russia (horizontal striping), France (vertical striping), and Elizabethan Era (Shakespeare’s portrait).

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Appendix. English (left) and Elizabethan Era (right) versions of the last rap battle in *8 Mile*, with color-coding denoting instances of one of five criteria: Obscenity (red), Wordplay (yellow), Cultural Reference (green), Rhyme (blue), and Slang/Colloquialism (orange).

Now, everybody from the **313**
put your **motherfucking** hands up and follow **me**.
Everybody from the **313**, put your **motherfucking** hands up.
Look, look.

Now, while he stands **tough**,
notice that this man did not have his hands **up**.
This **Free World's** got you **gassed up**.
Now, who's afraid of the **Big Bad Wolf**.
1, 2, 3 and to the **4**, **1 Pac**, **2 Pac**, **3 Pac**, **4**,
4 Pac, **3 Pac**, **2 Pac**, **1**, You're **Pac**, he's **Pac**, no **Pac**, **none**.
This guy **ain't** no **motherfucking MC**.
I know everything he's **bout** to say against **me**.
I am white, I am a **fucking bum**.
I do live in a **trailer** with my **mom**.
My **boy** Future is an **Uncle Tom**.
I do got a dumb friend named Cheddar **Bob**
who shoots himself in his leg with his own **gun**.
I did **get jumped** by all six of you **chumps**.
And Wink did **fuck my girl**.
I'm still standing here screaming, **fuck the Free World!**
Don't ever try to judge me, **dude**.
You don't know what the **fuck** I've been **through**.
But, I know something about **you**.
You **went** to Cranbrook, that's a **private school**.
What's the matter, **dog**, you **embarrassed?**
This guy's a **gangster?** His real name's **Clarence**.
And Clarence **lives at home with both parents**.
And Clarence's parents have a real good **marriage**.
This guy don't **wanna battle**, **he shook**
'Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks!
He's **scared to death**, he's scared to look in his **fucking yearbook**.
Fuck Cranbrook.

Fuck a **beat**, I'll go a **cappella**.
Fuck a Papa Doc, **fuck** a clock, **fuck** a **trailer**, **fuck** **everybody**.
Fuck y'all if you doubt **me**.
I'm a **piece of fucking white trash**, I'll say it **proudly**.
And **fuck** this **battle**, I don't **wanna** win, I'm **outtie**.
Here, tell these people something they don't know about **me**.

If thou art loyal to some heretofore unnamed region of the **New World**,
do as me likewise and extend thy hand into the air.
Yay, thou spirits art high and thine clamour is great, so I shall repeat:
If thou art loyal to some heretofore unnamed region of the **New World**,
extend thy hand into the air.

Behold! This **knave** afore me doth not signal his **duty**,
a spite of his vain attempts to appear so **shrewdly**.
Methinks his **rabble** hath impressed upon **him**
a false reckoning of the odor of his **bottom**.
With a hey, and a **ho**, and a hey **nonino**.
Thou a low, He a low, but a Marlowe? No!
This **fascal** here, he resembleth not a **poet**.
So stale be his act, **e'en** the **groundlings know't**.
I am but a **peasant swain**, I do hath pale **skin**.
I liveth with my mother in but a small **cabin**.
My **coz** Future doth act as a **vassal**.
My boorish friend, Cheddar Bob, hath a **pistol**,
and with great fortune hath **missed his missile**.
'Gainst thine company, I alone dost **battle**.
And my once dear Wink **didst** cuckold me **true**.
Yet, **fore you** I stand, I still **bite my thumb** at your **crew!**
Judgeth me not, thou **whoreson mountebank**.
Thou knowest not my torments and cruel **pains**.
Howbeit of some knowledge, I am **privy**.
Thou attendeth Cranbrook **University**.
Lo, how his face changed to a rotten **medlar**.
His true title is Clarence, not **ne'er** the **Bard**.
Thine parents of Clarence his apparent **landlords**.
But, **soft**, it that thine **fool** or thy mother's **cord?**
Thine eyes betray fear, for near is thine **defeat**,
'cause there existeth nothing like **in-twixt thieves!**
Afeard is he, afeard to peep at his life so sweet.
Fie on Cranbrook.

The music hath vanish, yet I will still finish.
A pox on Papa Doc, **a pox** on thy clock, **a pox** on a **cabin**.
A pox an all if me thou believeth not **in**.
I say I am trash with force of **young Phaethon**.
Victory **beest** not my intent, I shalt **exeunt**.
Inform thy followers of all my private **events**.