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**Translation of Swearwords in Literary
Autobiographies: The Case of Miles Davis**

Diplomsko delo

Prevajanje kletvic v avtobiografiji Milesa Davisa

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“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”

- Albert Einstein

I would like express my gratitude to dr. Michelle Gadpaille for her inspiration to seek deeper for knowledge, for her understanding and patience with my flaws and her guidance when it seemed that there is no light at the end of my tunnel.

I would also like to thank my family and my closest ones for keeping up with me in my best and worst moments and supporting me my entire life in my (in-)sane ideas.

Izjava

Podpisani Matjaž Praprotnik, rojen 11.1.1987, študent Filozofske fakultete, smer Prevajanje in tolmačenje angleščina in nemščina, izjavljam, da je diplomsko delo z naslovom *Translation of Swearwords in Literary Autobiographies: The case of Miles Davis*, pri mentorici izr. prof. dr. Michelle Gadpaille, avtorsko delo.

V diplomskem delu so uporabljeni viri in literatura korektno navedeni; teksti niso uporabljeni brez navedbe avtorjev.

Matjaž Praprotnik

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Povzetek

V svoji diplomski nalogi sem se osredinil na kletvice v avtobiografiji Milesa Davisa, jih poskušal opredeliti in pojasniti njihovo funkcijo; v analizi sem primerjal kletvice v izvorniku s tistimi v prevodu. Pri argumentiranju ustreznosti prevoda sem si pomagal s Slovarjem slovenskega knjižnega jezika in se tudi skliceval na rezultate, do katerih sem prišel z iskanjem po korpusu *Fidaplus*. Pomemben kriterij sta predstavljala kontekst in konotacija, ki sta velikokrat izločila dobesedni prevod, saj se ta v slovenščini uporablja drugače kot angleščini.

Podrobneje sem analiziral tri kletvice: *motherfucker*, *nigger* in *bitch*. Prva je predstavljala največjo težavo za prevajalca, saj se v izvorniku uporablja na številne načine in nastopa v mnogih funkcijah. Prevoda za njo v slovenščini ni, tako je moral prevajalec seči po drugih besedah, s katerimi je iskal ustreznice. Ugotovil sem, da se je prevajalec trudil obdržati en prevod glede na funkcijo besede v izvorniku, npr. *pizdun*, kadar je šlo za moškega ali ljudi na splošno, ali *pizdarija*, kadar se je beseda navezovala na predmete, situacije. Vendar pa je v veliko primerih prevod kletvice *motherfucker* zahteval prevajalčevo kreativnost, kajti uporabljena je bila za ženske, za primerjavo in tudi v funkciji pridevnika. V vseh teh primerih je težko obdržati konstantne prevode in tako je prevajalec moral rešitve prilagajati posameznim primerom.

Beseda *nigger* ni predstavljala takšnega izziva, saj se je v slovenščini že ustalil prevod *črnuh*, ki ga je uporabil tudi prevajalec. *Bitch* pa je kljub številnim možnim prevodom, npr. *mrha*, *kuzla*, *prasica*, *pička* ipd., vseeno povzročala težave in dvome v določene prevajalske rešitve. Konotacija je bila tukaj ključnega pomena, saj je ta morala v prevodu ustrezati izvorniku, v slednjem pa je ta lahko bila tako pozitivna kot tudi negativna ali nevtralna. *Kuzla* tako ni ustrezala v vseh prevodih, saj je ta v slovenščini vedno negativno konotirana, *mrho* pa najdemo v vseh treh konotacijah in je po teh kriterijih najbolje ustrezala prevodu.

Na splošno sem ugotovil, da je prevajanje kletvic težavno, kajti preklinjanje je v veliki meri vezano na kulturo, iz katere izhajajo, vsaka kultura pa

je zaznamovana s posebnostmi in ravno te posebnosti predstavljajo velik izziv za prevajalca.

Ključne besede: prevajanje, kletvice, Miles Davis, avtobiografija, konotacija, kontekst

Abstract

My thesis focuses on swearwords in the autobiography of Miles Davis. I define them, explain their function and compare swearwords in the original and the translation. My attempt was to argue the appropriateness of the translation and I used the dictionary of Slovene language (SSKJ) and results from the corpora *Fidaplus* to provide support for my claims. Context and connotation were among the most important criteria, since these often ruled out a literal translation because they are not used in the same manner in Slovene as in English.

A deeper analysis was done on three swearwords: *motherfucker*, *nigger* and *bitch*. The first represents the most difficult challenge for the translator, because it is used in several different ways and can take on numerous functions. A translation for the word does not exist; therefore, the translator had to find several other translation solutions. The analysis has shown that the translator tried to keep one translation solution per function of the word, e.g., *pizdun* when the word was used to refer to people, and *pizdarija* when the referent was an object or a situation. However, translating *motherfucker* often demanded a certain degree of creativity from the translator because it was also used to refer to women or even Davis' own father, as a means for comparison and as an adjective. It is difficult to find consistent solutions in these cases; therefore, the translator had to adapt his translation to individual cases.

Nigger itself was not as challenging as the previous word, because *črnuh* has already been established as a prototypical translation in Slovene. Albeit several possible translations, e.g. *mrha*, *kuzla*, *prasica*, *pička*, translations for *bitch* still raised doubts in some cases. Connotations were of key importance in this case, because they had to match the original, where they could either be positive, negative or neutral. *Kuzla* was inappropriate in some cases, because it is always used with negative connotations in Slovene; however, *mrha* is used with all three connotation possibilities and therefore seems to be the most appropriate translation.

Generally, I found that translating swearwords is difficult because swearing relies strongly on the originating culture, and each culture is marked by

different characteristics; these characteristics, in particular, represent a challenge for the translator.

Key words: translation, swearwords, Miles Davis, autobiography, connotation, context

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1 Introduction

“The language of the gutter” swearing was once called, when people used words that were considered inappropriate. It was seen as a habit of the lower classes, a sign of poor education or manners. Once it was used only with negative connotations and people were truly sensitive about it. During the last hundred years, however, swearing has shifted in many ways. Traditional social groupings do not suffice for its classification; it is not chastised by the authorities; people seem to have become more tolerant towards it and, last but not least, swearing is nowadays more frequent than ever before. Traditionally, swearing is a feature of spoken language; however, during the twentieth century, it has also made it into print. One particular publication that shocked the readers and the critics is the autobiography of Miles Davis. It is riddled with the type of vocabulary that many people deemed inappropriate even for speaking, not to mention print. Davis used swearwords to express emotions, from positive to negative ones, and while he was narrating his autobiography, he did not hold back. This was his voice. As an African-American jazz musician from the classical jazz era, Davis was influenced by the vocabulary of contemporary jazz musicians, who had a particularly shocking feature in their jargon: the extensive use of swearwords. While the morality of this usage is subject to individuals, my thesis will be about the translation of swearwords. I will try to analyse the original and the official Slovene translation, compare the two and try to provide constructive criticism. Wherever needed, I will check the translator’s solutions and also my suggestions in the *Fidaplus* corpus. Since there is almost nothing written in Slovene about swearing, this corpus will provide backup for my claims. Should there be several possible translation solutions, I will compare them and comment on which one is more appropriate and why. The number of different swearwords in the autobiography is enormous; therefore, I am going to limit my analysis to the translation of three words: *motherfucker*, *nigger* and *bitch*. Each represents a particular problem for the translator and is not easily translated, because they occur in various contexts and can take on several functions. These will be an

important criterion in my analysis, and I will try to outline any adaptations that had to be done in the translation to make it sound natural.

2 Swearing

2.1 Definition and Motives

Swearing is a widespread human phenomenon. It cannot be learnt in schools, nor is it taught by parents or expected to from authorities, and yet everybody seems to know about it and learn it in life. The origin is not entirely clear; however, authors like Ashley Montagu claim that it is as old as humanity itself. For a phenomenon as old as this, it is interesting that it remains hard to define. *The Oxford Dictionary* offers a general explanation for swearing: “the use of offensive language”. This explanation argues only that the hearer or the audience can be offended when this kind of language is used. The entry in the *Free Dictionary*, on the other hand, seems rather outdated: “to use profane oaths; curse;” it evolves religion too much.

The definitions of *swearword* in the same two dictionaries, however, provide us with slightly more information. *The Oxford Dictionary* unveils one possible source of swearing “*an offensive word, used especially as an expression of anger*”. As we will see in the analysis, this can be one source or context for swearing; however, among special groups of people there can be several other motives and contexts in which swearwords occur. *The Free Dictionary* offers a set of “sub-groups” that a swearword as a hypernym can cover: “a socially taboo word or phrase of a profane, obscene, or insulting character.” Trying to find a clear distinction between these three adjectives with the help of dictionaries can often result in a dead-end; sooner or later they all start pointing at one another. In his *Cursing in America*, Timothy Jay provides us a useful explanation how to tell one from another. He classifies profanity as “ignorance or intolerance of guidelines of a particular religious order” (Jay 3); blasphemy, on the other hand, is a direct insult to God or the church. Taboos can be sometimes confused with obscenity. Jay sees taboos as a means for control of individuals within a group, and taboos vary from culture to culture. Whereas a taboo suppresses the behaviour, thoughts or even speech of the speaker, obscenity is seen as a legal term that does not aim to control the speaker, but tries to “protect

the listener from harmful language” (Jay 4-5). Insults are defined simply as verbal attacks on people, meant to harm the other person with words.

Furthermore, Jay’s classification of swearing includes vulgarity, slang, epithets and scatology. The definitions of vulgarity and slang might be interesting for my analysis. Vulgarity is seen by Jay as “the language of the common person, the person in the street, the unsophisticated and under-educated.” It is not necessarily bad or evil, it is simply common and has “no function beyond communication demands.” Slang (and jargon) is the language that belongs to a certain sub-group (teenagers, musicians or athletes) and consists of “codes” that its speakers use in communication. Sometimes these codes can become part of the standard language, because of their popularity; however, others can be too offensive to be broadly accepted. This will be further clarified in the analysis of the term *motherfucker*. It took several decades for the term to be allowed in print and even nowadays it can still be too offensive in the ears of some listeners, whereas other people see it as part of their identity.

Swearwords do not necessarily belong to one category only; often they can be cross-categorized. Their category can never be determined based on the word alone, the entire sentence or even the context and situation in which it was used has to be taken into account when we try to fit words into these categories (Jay 9).

Context is not important only for this classification; moreover, the denotative and connotative usages rely strongly on it. Jay writes that people tend to immediately interpret swearwords connotatively; the denotative usage is far less frequent and quite often the subject of jokes or puns (Jay gives an example of graffiti saying “You’re all a bunch of fucking nymphomaniacs,” and under it, it was written “there ain’t no other kind”).

“Dirty words are used to express connotative meaning, such as the emotional overtones of a word, the feelings, moods, attitudes and power that is comprehended along with the denotative referent” (Jay 10). A good example of this is, again, is the word *motherfucker*. No matter whether it is used to address people directly (*a bad motherfucker*) or used for comparison (*weirder than a motherfucker*), in none of these cases does the person have anything to do with the mother or sexual intercourse, nor does *motherfucker* in the second example

necessarily represent a real person. It is used to increase the emotional charge and express the attitude or feelings towards what is being said. In the analysis we will see that the list of this kind of example goes on and on. As a way of assessing words and their connotative meaning, Jay suggests using the semantic differential technique. One should ask himself three key questions: 1) is the word good or bad?, 2) Is the word active or passive?, and 3) is the word weak or strong? (Jay 11). In an evaluation done by several people, he found that people used swearwords in messages in which they wanted either to express emotional thoughts or to have an emotional impact on the listener; nevertheless, taboo words, as a class of words, were rated as worse than non-taboo words (Jay 11). From this, we could assume that the attitude towards swearwords has nowadays shifted towards a partial tolerance: we know that they are considered bad, but we use them when we think it is appropriate or feel the need for them.

Jay claims that “regardless of the definition of dirty words, the ultimate decision about the offensiveness of words relies on context” (Jay 13). Context is here used in a broader sense and covers the location, situation, the relationship speaker – listener and the intent of the speaker. Furthermore, Jay claims that the speaker alone has to make a decision about what he can and cannot say in a particular setting. He has to base his judgement on the listener and the social and physical environment. In the analysis we will see that Miles Davis chose to speak in a very vulgar manner; he chose to be himself and face the potential criticism instead of inhibiting his narrative style to a degree which would be considered acceptable by broader audiences. A similar decision was made by the editors when they chose not to adapt the book to the laws of obscenity but to leave Davis in his pure tone.

Since swearwords are stereotypically considered a bad habit, why do people keep on using them? This question cannot be answered that easily. If we asked this question in a questionnaire, we would probably get as many different results as the number of people answering. Their answer would overlap to some extent; however, swearwords nowadays occur in many contexts and can take on numerous functions, so a finite answer to this is questionable. Davis’

autobiography is a perfect example of this. Nevertheless, I will try to explain at least three major motives for swearing.

The first motive is psychological. Montagu presents swearing as a reaction to pain, annoyance, anger or frustration. When a child is born, the only reaction to the outer world it can give is crying or yelling. Only months later, it begins to laugh and around the age of twelve months, it starts to speak and even later it makes its first steps. If a toy is taken from the baby, the only reaction it has that defenceless situation is crying or howling. Montagu sees this situation as the “elementary form of the human swearing situation” (Montagu 70). When a child grows older, it learns to cry less frequently and, as Montagu claims, finds other forms of “naughtiness” to react to frustration, pain or anger. By the time it has come of age, both crying and naughtiness are abandoned, and the only reaction that is left to a person is swearing.

So when we hit our thumb instead of the nail with a hammer, or if we hit our knee against the table while trying to stand up, it fills us with pain and this pain has to be let out of the body so that equilibrium can be re-established. We were taught that crying is unmanly and that violence is simply not an answer, so that leaves out belabouring the hammer, nail or table; the only other way to release the stress that has been piled up in our body within a matter of nanoseconds is to swear. Montagu quotes Robert Graves, who also sees swearing as psychological reaction:

There is no doubt that swearing has a definite psychological function: for after childhood relief in tears and wailing is rightly discouraged, and groans are also considered of extreme weakness. Silence under suffering is usually impossible. The nervous system demands some expression that does not affect towards cowardice and feebleness and, as a nervous stimulant in a crisis, swearing is unequalled. (Montagu 67)

To sum up, Montagu basically sees swearwords as a learned reflex to a shocking situation.

Andersson took this a step further and also claimed that swearwords are deliberate; if a similar situation as described above happens at home or in church

– the swearwords can come out just the same (Andersson quoted in Karjalainen 25).

When considering psychological motives, Andersson and Montagu start from similar ideas; however, Andersson claims that swearing is innate, whereas Montagu suggests the contrary: swearing is not innate, but it is “a learned form of human behaviour in cultures and under conditions in which it is encouraged” (Montagu 71). Swearing and taboos are not universal and vary from culture to culture; therefore, they have to be learned. We can have a “good laugh”, a “good cry” and a “good swear” and, in a way, all three of them have a relief-purifying-pacifying function against a harassed mind (Montagu 83).

The psychological motives might not be directly applicable to Davis’ autobiography. If we consider swearing a reaction to anger, then it can be applied only to those examples from the book that have negative connotations and the book was narrated from a certain distance and perspective that Davis had on his life. The explanation for other examples will have to be sought elsewhere, because, unfortunately, Montagu’s explanation of motives ends here.

Secondly, there are sociological motives for swearing. Not all swearing can be assigned to frustration or anger. Insults might be stimulated by anger, but one can insult someone even without swearing. If a person forgets himself and swears in a public speech, it would most likely be considered bad manners, not frustration (depending on the context). When Davis calls someone a *bad motherfucker*, it is one of the biggest compliments he is able to give. This example is robbed of any negative connotations whatsoever and the motive for it is sociological.

David Crystal argues that social swearing is the most common swearing patten (Crystal quoted in Karjalainen 26). Social swearing means that we do not swear in solitude where nobody can hear us, but we do it in front of an audience, which can consist of one or several people. Swearing in this case has a completely different function from psychological motives; it can be used to shock, insult, amuse, praise or even to assert our identity in a group. Regardless of the connotations in these cases, all of them are used to achieve a certain effect on the referent.

Gloria Naylor and her thoughts about *nigger* are a good example of that. She wrote that *nigger* has a completely different meaning when used among African-Americans; it is a term of praise and identity, and in this way it is accepted by the entire African-American community. *Motherfucker* was also considered a negative swearword; however, as we will see in the analysis, the function of it shifted from negative to (also) positive. As suggested in the *Jazz Lexicon*, this shift was a feature especially common in jazz jargon. Swearing therefore had an important role among African-American jazz musicians when Davis moved to New York and started to be more and more engaged in the jazz scene of that era. Both *nigger* and *motherfucker* were results of a certain type of protest. As Naylor suggested, words like these, acquired the opposite meaning among the African-American community as a protest against white people and their prejudice. It was almost like a bond that held them together, and if we go back to the list of sociological motives, we can say that in some cases it could assert their identity inside the group. People from these social groups are always influenced by their prevailing norms, even swearing norms, which, according to Crystal, can be contagious (Crystal quoted in Karjalainen 28). The increasing usage of swearwords in the modern world has been noticed by several scholars, but so far it has not been properly explained and perhaps the explanation is as simple as Crystal put it: people can simply get used to swearwords. Maybe one reason for this is their flexibility, and people tend to be very creative in using swearwords with different connotations. If one tolerates this kind of language, it can have a humorous effect.

Offence is never given, it is always taken; therefore, a certain understanding between the speaker and the audience is vital for a correct interpretation, especially if swearwords are used without any negativity or as terms of endearment. Body language and context might signal friendliness; however, one can unintentionally offend the audience. Davis' autobiography is a good example of that. Even though Davis did not insult the readers, he did not even address them with or without a swearword, and yet most of the criticism that the book received was about Davis' language, not the contents.

Lastly, as a linguistic motive for swearing one must mention a term called “linguistic crutches”, a term introduced by Dawson. He said that Americans are regressing to a more tonal language that is short on vocabulary; therefore, the role of context is increasing. Words can take on several different functions and meanings that cannot be interpreted without the context or the situation in which they are used. Americans are not the only nation that has succumbed to this phenomenon; Slovene colloquial language is regressing in the same manner. In certain situations people might lack the right words and quite often use a swearword instead. Often their function has shifted towards plain intensifiers, because other words might lack sufficient emotional charge, or the speaker might not know or remember a more appropriate word in that situation. Swearwords have also taken on the function of substitutes for the words people need in a situation but do not know. This motive overlaps with the social motive for swearing, because people probably will not decide to choose this kind of substitute in every situation, so the decision also depends on the audience. The best example for this motive is the word *motherfucker*. As we will see in the analysis, it can take on several meanings, can be used in countless contexts and is impossible to translate either literally or without context.

2.2 Shifts in Meaning or Semantic Shifts

Bitch was originally a word for a female dog. While the referent remained an animal, there was nothing special about it. However, when the picture of a dog in heat started to be used with reference to women, *bitch* was not as innocent anymore. *Shit* might once have been a word that referred to excrement, but nowadays it can refer to almost anything. The original meaning was kept, of course; however, an entire list of meanings can be added to it. It can be an expletive in an unpleasant situation (Shit!) or an introductory element (*Shit*, this is amazing!); it can refer to almost any object or situation (This *shit* is amazing!). What I tried to underline with these examples is the shift in meaning that swearwords have undergone. It is a characteristic of swearwords that their meaning has shifted throughout the course of time. Usually the original meaning

is still preserved, and new ones are added to it. However, in some cases the original meaning might have been almost lost. If we take the word *motherfucker* as an example, we can see that the literal meaning of having sexual intercourse with one's mother is nowadays limited to word play or puns (Oedipus Rex was a real motherfucker). Outside of these examples, the word takes on countless other meanings (see analysis).

I will use the word *motherfucker* again to point out another significant shift concerning swearwords. By definition, swearwords are considered negative. According to Nübling, swearwords arise from different taboo topics specific to a particular culture. As an example, he writes that the numerous swearwords about excrement in German are a consequence of the German obsession with hygiene and purity (Nübling and Vogel 30). In America, the strongest taboo field is sexual intercourse and organs and, according to Jay, these taboos were forced from the authorities (Jay 5). So, if taboos are about things we are not supposed to say or think, they cannot be connoted otherwise than negatively. At least not in theory; we will see in the analysis, that in special circumstances and among some individuals or groups, swearwords can nowadays be used with no negative connotations whatsoever. Moreover they can express admiration, affection or even respect. Andersson and Trudgill claim that in the past, religion had a strong influence on people and their behaviour, so religious swearwords had a strong impact and meaning. As religion lost its importance, society has also become more loose or "free minded" towards words or behaviour that were previously considered obscene or taboo (Andersson and Trudgill, quoted in Paavilainen 107). This could provide us with one explanation of how it was possible for people to take emotional charge of swearwords and turn their connotations upside down. As we will see in the analysis, this, although being an interesting or even humorous phenomenon, brings along additional difficulties for the translator.

2.3 Comparison of the Field in English and Slovene

Even though Slovene is a Slavic language and English a Germanic one, there are several similarities between the fields from which swearwords originate in both languages. I will not list all of them, that being theoretically impossible, but limit my choice to those I consider the most frequent in both languages. My aim is to give examples in which the basic meaning of words overlap, but if the same words are used differently, e.g., with reference to a person, the meanings start to differ from one another. This makes the work of the translator even more difficult, since the basic meaning can easily be misleading and result in the wrong swearword in the translation. Since there is no solid reference I could use for the explanation of Slovene swearwords, I will explain them as I remember hearing them in real-life situations.

As has been established, in America sexual intercourse and organs are taboo and therefore a strong source of swearwords. One of the most frequent swearwords in English is *fuck* (v. to have sexual intercourse). At the same time, it is also one of the most flexible ones, and there are countless functions it can take on (expletive '*fuck!*'; intensifier '*fucking awesome*') and even several phrasal verbs (fuck up, fuck off) are built from it. In Slovene we have two words, *fukati* and *jebati*, that would suit the basic meaning of *fuck*; however, both Slovene words can also take on several different functions and these functions change, the English equivalent can change as well.

If we stay in the field of sexual organs, the English *cunt* would basically mean the same as *pička* and *pizda* in Slovene. All three words can also be applied to people; however, this is where the similarities end. Whereas *cunt* would be used for disparaging a person, *pička* and *pizda*, used for males, would mean a coward. *Pizda* could be in some contexts with reference to a despised person, though rare, and *pička* would also be either an attractive woman or a female in general.

The last word(s) from this field are *cock* and *prick*. Both share the same basic meaning with the Slovene *kurac*, which is a male sexual organ. When used with reference to men, *prick* and *kurac* both define the referent as a disparaged

person; however, *kurac* in Slovene would be a very derogatory term for a person, probably more derogatory than *prick*. *Cock* is used for people only in the form of *cocksucker*. Dawson writes that in some areas in the north of the United States, homosexuality was once considered a greater sin than incest among some African-Americans; therefore, *cocksucker* was considered an even a stronger insult than *motherfucker*.

None of the swearwords mentioned so far is originally Slovene. They were brought into our language from Serbian and Croatian. No research about when and why these swearwords supplanted our own has yet been done; however, my guess is that it can be traced to two reasons: migration and sound. On the Balkan peninsula, the nations share a common history of friendship and belligerence. If not earlier, during the Turkish invasions, Slavs from the southern Balkans started to flee north towards the area where present-day Slovenia lies. Even before sharing a common country, Yugoslavia, in the twentieth century, there have been several attempts to unite Nations like the Slovenes, Serbs, Croatians, and Bosnians into one country. So, the people must have been closely connected and this way the exchange of words comes naturally. Which brings me to the second reason: the sound and strength of their swearwords. Traditional Slovene swearwords, e.g., *tristo kosmatih* ‘three hundred hairy ones’ or *jebelacesta* ‘this road is white’ (the translation is given literally and for the purpose of explanation; however, both are normally used as expletives) might sound ridiculous in the ears of the modern hearer, but if not ridiculous, than at least much milder than the five swearwords listed above. Not only in America but also on the Balkan peninsula, sexual intercourse or organs represent some of the strongest fields from which the most powerful swearwords are drawn.

The next field from where many swearwords are drawn is excreta or scatology. *Shit* was the most frequent swearword word throughout this autobiography (see chapter Frequency of Swearwords). It can be further modified to *bullshit* or can build compounds with other nouns, e.g., *shithead*. Frequent synonyms are *turd* and *crap*. In Slovene we also have *drek* and *sranje*. The former would refer to the result of the activity and the latter to the activity itself. Here I must note that the frequency of *shit* in English is higher than of the Slovene

equivalents; usually they cannot simply replace some other noun in the sentence. Another common expression from this field is *ass* and the Slovene *rit*. As Spears pointed out, in African-American vernacular, *ass* is part of a common phenomenon called *ass-compounding* where *ass* is added to the end of another word, e.g., *bitch-ass*, *jive-ass*. The same structure is impossible to reproduce in Slovene. Again there is a difference when these words are used with reference to people. An *ass* in English would be a fool or a person who behaves stupidly. If we someone is called *rit* in Slovene, that would mean he is a coward.

Race is also a strong source of swearwords, probably stronger in America than in Slovenia, because America has a more complex race structure. From the days of slavery on, there have been several swearwords that were used as insults or simply to express superiority over the Black. Words like *Negro*, *nigger* and *coon* come from this era. After that, demeaning expressions were “invented” for every major group of immigrants (Asians, Arabs, etc.). There are, of course, Slovene expressions that are deemed derogatory, for example, for Black people, e.g., *črnuh*, *zamorec*; however, Slovenia is racially not as mixed as America. There have also been several migrations from other Balkan countries (especially from the countries of former Yugoslavia) but in this case I would say that Slovenia is not racially but nationally mixed. Therefore, there might perhaps be more derogatory expressions for different nations (*šiptarji* for Albanians, *ustaši* for Croatians, *četniki* for Serbs and *čefurji*, a derogatory term to refer generally to immigrants from the south) than for different races. Thus it would be more appropriate to classify these under nationalism; however, racial insults will be a topic of our analysis, while here I wanted only wanted to outline this difference in swearwords between America and Slovenia.

Blasphemy has undergone the same trend in America as in Slovenia. Religion has been steadily losing its power within society; therefore, religious swearwords have also been losing their power over time. Nowadays, they have almost nothing to do with religion (except in origin) and the majority of them have undergone a semantic shift from powerful swearwords, curses or insults towards simple expletives or intensifiers. The usage of *damn* or *goddamn* in English is almost identical to its Slovene equivalent *prekleta* and *vražje/vraga*,

meaning devilish or devil. In Slovene these can intensify almost any adjective or adverb, whereas the usage of *damn* and *goddamn* is more limited to intensifying adjectives.

Animal terms also share a long history in both English and Slovene swearing. These expressions, when applied to animals, were not originally meant in a derogatory sense, but when a quality or characteristic of the animal has been used to offend or describe people, that is when swearwords started to flourish in this field. In the analysis we will take a deeper look at *bitch* and the possible Slovene translations in different contexts and point out the different animals from which the Slovene expressions originate.

2.4 The Motif of the Mother

As an interesting difference between swearing forms in English and in Slovene, I would like to mention the motif of the mother. *Motherfucker* and its translations make up a significant part of our analysis, and even though the motif of the mother is strong and common in Slovene, it was impossible to suggest this in any of the translations, because the usage is entirely different. In Slovene, the motif of the mother is evident in expressions like *pičko materno* or *pizdo materno* (literally ‘the mother’s cunt’). The usage varies for simple expletives with a relief-function (often as a consequence of anger or despair) to functions similar to *fuck off* in English (*idi v pičko/pizdo materno*, literally ‘go into your mother’s cunt’). *Pička/pizda ti maternal* can express simply disagreement or disapproval of somebody or his or her actions. *Jebem ti mater* (literally ‘I fuck your mother’) can also explain disapproval or anger; moreover, it is quite flexible, because the pronoun ‘ti’ (you, 2nd person singular) can be changed and adapted according to context and need. All these expressions do not necessarily address people; they can also be freely used for objects, situations and the like. This indicates a similar aspect, as we will see with *motherfucker*: the mother, with its role in a culture, is used simply to intensify the power and emotional charge of the expression.

3 Miles Davis

Miles Dewey Davis III was born May 26, 1926, in Alton, Illinois. In his early years his family moved to East St. Louis, where his father had his dental practice. Davis was told by his father and grandfather that his family tree was a family of “special people – artists, businessmen, professionals and musicians.” Indeed they were. Davis’ father was a university graduate from three different universities and a renowned dentist. Even though his father was not a musician, Davis got one half of his inspiration and talent for music from his fathers’ side of the family. He recalls being told by the grandfather that the Davises were performing for the landlords in the days of slavery. The other half where Davis got his musical talent from is his mother, who also came from a musical family and played the piano and violin. Davis claims that he got all his artistic talent from her.

In his early childhood he began playing the trumpet and by the age of 12, he recalls, it has become the most important part of his life. Furthermore, music and the musicians he played with were an immense influence on his way of thinking, behaviour and vocabulary. Davis moved to New York in 1944 to attend Julliard and to meet and study from Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, at that time the top two jazz musicians in the world. He also claims that learning from them was his primary objective; Julliard was only a formal excuse he needed for his father to support him.

Gillespie and Parker were the two hot-shots of the jazz scene in the 1940s which was also marked by the idea of being “hip” (being cool or even the coolest of all). Being “hip” did not mean only to dress cool and have cool friends, listen to cool music, the idea of hipness was also visible in the way people were talking. One side of it is what they were saying, and the other was a particularly “shocking” vocabulary for that time. The most shocking were probably the swearwords that started to become increasingly frequent and were used in positive contexts. The words themselves were not necessarily negatively connoted, and therefore, the context and the intonation started to play a vital role in the interpretation. In the analysis we will take a closer look at three words

(*motherfucker, nigger and bitch*) that shared a particularly important role in the jazz jargon of that era and in the way Davis was speaking.

I am unsure whether I should associate the use of heroin with the idea of hipness or to simply pleasure and experimentation; however, drug-use and abuse were common phenomena of the jazz scene of that time to which Davis also succumbed. After a four-year long drug addiction, it was his future wife, Cicely Tyson, who helped him overcome his. Davis was married three times and even though he was also divorced three times, he seems to have had great respect for all his wives. In the analysis of the frequency of swearwords, it will be clarified how this is visible in his vocabulary.

From some of the examples in the analysis, Davis' attitude towards white people can be deemed very critical or even racist. Davis spent his childhood in St. Louis, which was at that time especially marked by an event from 1917 in which white people hanged black people on lampposts because they were a cheaper workforce and got jobs instead of them. Davis moved to St. Louis in a period in which this hatred was still palpable, and it defined his opinion of white people till his death.

In the afterword of the autobiography, Quincy Troupe, the ghost writer of Miles Davis, writes about his first encounters with Davis and how he interviewed him for the first time. From that first interview on, they felt a special bond between each other. Troupe was also from St. Louis, and an African-American who shared interest in music, clothes, art and sports with Davis. Troupe says that they "speak the same language and share similar outlooks on life." Davis explained his decision to choose Troupe for his ghost writer as: "I like the way he writes, he's Black, and he's from St. Louis."

Troupe writes that the autobiography is a result of several months of work and countless interviews that took place on many different places in North America or Europe. Other people that have been acquainted with Davis have also been interviewed; however, Troupe does not imply whether this was in anyway implemented in the text. Davis told Troupe the most during lunch or dinner and, for legal reasons, some of it had to be edited, because it was "so explosive."

Troupe describes Davis as an especially honest person, even if honesty means hurting him or his close ones. Above that he is very critical, especially to himself. He praises only those who deserved it and when they deserved it. Troupe also writes that people might dislike Davis for his bluntness.

The reactions to this book have been interesting. Troupe writes that several critics chose to review Davis and judge him rather than the book. A significant part of the criticism had to do with his vulgar language; however, Troupe writes that “this is the way Miles speaks in life and the way he decided to speak on paper.” Troupe claims that if the language in the book had been censored, “*Miles* wouldn’t sound authentic” and this way they “preserved his true voice.”

Miles speaks in a tonal language, in the manner of mainland Africans and African-Americans from the South. By tonal I mean that a word can take on different meanings according to the pitch and tone, the way the word is spoken. For example, Miles can use motherfucker to compliment someone or simply as punctuation. Anyway the voice you hear in the book is truly Miles ... (Davis 414)

Moreover, Troupe writes that Davis’ voice resembles his generation of African-Americans and that he is proud to have documented this style of speaking. Since the book resembles Davis’ speaking style, this speaking style should also be visible in the translation. This is not an easy task; especially swearwords tend to represent a particular translation problem. I have chosen three swearwords which I found important and tried to provide a detailed analysis of the translation possibilities.

3.1 Frequency of Swearwords

It was necessary to count the swearwords in the book in order to get an overview of their frequency in the original. Three extracts of the book were chosen: the beginning 70 pages, 50 pages in the middle and the last 50 pages – in which I counted the swearwords and ordered them in the chart below:

	<i>Motherfucker</i>	<i>Shit</i>	<i>Bitch</i>	<i>Fuck</i>
Beginning	109	103	15	31
Middle	34	43	1	26
End	25	85	1	41

Table 1: Frequency of swearwords

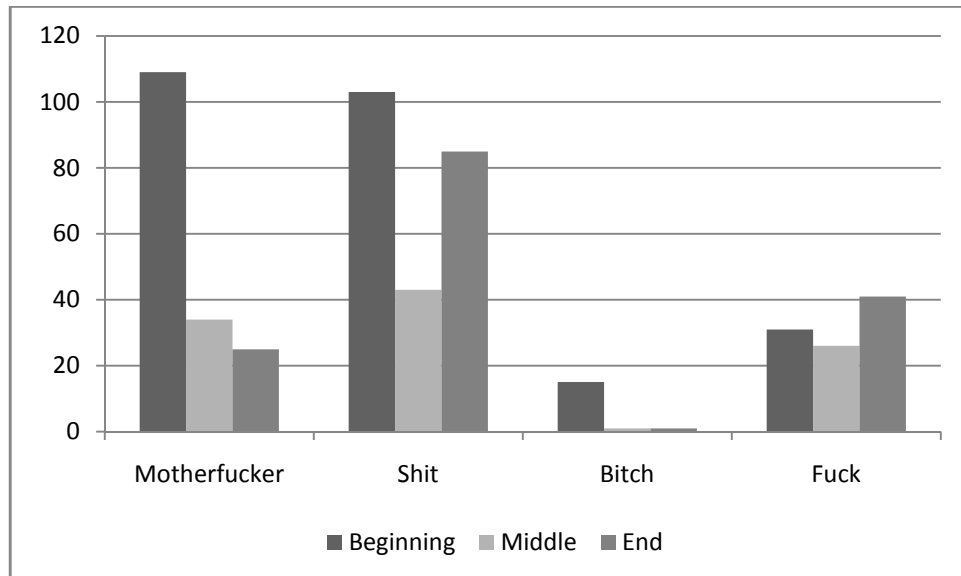


Diagram 1: Frequency of swearwords (comparison)

Motherfucker was counted as one word in all its forms; occurrences of *bullshit* were added to the much larger group comprising *shit* in all of its forms, and *fuck* includes all forms of verbs, phrasal verbs, adjectives and nouns. Surprisingly, the most frequent swearword turns out to be *shit*. Only in the first part of the book was *shit* outnumbered by *motherfucker*; however, as the frequency of other swearwords dropped throughout the book, *shit* was less frequent only in the middle of the book. All of the swearwords seem to be less frequent in that part; the topics Davis discusses there are serious. He talks about

the death of his parents, his marriage and divorce from Frances, the declining popularity of jazz in the late 60s and the rise of rock music, as well as the death of his friend and co-musician John Coltrane. So, if the majority of the swearwords were a consequence of either admiration, astonishment or anger, the contents in this part of the book logically did not leave much leeway for swearing. This is also true for the end of the book, which is riddled with musicians leaving his band, deaths of other jazz giants and his friends and Davis' struggle with diabetes. Towards the end of the book, Davis' anger with racism and the white race becomes clearer again, which can explain the more frequent use of *shit* and a general increase of *fuck* and its forms. The latter of these was used relatively equally throughout the book. *Bitch* is also quite frequent at the beginning of the book, but almost vanishes after that. One reason might be that he was going through several marriages in his later life and that, despite the break-ups and divorces, he seems to have kept a certain respect towards the women with whom he shared his life.

The most interesting is again the word *motherfucker*. There almost is no page in the beginning of the book on which the word is not used at least once; however, its frequency falls significantly even towards the middle the autobiography, and even more towards the end. Again I think an explanation can be sought in the contents. The beginning is full of astonishment at all these great musicians he admired and esteemed; it seems as if he was really shining in the beginning, and the analysis has shown that in a significant number of cases, swearwords were a reaction of affection or astonishment. As he grew as a musician, his self-esteem and abilities also rose, so it became harder to feel like that again; the number of musicians who would deserved to be called a *bad motherfucker* was simply decreasing as his fame and facility rose.

The closer the book comes to its end, the more it creates the feeling that his narrative style is changing as he changed over the years: from a naive child who wants to live a dream, through an arrogant, drug-addicted musical genius, towards a grumpy, old man who has helped numerous talented younger musicians to gain fame and establishment by playing with him. Even though all these

musicians left him in pursuit of their solo work, by the time he narrated his autobiography, he seems to have gone past the anger to understand their decisions.

4 Analysis

4.1 *Motherfucker*

One of the most evident and common swearwords that Miles Davis uses is the word *motherfucker*. *Motherfucker* is a relatively new word in English; it first appeared in print in the 1960s and should not be much older in speech (Montagu 313). Some people suggest that it is the swear word of all swear words or the most offensive word that someone could use. The idea arose from the fact that the word does not imply only to have sexual intercourse (in a very vulgar way) but also suggests that someone does this with his mother. In some cultures, offending the mother can be absolutely taboo or the worst that someone could do or say to another person; it is a violation of both cultural and verbal taboos (Hughes 320). Hughes also suggests that this violation is widespread in the European languages and that it is also a specialty of the Slavic languages.

However, the vast usage of the swearwords and the semantic shift in meaning suggest that the word might be considered more as a form of *fuck* or even as its most powerful form, since mother is “the most powerful figure among the families in which such powerful words flourish” (Montagu 313). Geneva Smitherman claims that *motherfucker* comes from oral tradition and is double voiced; she describes African-American English vernacular as a “dramatic, poetic counterforce to verbal deadness and emptiness” (Smitherman 217). Furthermore, *motherfucker* has a unique Black meaning that is never a person with an Oedipus complex, a term introduced by Sigmund Freud to describe the desire for sexual intercourse with one’s mother. Freud named the complex after king Oedipus, a character from Sophocles’ tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. Freud initially associated the term with boys and their psychic development till the age of five; nowadays, the term can be applied without reference to the age (Dawson 46). In isolation *motherfucker* word cannot be interpreted, nor can its polarity be determined, and it is the context that clarifies whether the word has a positive, negative or neutral reference to a person, place or thing (Smitherman 223).

The exact origin of *motherfucker* remains unknown; however, it started to spread widely among African-American jazz musicians in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1964 Robert S. Gold published *A Jazz Lexicon*, a lexicon of all slang terms that were used among jazz musicians till that time. For “motherfucker” the entry was the following:

mother, muther, motherree, mothering, m.f., motlierferyer, mother fucker, mother-fouler, mother-hugger, mother jiver, mother-lover, mother superior, mammy jammer, [all others are variants of *mother-fucker* and derive from *the dozens*, q.v.; though initially (c. 1900) an insult, the perjorative connotation is not always present since c. 1950 in this very common term; see also *poppa-stoppa*] Initially, an incestuous male; also, since c. 1950, anyone or anything that is formidable or extraordinary (see last 1959 and last two quotes.)
(Gold 209)

Several important pieces of information can be derived from that extract: first, Gold claims that it was already at that time part of the musicians’ vocabulary. It exists not only in the form of *motherfucker*, but throughout time several “euphemisms” were used in print to refer to the term. Swear words existed only in spoken form for decades and only rarely made it past the censorship of the publishers. Only “war memoirs and jazz recollections from both black and white artist seemed to be a field where a writer could get away with saying *motherfucker*, as long as it was put into a form less obvious than *mother-fugger*” (Dawson 123).

Two autobiographies of jazz musicians provide clear examples. In Billy Holiday’s autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues* from 1956, the term *mother-hugger* was used for *motherfucker* and *mother-hugging* for *motherfucking* (Dawson 15,123). Later in 1971 Charles Mingus used *motherfucker* without any euphemisms in his autobiography *Beneath the Underdog*. His autobiography is interesting because of two examples in which he remembers the vocabulary of the musicians with whom he played.

In a memory from 1947 Mingus remembers, “[I] felt embarrassed as the band walked out. There were strangers, women and children, all around, and the guys were laughing too loudly and joking and words like *motherfucker* and *cocksucker* echoed through the station” (Dawson 131).

The second example might be even more important in our case, because of his description of Miles Davis' behaviour or attitude and vocabulary on stage. Mingus thinks that there is even more to motherfucker than a simple swearword and that "on the bandstand the word binds the musicians together in a special fraternity" (Dawson 130). He tries to clarify this with the following example:

"Ladies and gentlemen, will you all shut up and just listen to this motherfucker blowing"
"Miles! Careful, man, you can't say that."
"Shit, man, I put my hand over the mike on 'motherfucker'. Remember [Thelonious] Monk calling the club owner in Detroit a motherfucker seven times on the mike 'cause he didn't have a good piano?"
(Dawson 131)

Maybe even more important are the shifts that can be seen in the *Jazz Lexicon's* entry, both of them around 1950, according to the lexicon. One shift is from person to anything else. Not only has it lost the original literal meaning of an incestuous male, but it has jumped even to objects and abstractions. One example that Gold gives is from an issue of the magazine *The Jazz Review* (September 1959) "You go and buy me a tenor saxophone and I'll play the m-f." Later we will also see examples of Miles Davis using the term when he is not referring to people.

The second shift is equally important and represents a connotation shift. Gold writes that the "perjorative connotation is not always present" anymore, although the word was originally an insult. Around 1950 it shifted to "anyone or anything that is formidable or extraordinary". Furthermore, he backs that up with a quotation from *Esquire*, the November issue from 1959, "mother jiver: someone who cons or fools. Lately has taken on affectionate meaning and even a term of praise. Example: a bad mother jiver is an excellent musician" (Gold 209) So, if swearwords used to be used mostly in negative contexts, this semantic shift has created a "disorder". A term that was considered negative and used in negative contexts can from now on be used to express a positive attitude towards a person or an object.

However, the list of shifts and changes does not end here. A 1960 quotation from the *N.Y. Citizen-Call*, a black weekly newspaper, noted that "Doctors, lawyers, businessmen and athletes, especially professional baseball

players and jazz or cool school musicians use the term, "M . . .," as lingual crutches." It indicates more than a growth in the frequency of its usage: "linguistic crutches" might indicate that the word was used more often to replace other words, even in place of words that people did not remember in a particular moment or did not know at all but needed in that particular situation. Dawson suggests that Americans are maybe "regressing (some might say evolving) into a tonal English that's short on vocabulary and long on gestures, inflection and the need for context" (Dawson 8). As an example, he takes *dude*. Dude shifted from a fashion term in 1880 to the black hipster language of the 1920s, became part of the surfers' vocabulary in the 1950s and has several meanings nowadays. However, he also claims that *motherfucker* has made it even further, is used in even more contexts and linguistic functions, some of which I will examine on the basis of Miles Davis' writing.

Miles was a jazz musician who lived and worked with musicians like the ones described above. Not only did he learn to play jazz from them, but they must have also influenced his vocabulary. Although they might have influenced his vocabulary, it could have also been his father. In the book he quotes his father, and from those passages it is clear that his father used the same vulgar vocabulary as Miles. However, I must note that Miles might have "added" the swear words to the emotional charge of the words himself when he was composing his autobiography.

Miles' use of the word is astonishing not only because of the frequency but also because of the variety of different ways in which he uses this word. He uses it for people (regardless of gender), and for objects, events and weather. Bands are *motherfuckers*, so are records and sandwiches. Nobody escapes being a *motherfucker*, not even himself or his father.

It seems that the term can be used as a comparison for almost anything. In his words everything could be "as (adjective) as a motherfucker". Moreover, the negative or positive polarity cannot be guessed from the word itself; only the context gives his attitude away. Sometimes the adjective preceding *motherfucker* gives his attitude away, however, this can also be misleading, as we will see in the further examples.

A similar pattern can be used for adjectives in the comparative form: “weirder than a motherfucker”, “funnier than a motherfucker” etc. The superlative form was found only in combination with the adjective “bad”, as in “the baddest motherfuckers” which is an excellent example of two semantic shifts – words meaning the opposite (“bad” is used in this case as exclusively positive) and the neutralisation of “motherfucker”.

In the form of *motherfucking*, the term can also function as an adjective that modifies the following noun. As an interesting exception to all these uses of “motherfucker”, the adjective “motherfucking” is never used in a positive or neutral context; it is always and without exception used with negative attitude. *Motherfucker* itself represents a problem for the translator. There is no word meaning the same in German or Slovene; moreover, there is no such word in any of the languages that could be used in so many different contexts and functions. Therefore, the translator has to make compromises and even sacrifices and, as we will see in the examples, sometimes has to make the translation genteel in order to keep it sound natural.

The Slovene translator stuck mostly to one word with which he translated *motherfucker*. His choice was *pizdun*. The word might not be the most common one in spoken Slovene, but it is vulgar enough and also functions adequately in a context where it simply “replaces” the word “person” or “people”. It is not the swear word of all swear words like *motherfucker*, but it is derived from *pizda*, and this swear word has, next to *kurac*, *pička* and *fuk*, probably the highest ranking in the level of vulgarity in Slovene. However, problems arise when we examine the connotation of the word in a corpus of Slovene language. Research in *Fidaplus* showed that the word is almost exclusively used in negative contexts; only in two cases could the context be assessed as either neutral or positive.

So I heard all that shit back in 1944 all at once. Goddamn, them **motherfuckers** was terrible. Talk about cooking! (9)

Tako sem leta 1944 slišal vse to sranje. Vraga, ti **pizduni** so bili strašni. Govorim o briljanci! (7)

Miles was obviously astonished or surprised by the way the musicians were playing when he heard them. He even seems to be affectionate; therefore, the polarity in this case is unquestionable. The context in the Slovene translation is also positive; only it could be argued, nevertheless, that *pizdun* has too negative connotation. Where *motherfucker*, used as a noun in English, can express positive contexts, Slovene swearwords used as nouns (e.g., *pizda*, *pička*) are almost always accompanied by a negative attitude or meaning (only *pička* could be used in all three polarities to refer to a female person). However, simply using a swearword as a noun to refer to people, putting it into positive context and expecting it to be immediately connoted positively is an unreliable strategy in Slovene. Calling a male either *kurac*, *pička* or *pizda* would almost always have a negative connotation towards the referred person. Moreover, *pička* would also mean that the man is a coward, and a *pizda* would be simply a bad man.

A similar problem arises when “motherfucker” is used with positive connotations and refers to females:

Sarah Vaughan was there also and she's a **motherfucker** too. Then and now. Sarah sounding like Bird and Diz and them two playing everything! (9)

Tudi Sarah Vaughan je bila tam in tudi ona je bila za **popizdit**. Takrat in zdaj. Sarah je bila slišati kot Bird in Diz, tadva sta pa igrala vse! (7)

Davis is obviously astonished by Vaughan and is trying to connote authenticity in this case. In his opinion Vaughan was a true, genuine singer who had all the qualities a singer requires. In an interview in 1974, Frank Zappa defined a motherfucker as “a musician who is supposedly good on his instrument” (Dawson 57). Calling Vaughan a motherfucker could therefore transfer these abilities from an instrument to a voice. Vaughan could sing as well as others were playing their instruments.

We can see that in this case the word *pizdun* cannot be used, since it indicates the male gender. So the translator had to find another way to express Davis' enthusiasm for Sarah, while keeping the vulgarity and the positive connotation of the text. *Za popizdit* works well in this case, since it is derived from the same word as *pizdun*, so the level of vulgarity is kept, and in Slovene *za*

popizdit can be used in two contexts: either if something is annoying or a “drag”, or if something is extremely good, which is the case in the original. In both cases the emotional charge is high and in compliance with the original. In this case even “pička” could not be used. The entry in SSKJ says for *pička* that it refers to “a woman, mostly young”, so it can be connoted neutrally. A search in *Fidaplus* has also shown that *pička* used for women would mostly occur in neutral or slightly negative contexts; however, cases of positive connotation almost always refer to the appearance of the woman and not to her character or her qualities. Davis was obviously impressed with Vaughan’s singing and not with her looks.

My father was something. He was a strong **motherfucker**, ... (23)

Moj oče je bil od vraga. Bil je močan, ... (22)

Davis had great respect and admiration for his father, who was a university graduate and renowned dentist, and played golf. This might not seem remarkable nowadays; however, in the 50s it was extremely rare to see a black person playing a sport that was considered predominantly “white”. Thus, Davis’ father was a big man, and it seems that exactly this is expressed through the phrase *strong motherfucker*. The combination of the adjective *strong* and the swearword *motherfucker* results in an even “greater” person than simply a “strong man”. The explanation for the Slovene translation *od vraga* is “of a high level” (SSKJ). *Vraga* is still considered to be one of the Slovene swearwords; however, nowadays it seems that it has lost its force and can sound more euphemistic than actual swearing. Moreover, it sounds outdated compared to the most common swearwords, e.g. *pizda*. The connotation is still preserved, although expressed with much less “power” than in the English original. Why the translator in this case omitted *pizdun* is unknown; one guess could be that it seemed inappropriate to him to use such a swearword to describe a parent.

4.1.1 *Bad Motherfuckers*

Smitherman introduced a term called “semantic inversion” by which she described a phenomenon where words turn into their opposites, e.g. *stupid* means ‘excellent’ and *bad* means ‘good’ (Smitherman 216). The latter in particular is part of the common phrase *bad motherfucker*. Dawson claims that bad is good, but baad is even better. In 1939 H.C. Brearly wrote that “the word *bad* loses its original significance and may be used as an epithet of honour. ... The more a black man prolongs the *a*, the greater is his homage” (Dawson 26).

Davis uses the phrases *bad motherfucker(s)* and *the baddest motherfucker(s)* exclusively for evaluating people and showing his admiration for their ability to play an instrument. It is interesting to note that, in isolation, this word combination would have a very negative polarity. *Motherfucker* was originally used pejoratively and the adjective *bad* means something unfavourable, unpleasant or disturbing. However, the dictionary entries include the slang usage of *bad* meaning “very good” (thefreedictionary.com; 16.01.2012 21:28). This combination, even without the knowledge of semantic inversion, read in context, gives us a completely different interpretation. Two negative words, one of them even vulgar, are used to express a positive attitude that is also highly emotionally charged.

English original	Slovene translation
bad motherfucker (s) (29, 31);	izjemnih pizdunov (27); bil je vražje dober (31); pravi pizdun (31); hudih pizdunov (43);
baddest motherfuckers (45)	najstrašnejši pizduni. (45)
one of the baddest motherfuckers I ever heard. (42)	eden najbolj strašnih pizdunov, kar sem jih kdajkoli slišal. (42)

Table 2: Translation solutions for *bad motherfucker*

Whereas Davis uses only *bad* or *baddest* as premodifiers and intensifiers for *motherfucker*, the Slovene translation uses several different words in these functions to achieve the same effect. The translator kept *pizdun* for *motherfucker*,

so the vulgarity was kept, but used several different adjectives to express the positive connotation of the original. *Izjemnih* (exceptional) and *pravi* (real, true) are words with positive connotations, and both express positive polarity. *Strašni* (terrible) and *hudi* (bad, evil), however, normally express negative characteristics. A search in *Fidaplus* has shown that *strašen* occurs extremely seldom with positive connotation; however, *hud* is colloquially frequently used in the form of the adverb “*hudo*” to express either positive or negative emotions (often in the form of the exclamation *Hudo!*). The usage of *hud* as an adjective with positive connotation is more limited; it does however occur. Since the world has also undergone a semantic shift in colloquial language, it is an adequate solution in this case. *Bad motherfucker* is used often, so we could even speak of an established phrase; therefore, the translation should be constant and should not vary. *Hud pizdun* works well in this case and would work equally well even in the comparative form *hujši* and the superlative *najhuši*; however, I would note here that the translator would need to be absolutely sure that the reader will understand the phrase as a positive evaluation. In unclear contexts, it still might lead to misinterpretation.

4.1.2 *Motherfucker* as a Means of Comparison

Whenever Davis evaluates or describes a person or his/her characteristics, he likes to use *motherfucker* as a mean for comparison. Someone or something can be *clean, skinny, fat, weird, funny, mad, fine etc. as a motherfucker*. However, it seems that *motherfucker* has no real reference, no grounds from which we could objectively evaluate or measure the characteristics and qualities of the referents. In this sense it could be compared to the function of an indefinite pronoun, which refers to non-specific beings or objects. My guess is that the *motherfucker* in each example takes on all the characteristics of the preceding adjective and represents an abstract or imaginary “person” to whom these characteristics apply and that we use as a comparison. One of the entries in the *Urban Dictionary* defines *motherfucker* as “a mean for comparison, the second best, or second worst thing in the universe” (urbandictionary.com; accessed 10.2.2012, 15:05). I consider it

unlikely that it would mean exactly the second best or worst thing in the universe; however, it does intensify the adjective to a significant degree and also adds emotional charge.

I will analyse the examples in two groups according to different translation techniques. The first group will include translations in which it was possible to translate the phrases with swearwords; the second group comprises those translations in which the translator used phrases or sayings in his translation. A general note here is that, even if the translator was consistent in translating *motherfucker* with *pizdun* in the contexts and connotations described earlier, this usage cannot be so easily followed in Slovene, e.g. *bolj čuden kot kakšen pizdun*. Grammatically it is correct, and also semantically it makes as much sense as in English; however, it simply would not sound natural. A keen reader would recognise that the structure of the phrase was taken from English.

I got up and went to the door with sleep in my eyes, **madder than a motherfucker**. (61)

Vstal sem in **ves besen** ter popolnoma zaspan stopil k vratom (62)

Well, the bitch got **madder than a motherfucker** and told Margherite that I was silly. (47)

No, ta prasica je **popolnoma ponorela** in povedala Margherite, da sem trapast. (48)

Vachiano would get **madder than a motherfucker** and turn all red in the face. (64)

...je Vachiano **popolnoma popizdil** in zardel v obraz (64)

For the first example, *madder than a motherfucker*, the translator used three different translations. The first one is simply *ves besen*, meaning “very mad” – no vulgarity or emotional charge, only an angry person. In the second one, *popolnoma ponorela*, the translator has made the woman very angry by using the word *popolnoma* (completely); however in the third case, *popolnoma popizdil*, the person is significantly angrier. The reason lies in the word *popiziti*. It is a vulgar expression derived from *pizda* that means “to go mad or crazy” and would be used to refer to the highest level of anger. Combined with *popolnoma*, it describes the same level of anger, vulgarity and emotional charge as the English expression, whereas the second example would rank lower in the same terms, especially the

two latter ones. The first example would in these terms rank lowest of the three. If we assume that in all three cases the persons were equally angry in the original, we cannot claim the same thing for the translation. Only the third example expresses the same amount of anger through the verb *popizditi* as the original. In this case it would not be that demanding to maintain consistency in the translation. In other cases, as we will see now, it is not as easy:

My aunt Corrine had a lot of money and shit but everybody thought she was **weirder than a motherfucker**. (27)

Teta Corrine je imela cel kup denarja, ampak vsi so menili, da je tudi **vražje čudaška**. (26)

Vražje čudaška consists of the intensifier *vražje* and the adjective *čudaška*. It has already been mentioned that the word *vražje* might still be considered a swearword by some people, but would generally seem an outdated and euphemistic expression rather than a true swearword. The entry in SSKJ defines *vražje* as a word that shows either a negative attitude towards the referent or great intensity or a high level in the referent. The exact same dictionary explanation can be found under the entry for *prekleta*. Both originate in religion, but have lost their religious connotations and are nowadays used mainly as intensifiers. *Vražje* can now be found mostly in written language, whereas *prekleta* has also survived in spoken language, perhaps because these two are the only two intensifiers that can modify every adjective. The adjective *kurčev* can also be used as an intensifier; however, it is always used with negative connotations; *prekleta* and *vražje* can always take the polarity expressed in the context and do not add any connotation to the meaning. They are, however, less vulgar, but because of their wide usage and natural sound, they seem to be the best (but not the only) option in this case.

There is one expression in Slovene that could be used in the same way as the pattern “adjective – than a motherfucker”. *Kot svinja* (like a pig, swine) is an expression that (literally) compares either the characteristic or the state of a person to a pig. The “pig” does not need to have any of the characteristics of the adjective; it simply raises its extent to a significantly higher degree or level. A

search in *Fidaplust* yielded results in which *kot svinja* was connoted both positively and negatively, although the negative would still be the more common usage (we can mostly find it used with adjectives like lazy or dirty). It could be that the expression seemed too colloquial to the translator and he therefore decided to use *prekleta* or *vražje*; however, since the autobiography is narrated in the first person and in is the voice of Davis, I think this would in our case also be a solution for our translation.

There is also another option, but it is very rare. Adjectives in Slovene can colloquially be modified or intensified with “ADJECTIVE + *v pičko/pizdo materno*”. Weirder, funnier, fatter, skinnier or madder *than a motherfucker* would thus become *čuden, zabaven, debel, suh ali besen v pičko/pizdo materno*. In terms of vulgarity, these two versions would rank the same as *motherfucker* in English. However the reception among the readers might not be the same. This suggestion might be “too vulgar” and even too colloquial for some readers, although it would stay loyal to the original. Again, I would like to mention that the usage is rarer than any of the previously mentioned phrases; a search in *Fidaplust* yielded only one result of this usage, however, it does exist.

His wife, Mable, was **fatter than a motherfucker**, though, and Clyde was **skinnier than a motherfucker**. (42)

Čeprav je bila **debela kot sod**, Clyde pa **še bolj suh od trlice**. (42)

An interesting translation decision is the one for “His wife, Mable, was fatter than a motherfucker, though, Clyde was skinnier than a motherfucker”. It was translated with *debela kot sod* and *suh kot trlica*. Both are set phrases or sayings in Slovene, used in both colloquial and formal language, and describe the same characteristics as in Davis’ case; *debela kot sod* (fat as a barrel) is used to refer to people whom we consider extremely obese, and *suha kot trlica* (thin as a poker) is used for people of unnatural slenderness. So the meaning of the sayings fits the content of the original, but they are considered entirely neutral and not vulgar.

Perhaps one option in this case would thus be to modify these phrases by adding a swearword, e.g., *debela kot prekleti/kurčev sod* and *suh kot prekleta/kurčeva trlica*. *Prekleta* would be less vulgar, but not limited only to negative connotations. Adding these two words would add the vulgarity and emotional charge of the original to the translation; however, this is not a common practice in Slovene. Such standard sayings are usually not modified in this way, so any changes we apply in this case would be compromises between a more vulgar translation and a more natural sounding one.

There is, however, the option of translating these examples with the approaches described in the previous group, but I wanted to comment also on these interesting translations.

People who came to Minton's wore suits and ties because they were copying the way people like Duke Ellington or Jimmy Lunceford dressed. Man, they was **cleaner than a motherfucker**. (53)

Ljudje, ki so prihajali k Mintonu, so nosili obleke in kravate, kajti pri oblačenju so posnemali ljudi, kot sta Duke Ellington in Jimmy Lunceford. Fant, bili so **kot iz škatlice**. (53)

The same translation strategy was applied to the translation of “as clean as a motherfucker” and “cleaner than a motherfucker”. In two out of three cases the translator used “kot iz škatlice”. That is a well established, colloquial phrase for an elegant, well dressed person and therefore also fits the context, but again has no degree of vulgarity. The same method as mentioned in the previous two examples could be applied in this case; either we would add a swearword to that phrase to make it more vulgar and intense, or we would translate it with *prekleta urejen*. Whereas *kurčevo* would have been a translation option in the previous examples, it would not be applicable in this case because *cleaner than a motherfucker* is connoted positively and *kurčevo* is used mostly with negative connotations and would mislead in this case from the actual meaning of the phrase.

4.1.3 *Motherfucker* Used for Objects and Abstractions

One of the definitions of *motherfucker* on urbandictionary.com is: motherfucker is a (1) PERSON, (2) PLACE, (3) THING, or (4) EVENT. So far the analysis has been about the usage of the word in the first meaning. This part, however, will focus on *motherfucker* when is it used for the other three definitions. The reason for this categorizing is the following: in the majority of cases when Davis uses *motherfucker* to refer to people (excluding all the cases when it was used as a means of comparison) it was translated with *pizdun*. When it refers to places, things, events or situations, the translator mostly chose the swearword *pizdarija*. First, I will take a closer look at these examples where *motherfucker* refers to a situation or “thing”.

The first two weeks with Bird was a **motherfucker**, but it helped me grow up real fast. (69)

Tista prva tedna z Birdom sta bila **pizdarija**, vendar sta mi pomagala, da sem hitro odrastel. (70)

I mean, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie “Yardbird” Parker, Buddy Anderson, Gene Ammons, Lucky Thompson, and Art Blakey all together in one band and not to mention B: Billy Eckstein himself. It was a **motherfucker**. Man, that shit was all up in my body. (7)

Bila je **pizdarija**. Fant, to sranje me je popolnoma prevzelo. (5)

In both examples, Davis refers to a situation: in the first one he describes the first two weeks that he spent with Bird and in the second one his affection of the band in which all of these great musicians played. The connotation in the second example is obviously positive; however, the first example has negative connotations. Parker was a drug addict, an alcoholic and always borrowed money from others; Davis was at that time young and still did not know exactly how to live with that – it was quite a shock for him. Unfortunately, there is no entry in SSKJ for *pizdarija*, so again a search in *Fidaplus* had to be done to determine the connotation and the most frequent usage of the word. The most frequent meaning, according to the results in *Fidaplus*, was “a stupid deed, a mess, an unpleasant situation”. This explanation applies wonderfully to the meaning and connotation

of our first example, so I would say that the translations does not shift from the original; moreover, in this case a “loyal” translation of the function (not the literal meaning) of the word and its usage in the language has resulted in a natural sounding sentence.

The search, however, also showed that the word is rarely used with positive connotations; there was only a handful of search results in which *pizdarija* was connoted positively. That brings us to the second example. *Motherfucker* in the second example could be understood as a consequence of Davis’ affection; there is no trace of any negative feeling in the sentence. The positive context was also expressed in the Slovene translation, but it could be that *pizdarija* imports some negative connotations to the sentence. The following sentence does make it clear that admiration is meant, but if the reader, for some reason, stops at that point, he might be left with mixed interpretations. Finding a different swearword for the translation would also be problematic, because only *pizdarija* can be used in the same functions or “meaning” as *motherfucker* (in this case); it sounds unnatural for the word to occur in positive contexts.

... so my father received three degrees and I remember looking at them **motherfuckers** up on his office wall after I got older and saying: “Goddamn, I hope he won’t ask *me* to do that.” (13)

... torej je prejel tri diplome in spominjam se, da sem si, ko sem bil starejši ogledoval, te **pizdarije** na steni njegovega urada in govoril: „Prekleto, upam, da od *mene* ne bo zahteval, naj to ponovim.“ (11)

Another way of using *pizdarija* would be to refer to objects or things; often (but not always) these have been mentioned previously in the sentence – the same way as Davis refers to the degrees on the wall in his father’s office. From that point of view, this *motherfucker* can be very efficiently translated into Slovene because *pizdarija* and *motherfucker* can be used in the same way in both Slovene and English and are also equally vulgar. The only comment in this case would be that, again, *pizdarija* might add some negative connotations. However, one could argue that even *motherfucker* in that case in English imports a slightly

negative connotation to the sentence; Davis did respect and admire his father, however, he felt repelled by the idea of achieving similar goals.

4.1.4 *Motherfucking* Used as an Adjective

Noun is not the only word class in which *motherfucker* occurs; in the form of *motherfucking*, it can be used as either an adjective or a verb (infinitive *to motherfuck*). There is no case of the usage as a verb in the autobiography; however, it is used several times as an adjective.

The *Urban Dictionary* offers several explanations for the word *motherfucking*. The second one, “*motherfucking* - (adj) Used to tone up and strengthen what you mean like making something heavier, worse, better, more incredible...etc” (urbandictionary.com; accessed on 13.2.2012 15:38), suggests that it is simply used as a general intensifier with both positive and negative connotations. Another explanation, however, claims that *motherfucking* is used primarily with negative connotations: “*motherfucking* - a distressed state of condition, primarily used to speak in a pejorative fashion” (urbandictionary.com; accessed on 13.2.2012 15:38). The latter explanation is closer to the way Davis uses it. It is true that generally the word is used both positively and negatively; however, whenever Davis used the adjective *motherfucking* it is always accompanied by a negative connotation.

The comparison with the translation will again be done in two parts. In the first part I will closely examine three examples in which *motherfucking* was translated with a swearword, and in the second set there will be two examples where the swearwords were omitted.

Nonetheless, the city was an eye-opener for me, especially all the tall buildings, the noise, the cars, and all those **motherfucking** people, who seemed to be everywhere. (51)

Kljub temu je bilo mesto zame presenetljivo, zlasti vsa visoka poslopja, hrup, avtomobili in vsi tisti **pofukani** ljudje, za katere se je zdelo, da so vsepovsod. (51)

But the rest of them white **motherfucking** critics hated what we were doing. They didn't understand the music. (67)

Toda ostali beli **pizdunski** kritiki niso marali tega, kar smo počeli. Niso razumeli glasbe. (68)

That part of the 52nd Street was nothing but a row of three- or fourstoried brownstones in the first place. Wasn't nothing fancy about that **motherfucking** place. Earlier, rich white people used to live on the block, between Fifth and Sixth avenues. (71)

Tisti del 52. ulice že tako ni bil nič drugega kot vrsta tri ali štirinadstropnih hiš iz peščenjaka. Ničesar navdušujočega ni bilo na tam **trapastem** kraju. Prej so v bloku med Peto in Šesto avenijo živeli bogati belci. (72)

In the first two examples the translator used a swearword in his translation; no swearwords were used in the third one, but the word *trapast*, meaning silly, stupid, inappropriate (SSKJ), was used. *Trapast* is not a swearword, but at least the translator used some word to express Davis' attitude, so I have deemed it a linking example between this set and the second, and so have decided to examine it in this part.

The first two translation possibilities are *pofukani* and *pizdunski*. The adjective *Pofukati* comes from *fukati* (Engl. to have sexual intercourse), and *pizdunski* from *pizdun*. Since *pizdunski* is a derivation from *pizdun* the same way as *motherfucking* comes from *motherfucker*, it seems that this translation would be the closest to the original. This speaks in favor of *pizdun* being the better translation; however, there are other criteria that would rank other swearwords higher than this one.

Both adjectives rank highest in the vulgarity of Slovene swearwords, and research in *Fidaplus* showed that both are always used with negative connotations and, due to their vulgarity, carry strong negative emotions towards the following noun. According to the search results in *Fidaplus* on both words, *pofukani* would be the more frequent; *pizdnun*, as a noun, is a frequent word, but the adjective *pizdunski* is rare compared to both *pizdun* and the adjective *pofukani* and resulted in only a few hits on *Fidaplus*. However, both seem acceptable as possible translations for the adjective *motherfucking* when it is used pejoratively; they are vulgar enough, carry the same emotional charge as in English and also sound natural in Slovene.

Another translation option would in this case be *kurčev*. It is a derivative from *kurac* (Engl. male sex organ) and has the same characteristics as *pizdunski* and *pofukani*. It has same level of vulgarity and is used mainly with negative connotations; however, it is used more frequently in Slovene than the two others together. A comparison in the search results from *Fidaplus* showed that *kurčev* is twice as frequent as *pizdunski* and *pofukani* combined and could therefore sound more familiar to the reader.

The third word that was used as a translation for *motherfucking* is *trapast*. The word is not a swearword; the entry in SSKJ says that it is only used colloquially and pejoratively. The negative connotation is still present with the word; however the vulgarity is lost. It does seem that Davis had a slightly less negative attitude in this example than in the preceding two, perhaps even suggesting a neutral connotation. This could be one reason that the translator decided not to use a swearword; however, *Fidaplus* also yielded results in which it seems that *kurčev* also expresses an attitude where the speaker, is in a way, ignorant towards the subject and judges it neither positively nor necessarily negatively. This would also be the case in this example and would therefore suggest *kurčev* as the better translation option.

But he did tell me that if I ever so much as “ever stumble again like that, and you’re not supposed so stumble, I’m going to kick you **motherfucking** ass.” (25)

Vendar mi je povedal, da mi bo, če se “še kdaj spotaknem, kljub temu, da takih stvari ne bi smel početi, dobro izprašil rit.” (25)

Bird even moved in with me for a while, until Irene came. ... All of a sudden, there she was, knocking on my **motherfucking** door: my mother had told her to come. 58

Bird je celo nekaj časa živel z mano, dokler ni prišla Irene. ... Kar nenadoma se je pojavila in potrkala na moja vrata. Moja mama ji je rekla, naj pride. (58)

In this second set I will examine two examples in which the swearword was omitted in the translation. The first one is a modification of the common expression “to kick someone’s ass”. That additional *motherfucker* increases the disagreement and anger expressed by the unmodified saying and also suggests an ultimatum. The translator probably tried to imply that by modifying the standard saying “nekomu izprašiti rit” with the adverb *dobro*. *Dobro* (Engl. good) in this

case functions simply as an intensifier of the phrase and raises the level of anger, but I would say it still does not reach the level of anger of the original. This translation shift could be corrected with any of the suggestions given above; however, this phrase is rarely modified in this way by its speakers. Naturally the phrase would not be modified; even *Fidaplus* gave only one result in which *rit* was preceded by an adjective. Adding an adverb as in the translation, sounds much more “Slovene”. The adverb could also be replaced by *prekleta* (Engl. damn, goddamn). *Prekleta* can function as an intensifier in adverbial use; the use of *pizdunski*, *pofukani* and *kurčevi* in this manner is limited. Although less vulgar than the original, it would still be a more adequate solution than simply *dobro* and would add more anger to the speaker.

The last example shows Davis’ surprise when Irene appears at his place in New York. Again the surprise and disapproval are intensified with the adjective *motherfucking*. By simply omitting it in the translation, the meaning shifts a little, suggesting that Davis was not as surprised that she had come and the disapproval vanishes. Adding *kurčeva*, *pizdunska*, *pofukana* or even *prekelta* would immediately restore the vulgarity and the emotional charge, while avoiding the slight shift in meaning.

4.2 *Nigger*

Nigger is another term that at first glance seems simple, but a detailed analysis shows a complex term that has not only been changing over time, but even whose usage nowadays varies strongly depending on the speaker, the addressee and the context. The origin of the word lies in the slave trade, where it originally did not intend to offend, however, it represents an important link to slavery, because it “embodies in an intensified fashion the demeaning roles of servitude and of being an outsider that have characterised the early roles of black people in Western society” (Hughes 327). From ca. 1800 till the twentieth century, the term was, considered an offensive racial insult. Nowadays, if a white person uses *nigger* to refer to an African American, the addressee would take this as an insult. In contrast, if African Americans use this term among themselves, it is used more as an affectionate, ironic or jocular epithet. This shift was noted around the 1950s, especially in contexts expressing solidarity (Hughes 328). It is not entirely clear, but it was probably during or right after the Vietnam War when the meaning shifted from African American to other ethnicities and that other ethnicities also started to use the term (Spears 239). This shift in the meaning can partly be seen in dictionaries. Hughes compares several dictionaries dating from 1900 to 2003. In 1900 the word was either marked with “colloquial”, or no further comments were provided. However, already in 1934 *Webster II* was defining the word as “often used familiarly; now chiefly contemptuous”. All later entries in different dictionaries define the word either “usually pejorative” or “taboo/offensive” (Hughes 329). Even nowadays *The Free Dictionary* (which includes entries from the *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Collins English Dictionary*) along with the *Oxford Dictionary* still marks *nigger* as offensive/taboo and disparaging. Only the *Oxford Dictionary* has a separate paragraph noting the shift from an entirely disparaging term to a mildly disparaging term when used among African Americans. Neither is there an entry for *nigger* in *The Jazz Lexicon*. This is understandable, because the increasing usage of *nigger* is more connected with the rise of hip-hop music or culture than it is with jazz.

Nigger may, in rare cases, also refer to any victim of racial and other prejudice, a person disenfranchised economically, politically or socially (Hughes 328). A good example of this interpretation is a song by John Lennon titled “Woman is the Nigger of the World”. This song was also one of the first songs of women’s rights. It was banned from some radio stations because of the word *nigger*, but there were several prominent African Americans, including the comedian Dick Gregory and congressman Ron Dellums, who defended the song with the explanation that the word *nigger* in this case refers to someone who is being told by others how he should behave, what to say and what not to, what he is allowed and what not etc. In this case the term does not refer to any ethnicity whatsoever but refers in this case to gender and gender roles (Woman Is the Nigger of the World: accessed on 19.3.2012: 20.20).

Another example of this usage can also be found in Roddy Doyle’s *The Commitments*; there he writes that “the Irish are the niggers of Europe”. Furthermore he calls the Dubliners the niggers of Ireland and indicates the similarities of the working class in Ireland to African Americans and their role in American society.

Currently *nigger* is used by younger African Americans (and some non-African Americans) similarly to *guy* – to refer to a male person in general regardless of ethnicity. It may, however, also refer to females, if they are in a group together with males (Spears 239). The attitudes towards *nigger* still remain strongly polarized. The negative attitude evokes the memory of the past and the circumstances from which the term originates. On the other hand, others claim that no white person can tell an African American what he is allowed to say and what not. Moreover, the word can show black pride, regardless of the original “white” meaning (Spears 240).

In an essay titled “Mommy, What Does ‘Nigger’ Mean?” Gloria Naylor remembers how she first came across the word *nigger*; she was in school and was called a *nigger* by a white person. That was the first time that she recognised that word, although she is sure that she had heard it already. She claims that she heard the word in a different context, or some African Americans might say as a different word. For her, African Americans took a word that white people used for

humiliation and “rendered it impotent”. She says they “transformed *nigger* to signify the varied and complex human beings they knew themselves to be.” She also lists several examples of the usage of the word: it could be a man who distinguished himself for his strength, intelligence or drive; it could be an endearment for a husband, or it could even mean the pure essence of manhood. *Trifling niggers* could refer to a group of people that “overstepped the bounds of decency”- drunkards, those who did not want to work or were not cleaning their households. Her essay is also important because she writes that words as sequences of sound do not carry a meaning; it’s the consensus, an “agreement” in the society, that gives words a meaning and also true power.

Spears claims that *nigger* has been neutralised long ago among African Americans; what is new is that it is being used for any race or ethnicity. Prototypically, *nigger* still means a black person, but for non-African American persons it is used without ethnical modification. Its generalised usage continues to stun older African Americans as well as non-African Americans (Spears 242). Some older generations even reject the term African American and still prefer to be called *black*. For them, *black* symbolises “a long struggle over racial self-hatred and the eventual adoption of the term represents a victorious shift to the positive in the African American psyche” (Smitherman 214).

Davis uses the term *nigger* in a unique way. I have listed several possible explanations for the word, yet it seems that none applies entirely in this case. He uses the word in a strictly negative way, and even then it seems that it is not his words he is saying – as if in this case, he takes the perspective of a white person looking down on a black person and ironically saying it from their perspective. So he uses the words that he thinks white people would use in this case and parodies them. These expressions are always connoted negatively.

But the real reason I think they shut it down for a couple of weeks was because they didn’t like all them **niggers** coming downtown. They didn’t like all them black men being with all them rich, fine white women. (71)

Mislim pa, da je bil pravi razlog, da so jih za kakšna dva tedna zaprli, ker jim ni ugajalo, da so **črnuhi** prihajali v center. Ni jim bilo všeč, da so se črnici dobivali z bogatimi, elegantnimi belimi ženskami. (72)

A lot of people – white people included – followed the band uptown. I think that’s one of the reasons 52nd Street didn’t stay closed, because them white owners began to complain about how they was losing the money to them **niggers** up in Harlem. (73)

Mnogo ljudi – vključno z belci – je sledilo skupini iz centra. Mislim, da je to eden od razlogov, da 52. ulica ni ostala zaprta, kajti veli lastniki so se začeli pritoževati, kako da izgublajo zaslužek zaradi tistih **črnuhov** iz Harlema. (73-74)

When Bird left New York he was a king, but out in Los Angeles he was just another broke, weird, drunken **nigger** playing some strange music. Los Angeles is a city built on celebrating stars, and Bird didn’t look like no star. (88)

Ko je Bird odšel z New Yorka je bil kralj, toda tam v Los Angelesu je bil samo še en propadli, čudaški, zapiti **črnuh**, ki je igral čudno glasbo. Los Angeles je mesto, temelječe na slavljenju zvezd, Bird pa še malo ni bil podoben zvezdi. (92)

The word *črnuh* is defined in *SSKJ* as a pejorative expression for a black person; there are also other definitions, one of them being “a black animal, usually a dog”. The entry does not include any information on whether *črnuh* is generally used for black people or limited only to African Americans. A search in *Fidaplus* established what kind of contexts the word occurs in and its connotations. There were only a few examples in which the use of *črnuh* seemed to be neutral; in the majority of cases it was used negatively and referred to a black person; the second most frequent result was the reference to a black dog. Moreover, it was often used along with the English word *nigger* and functioned as an explanation or translation. It was also observed by Kočan in her senior thesis about African American poetry that *nigger* in poems has mostly been translated into Slovene as *črnuh* (Kočan 27). So I would guess that *črnuh* is becoming the more or less a prototypical translation for *nigger*. It does seem to fit. There are two theories for the origin of *nigger*: the first one is that it is a mispronounced version of the word *Negro*, the other one, however, claims that it comes from the Latin word *niger*, meaning “black” (Hughes 328). *Črnuh* is also a derivation from the adjective *črn*, meaning “black”, and is used mainly pejoratively. Especially in our case, because of the way *nigger* was used in the original text, the translated word fits very well. It has the same negative connotation as in the original and is also a word not uncommon in Slovene.

It would, however, be even more interesting if *nigger* has been used with positive connotation in the original text, and if the translator had still chosen the same translation. In that case, one could again argue that it is not normally used in Slovene with positive connotation (as it was the case with *pizdun*), however, an alternative would be hard to find.

One alternative to *črnuh* would be *zamorec*; in SSKJ it is also defined as a (usually) pejorative expression for black people – “usually” because this expression was used (often as a diminutive) in literature for children. Nevertheless, used among adults, it is negatively connoted. Unlike *črnuh*, *zamorec* is also used in sayings: e.g., *dela kot zamorec* (works like a nigger), which means working long and hard for low wages. Often the word carries the idea of person that is inferior to someone else and, again, has to do the most demanding labour. So in this case it partly captures the idea of slavery behind it. However, I still think that *črnuh* fits better in the translation; this is because the association with children’s literature and its slightly archaic sound mean that *zamorec* does not fit as well into an autobiography of a jazz musician.

Nowadays, the English word *nigger* can even be heard on the street in Slovenia, and people use it the same way as the expression is (currently) used among African Americans – both positively and negatively. One might suggest that since it is also becoming quite frequent in the spoken language in Slovenia that it would be possible to simply leave it as a loan word in the translation. In the case of this particular autobiography, I would say that this would be inappropriate. The word *nigger* came into the Slovene language as part of hip-hop jargon and started to spread with the increasingly popular urban culture. Regardless that both jazz and hip-hop originate from African Americans, they are two different styles of music from different eras and originated from different environment. Similarities between the vocabulary of the two can easily be found, one example being *motherfucker*; however, the jazz-era in which Davis lived precedes the era of hip-hop, and therefore terms that are more typical for the latter should not be mixed with the former.

So a lot of critics didn’t like me back then – still don’t today – because they saw me as an arrogant little **nigger**. (83)

Takrat me torej mnogi kritiki niso marali – še danes je tako – kajti imeli so me za predrznega **črnčka**. (86)

Only in one example did the translator decide not to choose *črnuh*, but instead to use a diminutive, *črnček*, of the otherwise neutral *črnc*. This way the translator combined *little* and *nigger* into one word. The main idea of diminutives is to express smallness, intimacy, endearment or affection. This ‘smallness’, however, might not always have positive connotations. In Slovene, diminutives do not necessarily express endearment or affection, but often they are used to express negative connotations or contempt towards the referent; however, it is always the context or, in spoken language, the intonation that distinguishes sweet talk from a pejorative statement. In our example it is clear that *arrogant little nigger* cannot be understood as a positive statement, so the translation works well in this context, but only in this context; applying it to any or all of the other examples listed before might produce a misleadingly immature effect. In this example the person so designated is a negatively judged, young and presumably not tall African American, so a diminutive works well, because diminutives, are always accompanied by the idea of smallness, regardless of other connotations and context. Using this word in all the other cases could therefore result in an amusing and even childish effect, and this would also be misleading.

4.3 *Bitch*

Bitch will be the last word that I will analyse here. Although *shit* was the most frequent swearword, it is not used in a distinctive way; the majority of occurrences are either references to a previously mentioned object or idea, or it is used generally, e.g., *that/and shit*. *Fuck* is also used in a mostly ordinary manner; however, my decision to analyse *bitch* was based on the idea that *motherfucker* and *nigger* were mostly used for male referents, so *bitch*, as an offensive term for women, offers a completely different field for exploring potential translations, which I will examine closely.

Unlike *motherfucker* and *nigger*, *bitch* is an animal term used as an insult. It has been around since the fourteenth century and has “steadily lost force through generalisation” (Hughes 23). Originally it meant a female dog and had no negative connotations. Later it was used metaphorically to apply the behaviour of a female dog in heat to that of a promiscuous woman – hence the insult *son of a bitch* (Hughes 24). At present, the meaning has shifted in several ways, so *bitch* can nowadays be used for men as well, for difficult situations or as a verb, meaning “to complain or criticize”, e.g., “Like, she kept bitching all night about how I show more respect to Dosser than to her” (*Urban Dictionary*); moreover, as an adjective in American slang it can mean exactly the opposite: “wonderful or excellent” (Hughes 24), e.g., “Dizzy is “it,” he is a *bitch!*” (*A Jazz Lexicon*). It can also be used to refer to females generally, without any implication of misogyny (Spears 227) or negative connotation. In this way it can be used by both men and women. The *Urban Dictionary* has a surprisingly generous number of entries for *bitch*: 330 on 48 pages. Most provide the same explanation with a different description or example, and there are several humorous ones that cannot be included in an academic study; however, some provide interesting additional explanations of the term: e.g., “Modern-day servant; A person who performs tasks for another, usually degrading in status”, “A term used for anything”, “In modern day language, a highly disrespectful way to refer to any woman” (*Urban Dictionary*). The number of entries in *The Urban Dictionary* supports Hughes’ claim that the popularity of *bitch* has risen over the last century.

The entry for *bitch* in *A Jazz Lexicon* gives a very good overview of the usage, meaning and connotations of the word either generally or when used among particular groups of people (specifically, jazzmen):

bitch, n. 1. [cf. 1928 *American Speech*, Feb., "Kansas University Slang," p. 218: "*bitch*: something difficult or formidable"; current among jazzmen since c. 1935, though term, like several others (see bad, tough, hard, terrible, etc.) has acquired increasingly favorable connotations since c. 1945] See note above; also, a formidable person. — 1946 *Really the Blues*, p. 19. That boy was really a bitch. —

1955 *Hear Me Talkin to Ya*, p. 196. The depression for musicians in New York—man, it was a bitch! —1956 *Sideman*, p. 47. "That last road trip was a bitch." — 1956 *Eddie Condons Treasury of Jazz*, p. 207. His followers, both white and Negro, often affectionately declare that Dizzy is "it," that he is "real crazy," "a bitch," and "a killer."

2. [also some general slang use, but with esp. currency among jazzmen since c. 1935 in a less pejorative than neutral sense] A woman (note: the term does not necessarily have a pejorative connotation). — 1956 *Lady Sings the Blues*, p. 80. If they had caught Pop having a drink with a white bitch, the management would have flipped.

(Gold 20)

The first part of the entry comprises all the uses of *bitch* in which the referent is not a woman. The first explanation, "something difficult or formidable", implies that *bitch* can refer to anything. Later examples include people, situations or experience; however, the most important piece of data is that the connotations of the term started to shift increasingly from negative towards more positive senses and that the term was part of the vocabulary of jazzmen of that time. The last example (about Dizzy) in this extract shows that the word can also occur in a positive context.

The second part of the entry discusses *bitch* when the referent is a woman. Since 1935, *bitch* has not necessarily been negatively connoted anymore. Especially among jazzmen of that time, it started to be used generally for women. This part of the entry is also important for our analysis because in this autobiography Davis uses the term mostly for women:

Now, this **bitch** had a fine, low ass, long legs, hair down her back; (47)

Ta **kuzla** je imela lepo ritko, dolge noge, lasje pa so se ji spuščali po hrbtu. (48)

I remember one time we was coming down to The Street to play from uptown and Bird had this white **bitch** in the back of the taxi with us. He done already shot up a lot of heroin and now the motherfucker's eating chicken - his favorite food - and drinking whiskey and telling the **bitch** to get down and suck his dick. (65)

Spominjam se, da sva nekega dne iz predmestja prihajala na Ulico, da bi tam igrala in Bird je imel zadaj v najinem taksiju neko belo **mrho**. Kar precej heroina si je že vbrizgal, zdaj pa je pizdun jedel piščanca - svojo najljubšo jed - pil viski in prigovarjal **kuzli**, naj se skloni in mu cuza kurca. (66)

Freddie had a lot of **bitches**. Women were his thing, besides music and heroin. (62)

Freddie je imel celo vrsto **punc**. Ženske so bile ob glasbi in heroinu njegova slabost. (63)

One night this guy who couldn't play worth shit got up to try and do his thing - bullshit - and style himself to get some **bitches**, playing anything. (54)

Nekega večera je neki tip, ki je znal igrati za en drek stopil na oder in skušal igrati svoje - sranje - in se hotel važiti, da bi z igranjem neumnosti osvojil kakšno **mrho**. (54)

Four examples were chosen for this part of the analysis. The referent of *bitch* varies in all these examples. The first example concerns an African American woman (not clear from the extract), the second one a white woman, and in the last two examples, *bitch* is used with reference to women in general. These examples were chosen to show that *bitch* is not used pejoratively for any race; however, it seems that it is always used at least slightly pejoratively for women. Davis called his father a *strong motherfucker*, but he never called his mother or any of his (ex-) wives a *bitch*. Even in the examples it seems that he did not look up to any of the women so designated; moreover, they could be considered just “numbers”. Therefore, I deem *bitch* to be a general reference for women, but with a slightly negative connotation. The last criteria for the choice of examples were the translations. Three different translation solutions were chosen for *bitch*: *mrha*, *kuzla* and *punc*. In the second example (I remember one time...), both *mrha* and *kuzla* were used, although in this case only *bitch* was used in the original and the

referent was the same woman. *Punc* is the only translation option that is not a swearword, nor is it used pejoratively.

First, I will focus on the comparison of *mrha* and *kuzla*. Both words originate in animal terms: *mrha* can be any neglected or strong animal, but mostly a horse, and *kuzla* was originally a pejorative term for a female dog (SSKJ). Although both can be used with reference to women, only *mrha* is defined in SSKJ as a term for either a worthless person (gender non-specific) or an attractive and qualified person (mostly pertaining to women). In spite of the entry in SSKJ, a search in *Fidaplus* yielded results attesting that *mrha* is used mostly for women; there are almost no results in which the referent is male. The results were found with all three possible connotations – neutral or slightly negatively connoted being the predominant ones, and the most numerous cases were for an attractive female or generally a woman. *Kuzla*, on the other hand, is defined in SSKJ as a derogatory term for a female dog; however, a search in *Fidaplus* established that cases in which the referent is a dog seem to be in the minority. In the majority of cases, the referent was a female person. Whereas *mrha* can be found with all three connotations, this characteristic does not apply to *kuzla* because all the results yielded cases with negative connotations. Therefore, I would say that in most cases *mrha* would be the preferred translation solution for our autobiography.

The comparison of the first and second example from the autobiography shows that *bitch* has negative connotations in the second example (Davis was not pleased by their behaviour), in the first example however, it is used more neutrally than negatively. So *kuzla* fits well in the translation of the second example, but its use is questionable in the first. I would prefer to use *mrha* in the first example, because it would leave a neutral connotation, perhaps only slightly negative, whereas the generally negative connotations of *kuzla* seem to collide with the neutral-to-positive context of the extract.

The last two extracts include examples in which *bitch* was used generally for women. There were two different translations solutions chosen: *mrha* and *punc*. The latter is a neutral expression for girls or girlfriends and is normally used without negative connotations – it can be either neutrally or with positive connotations. It does not therefore fit the context as well because *bitches* in the

original seemed to be used for women who were looked down on and treated as only numbers, so the quality is questionable. As in the last example, *mrha* would in this case fit better, since it would keep the slightly pejorative attitude of the original.

Two more translation solutions come to mind whenever I come across *bitch*: *psica* (bitch) and *prastica* (a female pig). The first one would be a neutral expression for a female dog, the second for a female pig. When applied to women, both carry negative connotations and are defined in SSKJ as expressions for worthless women. The entry for *psica* also implies that it can refer to prostitutes. A search in *Fidaplus* established that *prastica* can also have a sexual connotation; moreover, the sexual connotation was more frequent than with *psica*. *Psica* returned approximately the same number of cases in which the referent was either a female person or a dog; however, *prastica*, in the sense of a (worthless) woman, has almost entirely supplanted the meaning of a female pig. For both words I found cases with negative, positive or neutral connotations, negative ones being the most frequent. I think both could be used in the translation in some cases. The second and perhaps the third example would definitely be ones in which *prastica* with its sexual connotation would fit. However, I would not suggest it as a prototypical translation. Among younger generations, I believe, the word has lost some of its force over the last decades, but it might be still too powerful and derogatory for an older reader. Perhaps that is why the translator decided in favour of *mrha* and *kuzla*.

There are only a few cases in the autobiography in which *bitch* does not refer to a woman, but is used more as an ironic exclamation for an unpleasant situation:

They sent us to war to fight and die for them over there; killed us like nothing over here. And it's still like that today. **Now, ain't that a bitch.** (15)

Poslali so nas v vojno, da bi se bojevali in tam čez umirali. Tukaj pa so nas mirno pobijali. In še danes je tako. **Ali ni to zoprno.** (13)

But she must have thought that *I* was weird, because as soon as I walked in her office she started lighting her candles and lighting cigarettes. **Ain't that a bitch;** she thought *I* was weird. (28)

Vendar je gotovo mislila, da sem čuden *jaz*, kajti takoj ko sem stopil v njeno sprejemnico, je začela prižigati vse tiste sveče in kaditi cigarete. **Ali ni čudno:** mislila je, da sem jaz čudak. (26)

The drummer, who was about twenty-six or twenty-seven, just shook his head and started laughing and then he said, “You mean with all these sex-fiend motherfuckers in this band she lets *you* hold that goddamn mirror? **Aw, man, ain’t that a bitch!**” (48)

Bobnar, ki je imel šestindvajset ali osemindvajset let, je samo zmajal z glavo in se začel smejati, nato pa je rekel: “Hočeš reči, da je pri vseh teh spolno obsedenih pizdunih iz orkestra izbrala *tebe*, da ji držiš zrcalo? **Ej, človek, ta je pa res huda.**” (48)

In these three examples I will not analyze *bitch* as a separate word, but as part of the entire expression *ain’t that a bitch*. The sentence functions as an exclamation or an ironic comment. The *Urban Dictionary* is the only dictionary that has an entry for this entire phrase and defines it as “another way of saying, “How ironic!”” (*Urban Dictionary*; accessed on 5.4.2012, 12.05). The examples from the autobiography, however, cannot be that easily interpreted. The first one is the easiest and could be explained as “isn’t that dreadful/awful”. In the second and third extract, a woman is involved in the text, which causes the possibility of two interpretations. Either the interpretation is the same as in the first example, in which case the expression refers to the situation, or *bitch* refers to the woman in the text. The last example is the most ambiguous, because “that” is stressed, which does not help to bring the interpretation any further, in contrary, it intensifies only the force of the expression leaving no implication whether *bitch* refers only to the woman or the entire situation.

The phrase cannot easily be translated into Slovene, because there is no phrase that would function as an ironic comment and even include a swearword. Also the ambiguity of the last two extracts makes the translation even more difficult, because the translator has to make a decision which interpretation to translate. For the translation, the translator chose a strategy in which he tried to capture the irony of the phrase and also the idea of a comment. In a way *ain’t that a bitch* involves a rhetorical question, even though there is no question mark at the end of the phrase. In the first two examples the translator tried to illustrate this idea of a question and wrote *ali ni to zoprno* (isn’t that abhorrent?) and *ali ni*

čudno? (isn't that weird?). In both cases the adjectives that were used instead of *bitch* were chosen according to the context. The English phrase in this case leaves the assessment of the situation ambiguous to a certain extent, because the interpretation is left to the reader; the Slovene translation, on the other hand gives this assessment away. However, it would be also hard to find any other translation solution in this case. A literal or word-for-word translation is not an option, because there is no such phrase in Slovene, nor can the irony of the original be simply forced into the interpretation. A search in Google yielded a few results in which *ain't that a bitch* was translated literally as *ali ni to prasica?* (isn't that a hog/swine?) and *ali ni to kurba?* (isn't that a whore?). Both were found in forums or subtitles done by amateurs. These can be understood similarly to the original, if used in the right context; however, both attempts resemble the English phrase too much to fit in a professionally translated book. One criteria, however, does speak in favour of these translation solutions. They would keep the ambiguity of the last two examples, because *prasica* and *kurba* can also be understood as a reference to women. But since these options exist mostly in translated texts, I think the unconscious interpretation of a reader would mostly be a reference to women, which would supplant the reference to the situation. So, if we deem the strategy of the translator correct, than we have to account for a loss of vulgarity.

In the last example, the translator chose to present his translation in the form of a statement rather than a rhetorical question; hence, *ta je pa res huda* (this one is really bad). Whenever a rhetorical question is used, it establishes a certain connection to the reader, as if the speaker were seeking confirmation, and this connection gets lost in the statement. Therefore, it might be better if the translator kept the question in this case, making it *ali nit ta res huda*. Clearly, the adjectives cannot be kept the same in all three examples because in each example *bitch* can be interpreted differently, but the same form would keep a certain consistency in the text.

5 Conclusion

My analysis focused on the translation of three words: *motherfucker*, *bitch* and *nigger*. Each of them represents a particular translation problem. Firstly, I analysed *motherfucker*. There is no literal translation for it in Slovene, and it can take on so many functions and meanings in English that it is also impossible to find one word that could be used in all the contexts and connotations. I established that the translator did keep a certain consistency in his translation and tried to use the same word in the translation when *motherfucker* was used in a particular function. Unfortunately this was not possible in all cases because swearwords simply might not sound natural in the same context in a different language. The analysis showed that in the original, most of the swearwords used would rank highest in terms of vulgarity, and if the translation is supposed to be loyal to the original, this vulgarity has to be visible also in the translation. I found out that the translator tried to keep this high level of vulgarity wherever he could; however, in some cases the vulgarity had to be lowered intentionally in order to sound more natural in the target language.

Both context and connotations have an important role to play when it comes to translating swearwords. The case of *bitch* has showed that even though there is a literal translation in Slovene, it is connoted differently and occurs in different contexts; therefore, the translator had to find other translation solutions. He limited his choice down to three words and used them whenever he deemed appropriate.

Nigger was always used by Davis with negative connotations, which made the translation easier, because the translator was able to use a pejorative term for a black person that exists in Slovene and is gradually becoming the prototypical translation for the English word.

These are only a few examples of the problems that the translator, Jure Potokar, had to face when he translated this autobiography. The translation of swearwords is a demanding task that also requires a certain amount of creativity, and even though I might have disagreed or have questioned some of his solutions in the analysis, Potokar gave us a fine translation.

Swearwords had an important role in the way Davis was speaking, if not even his personality, and they also had an important stylistic function in his dark and occasionally arrogant manner of speaking. Omitting swearwords would rob the reader of this experience, and if the editors decided to keep Davis in his true voice, I think the same task is passed on to the translator.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Oral Source

On May 23 2012, from 10:00 to 11:00, I held a discussion with Simon Zupan and Aleksandra Nuč, both professors at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. Our debate was about the ranking of swearwords used in Slovene, and we also commented on the translation solutions that the Slovene translator used in certain situations. A ranking on the vulgarity of Slovene swearwords has not yet been published; therefore, we discussed the possible options and agreed that the four swearwords from the field of sexual intercourse or organs, *pička*, *pizda*, *kurac* and *fuk*, would rank highest in terms of vulgarity (this also applies to their derivations, e.g., *pizdun*, *popizditi*, and all the phrases of which they might be part). We also agreed that *pizdun* might not be the best translation solution, but at the same time there is no better one. And since the word is not that often used with positive connotations, the translator has to pay special attention to the possible interpretations and use the word in a context where the connotations are undeniable. They also provided support for my comments about the possible translations for *bitch*. *Mrha* might be the best one, since it can be used in any context; however, other translation options, including my suggested, are also plausible, but they cannot be used as freely, so the translator has to be careful with what connotations he uses a particular word. We also agreed that *črnuh* is the best translation option for *nigger* and that the diminutive *mali črnček* can be interpreted as derogatory, although we would rather see that phrase also translated with *črnuh*.