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## Harold Pinter in Slovene Translation

### Summary

This article examines the translation of Harold Pinter's most notable stylistic peculiarities into Slovene, illustrating its main points with examples taken from his play *The Homecoming*. The findings demonstrate above all a marked degree of non-observance of the special verbal pattern (special cohesion) of the originals, a failure to convey Pinter's special configuration of meaning (special coherence), and a disregard for internal unifying coincidences. It argues that the Slovene translations of Pinter rely mostly on traditional theories of meaning and of language norms, thus preventing the reproduction of those emotional and psychological actions of Pinter's characters which are usually not expressed by means of the rhetorical, informative elements of his dialogue, but by its form and sonority, i. e. the length, strength, and level of articulation of verbal expression. This blurs Pinter's famous logic of emotion, narrows the proverbial openness and conceptual uncertainty of his plays, and limits their potential vitality in translation. Taking into account current drama and theatre translation practices in Slovenia, i.e. the rarity of published drama translation and the dependence on a translated performance text for subsequent theatrical productions, the article argues that in such cases the drama translation should be retrospective, i.e. aiming at a maximum reconstruction of all relevant linguistic, stylistic, and textual properties of the original, leaving expressly subjective interventions in the text to the theatre practitioners.

## Harold Pinter v slovenskem prevodu

### Povzetek

Članek preučuje prevod najbolj očitnih slogovnih značilnosti Harolda Pinterja v slovenščino. Svoja dognanja ponazarja s primeri iz igre *Vrnitev*. Ugotavlja, da slovenski prevodi Pinterjevih iger kažejo visoko stopnjo neupoštevanja značilnih besednih vzorcev (kohezije) in njihove ponovne uporabe (ponovne pojavitve) ter da ne upoštevajo značilne pinterjanske konfiguracije smislov (koherence). Ugotavlja tudi, da se slovenski prevodi Pinterja naslanjajo predvsem na tradicionalno teorijo pomena in jezikovne norme, s čimer preprečujejo poustvaritev tistih čustvenih in psiholoških odzivanj Pinterjevih dramskih značajev, ki jih avtor ne izraža s pomočjo retoričnih, informativnih prvin dialoga, marveč z besednimi oblikami in njihovo zvočnostjo: dolžino, poudarkom, stopnjo artikuliranosti, ponavljanji, itd. S tem krčijo pomen izvirnika in siromašijo prislovično interpretativno odprtost Pinterjevega dramskega izraza. Glede na majhno število objav dramskih prevodov v slovenščini in na dejstvo, da prvi delovni prevodi dram služijo kot predloge vsem nadaljnjim uprizoritvam prevedene igre, se avtorica zavzema za retrospektivno prevajalsko strategijo: pristop, ki omogoča najvišjo možno rekonstrukcijo vseh jezikovnih, slogovnih in besedilnih značilnosti izvirnika, in ki prepušča izrazito subjektivne posege v besedilo gledališkim strokovnjakom.

# Harold Pinter in Slovene Translation

## 1. Introduction

Harold Pinter has been extensively translated into Slovene. The translations have, however, not been published and only exist in the form of theatrical scripts. Six of Pinter's fourteen Slovene translations have been staged (*Ashes to Ashes* once, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, and *Betrayal* twice, *The Birthday Party* and *Old Times* three times). Judging from the number of first-night performances and critical acclaim, in Slovenia Pinter is already considered a classic dramatist. Although well received by the theatre practitioners, the dramatist seems to be less well received by the public, which may be due to the translation strategies applied.

The studies of six Slovene translations of Pinter's plays<sup>1</sup> have manifested a failure of reproduction of the formal characteristics of his language. Although the Slovene theatre critics, directors and translators claimed to be aware of a special structuring of semantic, rhythmic and acoustic components of his plays already at the time of their first stagings, Pinter's distortion of the rules of coherence allowing for a specific "Pinteresque" openness and conceptual uncertainty in his plays is mostly not reflected in translation. Additionally, some plays have been staged on the basis of an already adapted Slovene stage script, thus modifying the original so as to completely deny the audience the notion of the peculiar quality of Pinter's dialogue. The shifts of meaning contributing to this fact have been mostly generated by modification, expansion, or change to the following verbal characteristics of the original in translation:

- (i) specially structured recurrences: the repetition of words, phrases, or entire sentences;
- (ii) the use of pro-forms;
- (iii) parallelisms;
- (iv) stichomythia;
- (v) register (colloquialisms, clichés, vulgarisms);
- (vi) psychological rhythm of utterances: special structuring of semantic, acoustic and rhythmical components.

The above list suggests that Pinter relies heavily on traditional forms of speech. The author, however, retains only their form, despoiling them of their traditional structuring and, consequently, meaning. He does that by the use of illogical, immediately irrelevant, and nonsensical verbal expression. The last of these seems such because it does not relate to the immediate objective reality of Pinter's fictional world. According to Pinter, it is, however, directly related to the immediate subjective reality of his characters. This is an absurdist's way of destroying the stability and continuity of the text as a traditionally conceived system observing the rules of coherence and cohesion. By doing that Pinter illustrates the logic of emotion and enigma pervading everyday human communication.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Birthday Party*, trans. by Janez Žmavc; *The Dumb Waiter*, trans. by Irena Trenc Frelih; *The Caretaker*, trans. by Janko Moder; *The Homecoming*, trans. by Ciril Kosmač; *Betrayal*, trans. by Dušan Tomše; *Old Times*, trans. by Maila

Since the first four items of the above stated shifts have already been discussed elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, here special attention is paid to Pinter's use of foul language and his structuring of semantic, rhythmic and acoustic components in his most openly brutal and abusive play, *The Homecoming*.

## 2. Harold Pinter's Style

In the case of Pinter, "the sorts of features traditionally used in stylistic analysis (phonological, lexical, syntactical) will not, on their own, be sufficient" (Burton 1980, 7), since Pinter's dramatic dialogue grossly defies the precepts of traditional theory of meaning and of language norms.

Harold Pinter is widely accepted as the contemporary British dramatist who pays the most attention to the various modes of linguistic expression. He is considered an accomplished technician, evolving a typical style of his own, and making use of traditional as well as absurdist dramatic techniques.

Pinter is usually placed within the contemporary stage convention known as The Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 1985), an identification which indicates certain common traits to be taken into account in translation: no logically constructed plot, no traditional characterisation, a representation of, rather than argumentation about, the human condition. But Pinter critics also stress that one part of the dramatist's dialogue sounds very realistic, abounding in repetition (Brown 1972), colloquialism (Kennedy 1975), non-sequitur (i.e. inferences that do not follow from the premises), malapropism, cliché, different jargons (Davison 1982), the use of elliptic sentences and co-ordination rather than subordination, obscene language, the absence of words "believe" and "think" (Worth 1972), deictic rather than explicit words, etc. On the other hand, as A. Kennedy (Scott 1989, 103–5) points out, Pinter's dialogue is highly stylised and structured, often switching to "the chain of idiomatic and idiosyncratic phrases" serving as "a stylised verbal smoke screen" and usually "functioning as a violent parody of institutional caring", or pointing to the sinister character of the speaker. They also express an awareness of the implicit meaning Pinter achieves on the language level not through the traditional concept of word meaning, but by word form.

In this respect, M. Esslin (1982) and A. Quigley (1975), although starting from different theoretical positions, point to some useful features for the Pinter translator. They say that Pinter uses his language not to express conceptual thought but to illuminate the mental processes of his characters, and that language is not so much a means of referring to structure in personal relationship, as a means of creating it. Quigley also points to another feature relevant to our discussion, namely that the most important unifying feature of Pinter's dramaturgy is not a unified and coherent plot based on traditional pre-established characterisation of the protagonists, but the development of relationships. According to Quigley (1975, 73) the major structural units of Pinter's plays coincide with the progress

<sup>2</sup> See Hribar 1999, 299–313.

of the relationships between characters, and “the categories of theme and structure fuse in the charting and special timing of significant episodes in the development of these relationships”.

Recognising this general principle enables the translator of Pinter to come to important perceptions about ongoing development or change in Pinter’s character relationships and its related linguistic expression. It alerts him to the importance of understanding the emotional and psychological actions of Pinter’s characters which are usually not expressed by means of the rhetorical, informative elements of Pinter’s dialogue, but by its form and sonority, i.e. the length, strength, and level of articulation of verbal expression. However, the translator still has to find out in what particular way an emotional or psychological action is verbally manifested in each individual case and what its underlying meaning is.

The best methodology giving satisfactory answers in the stylistic analysis of modern drama texts seems to be the one suggested by D. Burton (1980). The author starts from the position which best corresponds to the translator’s, i.e. the position of a reader who “has certain intuitive impressions of a set of stylistic effects – intuition which should be open to linguistic justification on a closer study of the text” (Burton 1980, 5). To be able to justify her/his intuition, the analyst “must be able to relate the language used by the author to the conventions of the language as a whole”. Burton shares the conviction of many a contemporary theorist<sup>3</sup> that style results from a deviation from a linguistic convention.

To illustrate her methodological approach, Burton analyses Pinter’s sketch *Last to Go* (Burton 1961, 10–23). Firstly, she gives the text to be considered as data. Secondly, she articulates her intuitive perception of its effects on her. Thirdly, she specifies some relevant rules of conversational structure, as observed and specified by analysts of naturally occurring conversation<sup>4</sup>, and shows how these are used and exploited in the text to create the effects she has noticed intuitively. Although this methodology does not provide a Pinter translator with all the necessary knowledge to pinpoint Pinter’s specific method of distortion in each individual case, it indicates an efficient way of approaching this issue. Additionally, it not only suggests a deep understanding of Pinter’s and the translator’s intentions, culture, language and dramatic expression<sup>5</sup>, but also a relevant set of linguistic knowledge, with the help of which the translator is to detect and explain “the norm deviation relationship realised in the micro-conversations of a drama dialogue” (Burton 1980, 7).

### 3. *The Homecoming* in Slovenia

There are two Slovene working translations of the play: one done for the first Slovene production in 1977, another being an adapted translation of the film version of the play. The first was

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Leech & Short 1981; Beaugrande & Dressler 1981; Snell-Hornby 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jefferson 1972; Lakoff 1968; Beaugrande & Dressler 1981.

<sup>5</sup> In these respects the article relies mainly on the following authors: Bassnett-McGuire 1981, 1985, 1990; Beaugrande 1991; Broeck 1986; Corrigan 1961; Gravier 1973; Grosman 1995, 1997; Merino 1991; Mozetič 1991, 1995; Pavis 1989; Poyatos 1997; Scolnikov & Holland 1989; Snell-Hornby 1995, 1997; Zuber-Skerritt 1980, 1984, 1988.

translated by the late Slovene novelist and short-story writer, Ciril Kosmač, the second by the translator Breda Lipovšek. Both, however, seem to be unaware of the verbal games Pinter is playing. In the case of *The Homecoming*, the latter are most evident in Pinter's use of foul language.

Of all Pinter's early works, *The Homecoming* has produced the hottest critical debate in Slovenia. Trussler's critique (Trussler 1973, 123–4) may have influenced one of the most notable Slovene critics of the time, Josip Vidmar, who not only feels appalled at the theme but also cannot understand what made Pinter write it, or why the Slovene director of the play, Žarko Petan, put it on the Slovene stage at all (Vidmar 1967).

In contrast to Vidmar, some other Slovene drama critics of the time (Novak 1967; Predan 1967) find the play one of the most powerful expressions of the bestial nature of man and his struggle for territory, trying to explain the theme of the play without taking moral stands. Though noting its special structure, its enigmas, its confrontations and its violence, Slovene critics seem to have been completely unaware of the special quality and function of Pinter's dialogue.

*The Homecoming* was first staged in Slovenia only one year after its first production in England. At the time, Slovene theatre professionals had already been well-acquainted with the dramatist, ever since, soon after WW II, Slovenia established good cultural relations with France and England. So the first Slovene director of the play, Žarko Petan, read about Pinter in English and French journals and magazines which could then be found in Slovene libraries. Additionally, he was financially supported by the British Council to go to London and acquaint himself more thoroughly with Pinter's work. He was even given an opportunity to have a brief discussion with Pinter's director Peter Hall<sup>6</sup>.

Judging from the Slovene translation of the play, its critical acclaim, and discussions about the special quality of Pinter's verbal abuse with both Slovene directors of the play, Pinter's distinctive style – the long ambiguous pauses, the hints of distant menace and the bizarre motivation of his characters – have been “properly” understood. What, however, has failed to be reproduced in the translation and consequently in both Slovene productions of the play (as indeed in some other Slovene translations and productions of Pinter's plays) is the special rhythmical quality of Pinter's language, pointing to the secrets of his characters' hidden psychological needs, activities, and responses.

The first Slovene production of *The Homecoming* did not even notice the above shortcomings of the translation. This may have been due to the fact that the translation had to be sent to Pinter for inspection, whose comments referred mainly to most obvious culturally bound expressions. This is quite understandable, since Pinter (or whoever inspected the translation for him in London) could hardly have had a better command of or the feeling for subtle

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<sup>6</sup> A conversation with the director at his home in Ljubljana, October 9, 1998.

rhythmical nuances of the Slovene language than the Slovene novelist and short story writer Ciril Kosmač who had translated the play. Kosmač's translation of swearing and cursing expressions into Slovene was, at the time, considered extremely good and bold, since he employed vulgar expressions and curses excluded from all monolingual Slovene dictionaries of the time, being considered "bad" words.

It was only the second Slovene director of the play (1997), Jaša Jamnik, and the actors appearing in the production who noticed that the Slovene translation seems to fail completely to reproduce the language effects of the original, especially concerning the use of obscene language. In Jamnik's opinion, this was due to the outdated language of the translation.

#### **4. Pinter's Verbal Abuse and Its Translation into Slovene**

Both Slovene productions relied heavily on Kosmač's working translation of the play (1967). The analysis of the translation has, however, shown that its main language problem does not consist in outdated expressions, but in an inadequate rhythmical reproduction of the psychological reality of Pinter's characters, which in translation does not observe any special gradation and structuring of sound, length, strength, and rhythm of words, phrases and utterances characteristic of the dramatic structure and technique of the original. Thus it fails to fully establish the fragmented and quickly changing psychological reality of Pinter's major structural units (individual progress of relationships between characters), striving to establish a "story" as a whole rather than an instant psychological reality for the speaker. Although the director and the actors of the second Slovene production of the play felt there was something wrong, they could not tell what. We shall try to specify the "what", with the help of Burton's methodological approach and some relevant rules of conversational structure as specified and explained by the Slovene analyst of cursing and swearing expressions Bernard Nežmah.

The dialogue of *The Homecoming* is short, brutal, sharp, and colloquial on the one hand and long, ceremonial, decorative, and sentimental on the other. Though placed side by side and sounding extremely "naturalistic", the two kinds of utterances constantly give the impression that something is "not right", i.e. that the dialogue does not follow the logic and psychology we have been taught to expect in similar situations. Apart from being quick and unexpected, the shifts from one to another also seem highly illogical and thus confusing.

Secondly, it is clear that the main issue of the conversation is a trial of strength. The speakers, however, do not always directly tell us what they are constantly fighting about. This kind of speech often sounds highly farcical, since it employs seductive words to narrate a cruel story which again does not have a direct bearing on their conversation.

Thirdly, constant threats or feelings of being threatened are conveyed, although again the speakers do not always directly address the person(s) they want to hurt. The most eager and

forceful in this respect seem to be Max, the father, and Lenny, the pimp-son. Though the most vulgar, they also seem to be the most vulnerable and helpless. Their most vulgar and forceful insults and threats seem to be directed at each other and at Ruth, who, however, takes them with a surprising calmness and serenity. Ruth, moreover, seems to be the most powerful, composed, and determined person in the play.

But how do we know so much about the atmosphere pervading the play and about the participants in the dialogue? They hardly ever express their real concerns with the “right” words. And how are we to find linguistic justification for our perceptions so as to be able to form a consistent translation strategy? Since our intuitive perception has much to do with swearing and cursing, it seems feasible that some analysis of this kind could provide answers.

As for the Slovene translator<sup>7</sup>, the most useful book dealing with swearing and cursing expressions is *Kletvice in psovke* (Swearing and Cursing Expressions) by Bernard Nežmah (1997). Though the book does not provide a Pinter translator with the selection of Slovene swearing and cursing expressions which could be directly employed in the translation of *The Homecoming* (not many of such words can be found in Slovene dictionaries either), parts of its analysis prove instrumental in our discussion.

According to Nežmah (ibid., 8), swearing and cursing expressions are used to relieve a trauma – a traumatic situation with which a person is faced. In inter-personal relationships they have two functions: (i) to silence the addressee, or (ii) to express the inability of the speaker to find another expression (ibid., 81).

This statement from Nežmah already explains the general feeling of a traumatic situation pervading Pinter’s *The Homecoming*, the vocabulary of which abounds in swearing and cursing expressions. It accounts also for our impression of Max being both the most violent and helpless character. By swearing and cursing Max usually wants to silence the addressee, but almost always fails to do so. Feelings of defeat and anger prevent him from “adequately” responding to the verbal attacks of others. His strong emotional engagement forces him instead to resort to swearing and cursing expressions.

The most illuminating points of Nežmah’s discussion for our rationalising of the stylistic distortion of Pinter’s verbal abuse are his establishment of the difference between swearing and cursing expressions, their effect, and the description of the possible reactions of the addressee. According to Nežmah’s definition (ibid., 84–5), swearing expressions, like the one word exclamation “Idiot!”, belong to the process of degradation. Thus naming someone, the speaker transforms the addressee into a mentally handicapped person. This effect is immediate. A swearing expression is always a single word or the copulative “to be” + noun. Cursing expressions, as for instance “May the devil take you!”, belong to the process of projection, since

<sup>7</sup> Translators of other nationalities may find useful some of the books Nežmah draws on such as Freud 1905; Austin 1962; Anderson et al. 1985; Jay 1977; and Highes 1991.

the text of cursing describes the whole process of the addressee's annihilation or devastating transformation. Their effect is long term. A cursing expression is always composed of a verb other than the existential "to be" + subject and object. The difference between swearing and cursing expressions thus consists in the time of their activation.

It is obvious that in drama or in the dramatic mode swearing expressions prove to be more efficient than cursing ones, since they are activated at the moment of speaking. The feeling of sharpness and brutality of *The Homecoming* is conveyed by the prevalence of swearing expressions. Our feeling that something is wrong, however, stems from the Pinteresque combination of swearing expressions with verbs usually characteristic of cursing. Pinter's characters do that by pretending to address an absent character to whom they are referring in the larger context of telling a story or expressing an opinion; or by pretending to address a third character present on the stage but not directly involved in the conversation. With Pinter such language is characteristic of situations when a relationship is under negotiation, i.e. in the contest of wills, psychological overpowering, fighting for possession, wanting to induce fear, wanting to manipulate others, etc.

Understanding that conditions the choice of swearing and cursing expressions in translation. With Pinter it is mainly the length, strength, and the acoustic value of such expressions which point to the psychological state of the speaker: the more emotional his characters get, the shorter his or her verbal expression.

When explaining the possible reactions of the injured person to the trauma experienced, Nežmah (1997, 9) offers the following burlesque example. Imagine you are helping a friend to hammer a nail. Your friend misses the nail and hits your finger. Your reaction may be one of the following: (i) you cry out "ouch!"; (ii) you clench your teeth and say nothing; (iii) you recite or sing a popular song; (iv) you call the clumsy friend an idiot; or (v) you strike him. In the first case, you have signalled your friend your physical trauma (you have lamented). In the second you have shown your superiority to the event. In the third you have taken an ironic distance. In the fourth, you have avenged the injury with words. In the fifth, you have repaid him in kind – with a physical injury.

With all that in mind, let us now consider one of the most vulgar scenes of *The Homecoming* and comment on its translation into Slovene by Ciril Kosmač. It is the opening scene of Act I of *The Homecoming*.

#### 4.1 Opening Scene of *The Homecoming* in Slovene Translation

The opening scene introduces us to Max, a retired butcher, the father of three sons, and Lenny, one of his sons, the loud-mouthed pimp. Max talks too much: here he is looking for scissors to cut an advertisement from the newspaper. He asks Lenny where they are. Lenny at first does not pay much attention to him. When he does, he is highly abusive:



LENNY (*looking up, quietly*). Why don't you **shut up, you daft prat?** (Pinter 1978, 24)

**Kosmač's translation:**

LENNY /dvigne glavo, mirno/: Ali ne bi **zaprl gobca, ti prismuknjena grižava rit?**

**Back-translation:**

LENNY (lifting his head, calmly). Why don't you **plug it, you demented dysenteric arse.**

Right from the start the Slovene translation fails to capture the psychological rhythm of the utterance and misses the colloquial character of the original. Instead of verbally expressing first the feeling of annoyance and then, after Lenny has fully realised who he is speaking to, the feeling of hatred (and the awareness he might succeed in being left in peace only if he is extremely insulting), it reveals a confused sequence of colloquial and literary language, which does not imply the afore-mentioned gradual psychological response of the speaker. First, instead of retaining the brevity of the original utterance, it prolongs it. Second, in place of the correct lexical item "*utihni*" (for Eng. "*shut up*"), it employs the Slovene phrase of vehement abuse "*zapri gobec*" (Eng. "plug it"). Third, it turns the following "daft prat" into a literary (and thus artificial sounding) description (Eng. "*you demented dysenteric arse*"). Had he chosen a milder first expression and a stronger second, and retained the brevity and colloquial value of the entire utterance, the translator could have retained the rhythm and the implication of growing anger and colloquialism of the original. In Slovene such a translation would run as follows:

LENNY (dvigne glavo, mirno): Zakaj ne utihneš, ti rit zabita?

It expresses the psychological gradation of the speaker; it is short, retaining also the sharpness of the original conveyed by Pinter's sequence of the same vowels in "daft prat", which, although different in Slovene (the *i*'s), has the same acoustic, sharp and short, effect (of an English short /i/) and produces the same psychological impression.

Let us now consider the continuation of the above conversation from the point of view of Max's inner drives and reactions. In Nežmah's terms (see above), Max's reaction signals that he has experienced a trauma, since he answers Lenny with a threat: "Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you". Let us keep in mind that the injury he has suffered has not yet been repaid in kind. It is common knowledge that "the injured person's reaction to a trauma only exercises a completely cathartic effect if it is an adequate reaction – as, for instance, revenge" (Freud 1978, 59). So a later verbal revenge is to be expected. With Pinter, such a revenge is however never obvious or explicit. He is too much a connoisseur of human nature to base the outburst of vulgarity of his characters on conventional logic. Not particularly quick-minded, Max cannot instantly produce a stronger insult, so he changes the subject, starts bragging about his youth and his late friend McGregor – how they terrorised people and how McGregor was fond of Max's wife Jessie. By his reminiscences he initially tries to intimidate Lenny indirectly, telling him what he used to be capable of. Immediately after the mention of Jessie, Max's description of his late wife – the rhythm and vocabulary of his

account – starts changing. Let us consider how and what manifold implications his seemingly illogical and grotesque account has with Pinter and why this is lost in translation.

I.

MAX./.../ Mind you, she wasn't such a **bad woman**. Even though it made me sick just to look at her **rotten stinking face**, she wasn't such a **bad bitch**. I gave her the **best bleeding years** of my life, anyway (Pinter 1978, 25).

**Kosmač's translation:**

MAX: /.../ Pa niti ni bila tako **slaba baba**, da boš vedel. **Ne, ni bila tako slaba**. Čeprav se mi je želodec obračal, samo če sem se ozrl v njen **gnili in smrdljivi fris**, le ni bila tako **slaba kuzla**. No, naj bo kakor koli, njej sem dal **preklete najlepša leta** svojega življenja.

**Back-translation:**

Mind you, she was even not such a bad hag, you know. No, she wasn't so bad. Even though my stomach turned if only I looked at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. Well, be it as it may, to her I gave the best bleeding years of my life.

II.

LENNY. **Plug it**, will you, **you stupid sod**, I'm trying to read the paper.

MAX. Listen! I'll **chop your spine off**, you talk to me like that! You understand?  
Talking to **your lousy filthy father** like that!

LENNY. You know what, **you're getting demented**. (Pinter 1978, 25)

**Kosmač's translation:**

LENNY: Daj no, **gnoj zanikrni**, zapri že svoj **trapasti gobec**. Rad bi bral časopis.

MAX: Poslušaj! **Razmesaril te bom kakor prašiča: Rilec in hrbtenico bom izsekal iz tebe**, če boš tako govoril z mano! Ali si me razumel? Kaj pa se to pravi, takole govoriti s **svojim ušivim, umazanim očetom?**

LENNY: Veš kaj, **možgani se ti kisajo, vsak dan si bolj slaboumen**.

**Back-translation:**

LENNY. Shut your silly clam, will you, you stinking manure. I'm trying to read the paper.

MAX. Listen! I'll butcher you like a pig: I'll chop your snout and spine off, if you talk to me like that! Have you understood me? What do you mean by talking to your lousy filthy father like that?

LENNY. You know what, your brain is turning sour, every day you are getting more and more demented.

The first sentence of Section I is verbalised in the monotonous rhythm of Max's previous bragging about his and his friend's, McGregor's, exploits. Mentioning McGregor in connection with his late wife Jessie reminds Max of the fact that Jessie liked Mac (McGregor) more than him. This and some other hints (that Jessie was a whore) are, of course, given later in the play, so at this point Max's change seems completely illogical and grotesque. This is not, however, the case. The beginning of the second sentence ("Even though") signals Max's awareness and developing anger, into which he (since he is still talking to Lenny)

also projects his revenge for Lenny's previous insults. And what can be more insulting than calling one's mother a whore? Max's combination of extremely vulgar expressions ("rotten stinking face", "bad bitch") thus becomes more acceptable and understandable.

Our assumptions are confirmed by Lenny's vehement abuse and explicit reaction in the first sentence of Section II: the employment of Nežmah's swearing expression with an immediate effect, calling his father "*a stupid sod*". Max's threat, "I'll chop your spine off", is another expression of his inability to repay Lenny in kind – a signal he has suffered an injury. His helplessness and anger (this time directed towards himself) is detected in his illogical calling of himself "your lousy filthy father" and has the implication of Max's punishing himself for not being able to overpower Lenny. Lenny asserts his superiority with a cursing expression "you are getting demented". He intuitively feels that its prolonged effect will put his father at rest for a while, since Max is too slow-minded and exhausted to figure out how to react to this one and to try to re-establish his superiority. This assumption proves correct. There is a pause, after which Max decides to speak about something he is good at: horses.

Consistently Max's defeats<sup>8</sup> account for his being the most vulgar and illogical among the play's characters. They force him to constantly engage himself in new verbal battles, the timing of which, however, seems "wrong". Strong feelings and a slow mind usually prevent him from finding "proper" words when most needed, so his anger and revenge are usually incorporated into later verbal expression which thus seems unnatural, since it has no direct conceptual bearing on the discussion at hand.

A closer study of the Slovene translation of the above dramatic utterances shows that it concerns itself more with the conceptual meaning of words than with the psychological implication of their acoustic value. It is probably the translator's feeling that something "is not quite right" that makes him add sentences expressing the same conceptual meaning. It also shows that it is Pinter's elliptic sharpness of expression, colloquialisms, and clichés which prove to be the greatest problem in translation. So, instead of finding a single strong, short, and rhythmically corresponding Slovene expression, the translator prolongs original utterances, thus disrupting their original rhythm and producing a "wrong" psychological timing. Besides, the translation tries to achieve the colloquial quality of the original solely by the use of swearing and cursing expressions (as for instance the well-chosen "*kuzla*" for "bitch"), which are, however, accompanied with literary (sometimes even poetic) language, thus producing a feeling of artificiality alien to the original.

This is most visible in the translation of Max's reaction in the above Section II: to denote the strength of Max's "I'll chop your spine off", instead of a simple and strong enough Slovene "*raztrančiral te bom*", which is a typical colloquial butcher's expression, the translator prolongs it into the conceptually (but not rhythmically) strong "*Razmesaril te bom kot prašiča: Rilec in hrbtenico bom izsekal iz tebe*" (I'll butcher you like a pig: I'll chop your snout and spine off). This again misses the original psychological rhythm. Feeling hurt and

<sup>8</sup> More illustrations can be found in the unpublished doctoral thesis by the author. Cf. Hribar 1999, 169–90.

angry at Lenny and himself, Max is struggling for words strong enough to express his manifold trauma. In such a state of mind, he could have hardly been able to express himself in such an elaborate way.

## 5. Conclusion

Slovene productions of the play prove that many of Pinter's intentions have been correctly understood. They however narrow the proverbial enigmatic nature and openness of meaning of the Pinter play and tend to replace Pinter's verbal "gesturality" (hidden in the rhythm, tension, structuring and timing of utterances – not indicated in stage directions) with additional theatrical devices (mimicry, bodily movements, etc.) to explicitly indicate a meaning fitting in the concept of the plot as a whole. Slovene productions of the play seem to be more concerned with a uniform conceptual expression of the play than with the fragmented reality of the psychological apprehension of and intuitive reaction to the achieved relationships among characters. This is probably due to a fear of not being understood by the audience. But as Pinter's director Peter Hall says, "/.../ An actor who says to you, 'All right, I may be feeling that, but unless I show the audience that I'm feeling it, they won't understand', is actually wrong. If he feels it and masks it, the audience still gets it" (Scott 1989, 47). The same, no doubt, applies to Pinter's verbal expression, the emotional essence of which is aptly masked, but we still get it. Forcing us to find our own interpretations of his characters' behaviour and reactions, the dramatist exerts trust in our judgement and capabilities, thus allowing for different interpretation of the human condition – an aim which is also the kernel of Pinter's view on the complexities of life.

Pinter is still popular with Slovene directors and actors. It may be their feeling that the dramatist is telling them more than they have been able to translate to the stage that makes them repeatedly study and produce his plays.

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